A performative analysis of primary school governance: labour, costs and repair work

by

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Abstract

Presented in this thesis is a feminist poststructuralist bricolage of primary school governors' talk, written narrative accounts and documentation. Drawing from Judith Butler's writings, this thesis de-naturalises performances of school governing, departing from and countering the functionalist and rationalist standpoints that dominate the field. It is argued that the current body of literature fails to recognise the complexity of evoking the school governor; the labour, costs and repair work required to secure and sustain viable subjectivity within the terms of recognition.

By inserting a feminist poststructuralist perspective into the field, the unstable boundaries of school governors' subjectivity are foregrounded. The Butlerian concepts of 'recognition' and 'intelligibility' were applied to analyse the performative acts of school governance. Analysis drew attention to how the discursive construction of the school governor is constituted and (re)produced through a gendered intelligibility matrix of commitment, challenge and objectivity that create tensions between different subject positions, most significantly maternal subjectivity. Continual maintenance is thus required and temporarily achieved through 'emotional labour' and 'speech censorship', where the demands and costs attached to securing recognition and coherence become even greater.

These conclusions present a far more complex understanding of accountability in school governance; challenging the notion that school governors' holding of leaders to account is solely linked to the presence or absence of any expert or 'professional' knowledge.

Drawing on Butler's writings has inserted an important dimension into the discussion of school governance, highlighting the labour, costs and repair work that maintain school governor viability. This has raised significant questions about the consequences of school governance's regulatory imperatives and has implications for the culture that governs the scene of recognition. Significantly more effort to make school governing an inclusive space is required if boards are ever going to be truly reflective of the communities they serve.

Dedication

For you, mum

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to express my sincerest thanks to the participants in this study. They are all remarkable people who selflessly give up their time to ensure the children in the schools they govern get the quality of education they deserve. They have inspired me greatly throughout this process and been an integral part in not only this thesis, but my own growth as a researcher and governor.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Governor Trouble

The sucker punch (part one) - written by Naomi

And there it was, the sucker punch! The crucial question…'Maybe our Parent Governors could share with us the journey their children have had in the past few years?' I paraphrase. Maybe this wasn't the exact question. Maybe what preceded this genuine query hadn't sunk in; or maybe it was the encapsulation, the realisation of the fear I'd had for the last 4 years.

But, here, now, in this room? I am not here as a parent; I am here as a Governor. I am here, as always, for the regular meetings. I am here having attended training sessions, having spent my time preparing, reading through the relevant documents, considering the data, preparing for critical questioning, knowing that every child matters. I am not here as a parent – am I?

I have always tried to separate the 'being the parent of a child at the school' with 'being a Governor of the school my child attends'. I can't answer this question. I am not usually lost for words, I don't usually feel anxiety, flushing, tears welling up from being asked a question during these meetings. But another identity has suddenly been called in, has been asked to attend the meeting in my place! Me, as a Mum – here; now.

Did I not see this coming?

School governors constitute an important part of school leadership. They are tasked with 'providing confident and strong strategic leadership […] robust accountability, oversight and assurance for education and financial performance' (DfE, 2019, p.9). However, despite these significant responsibilities, school governors are volunteers, defined as someone that gives up their time and performs unpaid work (Thomas and Finch, 1990). School governors can also be described as 'active citizens' (Brehoney, 1992) and tend to differ from most other volunteers who typically have much less responsibility.

The school governor role requires a substantial workload without remuneration (Connolly, Farrell and James, 2017). A daunting Competency Framework for Governance (DfE, 2017) provides any prospective governor with a 27 page list of 220 knowledge, skills and behaviours

required for effective governance in schools. The list is underpinned by 16 competencies, in line with the seven principles of public life 'The Nolan Principles' (ibid, p.7). The framework is a minefield of staunch and unyielding language. For example, in one single page it is stated that 'effective' governors must be: confident; ambitious; driven; resilient; determined; robust and efficient (ibid, p.9). It is therefore not surprising that some have argued that there has been a deviation from the stakeholder model to a technocratic one (Ranson, 2011; Wilkins, 2015) that excludes unskilled or non-professionals and occludes a diversity of voices (Baxter, 2016).

Personal context and experience has driven me to explore primary school governance. In 2014, the year I joined my local village primary school's governing body, Sir Michael Wilshaw, the Chief Inspector of Schools in England and Head of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), announced 'there's a need for professional governance to move beyond the current 'amateurish' approach to overseeing schools' (Cross, 2014). His words compound a discourse that positions school governance as too risky in the hands of 'lay-people' or 'non-experts'. According to Young (2017a), such discourse produces and requires a binary system which materialises in the interplay between 'lay', 'educational' and 'managerial' knowledge. A relationship, she concludes, demonstrates how power operates in school governing bodies, and results in the exclusion and marginalisation of 'non-managerial' voices (*my emphasis*).

Views such as Wilshaw's idealise certain norms and practices, with one of its effects being the production of school governors as professionalised, political subjects rather than volunteers or democratic citizens. Young's conclusion aligns with others' thinking (Farrell, Morris and Ranson, 2017), however, it is my experience that the silencing, exclusion and marginalisation of voices is far more complex than simply possessing or not possessing an 'expert' or 'managerial' knowledge.

The current myopic approaches to school governance research are insufficient in extending and introducing new knowledge into the field. Humanist understandings fail to question the cultural structures and regularities they allow and perpetuate (St Pierre, 2000). In response, I aim to disrupt dominant and sedimented understanding with a feminist poststructural critique. I am, therefore, not interested in finding out 'exactly' what is going on in school governance, I do not wish to identify, isolate and extract any specific replicable practice, but instead aim to make 'trouble'. Patti Lather (2000, p.289) defined causing 'trouble' as 'mobilis[ing] the forces of deconstruction in order to unsettle the presumed innocence of transparent theories of language', an understanding that disregards the assumption that language simply mirrors the world.

In the preface to her 1990 book 'Gender Trouble', Judith Butler describes engaging in 'trouble'

as revealing the subtle ruse of power; whereby power is more than a mere exchange between subjects (Butler, 1990, p.xxx). It is necessary to cause 'trouble' in school governance to show how power operates through language, and by doing so, challenge and extend the thinking of school governance scholars such as Young (2016; 2017a; 2017b) and Farrell, Morris and Ranson (2017). Damaging structures produce discourses which mark the category of 'school governor' as normative and exclusionary, and where the insistence upon coherence and unity has refused the multiplicity of construction (Butler, 1990, p.19). This has resulted in elite forms of representation on school governing bodies and the occlusion of a diversity of voices (Baxter, 2016).

By exploring lines of coherence and incoherence, sedimented ways of thinking about school governance can be brought to the fore and challenged. The supposed fixed subject positions are queried via an analysis of the discursive construction of the primary school governor. The purpose of this is to explore how governors are performatively produced, by which I mean, constituting the identity it is purported to be (Butler, 1990). This allows an expansion of the possibilities previously excluded.

Causing 'trouble' therefore, to paraphrase Butler, will 'deconstruct the substantive appearance of [school governor] into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames' (1990, p.45). Such a process opens up new space for reconstruction. Most importantly, it questions how the subject might be made again differently, an important feminist aim.

Situated within a fluid and responsive bricolage methodology, and focusing on the micro level practices of school governance, I draw on Judith Butler's writings as a deconstructive force to explore how the school governor is constituted, held together, and produced (St Pierre, 2000). Judith Butler's theoretical concept of performativity is the central approach for analysing intertexualised discourses of governors' talk (interview data), written narrative and official documented accounts of governing (meeting minutes). Specifically, the Butlerian analytical tools of 'recognition' and 'intelligibility' were applied to performative acts of school governance (data). These tools were used as a lens to explore the evocation of 'school governor' through an analysis of recitations of cultural and organisational norms and practices.

Analysis highlighted how the discursive construction of the school governor is woven through the materialisation of both gendered and maternal performances. Gender and motherhood are constituted and (re)produced through a governor intelligibility matrix of idealised norms that create tensions between the viability of different subject positions. Continual maintenance is thus required but intelligibility and recognition are only ever potentially and temporally achieved. Labour ad repair work reproduce the security and sustainability of viable governor

subjectivity, resulting in significant costs, especially for mothers, where the demand for gender performativity becomes even greater.

1.2 Rationale and aims

School leadership literature draws attention to the gendered nature of education. Scholars such as Coleman (2020), Blackman (2013) and Fuller (2017a, 2017b) have provided considerable insight into not only how school leadership is performed, but how it is gendered. This thesis aims to extend this insight into school governance and trouble naive conclusion that statistical equality means issues of gender in organisations have been 'fixed' (Lewis and Simpson, 2010).

Statistical data foregrounds the significance of gender and exploring school governance through a feminist lens. School governance, historically, has been underrepresented by women (Deem, 1991). The rate at which women have become school governors remained slow into the first decade of the 21st Century. For example, in 2008, Stewart Ranson stated that school governors are usually white, middle aged, middle income men. However, recent data from the National Governance Association's survey (2022) indicates a significant increase in female governors on boards, with 63% of all governors identifying as female. However, if we look at specific age categories there is a different trend. For example, only 43% of governors under 40 are female. Similarly, there are differences in the occupation of the Chair[1] position, with 67% being occupied by women in local authority primary schools but only 20% in secondary schools and 4% in special educational needs provisions (NGA, 2022). In academies, despite more women on the governing boards, they are less likely to be a Chair in both stand alone academy trusts (SATs) or a multi-academy trusts (MATs). Only 2% of Chairs are women under 40.

Ethnic diversity also remains an issue, as governing boards continue to not be representative of the students in their schools and the communities they serve (NGA, 2022). The National Governance Association states on its website '*the governance community does not reflect national data for pupils, staff or the general population, nor is it reflective of Office for National Statistics ethnicity estimates'.* Only 6% of governors identify as from an ethnic minority background and only 2% are Chairs. Further significance is highlighted by the fact that school governance has its highest number of vacancies since 2016, with 38% of schools reporting at least two vacancies (NGA, 2022). It is estimated that 18,000 more governors need to be recruited to sustain current board sizes.

[1] The Chair of the governing body is responsible for ensuring the effective functioning of the board

As previously discussed, school governance's reputation for 'amateurism' now means that Ofsted 'shines a brighter spotlight on the effectiveness of governing boards because 'good will and good intentions will only go so far' (Ofsted and Wilshaw, 2015). This increases the stakes, expectation and pressure on what is already a highly demanding voluntary role. However, the current Ofsted inspection framework (2019) has raised increasing concerns for the NGA about the diminishing visibility of governors work in Ofsted reports, despite it being an important factor in a school's leadership and management judgement (Whittaker, 2022). Analysis by the NGA found that 31% of reports did not even mention governance (ibid), highlighting the complex and consistently evolving relationship between school governance and Ofsted.

In addition to the pressures described above, school governors find themselves in a considerably fast evolving landscape of school structures, assessment, curriculum and statutory testing; all of which have had an impact on governors' accountabilities (Ofsted, 2019). Most recently, the DfE (2022) White paper commits to converting all schools to academies that are operated by large multi-academy trusts by 2030, potentially re-defining the organisation and importance of school governing bodies at a local board level. Such rapid evolution, draws attention to the likely tensions and challenges for school governors and therefore the importance and immediacy of this research. Chapman (2013) argues that the role of the school governor is more important than ever in an academised system. This is further highlighted by Baxter and Cornforth (2021), who conclude that academy trusts are failing to connect with the school communities they serve, leading to fragmentation and feelings of disconnect. This raises questions as to the extent to which academies are in touch with and serving their school communities, an important role played by governors.

However, it is not solely the increasing incursion of multi academy trusts that demands greater attention be paid to school governance. Issues of inclusivity and participation continue to be stubborn and pervasive in all aspects of school leadership, a concern that the current body of research fails to tackle, or even consider in the field of school governance. These issues and those previously mentioned are all further explored in the next chapter. However, it is important to state them here, so as to position this thesis within the current educational climate and justify its significance.

It is argued here, that through this intimate, creative and nuanced study, a contribution can be made to the school governance and the wider school leadership field. As shown in the next chapter, the current body of research favours a positivist, quantifiable focus on measuring governors (Balarin et al., 2008); no room has been left to think differently, to open up what seems 'natural' to other possibilities (St Pierre, 2000, p.479). The extract from Naomi's written

account presented at the start of this chapter provides a clear example of the tensions and emotion experienced in performing the role of school governor, a dimension that has previously been neglected, a blind spot. Humanist desire for unity, coherence and grids of intelligibility have compounded a narrow focus in the literature on obtainable, measurable, replicable truth, perpetuating an idealised and exclusionary schema (Baxter, 2016). These methodological biases unproductively circumscribe our understanding of self, thereby constraining the possibilities for our 'becoming otherwise' (Butler, 2004, p.173).

The aim of this thesis is not generalisability, a limitation found in much of the field, but instead a challenge to the possibility of an objective, single truth, shifting the focus from school governors' voices to the encounters and processes in which they were expressed, thus avoiding the construction of a narrative to be interpreted (Rantala, 2019). By accepting this, it is possible to understand the importance of approaching questions often overlooked or neglected. Such an approach requires intimacy and nuance in its methodological decisions, as well as an understanding of research as a process that moves in different directions, rather than being static. Therefore, to unravel and provide insight into the intricacy of constitutive acts of school governing; a small sample is used in a fluid bricolage approach.

The closer proximity between primary school governors and the school, as compared to secondary schools, has been identified in the research (James et al., 2014b). These findings reflect my own experiences of governing in a primary school as opposed to presenting to governors in the secondary school in which I was senior leader. James et al., (2014b, p.116) described primary school governance as 'a more intimate affair', a point brought to bear on the identification and selection of primary schools as the site for a performative analysis in this thesis.

In conclusion, school governance is a field of education leadership research that has negated alternative and more fluid approaches that question and interrogate the subjectivity of the school governor. This study contributes to this under-researched field by inserting a feminist poststructuralist perspective that foregrounds the complex and unstable boundaries of school governors' subjectivity. The potential implications of which are to open a space for transformative thinking where it may be possible to:

> *create welcoming, inclusive spaces that engender forms of debate, collaboration and participation [...] setting families and communities free of the burden of technical-bureaucratic directives that now beleaguer the everyday work of ordinary governors.*
>
> *Wilkins (2016b, p.3)*

The overarching aims are to:

1. offer a feminist poststructuralist intervention into the discussion of school governance
2. draw on the writings of Judith Butler to explore how school governors are performatively constituted
3. challenge current thinking that 'professional knowledge' is the sole determinant of school governors' ability to hold leaders to account.

1.3 Entering the field of governance research

> *I trained to become a secondary school teacher immediately after leaving university at 21 with a BSc in Biology. It was never my intention to become a teacher, I wanted to be a forensic scientist, I fancied myself as a bit of a Sam Ryan from Silent Witness. Alas, after a weekend taster residential I realised forensics wasn't that exciting and instead opted to train to teach because the money looked good to a poor science graduate. For the first six years of my career I worked in a very challenging school. I don't think I ever met a school governor or had any knowledge of what they did, there was a mysticism about them but I wasn't particularly that interested. I became more aware through media scandals, whereby school governance was being written about in the newspapers and talked about on the television. The media attention piqued my interest because I realised that poor governance was causing outstanding schools to be graded inadequate by Ofsted - an organisation that had been drilled into me to care about from day one.*

Over the last 10 years, school governance has found itself at the centre of increased public scrutiny, primarily as a reaction to a number of high-profile scandals resulting in intense media attention. Most notably, in 2014, the Trojan Horse Affair, prompted by a now known fake letter, resulted in emergency Ofsted investigations into the alleged safeguarding failures of 21 Birmingham schools, consequently five were re-graded as inadequate after some previously being outstanding. The story was quickly picked up by the national press after reports linking the schools' leaders and governors to the incitement of extremism (Shackle, 2017). Other governing boards have found themselves under the media microscope for financial mismanagement. A damning report published by the Education Funding Agency in 2015 detailing the financial and governance review of Perry Beeches Academy Trust was reported in The Guardian (Adams, 2016) and became one of many over the proceeding years to expose financial abuses in schools.

More recently, it is the rapid expansion of multi-academy trusts (MATs) that has dominated the headlines. In a recent survey, the NGA (2022, p.1) reported that 'just over 40% of

volunteers involved in school governance are now governing academies, and the lion's share of them (over 80%) are within multi-academy trusts'. The growth of MATs raises questions about the role and power of governors and trustees in increasingly complex and multi-level structures that create distance, fragmentation and disconnect with their school communities (Baxter and Cornforth, 2021).

School governors unquestionably find themselves central and answerable in the examples described above. These cases draw attention to the importance of the role school governance should play in keeping staff, students and the wider community safe from abuse of power whether that be social or financial, further intensifying the value of school governance research. As well as the media attention, I became more aware of the role of school governors when I joined a new free school and was promoted to secondary school senior leader. As part of this role I was regularly required to prepare reports, give presentations and be 'grilled' as one governor first put it to me. It was at this point that I began to understand more about the structures, roles and responsibilities. But it was also at this point when I began to question some of the processes and the superficial nature of some aspects of school governing. At the same time, I had started my EdD and these reflections prompted me to consider researching within the field of school governance. As part of the 'nature of professional knowledge' module I chose to explore the literature on school governance, identifying that the field was dominated by approaches that presuppose a linear conception of cause and effect. In addition, an over reliance on distorted samples and generalisability was misplaced in the study of complex social and organisational processes.

Consequently, as a result of this research interest, I decided to join the governing body of my local village primary school. My initial encounters, now sitting on 'the other side of the table' were not quite what I had expected. I was really struck by the value conflicts created as a result of accountability measures. I distinctly remember feelings of discomfort and disappointment, with these becoming increasingly intense as I slowly recognised my own subjection to discourses of professionalisation and disciplinary regimes. I recall saying to my husband 'I joined the board to make a difference, not tick a box'. This led to frustration with myself, the culture and the system. There was a deep feeling that the 'cost' was much higher and complex than originally presumed. Below are the reflective comments I made at the time.

> *In my first meeting as a primary school governor I sat quietly and nervously around a small table in the Year 6 classroom. I distinctly remember the low desk with its tiny chair that ached the base of my spine. I listened intently and made lots of notes. Even though I had worked as a teacher for five years there were many new terms I had never heard before. I couldn't help but feel after an hour into the meeting that nothing 'educational'*

had really been discussed. Near the end of the agenda there was the opportunity to discuss and ratify some school policies. Nobody seemed to have any comments to make so I sheepishly raised my hand. 'Do you feel the bullying policy is sufficient in its scope of coverage? I cannot see where it makes gender, homophobic and other sexually discriminatory bullying clear. To say the response was icy was an understatement. 'We don't have that sort of bullying here, we're a primary school'. Everyone seemed to agree. I had been 'othered', marked out as a secondary practitioner in a primary world. I felt rejected and 'put back in my box'.

Perhaps I was a bit naive of how governing boards operate. Joining the governing body as a secondary school senior leader, Judith Butler's quote *'I am other to myself precisely in the place where I expect to be myself'* (2004, p.15) felt relatable. Through my own critical self-reflexivity, I began to recognise my own complicity in performatively accomplished subjectivity. I wanted to be a good governor, an effective governor, so I 'performed' this role, always ensuring my carefully pre-planned 'challenge' was evidenced in the minutes.

Through both my governing experiences and further reading, actors which had seemingly gone unnoticed were now apparent: inspection regimes, parents, the headteacher, the local authority. Stimulated by earlier reading of Stephen Ball (2003) and Jane Perryman (2006; 2009) on the 'terrors of performativity', I became more interested in both the performative nature of governance and its highly subjecting normalising discourses. As I began to re-read some of the literature I had previously explored, I was newly struck by how it didn't represent my experience of governing and governors. My multiple experiences had heightened my awareness and criticality of school governance, drawing attention to the multi-faceted and complex nature of 'doing governing'.

I recognised that responding to this would require an alternative approach in my research. All research is approached from a particular set of ontological beliefs about the nature of reality (Schraw and Olafson, 2008) and how it can be understood and studied. For me, these beliefs are not fixed, they have evolved over time, most notably since starting my EdD. This thesis is written from the perspective that the world should not be seen as objective truth where knowledge is a representation of the world 'out there'. Instead, my work is underpinned by a critical approach to taken for granted knowledge and being in the world (Burr, 1995).

As a biological sciences undergraduate and science teacher, familiarity with positivist, monological research may have proved familiar, comfortable and tempting for this thesis. A quantitative study, with masses of data and statistical analysis, presented in a beautiful graph

would have been an obvious option. But such a choice would have proven extremely problematic. Engaging with such an approach would require the study of school governors as separate and detached from the socio-historical contexts of which they are situated (Berry, 2011). Recognising that this perspective puts limits on knowledge and disregards power (Kincheloe, 2008), my younger self's positivist view of an obtainable knowledge and knowable 'truths' was supplanted; instead adopting a radically alternative view of reality (Austin, 2018).

1.4 Research questions and outline

Often excluded in leadership research, it is argued that governors, just like teachers, are subject to regulatory and disciplinary forces (Wilkins, 2015) and that governing bodies are institutions that engage in 'identity work' (Bradley, 2011); a point unexplored in schools. This thesis is not concerned with asking what policies are good or bad, or if certain governors are more effective than others, but instead seeks to explore how the governor subject comes into being, and what the costs of this subjectivity might be. Most importantly, it questions how the subject might be made again differently, an important feminist aim.

In a side step from the neoliberal draw of technocratic accountability, I look beyond the 'effectiveness' agenda to conduct a performative analysis of governor subjection by exploring the way governors as subjects are constituted through a repetition of the norms by which they are produced (Butler, 1997b, p.28). In order to do this, I ask the following research questions, which are further explained at the end of Chapter Two:

1. To what extent do norms and practices operate in school governing:
   i) to achieve recognition?
   ii) to acquire intelligibility?
   iii) to perform gender?

2. To what extent do repudiated subjectivities circumscribe and materialise viable governor subjectivities?

3. To what extent do the above impact school governors' ability to perform their core functions?

To explore and answer these questions I aim to deconstruct school governance from the vantage point of a feminist poststructuralist position. By deconstruct, I mean enquire into its construction (Salih, 2002). Drawing from Butler not only provides a robust theoretical

framework through which to critically assess the findings, but also to examine previously taken for granted concepts, identities and 'realities' (Nagington, 2016). This lens provides a view of governors not as fixed but inherently unstable, requiring continual maintenance: I write myself from this subject position.

The remainder of the thesis is structured into four further chapters. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature on both research within the field of school governance and the application of Judith Butler's theory of performativity. After an Introduction (2.1), school governance is defined, particularly in relation to education governance; this section is inserted to ensure clarity as there is conflation between the two concepts in the literature (2.2). Section 2.3 provides an overview of school governance research and consists of five sub sections. Early studies of school governance are reviewed in section 2.3.1, where four themes are identified which are reviewed in each of the remaining subsections. Section 2.3.2 focuses on reviewing the literature on 'effective' governance, 2.3.3 reviews the school governor as a neoliberal subject, 2.3.4 specifically reviews the literature on parent governors and 2.3.5 explores gender research in school governance.

Section 2.4 explores the Butlerian concept of performativity. Initially, school governance research that has positioned it as a 'performance' is reviewed before offering critique and departing from this dramaturgical perspective, repositioning it into a performative one. As such there is a review of the literature on both performance and performativity (2.4.1). Section 2.4.2 traces the most significant aspects of Butler's writings on performativity and draws out key concepts relative to this study. Section 2.4.3 focuses specifically on performative emotions, before concluding this section with an overview of the application of Butler's theory of performativity in education research.

Chapter Three presents the methodological approach and provides explanations for choices of methods and analytical tools used throughout the data collection and analysis. This chapter also interrogates the ethical procedures and considerations taken throughout. Chapter Three begins with an Introduction (3.1) followed by the Research approach (3.2). The Research approach is presented in four sections, 'A feminist poststructuralist lens' (3.2.1), 'Performative ontology' (3.2.2), 'A bricolage methodology' (3.2.3) and Ethics (3.2.4).

The research methods and data collection are presented in section 3.3, a diagram is included in this section to clearly present each stage of data collection and how they are related. This section starts with an overview of the data collection (3.3.1) before moving on to discuss the participants (3.3.2). In section 3.3.3, each method used is presented. The process of data analysis is explained as well as how the performativity tools of 'recognition' and 'intelligibility' were applied to the data (3.4). Section 3.5 outlines details of reflexive analysis employed

throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Chapter Three concludes with a summary of the chapter (3.6).

Chapter Four presents the analysis of the data. This chapter is structured into three sections of analysis (4.2 - 4.4) followed by a summary (4.5). Each section of analysis focuses on one of three empirically grounded themes, where the latter two sections were each generated from the previous stage of analysis. In section 4.2 'performing the school governor', analysis of the data is presented in three sub-sections: the governor subject (4.2.1); normative expectations (4.2.2), positioning the governor self (4.2.3) and the gaze of significant others (4.2.4). In section 4.3 'performing the gendered school governor', analytical emphasis is placed on the gendered performativity of school governance, a thread further developed from the previous section. This section is divided into three sub-sections: 'Naturally acquired' (4.3.1); Female domination (4.3.2) and Emotional dimensions (4.3.3). The final section of analysis (4.4) 'performing the mother governor' takes the maternal body as a theme identified in section 4.3 and explores this in two sub sections: (M)Othered governor (4.4.1) and (In)visible mother (4.4.2). This is followed by an original post-script titled '*I am bolder now*', jointly written with participant Claire. The chapter concludes with a summary (4.6), which is separated into two important sub-sections. The first summarises the key contributions of the chapter, the second a reflection on the analysis.

The final chapter (five) presents a conclusion that summarises the incoherencies and paradoxical performances of the school governor. Section 5.1 introduces the chapter and is followed by section 5.2 which summarises the key features from the analysis. Section 5.3 directly responds to each of the three research questions to demonstrate an original insertion into the field. The limitations, implications and potential further scope of the study are discussed in section 5.4, before concluding the thesis with a final reflection (5.5).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the literature pertinent to this thesis. Through an exploration of books, journal articles and the most significant government legislation and policy, I identify assumptions, biases and gaps in the literature. I argue that the current body of research relies too heavily on positivist approaches that make unhelpful assumptions about school governing and fail to ask questions of power, subjectivity and agency. This chapter considers, through the literature, an alternative approach to researching school governance, a 'performative' approach. This chapter reviews the literature on this approach and demonstrates where and how this has been usefully applied in educational research and beyond. This chapter concludes with a summary that outlines why this approach has been chosen to be applied in this thesis.

The remainder of this chapter is structured into four further sections. Section 2.2 is included to provide an interrogation of the definition of governance, positioning school governance within the wider sphere of education governance and the governance of other public services. This section is important because it makes explicit the 'slipperiness' and conflation that can cause confusion in the application of such terms. This is followed by section 2.3 which provides a brief history of school governance, summarising the most pertinent legislative acts and resulting changes. It also traces the impact of Ofsted's inception on school governance. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate its complex and ever-changing landscape of government and policy, directly fuelling the shifting nature of governance arrangements (Connolly and James, 2022). As such, school governors are required to navigate this challenging terrain, continually re-constituting themselves (Wilkins, 2016a).

Section 2.4 provides an overview of school governance research and is broken down into five subsections that each focus on a particular aspect of the school governance literature. Section 2.4.1 reviews the early studies of school governance, identifying the main foci of research in the last two decades of the 20th century and the early 21st century. This is followed by section 2.4.2 which takes the dominant theme of 'effectiveness' identified from the review of literature in 2.4.1. This section also reviews the methodological approaches dominant in the field and evaluates their success and impact. Section 2.4.3 situates school governors within the neoliberal discourse increasingly associated with the English education system. This section draws on two specific examples from literature that highlight the ways school governance

circulates a business logic.

Section 2.4.4 focuses specifically on the parent governor, a category of governor that is a notable theme from the review of the literature. Although a significant theme in the political arena, with much opinion-based rhetoric, theoretically rich research on parent governors is scarce. Section 2.4 is concluded with section 2.4.5 which reviews gender research in school governance. This section makes it clear how, despite a burgeoning literature in education leadership more broadly, there is a notable absence of gender in school governance research.

Section 2.5 reviews the literature on performativity. This section comprises four smaller subsections which each focus on either an aspect of performativity or its application to school governance. Section 2.5.1 reviews the literature on school governance as a performance, contrasting this with the concept of performativity. This is followed by 2.5.2 which provides a review of Judith Butler's key writings relevant to performativity, highlighting the most useful concepts that could be applied to explore school governance. Section 2.5.3 focuses specifically on the literature that positions emotions as performative and reviews literature on the emotional dimensions of educational practice and leadership. This section is concluded in section 2.5.4 which reviews the literature that applies Butler's concept of performativity to education research.

Finally, the chapter will be concluded in section 2.6 with a summary of the overall understanding gained from the literature; identification of the limits and gaps in the literature that need further research and questions that have arisen from my reading.

2.2 Defining Governance

Governance is an important issue, especially in times of increasing accountability and scrutiny of public services. 'Target fetishism' (Gray, 1997, p.353) and competition is impacting on governance across a number of public sectors; including education (Keddie, 2014; Wilkins et al., 2019) and police (Metcalfe, 2017). Seddon (2014) uses the term 'The Whitehall Effect' to describe this. Governance is variously defined across the public sector, with both the Health and Social Care Act (2012) and the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners the same year, re-defining governance in both the NHS and Police Force (Baxter and Farrell, 2015). School governance is defined by Gann (2015, p.3) as 'structures and practice that determine the ways schools operate and how they are led'. The Standards and Framework Act 1998 (DfEE, 1998) defined school governance as not what it is but by what it does, possessing 'overarching responsibility for the conduct of schools' and duties to: 'setting strategic direction;

secure accountability and monitor and evaluate its progress' (Ranson et al., 2005).

School governance is not to be conflated with education governance. Cornforth and Edwards (1998) in their research into governance in UK public sector organisations used the term, 'governance' loosely to refer to all the functions performed by the governing body (GB). However, loose definitions of important terms such as 'governance' leads to conflation and their meaning is lost and unhelpful, potentially becoming misleading, particularly to an international reader. Many terms and concepts in the field of education are polyvalent in nature and as Murphy (2018, p.863) reminds us 'the concept of school governance represents a much more diverse field of practice than just governors and school governing bodies'. It is therefore important to make clear both the distinctions and connections between education governance, school governance and school governors/gover*ning*.

The lack of precise meaning of 'education governance' is a concern of both James (2014) and Wilkins, Murphy and Olmedo (2020), who assert that it is a 'slippery' concept with divergent meanings due to it being experienced and interpreted differently. Whilst trying to avoid a simplified fixed concept or single definition, Wilkins and Olmedo (2018) characterise education governance as 'a heuristic device, discourse and technology of government' (ibid, p.2). Ranson (2008) describes how new forms of education governance are taking place, and therefore like Wilkins and Olmedo (2018) avoids a static and definitive view but instead a fluid, evolving relationship between central and local government.

School governance can be defined separately by its responsibilities for strategic leadership, accountability, people, structures, compliance and evaluation (DfE, 2019, p.13) in a school or group of schools. The Competency Framework for Governance (DfE, 2017, p.8) further clarifies these main activities as 'defining and implementing strategy whilst holding the leaders of schools and trusts to account'. This could be challenged as less of a definition and more of an example of gover*ning* but I would argue that this provides clarity for the reader of this thesis. Gover*ning* refers to the actual activities performed by school governors (Balarin et al., 2008).

Examples from legislation and academic literature highlight the relationship and differences between the concepts of education and school governance, but also draw our attention to the shifting, conflating and evolving nature of both. Clear definitions are hard to pin down and crystallise. This provides some evidence of the complex, ever changing landscape that school governors must navigate. Situated at the centre of school governance are the school governors themselves. The volunteers that commit their time and efforts to performing the

role of the school governor. School governors do not 'run' schools and should not engage in operational activities and/or decision making.

2.3 A brief history of school governance

School governance is not a new concept; in England it dates back some 600 years. Gann (2015) provides a detailed history of school governance before the Education Act (1944), describing its evolution and the most significant changes and advances. The Education Act (1944) affected governing boards by increasing their powers and specifically articulating their modes of operation (Baxter, 2016). However, Sallis (2019; 1988) suggested the greatest weakness of the act was its failure to give any guidance as to the kind of people who were to be appointed as governors, providing an early example of subjecting norms and discourses as pre-existing subjection.

Over the next 50 years, seismic changes took place that reconfigured both the role and composition of governing bodies. Governor numbers rose and a more inclusive form of governance was established as a direct result of the Taylor Report in 1977. Drawing attention to the emergence of 'corporate management' in local authorities, reducing independence of local education authorities and raising the profile of governing bodies as a voice for education (Gann, 2015), the report also recommended representation from both teaching staff and parents. The 1980 Education Act subsequently established the requirement for parent and teacher responsibility (Farrell and Law, 1999). This legislation extended the responsibilities of school governors; driven by the desire to enhance accountability (Beckett, Bell and Rhodes, 1991, p.98).

The Education Reform Act (1988) significantly enhanced the influence of school governing bodies, greatly increasing powers over resource allocation whilst simultaneously introducing a compulsory national curriculum and standardised system of assessment (Whitty, 2008). The funding of schools became conditioned on pupil numbers, thus argued by some, resulting in the beginnings of a schools' competitive market (Glatter, 2012). As a result, the governing board has become increasingly pivotal to strategic planning and accountability (James, 2014).

With the declining influence of the local education authorities over governing bodies, The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) was established in 1992, filling the void with a remit to inspect schools including their governing boards. Over time, James (2014) believes inspections and judgements have become a dominant agent of accountability and a significant driver/shaper of practice within schools and of school governing (ibid). Farrell and

Law (1999) describe the mechanisms by which governing bodies were held to account prior to Ofsted's creation as being rather weak and diffuse, however, subsequent inspection regimes have regularly evolved to become increasingly intensified with the ramifications of a 'less than good' inspection outcome being significant for a school and indeed the governing body (Ozga et al., 2013; Ehren et al., 2016).

Ten years on from Ofsted's inception, emerging educational concerns, such as the disproportion of underachievement in certain pupil groups and a number of poorly performing maintained schools, led the New Labour government to establish academies in the Education Act 2002. The policy goals of academisation included increasing school diversity and parental choice via competition (West and Bailey, 2013; Wilkins, 2012). The overarching purpose was to drive up standards (Goodman and Burton, 2012).

The continuing diversification of England's schools and thus its governance arrangements, meant further re-defining and re-distributing the powers between central government and local actors in publicly funded education (Kauko and Salokangas, 2015, p.1108). The introduction of the Academies Act (2010) promised 'a system-wide shift in this provision' (West and Bailey, 2013, p.139) and an 'education revolution' (Gove, 2014). Introduced in 2010, by the newly formed Coalition Government, the Act also founded the 'free school' policy, whereby new schools could be opened from scratch by sponsors, ranging from parents, to charities, to sports clubs. Free schools are argued by some to exemplify 'policy borrowing' (Halpin and Troyna, 1995) from the Swedish free school movement (Wiborg, 2010).

Education policy has continued to gain in pace and intensity, affecting the way in which England's schools are governed. Central government now have the mechanisms to close under performing schools, requiring them to convert to academies (Gove, 2012). This series of moves was described by Eyles and Machin (2019, p.1107) as 'one of the most radical and encompassing programmes of schools' reform seen in the recent past in advanced countries'. A rise of new 'stakeholders' have been charged with responsibility for setting up and running schools. These include charities, businesses, voluntary organisations, social enterprises and faith groups (Ball and Junemann, 2012). A white paper published by the DfE (2022) states that by the end of 2030 all schools will be academies run by Multi Academy Trusts (MAT).

The resulting impact of this direction from the government has been substantial on school governance. The incursion of multi-academy trusts (MAT) and other large groups of schools has led to the evolution of a more complex, multi-tiered school governance structure. The consequences of which can be the abatement of decision-making powers, which raises

significant concerns over the role and contribution of the school governor (Baxter and Wise, 2013; Chapman et al., 2010, Whittaker, 2022). It is even argued that decisions usually taken by governors in an open process are now often taken by trustees in an 'opaque' system, with one MAT even scrapping governing bodies in its 25 academies (West and Wolfe, 2018).

Within the increasing MAT hierarchical structure, the removal of certain powers and demotion of school governors to an advisory role, may result in exclusion from important governing responsibilities such as headteacher performance management (Baxter and Cornforth, 2021). As a result, Allen and Gann (2022) argue that participatory, stakeholder engagement has been impacted in schools, leading to a 'democratic deficit' (ibid, p.11). They argue for the facilitation of a new governance architecture, deepening democracy by the promotion of empowered participatory governance (EPG). The authors argue that more participatory forms of governance are imperative.

This section of the literature review recognises the shifting and potentially fragmented roles performed within school governance. This highlights the need for methodological approaches that examine school governance practices as continual movement, which is both ambivalent and contradictory.

2.4 An overview of school governance research

2.4.1 Early studies

Interest in school governance began to develop amongst the research community in the late 80's and early 90's following the introduction of the 1988 Education Reform Act; a significant piece of legislation which enhanced the roles and accountabilities of school governors. The increased powers and responsibilities drew the attention of education researchers whose initial interest focused on the practice and functions of school governing boards (Mahoney, 1988; Brehony, 1994). These early studies of school governance centered around renewed core functions of school accountability and performance. Considered previously to be largely symbolic, the governor role was now more demanding and autonomous, argued to render these lay volunteers as 'locally powerful' (Deem, 2013, p.151, *my emphasis*).

Despite the (re)newed narrative of increased governor power and autonomy, some critics questioned the reality, with Thody (1994) titling her book 'School Governors: Leaders or Followers?'. Rosalind Levačić, (1995) challenged the purpose of school governing, likening boards to 'supporters' clubs and concluded in her paper that the changes in school

governance reflect two political trends, namely, the increasing role of the client in delivery of services and developing local government alternatives within quasi-market structures. In response to Thody and Levačić's observations, the research focus began shifting away from what governors do to how 'good' they are at doing it.

Similarly, education policy makers were also becoming sensitive to the condition of school governance. The adjective 'effective' became synonymous with a discourse of school governance following the publication of the Audit Commission and Ofsted's (1995) 'Lessons in Teamwork: How School Governing Bodies Can Become More Effective'. The document offered a broad overview of five 'effective' aspects of the governing body; steering, monitoring, supporting, accounting to parents and the executive role. The document's publication triggered a cascade of articles and books citing the document and began developing a discourse around 'effective governance'.

Creese's (1995) analysis of the aforementioned documents and Ofsted reviews highlighted the quality and consistencies of school governing bodies in both primary and secondary schools. It concludes that governors in primary schools are failing to execute strategic planning and are not sufficiently involved in monitoring the effectiveness of their school. Similarly, Corrick (1996) believed there is a lack of confidence on the part of the governors in primary schools, who must be able to detach themselves from immediate and personal concerns and interests while having a sound knowledge of the role.

In their book chapter titled 'Working with Governors: A bridge to the community?', Earley and Creese (1999) describe governors as occupying a unique position, a 'bridge' between the school and the community. They were early critics of school governance, questioning boards' representation of the communities they served. Like Deem (1991; 1994), they challenged whether boards were accurately reflective of a 'balance of interests' and made early references to gender and race issues, however, this was not further explored. Deem's writing on gender in school governance is further discussed in section 2.4.5.

With weakening local authority control and an impending general election, the school improvement agenda became a top priority for politicians and there was an increased querying of the quality of what was going on in school boardrooms and its relationship to school improvement. The focus on what constituted 'effective' or 'good' governance and its link to school improvement and performance continued into the early 00's when more specifically identified aspects of governing and governors were studied. For example, Farrell and Law (1999) recognised that previous research had failed to make clear how governor accountability

works in practice, paying attention to how governors perceive themselves and the effectiveness of their accountabilities.

Earley (2000) interrogated the degree to which governors perform their roles, questioning whether their work equates to monitoring, managing or meddling? Researching specifically how governing bodies contribute to school improvement, the tensions created by a lay body undertaking what might be seen as the activities of educational professionals were revealed. In addition, Earley and Creese (2000) began to focus on specific roles within the governing body. Focusing on the role of the staff governors, they raise concerns of exclusion and marginalisation through the perceptions of their role. They also drew out the impact of relationships with headteachers which highlights the question of conflicts of loyalty in the headteacher's presence.

Debates in the literature have continued to question whether governance matters for school improvement (Ranson et al., 2005; Connolly and James, 2011). A significant study conducted by Balarin et al., (2008, p.4) cited that the contribution of school governors has not received sufficient attention and at present school governing is 'overloaded, overcomplicated and overlooked'. Conducting a large-scale study of interviews and over 5000 online surveys, their summary of findings state that 'generally, school governing is working well' (ibid). This is a finding that seems almost contradictory to the majority of studies on school governance. The study also provides a list of 10 recommendations for school governance, which include; new models of school governing being evaluated and more efforts should be made to recruit members of groups currently underrepresented on school governing bodies (NGA, 2022).

It would be impossible to cover the full scope of every study into school governance within this literature review, however, what is clear from those reviewed are the themes of 'improvement' and 'effectiveness'. In his book, 'Improving school governance', Nigel Gann (2015) provides a detailed overview of how the governing board can bring about school improvement. In his conclusion, he draws attention to the desire for some agencies to reduce school governance to a set of compliances, a one-dimensional list of boxes to tick (ibid, p.204-205). Yet, the body of research itself can be a contributing factor to this narrative, cementing its value through the prioritisation of knowable, replicable truth.

The next section of the literature review focuses more specifically on the themes of 'effectiveness' and 'improvement' in school governance research, drawing attention to both the contribution and criticisms of this body of work.

2.4.2 Research into 'effective' school governance[2]

The phrase 'effective' in relation to school governance did not appear in the Education Reform Act (1988), but has subsequently emerged as a pivotal construct for governors. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the adjective 'effective' as 'successful in producing a desired or intended result' (Lexico, 2020). However, it is questionable how one can validly ascertain or 'measure' the effectiveness of a school's governing body, let alone re-enact it. However, the obsession with labelling and defining what it means to be 'effective' has fuelled school effectiveness research which results in essentialising neutral descriptions of good practice in high performing schools. These supposedly replicable features become powerful benchmarks for dictating 'normality'.

Ranson et al., (2005), Balarin et al., (2008), McCrone, Southcott and George (2011), McCrone et al., (2017) and James (2014) have each undertaken substantial research projects in an attempt to assess the state of school governance; reviewing the arrangements and contributions made by governing bodies, with the aim of identifying the most effective practices. These and several other studies have concluded that governance does matter, yet the nature of the association between governance and school improvement remains problematic because causality of the correlation cannot be identified (Scanlon, Earley and Evans, 1999). Failure to identify the strand of governance as the principal cause in the correlation could place the significance of governance in doubt. However, there is concern that this view presupposes a linear conception of cause and effect which is misplaced in the study of complex social processes that necessarily comprise interdependent, mutually reinforcing social practices (Ranson et al., 2005).

In their study, Ranson et al., (2005) asked the question "could schools be efficiently administered by headteachers without the burden of a governing body?" The answer to this question was in part sought by the 'The state of school governing in England 2014' report produced by James et al., (2014) and prior to this 'Governing our Schools' by Balarin et al., (2008). Both reports concluded that a number of 'indicators' show school governing in England appears to be functioning well and is moving in the right direction, reinforcing the view that governance matters and is effective. Yet both fail to live up to their own report titles by contributing very little to the role governing bodies play in underpinning the quality of

[2] This section of the literature review cites my own unpublished work from the taught stage of the EdD. Austin (2015) Criticisms of research into school governance: The validity of autoethnography as a method for researching school governance. Unpublished. Canterbury Christ Church University.

institutional leadership and school improvement.

Both projects have failed to extend our knowledge and understanding of the contribution governance makes to school improvement, in the terms of which they set out to, with those being positivist terms. They summarise the views of active governors and provide suggested areas for improvement but they fail to address the significant issue of identifying any principal causes for the correlation between school improvement and governance. This identification is believed to be vital if there is to be a valid demonstration that trends of attainment are associated with more than just the socioeconomic context of schools (James et al., 2010).

In their earlier report 'The hidden givers', James et al., (2010) undertook an extensive review of the relevant literature on school governance; extending the analysis of data from a national survey of school governors undertaken by Balarin et al., (2008). They undertook 30 case studies of school governing in England in a range of settings. They concluded that data which demonstrates that good governing has a direct effect on school performance is lacking and notions of 'challenging the headteacher' and 'calling the headteacher to account' did not match the practices of the governing bodies studied. They also stated that the link between secondary school governing body effectiveness and pupil attainment is very weak. Within four years of drawing these conclusions, their 2014 report was published suggesting a contrasting and far more positive view of school governance and the contribution it makes to school effectiveness. This positive view was supported by the work of McCrone, Southcott and George (2011) into models of school governance.

The data in both reports by James et al., (2014) and Balarin et al., (2008) was collected through surveys. In both surveys only a small proportion of possible participants completed the surveys. Of the 350,000 school governors only 7,713 completed the survey, with high numbers of attrition (James et al., 2014), therefore distorting the sample and generalisability. Other weaknesses in their data collection methods include: it was the only method for collecting data; there is a high chance that responding governors may not have told the truth and misrepresented themselves; lack of ethnical diversity amongst governors taking the survey advocates a white, male, able bodied perspective creating a cultural skew in the findings.

James et al's., (2014) survey required participants to select from a list of responses. It is important to consider with this type of survey how the social desirability of the questionnaire section may lead to respondents answering inaccurately. For example, when asked to identify characteristics that were important as a governor 98% selected 'readiness to ask challenging questions' but only 60% selected 'knowledge of education'. A possible reason for this difference is the social desirability of governors not to identify weaknesses or gaps in their own

skills and knowledge. It also demonstrates how this method lacks rigour in proving that governors have the ability to exhibit these characteristics. This is highlighted by the earlier research of Balarin et al., (2008) who concluded from their surveys that six out of seven governors expressed the view that, overall, their governing body works effectively. Subsequently, James et al., (2010) reviewed their data and analysed it alongside observations of governing body meetings and concluded that notions of 'challenging the headteacher' and 'calling the headteacher to account' did not match the practices of the governing bodies.

Research into governance has commonly used surveys because this method can easily access the views of a large number of participants in a practical way, but participants bring their own understanding to the questions being asked. For example, two governors might answer yes to the question 'Is your governing body effective?', but measure the effectiveness in different ways, one associating it with external examination results, the other with grading by Ofsted. This view is particularly poignant when the sample of participants does not reflect the diversity of the cultural group.

It has been suggested that failures to identify the strand of governance as the principal cause in the correlation could place the significance of governance in doubt, a dangerous irony of positivist research. Caution has been raised that this view presumes a linear relationship of cause and effect which is misplaced in the study of complex social processes (Ranson et al., 2005). The social world in educational practice has such a complicated set of interacting factors that we cannot isolate events under consideration from this complex reality. Generalities are maintained only in highly standardised conditions that do not always prevail in the real world.

Although a dominant theme, there are relatively few empirical studies on the impact and 'effectiveness' of school governors. Whilst some from this small pool of studies were able to conclude positively that governing bodies have made an 'effective' contribution to school improvement, this is met with challenge because the data collection methods described above have not been able to yield valid data that can contribute to causal analysis of school governance and its effectiveness. Is it even possible to achieve this, and if so, is it really replicable in another organisation? Macbeath (2005, p.9) shares this concern, stating 'the search for the effective school is like the hunt for the unicorn, a quest for a mythical identity'. By assuming that all schools can follow the same method of success, any detour from this norm can become a signal that a school is failing, which neglects the unique contexts of schools. In addition, these dominant approaches fail to expand its scrutiny of the way power operates in school governance.

2.4.3 School governors as neoliberal subjects

Market principles have become firmly rooted in England's schools. It is well documented how the neoliberal practices of consumer choice, diversity and competition have impacted on teachers and school leaders (Cirin, 2014; Wiborg et al., 2018). Argued to reflect the neoliberal agenda, schools and their leaders are tasked with a delicate balancing act between the 'deliverology' (Barber, 2007, p.42) of measured outcomes and their responsibility for safeguarding, well-being and inclusion. Some have argued that this 'tightrope walking' has created a new 'ethical environment' in which practitioners, leaders and governors must operate (Blackburn, 2002). For example, Ball (2008) describes how schools compete to recruit 'value-adding' students, those that are easiest and cheapest to teach, whilst simultaneously discouraging those that add 'negative value' such as students with special educational needs (SEND). Evidence of this can be seen in school admission policies (Wilkin et al., 2005). Whilst the literature accounts for these more operational aspects of school leadership, there is very little in the literature on the impact of the neoliberal turn on the strategic responsibilities of school governors; perhaps signalling its considered insignificance.

Linking this to school governance specifically, Andrew Wilkins has been the most prominent writer in critiquing the transforming of governors into neoliberal subjects. In a series of articles, Wilkins utilises a Foucauldian lens to describe how discourses of 'good governance' regulate school governors (Wilkins, 2015; Olmedo and Wilkins, 2017). Drawing on a Foucauldian governmentality approach, Wilkins explores how governors are captured in governmental fields of power and why such mobilisations are important to the deregulation shaping the school system in general. He states:

> *These interventions in discussions about school governance are important precisely because they force us to confront the new modalities of power, hierarchy and expertise through which governors are called upon to make new accommodations within and adjustments to neoliberal practice*
>
> *(Wilkins, 2017, p.4)*

Two illustrative examples can be drawn from the literature that highlight the expectations and exclusions materialising from neoliberal discourses of school governance and the transformation of governors into neoliberal subjects. The first is the circulation of a 'business

logic', which dates as far back as The Education Reform Act (1988):

> *The instrument of government shall provide for it to be the duty of the governing body to secure that those governors include persons appearing to them to be members of the local business community.*
>
> *Education Reform Act (1988, p.50)*

References to 'business' as early as this legislative act present early evidence of what Ball (2008, p.185) describes as the 'ratchet' effect; small, incremental policy moves which have embedded and naturalised privatisation in schools. For example, Thody's (1994) advice book states that 'schools need to run like companies with the governing bodies being boards of directors and the headteachers the managing directors' (p.22). It is also argued that the state legitimated encouragement of private sector sponsors as governors, has 'corporatised' leadership (Courtney, 2015) in England's schools, subsequently refashioning school governance with a corporate identity (Ranson, 2012).

The move towards a 'corporate identity' is perhaps best demonstrated through the diversification of school governance structures across different types of schools. Traditionally, the stakeholder model has always underpinned school governance, comprising staff, parents and the local community. However, academies have a much greater flexibility over the membership of their boards and can adapt its compositions to meet its needs (Connolly, Farrell and James, 2017). According to McCrone, Southcott and George (2011) the stakeholder model is recognised as the most appropriate model of school governance and typically organised into committees that have responsibility for certain core functions such as finance and quality of education.

The NGA website tells states:

> *Most governing bodies carry out much of their business through committees. A committee is where a smaller group of people are chosen to represent the full governing board to receive information, make decisions on its behalf and act as a clear channel of communication to inform the wider work of the full governing board.*

However, more recently, this committee structure is being forsaken for a more corporate style that focuses on a business acumen. The 'circle model' has begun to circulate in the field of governance. Yet to appear in any published academic literature, the 'circle model',

is notably championed on important school governance websites such as The Key and the National Governance Association. It has become increasingly popular amongst primary schools, particularly in the South East counties such as Kent. The terms of reference of a school which adopts this model typically describes it as:

> *A Governing Body that operates a different model of governance where the governing body works as a 'whole team' without any standing committees and meeting every half term or more often if required.*

This school governance model replicates key features of the 'The Carver Model', also known as the policy model, which it borrows from the business world. The committee-less structure renders governors fully accessible to all discussions, reports and meetings. It is said to empower board members to fulfil their obligation of accountability. The removal of committees means that the circle model renders governors fully visible, creating panoptic effects and demanding a greater breadth and depth of expertise.

The second illustrative example is the parent, whose incorporation onto governing boards is through elections by parents of pupils attending the school. Parent governors as neoliberal subjects can be understood in two ways. Firstly, through parents as consumers (Olmedo and Wilkins, 2017), and secondly, through the 'professionalising' of school governance (Wilkins, 2015). Olmedo and Wilkins (2017) observe that school governance discourse can 'divide' parents between those who are 'skilled' and 'unskilled' in their ability to add value. Such dividing provides a clear example of precariousness of parent governor subjectivities. A point further explored in the next section.

2.4.4 Parent governors

A notable theme in the review of the early literature is the way certain governor roles are positioned as more precarious than others. As shown in the previous section, parent governors can become more precariously liable to critical attention due to the valuing of a 'business logic' and managerial knowledge (Young, 2016). As a result, parents as governors are interpellated through a dividing practice which discerns who is and isn't to be included (Olmedo and Wilkins, 2017).

The role and contribution of the parent governor has and continues to be contentiously debated since their compulsory appointment on boards was written into legislation in the

Education Reform Act (1984). For example, former Schools Minister Lord Nash (2013) states:

> *I'm certainly not opposed to parents and staff being on the governing body, but people should be appointed on a clear prospectus and because of their skills and expertise as governors; not simply because they represent particular interest groups […] Running a school is in many ways like running a business, so we need more business people coming forward to become governors.*

Lord Nash's statement directly contradicts the original purpose for parents' statutory appointment onto school governing boards, and challenges the contribution they can make by way of being significantly invested in the education their children receive. Such circulating discourses indicate who is to be included and excluded from the business of school governance, further pushing those marginalised in governance to the outer boundaries. It is therefore no wonder that there are insufficient parents coming forward for election in some school settings (Connelly, Farrell and James, 2017), with the more disadvantaged communities finding it the hardest to attract willing parents (ibid). Porritt and Stagg (2022, p.5) state that 'progress in diversifying school governance is too slow'.

A criticism levied at parent governors is the notion that parents join governing bodies to further personal aims. An example reported by James et al., (2010), is to bring about a specific change within the school or to promote their own child's/children's interests. It is argued that these parents focus on pursuing their 'single issue'. As such, some critics have called for removal of the statutory requirement for school boards to retain democratically elected parent governors. The suggestion to remove parents from governing bodies will be significant blow to those who champion for participatory, democratic governance.

Parents' participation in school governance is under-researched. Conclusions about the discharge of parent governors' duties is premised on a narrow view that places a sole premium on knowledge and experience which has business application (Young, 2017a). Viable parent governors are seen as those who are owners of professional knowledge and expertise. Parent governors are clearly marked out in the literature as a 'liability' because of the presumed risk they pose to bias and furthering their own interests. I argue that this raises further questions about the limited methodological approaches currently relied on to explore parent governors, and challenge the narrow and oversimplified ways parent governors are presented.

2.4.5 Gender research in school governance

Blackmore (2013, p.139) recognises that there is now a 'burgeoning' literature on women and educational leadership, but criticises its focus on numerical representation. For example, in school leadership, the gender gap in headteacher's, particularly in secondary schools, persists (Fuller, 2017b), and stubborn barriers are persistently faced by women who aspire to senior management in education (Coleman, 2020).

Much literature has focused on the differences between men and women, which perpetuates a view of binary opposites; and of gender as the physical embodiment of certain ways of being (Fuller, 2017a). Such a view negates the personal histories, social contexts and the multiplicity of performing gender, furthering stereotypes that position women in lose-lose situations. Numerous studies highlight how if women are judged to be efficient and competent then they are likely to be judged unfeminine and lacking in female characteristics of nurture and care, an 'inappropriate' female manager (Powell, Bagilhole and Dainty, 2009).

In the field of school governance research, however, gender has passed relatively unnoticed, and has been described by Deem and Brehony (1994, p.161) as 'unchartered territory'. Kyriakidou (2012) believes this is most likely because it is 'done' routinely, concealing its precariousness and performativity. It is only Rosemary Deem (1991; 2003) who has paid gender in school governance any attention, criticising the field for making no mention of feminist work. In the book titled 'Gender, policy and education change: Shifting agendas in the UK and Europe' published in 2003, Rosemary Deem's chapter titled 'Gendered Governance' traced the ways gender is relevant to the processes and organisational cultures arising from changes in school governance. This work has made an important contribution, however, it is predicated on a numbers based analysis of female board and committee members, revealing little about the underlying and socially conditioned practices of school governance.

Outside of the English education system, gender has been a focus of research in a few school governance studies. Nishimura (2017) explored gender inequality in primary schools in rural Senegal. Focusing primarily on processes of policy implementation and environment, this study concerns the impact of school governance on the gendered inequalities of pupil participation rather than of governors as gendered. In South African schools, Brown and Duku (2008) explored what they called 'gender issues in participation' concluding that all leadership/authority roles were gendered, despite more females being members. Similarly, Dhakal (2019; 2021) explored school governance in Nepal, drawing on the concepts of representation and participation, she concludes that there are less opportunities for women to engage in decision making.

The very limited research that has made gender visible within the field of school governance has viewed masculinity and femininity of what we do as expressive of what we are and that what we are is a coherent unity of sex, a stable identity, rather than as an identity tenuously constituted in time. What is clear is that there has been no methodological attempt to go beyond descriptive understanding of gender, to ask the important questions about the 'how' or the 'why'. Davies (1989) has asserted that 'self' is not a passive surface society impresses on from the outside, but is active in its own construction. Fuller (2017a) has advocated for engagement with a poststructural theory to ensure there is no view of homogenous groups defined by biological sex. This understanding is largely absent in the field.

2.5 Performativity

2.5.1 School governance as performance

In recent years, a few school governance scholars have developed a more nuanced critique. A wider range of concepts and theories have slowly been drawn from to explore governance. For example, Wilkins (2021) has challenged the prevalence of functionalist accounts of governance, instead outlining the benefits of deconstructing governance from a range of post-positivist theoretical perspectives including a Gramscian approach (Davies, 2012), a deliberative-interactive approach (Kooiman, 2003) and interpretivist-constructivist (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006). However, despite this alternative interjection, empirical studies of school governance are dominated by a perspective rooted in the facticity of observable, measurable and replicable truth.

Many studies have viewed the 'self' as a performed character, using the dramaturgical metaphor of stages, actors and audiences to describe the interaction between actors. In education research, Goffman's dramaturgical approach has been applied in studies of school Ofsted inspections (Case, Case and Catling, 2000), practices in the classroom (Preves and Stephenson, 2009) and the performance of headteachers (Ford, 2018). In these studies, an 'active, prior, conscious self' performs for an audience who in turn interpret the performance (Goffman, 1956; 1967). Researchers in school governance have drawn on this deliberate and conscious performance approach to explore accountability. Farrell, Morris and Ranson, (2017) likened governing to a 'theatrical performance' or 'dramaturgy', challenging the abilities of governors to 'hold[ing] leaders to account'.

> *there is a performance on the stage by actors, made up of headteachers and governors. The planning, the organisation and the preparation of scripts are all part of ensuring performances go well. The actors are performing together and there is a hope*

> *that the 'show', in this case, the governor meetings, can be delivered successfully. The authors of the performance are the headteachers or the authorities, depending on who has put forward the agenda.*
>
> (ibid, p.228)

They described governing body meetings as being characterised by headteachers 'giving an account', concluding that low governor participation represented a 'well managed stage performance' (ibid, p.228). As such, meetings were more of an exchange of information than scrutiny. Similarly, Young (2016) provides a similar description of a Goffmanesque performance by observing how governors are provided with the 'right' questions to ask, thus delivering a performance which she has termed 'prescribed criticality'.

From both studies there is a suggestion that the governor role is seen as one in which to participate you must play the required part, that of the conscious, scripted performer. The suggestion that aspects of school leadership and classroom practice resemble some sort of performance is not new. There are numerous sites or practices in education where drama of self is said to unfold: school league tables, the Higher Education Research Excellence Framework, annual staff reviews, performance-related pay (Ball, 2016). However, in many fields, we find those who highlight their discomfort in this concept of performance because of its perspective of the subject. In contrast to Goffman, many challenge the notion of an active, voluntarist human agent. This alternative view of performance has been taken further in the direction of gender studies, most notably by Judith Butler (1990). In line with Nietzsche, she argues in her book Gender Trouble:

> *gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed. The challenge for rethinking gender categories outside of the metaphysics of substance will have to consider the relevance of Nietzsche's claim in On the Genealogy of Morals that "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed — the deed is everything." In an application that Nietzsche himself would not have anticipated or condoned, we might state as a corollary: There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results.*
>
> *(Butler, 1990 p.34)*

It is this understanding of the subject where Butler's position on performance departs radically from that of Goffman. In contrast to Goffman's scripted, intentional actor, Butler's performance is instead subsumed and always connected to 'performativity' (Gregson and Rose, 2000), whereby the performances are articulations of power that discipline subjects as it produces

them, there is no social agent behind the costume.

Of course, such an understanding is not without its own critique, this will be further explored in the next section, however, the notion of exploring the governor subject from a performative lens requires an understanding of identity as changeable. The governors' subjectivity is not a stable category but is constantly created and repeated (Butler, 1990, p.179). However, the concept of performance should not be confused with an intentional, conscious activity, identity is an effect of discursive practices (Butler, 1990, p.24). Butlerian conceptualisations will be extrapolated further in the next section.

2.5.2 An overview of performativity

Butler's concept of performativity is predicated on a challenge to conventional humanist and social constructionist ideas and thinking on subjectivity. It provides an ontological critique of seemingly knowable categories. Performativity, in the Butlerian sense can be described as a 'forced reiteration of norms' (McNay, 1999, p.176). The repetition of norms rigidifies and institutionalises, but at the same time it is the variation in the way in which subjects actively repeat norms that agency is located (Butler, 1997b).

Such an understanding has been described as poststructural because it rejects a correspondence theory of language (Sarup, 1993), where words are understood as not a simple mirroring (St. Pierre, 2000). Words carry multiple meanings in and of themselves, meanings are always plural (Weedon, 2004).

Taking influence from Foucault in exploring the 'real' as constructed by discourse and power, Butler's notion of performativity fills the gap in what she describes as Foucault's 'failure to explain how the material body is constituted by power and discourse' (Butler, 1993, p.33). Butler's performative ontology supplements Foucault's work with a psychoanalytic perspective that accommodates failures in subject formation and explanations of resistance (Butler, 1997b).

Butler's performativity provides us with a different vocabulary; a vocabulary that is particularly useful in exploring a field that is currently blind to the modalities of subjectivation that are particularly gendered. Through a series of writings Butler develops her theories of performativity, subjection and agency. A brief mapping of some of her key texts makes explicit this important vocabulary and how it can be used to ask questions about the formation of school governor subjectivity.

In Subjects of Desire (1987), Butler draws on Hegel as her main influence. Her interest in

subjects, desire and recognition were first introduced here and continue to run throughout her later writing. This text asks questions of subjectivity and whether it necessarily rests upon negations of the 'Other' by the 'Self' (Salih, 2002, p.20). The concepts of desire and recognition continue into Butler's most widely known text 'Gender trouble', first published in 1990. Butler, focusing on how identity is constructed by and in discourse, shifts the course of debates within feminism and challenges the sex/gender conventional wisdom (Lloyd, 2015). It is here that she introduces the idea that gender is performative and unnatural, challenging the metaphysics of substance, asserting the subject is an effect rather than a cause. Butler argues that the body is a 'doing', a verb, rather than a 'being', though not a doing by a subject said to pre-exist the deed (1990, p.25). Despite focusing on gender in this text, her concepts have been richly applied to the formation of other subject categories, further discussed in section 2.5.4.

The key theme, widely taken up from 'Gender Trouble', performativity, continues into Butler's next book 'Bodies that Matter' (1993) where she continues her troubling, asserting that bodies are discursively constructed. Whilst also acknowledging that there is a physical, material body that feels pain for example, she makes clear that we can only apprehend that body through discourse. She develops her analysis of the connections between performativity and materiality. She specifically links performativity to the Derridean notion of citationality. It is in 'Bodies that Matter' that intelligibility is paid attention to as the limits of those identities and bodies that come to matter and those that don't. She challenges customary notions of 'construction', instead arguing for an understanding of construction as constitutive constraint. It is through this understanding that we can ask how it produces the domain of intelligible as well as the unthinkable, the abject (Butler, 1993, p.xi).

In the 'Psychic life of Power', Butler (1997b) predominantly works through the relationship between agency and subjectivity. She argues that subjects are attached to the power structures that subordinate them, but Butler finds potential for agency in the operations of the psyche and its potential to turn against power itself. Butler criticises Foucault for neglecting the subversive potential of the psyche in his accounts of power, yet still continues to describe power in his terms as multiple and productive. From this text, I draw out an understanding of the subject as a site of ambivalence and agency as possible through the constant reproduction of subjectivity. Agency arises in the gaps and fissures of how repetitive acts are carried out (Kelan, 2010). Despite, its often misinterpretation in critiques of Butler, her notion of agency does not enable subjects to merely 'stop playing to the script' (Digeser, 1994), but it also does not mean that action is necessarily nullified (Butler, 2015). Agency operates within a 'scene of constraint' (Butler, 2004).

In ‘Undoing Gender’ (2004), focus is placed on drawing attention to the preconditions attached to the production and maintenance of legible humanity. This is further extended to highlight the work that goes into sustaining subjective coherence. From this text, the term normativity is drawn out to highlight how normative expectations bind us to who we are and who we might be (ibid, p.206). Normative expectations govern subject viability (Tyler, 2019, p.87). In addition, this text interrogates concepts of ‘recognition’ and ‘intelligibility’. In the introduction to Undoing Gender, Butler writes ‘intelligibility is understood as that which is produced as a consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms’ (Butler, 2004, p.3). This means that someone is intelligible if the recognition of a person succeeds, that is, if a person can be successfully identified in the light of a given norm or if a person can be successfully placed in a certain category (Leopald, 2018). These two terms offer analytical tools to explore existing norms that govern who is recognisable (Willig, 2012).

In ‘Giving an Account of Oneself’ (2005), Butler departs from her earlier work taking moral philosophy as its starting point. However, a performative lens is used to understand how through narrative we can trace the processes by which we become subjects, by what means they are constructed and how those constructions work and fail (Salih, 2002). Through ‘accounting’ for oneself there is an establishing of normative expectations of ‘what counts’, thus conferring or denying recognition.

This thesis predominantly draws on Butler’s early writing up to 2005, specifically those texts that explore a performative ontology. This decision was made to focus on the processes of identification and subjection, most notably, where gender and other forms of identity can best be understood as performative acts, placing ontological significance on the ‘acts’ which bring gender into being. This decision was made to enable me to explore governance and the school governor as a ‘doing’ rather than a ‘being’. However, it is acknowledged that these writings focus on individuals. Butler’s more recent writing on shared experiences of performativity, a plural performativity, are set out in her works titled Dispossession (Butler and Athanasious, 2013) and Notes towards a performative theory of assembly (Butler, 2015). These more recent writings link ‘undoing’ to assembled bodies and vulnerability of resistance. The potential exploration of school governance using these texts is further discussed in section 5.4.

From my chosen series of writings, I have drawn out key concepts that can be usefully applied in a performative study of school governance. Butler’s understanding of ‘normativity’ as that which binds us, creating both unity and exclusion, enables an exploration of how, through repeated norms and practices, some governors come to be abject or marginalised. The notion of normativity that links to the concepts of ‘intelligibility’ and ‘recognition’, marking

them out as useful analytical tools. Normativity governs recognition, which in turn, determines who is and isn't intelligible, a viable subject. In undoing Gender (2004), Butler emphasises that viable subjectivity requires sustaining a performance that conforms to normative expectations and the terms of recognition. This constant struggle provides a site of possibility to challenge subjective normativity, or at least to question the terms of recognition of which it depends (Tyler, 2019, p.88).

Butler's understanding of subjectivity and agency, however, are not without criticisms and limitations. Perhaps one of Butler's most mainstream critics, Martha Nussbaum, famously attacked her writing in the article 'The Professor of Parody', stating:

> *The new symbolic type would appear to believe that the way to do feminist politics is to use words in a subversive way, in academic publications of lofty obscurity and disdainful abstractness.*
>
> *Nussbaum (1999)*

Nussbaum was drawing attention to the difficulty of Butler's dense writing and how it appears to go 'round in circles'. Debate has also occurred between Butler and Seyla Benhabib, played out in the essays 'Feminist Contentions' (Benhabib, 1995). Aiming her criticism at Butler's notion of the subject, she argues against Butler's 'dissolving' of the subject's intention, accountability, self-reflexivity and autonomy, stating that this debilitates feminism by replacing the self with a fractured opaque one, providing women a more fragmented and fragile vision of themselves and their future (Benhabib, 1992, p.16). Nussbaum has also aimed criticism at Butler from the same perspective and accusing her of annihilating the subject. This criticism is further interrogated and resolved in Chapter Three, where the use of Butler's understanding of subjectivity is defended.

With regard to limitations of a Butlerian notion of performativity, Karen Barad (2003) states that language has been granted too much power, and challenges the position of materiality as either a given or a mere effect of human agency. She extends Butler's performativity by not understanding it as iterative citationality, but rather iterative intra-activity (ibid, p.828).

The review of the above literature flags up some issues and tensions which are considered and resolved in Chapter Three. These include the ontological tensions created for feminist emancipatory aims, Butler's often misinterpreted understanding of subjectivity and agency and challenges to the position of materiality. Nevertheless, there is too much to be gained from this approach to dismiss it. For example, by being subjectivated the subject can subjectivate another. In Excitable Speech, Butler writes:

> *the one who names, who works within language to find a name for another, is presumed to be already named, positioned within language as one who is already subject to the founding or inaugurating address. This suggests that such a subject in language is positioned as both addressed and addressing, and that the very possibility of naming another requires that one first be named. The subject of speech who is named becomes, potentially, one who might well name another in time*
>
> *(1997a, p.29)*

This naming and constitution, that results from subjectivation, means to join its citational chains. This opens a space for a transformative study of school governance, whereby, agency is not the property of an a-priori, rational, self-knowing subject, but still retains a subject who can act with intent (Youdell, 2006).

2.5.3 Performative emotions

Gender research into leadership in education has drawn attention to schools as sites of emotional practice (Gill and Arnold, 2015; Crawford, 2007; 2009). Crawford (2004) draws attention to schools as a site of complex social and relational interactions where emotions are positioned as problematic (Oatley and Jenkins, 2003). Emotions are therefore understood as autonomous, psychological traits rather than the 'effects of power that become a part of our material, everyday existence' (Boler, 2004). For example, Crawford (2004, p.23) found that primary headteachers clearly defined 'separateness' of emotion as the 'professional thing to do'. These findings align with Corrick (1996) who stated that governors must be able to detach themselves.

However, much criticism has been levied at the idea that emotion is epistemologically submersive, particularly from feminist critics. Alison Jaggar (1989) argued that rationalist accounts obscure the vital role that emotions play in the construction of knowledge. She goes on to state that the 'myth of dispassionate investigation has functioned historically to undermine the epistemic authority of women as well as other social groups associated culturally with emotion' (ibid, p.151).

Performativity has been linked to emotion, prompting a (re)interrogation of emotion as effects of power rather than dismissed as feminised weakness (Boler, 2004). According to Zembylas (2003; 2005) and Ahmed (2014), emotions are 'performative'; they are discursive practice, where words used are not simply names for 'emotion entities' rather they are actions or ideological practices. In their 2007 paper titled 'rethinking emotion and educational leadership, Diane Zorn and Megan Boler engage with questions of power and cultural hierarchies that are

embedded into cultural norms. They state, firstly, that emotions should not be understood as private, they are not autonomous psychological traits. Instead, they argue for them to be re-inscribed as publicly and collaboratively formed. This would position emotions as productive.

Drawing from Zorn and Boler's thinking, Caroline Brahmuhl (2012, p.221) criticises Foucault for his 'reduction of the subject to a set of practices', instead advocating for the application of Judith Butler's writing on performativity to 'illuminate its deconstructive force, as contrasted with identitarian accounts of emotion' (ibid). She uses concretised examples from courtrooms to offer us academic inquiry into the affective.

The emotion of school governing is absent in the research. There is no literature that considers school governance as emotional practice or linking this to power and cultural norms. Despite importance being drawn to it from other areas of school practice and leadership, such as classroom teacher and headteacher, this dimension is a blind spot in the field, again highlighting the field's failure to account for the more complex 'realities' of school governing.

2.5.4 The application of Butler's performativity in education research

It would be impossible to cover the breadth and depth of the application of Judith Butler's writing here in this small section, therefore I have selected a small sample of pertinent studies to cite. In this section, I will firstly demonstrate the breadth of application by drawing on studies from across the broad range of fields in which Butler's work has been applied. Following this, I will draw more specifically on studies from within the field of education to show how these have been successful in giving insight into practice and providing practical implications for change.

The work of Judith Butler has been widely drawn from, most significantly since the publication of 'Gender Trouble' in 1990. Her theories and concepts have been richly applied far beyond the fields of gender and queer studies. It has been 'taken elsewhere' (Gregson and Rose, 2000), proving to be illuminating in helping to fill a void in understanding how people negotiate subject positions in everyday situations such as in different workplaces.

In nursing research, Nordgren (2010) demonstrates how patients performatively enact a discourse of consumerism therefore becoming responsible for the choices they make, as such performances become unviable if they do not fit the power/knowledge of consumerist ideas. Jenkins and Finneman (2018) applied Butler's theory of performativity to critique experiences in newsrooms, a traditionally patriarchal workplace environment, aiding them in examining the shaping of organisational norms and cultures. In accounting, McKinlay (2010) argues for

Butler's notion of performativity as providing a way for understanding the ambiguities and paradoxes of contemporary identities at work. Recently, Phillips and Knowles (2021) used Butler's performativity to explore women's behaviour as entrepreneurs, exposing the paradox of partial and conflictual identification with norms of gender and entrepreneurship.

Education is a field that, too, has richly applied Butler's writings. In particular, her concept of performativity has been drawn on widely across the field from leadership, to classroom practice, to the ways policies are received and enacted. Gowlett et al., (2015) used Butlerian ideas to understand how teachers make sense of educational policy, focusing on subjectivity and 'cultural intelligibility' to analyse teacher attitudes towards curriculum policy, making visible the unevenness of policy reception. Specifically focusing on school librarians, Centrewell (2019) analysed the performative identity and the constitution of the label 'librarian' through discursive processes of repetition. She states that librarians engaged in performative reconstructions of themselves during conversations and embody normative ways of acting.

In 2006, the British Journal of Sociology of Education devoted a special issue to examining Judith Butler's work and its contribution to the field of education. This special issue titled '*Troubling Gender'* comprises six articles which are predominantly ethnographic studies in education that focus on processes of becoming a subject. Davies (2006) uses Butler's writing to develop more ethical practices within classrooms in schools and universities around reflexive notions of responsibility that contrast with current neo-liberal notions of self and responsibility. Hey (2006) applies Butler to the classroom, examining the inclusion and refusal that structures young people's friendships, using classroom notes. The practical implication of this work is the questioning of 'common-sense knowledge' of, for example, 'boys' underachievement.

Nayak and Kehily (2006) draw on Butler's ideas to help understand the domain of the school and foregrounds how teachers and students both contribute to and sustain the fiction of gender identity as real and significant. Deborah Youdell (2006) adds to analysis of patterns of raced educational inequality and exclusion. Focusing on how the 'teachers are involved in practices of Whiteness that subjectivate raced–nationed–religioned students and these students are involved in practices of insurrection as they are subjectivated'.

The implications of reviewing this literature are, firstly, recognising the ability of Butler's writings to offer philosophical ideas that have practical implications for a pedagogy of political education. Secondly, in relation to speech and forming subjectivity, provides ways to frame theoretical and empirical research questions and the analysis of data

A noticeable absence from this part of the literature review is the application of Butler's

theories to school governance. More widely, Butler has been applied to governance in other spaces of public life, for example, Bradley (2011) provides an empirical example from housing governance. He describes tenant identity construction in the governance of social housing organisations using a Butlerian theoretical frame. Rejecting the housing governor as a sovereign subject, and instead a constituted subject, he concludes their actions are dependent on a desire for acceptance, as well as identifying agency and the possibility of resistance. This, and the previous studies cited, have drawn attention to the rich potential of applying the concepts of Judith Butler to a study of school governance. It is clear that her writings offer a way to 'inspire, cajole and disturb' (David et al., 2006, p.421), a premise which aligns with the aims of this study.

2.6 Summary

It is clear that in-depth research into governing boards (GBs) is a rarity (Cornforth, 2003), with only a paucity of empirical studies contributing knowledge about the organisational practices of governors (Murphy, 2018). Despite the contributions made by the studies described in this chapter, the work of school governors/governing bodies remain largely unrecognised (Salokangas and Chapman, 2014) and the role precariously liable to new articulations. Wilkins (2016b) states that little is known about structural organisation, delegation, division and differentiation of work of school governors; this remains elusive and difficult to articulate. What is known is that school governors have acquired far more responsibilities, with the government described as transforming from a 'trusting referee and resource provider to a demanding and impatient managing director with frequently changing identity and priorities' (Glatter, 2012, p.570).

It is also known that Ofsted surfaces as a leading presence (Wilkins, 2015), (re)producing and influencing the environment by which governors identify, perform and practise their role (Baxter, 2016). The literature review highlighted how education policy discourse since the 1988 Education Reform Act has circulated and legitimated a business ontology. In addition, the discourse of 'effective' governance sets out what governing boards should do and make clear the criteria against which their effectiveness as a governing board will be judged (DfE, 2019). These principles of effective governance are centrally concerned with securing the legitimacy of schools as institutions. Institutional legitimacy is achieved through institutionalisation processes (Connolly and James, 2022) which contribute to the exclusion and marginalisation of certain bodies (Baxter, 2016).

The obsession with the identification and generalisation of 'effective' governance and its central concern in achieving institutional legitimacy poses a concern as it requires an understanding of what is 'right, appropriate and proper', and the actions that will mobilise and secure wider society's approval (Drori and Honig, 2013). Such notions are embedded within power relations, which, following Butler, I understand to be 'power that acts but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability (1993, p.9). It is not to be conflated with voluntarism or individualism. This type of power is not discussed in the school governance literature, except for a few notable contributions from Andrew Wilkins, who draws on Foucault's concept of governmentality (Wilkins, 2017). It is unexplored how power operates in the changes that not only affect the role of governors but 'who' is valued (Young, 2016; Fielding and Moss, 2012). From the discussion of the literature, there is clear evidence that the norms and practices that constitute 'effective' governance are mostly formulated and evaluated within a field of judgement that privileges expert knowledge and a business ontology (Wilkins, 2016a). This is a notion that consequently results in elite forms of representation on school governing bodies (Baxter, 2016).

Most notably, in the literature, parent governors find themselves subject to an essentialising discourse of de-value and intense criticism (Winston, 2013). It is suggested that parent governors' lack of involvement and participation inhibits them from holding school leaders to account and are therefore not accountable to the other parents they represent (Farrell, 2010). However, it is not just parent governors who are reduced to simple binaries; all governors appear to be rendered obsolete if they do not enact the prescribed performance (Young, 2017a; Wilkins, 2015). But, following Ball (2012), simple binaries of expert/lay, effective/ineffective, professional/community, cannot accommodate the complexity of school governance.

In addition to the above points, the generalisability of much published work presents an issue because it normalises and perpetuates a potentially exclusionary discourse. A narrow focus in the research on finding an obtainable, measurable and replicable truth furthers the sedimentation of dominant norms that exclude and marginalise certain bodies. As previously stated, the National Governance Association (NGA) recognises that diversity remains a persistent and stubborn issue. As such, myopic approaches to school governance studies will continue to limit any real possibility of transformative effects.

The research to date has relied on an essentialising view of school governors, generally accepting a corresponding identity with the word 'governor', thus grouping people together

that are similar but significantly different in the same category. The gender, race, class and age have all been subsumed under one single identity category, an activity which privileges identity over difference (St Pierre, 2000, p.480). Not only have these differences been sidelined and neglected, but the category of governor itself, as briefly mentioned above, has been tainted with simple binaries that pit one against the other.

The literature review has also revealed some areas of governance research that previous studies have not dealt with, such as gender, race and class. Gender in school governance has been given little attention. In the book titled 'Gender, policy and education change: Shifting agendas in the UK and Europe' published in 2003, Rosemary Deem's chapter titled 'gendered governance' criticised the field for making 'no mention of feminist work' (p.193). This work has made an important contribution; however, it is predicated on a numbers based analysis of female board and committee members, revealing little about the underlying and socially conditioned practices of school governance. The dominating humanist understanding of school governors has positioned them as passive subjects that power imposes on from the outside, and fixes them. As such, the field of research negates the processes by which school governors' identities come into being and are sustained within a socio-historically pre-determined discourse. Thus, an alternative reading of school governance is required; one which draws attention to and problematises the extent to which taken for granted 'knowledge' and 'truth' operate to both privilege and silence certain ways of being or rather 'doing' school governor.

In response to these gaps, a feminist poststructuralist insertion into school governance offers an alternative lens that questions the norms and practices of school governance, exploring how these produce patterns of inequality that position governors in particular ways. Using this lens, we can ask 'how we know what we know' (Razack, 1993, p. 95) as opposed to the focus on technocratic accountability and observable, measurable truth.

More specifically, from the review of the literature, it is clear that Butler's psychoanalytically informed poststructuralism provides the vocabulary and resources that can deepen our understanding of the effects of power (Hey, 2006). Drawing primarily on Butler's concepts of 'performativity' and 'giving an account', school governance can be analysed as a site of performative instability; where power operates in less predictable ways than the current literature would suggest. The conceptual tools of 'recognition' and 'intelligibility' are drawn from her theorising to analyse the 'doing' of the school governor as a subject that actively, but not necessarily consciously, participates in their own social constitution (Butler, 1992). By that I mean that school governors' norms and practices are understood as simultaneously constitutive and productive; they are performative and not merely constructed. The decisions

to approach the study from these perspectives will be further justified in the next chapter.

Taking all the above into consideration, this thesis is written to challenge fixed notions and disrupt the unquestioned ideals and constraints of governing that serve neoliberal ideologies (Wilkins, 2015). Influenced by the potential of feminist poststructural perspectives, I am now asking different questions. There is no desire to 'capture' the essence of school governance, or identify specific 'effective' practices. I am asking how particular meanings have been acquired and (re)produced in these contexts. I therefore, draw on this understanding to underpin the development, and later on, exploration of the following research questions:

1. To what extent do norms and practices operate in school governing:

    i) to achieve recognition?
    ii) to acquire intelligibility?
    iii) to perform gender?

2. To what extent do repudiated identities circumscribe and materialise viable governor subjectivities?
3. To what extent do the above impact school governors' ability to perform their core functions?

These questions have been developed in response to the gaps identified in literature and my own experiences of school governing. Modernist, positivist, or interpretive assumptions would not have led me to these questions, which foreground issues of power and relations among discourse, desire, agency, and the subject. My aim is to generate an analysis that would otherwise be absent from the literature. More specifically, I aim to generate more complex understandings of the ways in which school governors are limited and limit themselves as they engage in their voluntary role, with the intention being the potential for a more inclusive re-articulation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present and justify the research approach, methodological decisions and choice of analytical framework. According to Morrison (2012, p.15), two questions in research are key:

1. What is the relation between what we see and understand and that which is reality?
2. How do we go about creating new knowledge in the world in which we live?

This chapter seeks to answer these questions by explaining the relationship between ontology, epistemology and methodology. In the previous chapter, a review of the literature has drawn attention to a number of assumptions about school governance that dominate current thinking. In the literature, school governors are typically viewed in humanist terms, where rationalist and functionalist approaches primarily strive to identify and define the most effective and replicable qualities and practices of school governors. In the previous chapter, I raised concerns over such approaches, which I argued, contribute to further sedimenting of dominant norms and practices. By ignoring important concepts such as power, gender and subjectivity, the field has put limits on knowledge and negates the processes by which school governors' identities come into being

In response to these blind spots, this chapter explains and justifies a feminist poststructuralist insertion into the field of school governance research. By engaging with both a poststructuralist critique and a feminist lens, the discursive and material structures that limit the way we think about school governance can be brought into question. In this chapter, I also argue that a bricolage approach offers a rich and creative space to answer my research questions. Bricolage is an innovative and evocative way of bringing performativity to the fore as it requires a fluid and adaptive response to the data. Tensions in using bricolage are resolved by explaining adaptations made to situate it in a poststructuralist study as opposed to a critical constructivist one.

The remainder of this introduction will describe the structure of the chapter. Following this introduction, section 3.2 'Research approach' presents four subsections that each explain a specific aspect of the research approach. Section 3.2.1 provides an explanation of my decision to apply a feminist poststructuralist lens to school governance. The purpose of this section is to make explicit the key philosophical concepts, defining them and explaining how their application is useful. This section tackles the often-cited criticisms of using such an approach, as well as the tensions I have identified and how I have resolved them. The next

section 3.2.2 ‘A performative ontology’ makes explicit the position of the thesis is terms of reality, subjectivity, knowledge and truth as constructed through language, discourse and power (St. Pierre, 2000). This section explains how a performative ontology enables research questions to be asked that interrogate the production of contextual meanings rather than questions of knowledge or truth.

Section 3.2.3 provides an explanation of the bricolage methodology, an innovative and evocative way of producing data to highlight the site of school governance as a performative space. Key aspects of Kincheloe’s (2005; 2012) bricolage are interrogated and critiqued through their roots in critical constructivism to resolve tensions of applying bricolage to a poststructuralist approach. Finally, section 3.2 concludes with section 3.2.4 which provides an overview of the ethical process by which consent was granted and the consideration taken throughout the study.

Section 3.3 presents the research methods used to collect the data performed by the governors and explains how this was analysed. I have deliberately presented all these aspects of the methodology in the same section because they are inextricably linked due to being situated in a bricolage approach. The fluid and creative process of a bricolage meant that methods and data evolved authentically in response to the participants and the data analysis. The purpose of this section is to explain how data collection and analysis was a circular process whereby new data was continuously being analysed as it was produced (lived and sensed). Capturing such complexity in a linear way is difficult, therefore the sections have been organised logistically to prioritise making explicit an understanding of the decision making processes.

The subsections within section 3.3, are not necessarily presented in a chronological order of those decisions but in the way I feel makes it easier for the reader to navigate. Section 3.3.1 provides an overview of the data collection and includes a diagram to show clearly the order in which data was collected and methods were applied. Section 3.3.2 provides an explanation as to how participants were identified and recruited. This section also provides some contextual background on each participant and which aspects of the data collection each was involved in. Section 3.3.3 explains each method for collecting the data, the reasons for its inclusion and how it aligns with the research approach. Section 3.4 explains how the data was analysed and why it was analysed in that way. Section 3.5 outlines the role of reflexive analysis in the data collection and analysis. The chapter concludes with a summary and evaluation, which highlights all the strengths of the methodology as well as the tensions and challenges; making explicit how these have been resolved through my methodological decisions.

3.2 Research approach

3.2.1 A feminist poststructuralist lens

As previously stated in Chapter Two, essentialist views of school governors and governance saturate the literature and fail to take into account the complexities and intensities of evoking the role of school governor. A poststructuralist insertion into school governance offers an alternative lens that questions the norms and practices of school governance, exploring how these produce patterns of inequality that position governors in particular ways. A poststructuralist inquiry, therefore, asks 'how we know what we know' (Razack, 1993, p. 95).

The absence of a feminist lens in school governance was identified in the literature review. The addition of poststructuralism here refocuses the feminist gaze away from numerical representation of women to the social relations of gender and power (Blackmore, 2013). Therefore, and in rejection of essentialising notions, this thesis does not focus on shared experiences of governors but how the social relations of gender and other identity categories are produced and constituted within systems of education, leadership and governance.

The ordering of 'feminist' first and 'poststructuralist' second is a deliberate one. This thesis originated from my own experiences of being a woman, mother, school leader, school governor and postgraduate student; all combining to create a feminist platform for my alternative ways of thinking. This thesis is feminist because it identifies norms and questions whether existing practices in school governance privilege certain groups and marginalise others. It challenges the presumption that governing is a neutral act and how the field overlooks the way gender and other categories operate and negotiate systems of power within school governance. It is feminist because positionality isn't a paragraph in the methodology section but instead intimately embedded (Freeman, 2019). In line with feminist qualitative research, data was thought through with theory at all stages of the collection and analysis process but it was understood that it was always 'partial, incomplete and being re-told and re-membered' (Mazzei and Jackson, 2012, p.3).

Secondly, this thesis draws on a poststructuralist perspective to view governor reality, subjectivity, knowledge and truth as constructed through language, discourse and power (St. Pierre, 2000). Poststructuralism is employed to question the inequality that is maintained in school governance through dominant discourses. A poststructuralist lens shifts attention from individualism to subjectivity, from text to discursive practices, and from signifier to signifying practices. Its focus is on 'how language works, in whose and what interests, on what cultural

sites and why' (Kelly, 1997, p.19). Through poststructuralism, I attempt to unsettle the sedimented understandings of the ways we 'should' govern schools, questioning the foundations and authority of these understandings, thus bringing marginalised discourses to the fore (Burr, 1995).

It is recognised that both feminist theory and poststructuralism are not without their own specific critique. In addition, the combination of 'feminist' and 'poststructuralist' as a complementing lens has also been challenged, most notably from standpoint theorists. For example, it is asserted that feminism is based on a notion of 'womenhood' and therefore, universalism, whereas a poststructuralist perspective emphasises that there is no universal 'women's experience' (Francis, 1999). Aligning with this thinking, both Nussbaum (1999) and Benhabib (1995) argue that poststructuralism annihilates the subject and is therefore antithetical to the feminist project. They argue that by suggesting the subject is just an effect of discourse, the subject is reduced to just a 'ruse of power' (Butler, 1992, p. 6); casting doubt over the very subject (women) on whose behalf feminists have traditionally advocated for.

In response to such critique, I assert that this thesis does not seek the emancipatory aims they claim would be put 'at risk'. To apply such a feminist understanding would raise theoretical tensions between feminism and poststructuralism due to the furthering of modernist aims. Instead, here I employ poststructuralism to deconstruct truth discourses, even emancipatory ones (Soper, 1990) and prioritise a transformative understanding rather than emancipatory one. The challenges for school governors are understood as local and specific and not totalising; the relations of power are complex and shifting (St Pierre, 2000). This goes some way to alleviate criticisms of a lack of diversity in a small participant sample. Black and post-colonial feminists have pointed to how white women are complicit in hierarchies of inequality (Blackmore, 2013). It is therefore asserted here that this thesis does not intend to speak for all school governors, women or mothers, it is instead aiming to use this approach to provide a more complex and subtle analysis. It is a temporal and situated exploration.

Another criticism levied at feminist poststructuralists is for a tendency to assume subjects can learn to consistently take up alternative discourses with which to oppose oppressive ones. Jones (1997) argues that such notions of agency are humanist and at odds with poststructuralism. I would agree and therefore draw on Judith Butler's understanding of agency through the concept of performativity. In Bodies that Matter, Butler (1993, p.15) states:

> *'the agency denoted by performativity will be directly counter to any notion of a voluntarist subject who exists quite apart from the regulatory norms which she/he opposes. The paradox of subjectivation is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive*

> *constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power and not a relation of external opposition to power.*

Such an understanding resolves concerns raised by Jones (1997), as it makes clear that there is no humanist, choosing subject, but one in which subjects cannot claim to be authors of their ideologies (Weedon, 2004). Instead, ideologies construct one's subjectivity, understandings of self and of what is both possible and permissible (ibid).

Further criticisms are aimed at the retention of the terms 'woman', 'women' and 'female' in a poststructuralist project. Jones (1993) states that these terms may have to be retained by feminists for practical purposes, but argues that we should use them more carefully. In this thesis no subject category is understood as fixed or essentialised.

The school governor, therefore, is a temporal identity, both contingent and contradictory. As such, the conclusions in this thesis are not generalisable; an often-cited limitation of feminist poststructuralist studies. Its lack of generalisability is instead seen as an asset, because it creates space of resistance against positive methodologies (St Pierre, 2016). This study cannot be generalisable because the evocation of the school governor is a site of multiple and complex subjectivation; where discourse(s) produce subjects. The supposed 'internal' features of ourselves are anticipated and produced through certain bodily acts; they are the 'hallucinatory effects of naturalised gestures' (Butler, 1990, p.xvi). The materialisation of naturalised ideals takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices (Butler, 1993, p.1).

To conclude this section, I will briefly summarise the main arguments that justify my decision to utilise a feminist poststructuralist lens. Poststructuralists speak of subjectivity rather than identity and therefore focus on one being made subject. Such a philosophical framework provides an alternative paradigm to identify and expose biases that marginalise and persist, thus providing a new way of constructing knowledge about school governing. Poststructuralism's critique of subject categories, does not repudiate but rather provides an interrogation of its construction as foundational (Butler, 1990). Feminist thought further supplements this approach. Feminist tensions are overcome through the negation of essentialised notions of 'womaness' and the aims of emancipation. The next section will take important concepts from this section forward for further discussion and explanation by positioning them within a performative ontology.

3.2.2 A performative ontology

A performative ontology of the subject departs radically from the ontology of the essentialist subject prior to discourse or the constructed subject through discourse (Hekman, 2014, p.454). Through the understanding of performative ontology, the school governor is neither voluntary nor passively constructed. Instead, the school governor subject is understood as an ongoing reiteration and performance of comportment that never fully achieves the ideal. Subjectivity is simultaneously 'acted on' and 'acted by' and where subjection exploits the desire for recognition (Tyler, 2019, p.85). Butler's concept of performativity, therefore, offers a shift from metaphysics to ontology (Hekman, 2014).

The business of school governing can be understood as a series of performative acts, open to constant change and redefinition. However, it is worth reminding that these performances are not a simple correspondence. There is no ontological distinction between the offstage and the onstage performance (Loxley, 2006, p.143). We become what we are through these actions (Butler, 1993). Butler (1990, p.177) states '[performance] is both intentional and performative; where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning'. Not repetition performed by a subject but that which enables a subject (Butler, 1993, p.95). This is poststructuralism's 'double move'. The subject is compelled to take up circulating discourses and social and cultural practices, yet simultaneously exhibits agency via this construction in taking up these discourses. This understanding as compulsive but alterable repetition provides the opportunity for normative understandings of school governors to be reconstituted as unstable. Such instability offers a space to explore normative acts of recitation as an underlying desire for recognition of oneself as a culturally intelligible, viable subject (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2014, p.1681).

A performative ontology, therefore, creates methodological openings for undoing the illusion of coherence, encouraging a critique of the norms and practices of which recognition depends (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2016). However, there is a risk of falling into the humanist trap of claiming what a subject really means or feels. This can be avoided by insisting on the way narrative constitutes part of the subjection processes, rather than simply a reflection of the 'way things are'.

As previously discussed, critics of a performative ontology, have argued that this account has left no room for 'self', or at least one with agency, highlighting an incongruence with feminist political purposes (Nussbaum, 1999; Benhabib, 1995). However, it is the position the subject

takes up in Butler's performative ontology where I find the most significance for this study of school governors. Hekman (2014, p.453) writes, 'if subjects are wholly constructed they are in fact social dupes, incapable of the agency and responsibility necessary for ethical action'. Butler's understanding of the 'I' tackles this problem. Neither social dupe nor an essentialist subject, it is closely associated with the discursive but is not fully determined by discourse. Our agency she asserts is found at the juncture where discourse is renewed, thus we find space for feminist transformative aims.

3.2.3 A bricolage methodology

In this section, I will argue that a bricolage is an innovative and evocative way of bringing performativity to the fore in school governance. A bricolage methodology welcomes fluidity, flexibility and creativity. It is employed in this study as a deconstructive methodology that, by drawing from an understanding of a performative ontology, offers transformative potential. It is recognised in this section that there are tensions with situating a bricolage within a feminist poststructuralist approach, most notably, because it is typically applied within a social constructivist framework. These tensions are resolved through a careful re-articulation of the bricolage that draws on its etymological roots and rejection of interpretivist intentions.

The concept of bricolage was originally presented by Levi-Strauss in 1962. For Levi-Strauss, the project of the *bricoleur* is a double movement of projection-retrospection captured in this description of the *bricoleur* at work:

> *Consider him at work and excited by his project. His first practical step is retrospective. He has to turn back to an already existent set made up of tools and materials, to consider or reconsider what it contains and, finally and above all, to engage in a sort of dialogue with it and, before choosing between them, to index the possible answers which the whole set can offer to his problem. He interrogates all the heterogeneous objects of which his treasury is composed to discover what each of them could 'signify' and so contribute to the definition of a set which has yet to materialize but which will ultimately differ from the instrumental set only in the internal disposition of its parts.*
>
> *(Levi-Strauss, 1962, p.18)*

The aim of the bricoleur is to examine how social, contextual and historical factors shape subjects, which are understood as ontologically complex and cannot be described as fixed (Kincheloe, 2005; Rogers, 2012). As such, it offers a critical lens that both challenges embedded structures of power and control and draws attention to the social and political forces that surround and shape education (Geelan,1997, p.5).

> *What the bricolage is dealing with in this context is a double ontology of complexity: first, the complexity of objects of inquiry and their being-in-the world; second, the nature of the social construction of human subjectivity, the production of human 'being'.*
>
> *(Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p.74)*

Lévi-Strauss describes the meaning-making bricoleur as one who does not 'approach knowledge production activities with concrete plans, methods, tools, or checklists of criterion. Rather, their processes are much more flexible, fluid, and open-ended'. Kaufmann (2011) describes the bricoleur as one who collects different objects (data) for an installation or a construction (bricolage). In this thesis, the aim is not 'meaning making' and the construction is not 'truth' but an expression of transformative thinking, as shown in the post-script.

A bricoleur assembles data through an improvised and intuitive process (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). This does not mean that 'anything goes', it means that there is space to respond to felt intensities and new avenues of exploration. The verb 'bricolaging' refers to unpredictable and creative processes, allowing researchers to draw on various tools and materials to produce new knowledge (Rogers, 2012). In this thesis, it enabled responding to the unanticipated foregrounding of how maternal subjectivity intersects with governor subjectivities.

Typically, bricolage involves the process of employing a range of methods, tools and techniques as they are required in the developing context of the research. A multi-method approach is employed rather than a mixed method approach that does not prioritise one method over the other. No one method takes precedence and analysis is not artificially forced to fit together, rather presented as different types of information that together give a multi-faceted picture (Wibbersley, 2012, p.2, as cited in Austin, 2015).

Drawing from Levi-Strauss and Kincheloe's perspective, this bricolage departs from theirs in its rejection of interpretivism and passive constructivism. Although agreeing with a number of the above, there is a point of departure epistemologically. Unlike Kincheloe's bricolage which aims to use critical hermeneutics as an interpretive process (Rogers, 2012), this methodology is grounded in a feminist poststructural epistemology, which utilises Butler's performativity tools (Butler, 1990; 1993; 1997) as an analytical framework.

In Bodies that Matter, Butler states that 'inquiry into exclusions by which construction of the subject operates in no longer constructivism but neither is it essentialism (1993, p.8). Further she adds 'construction is understood as a unilateral process initiated by a prior subject fortifying that the metaphysics of substance is retained' (ibid, p.9).

These tensions are resolved through rejecting the usual goal of bricolage to create a more meaningful, ordered whole such as a quilt or a piece of stained glass (Haw, 2005). Instead, aligning with Butler's concepts, this bricolage is a deconstructive tool, which is understood in a temporal way, to take apart and put back together time and time again. St Pierre (2000, p.479) describes poststructural feminists as 'eloquent models and savvy bricoleurs'. This is achieved here, by instead turning to the etymology of the *bricole* – "the one who breaks" (the catapult was intended to demolish the walls) to destabilise and de-veil that which is predicated on logic and naturalness. There is no attempt in this bricolage of 'stitching' together meaning in a perceived permanent and fixed way. There is no desire to settle this exploration in deterministic or finite terms. Instead, the overall aim is to invite change and uncertainty into the research process, specifically data collection and analysis. These are welcomed alternatives to the pre-determined and fixed methods approach (Rantala, 2019).

3.2.4 Ethics

The purpose of this section is to give an overview of the ethical considerations and processes carried out before and during conducting this study. As this study has not involved working with children or vulnerable adult participants it may be considered to have limited ethical concerns. However, this perspective would be naïve and insensitive, lacking the full regard that should be given to working with people. In any critical inquiry there is always the potential for impact on participants in ways that may have never been considered due to the open-endedness of the questions being explored. Ethical scrutiny is therefore embedded within this research; not only in the methodological choices made throughout the process but also in the recognition of both my positionality and the active role played as researcher.

Formally the ethical application process began in January 2020. This is when I submitted my application and supporting documentation to the University's Ethics panel on Research Space and received permission. However, I had been debating some ethical dilemmas since the proposal stage with regard to including my own governing body as a participant. However, it was considered possible that the naming of the author would implicate the school and board members by association. It was therefore considered unprofessional because of the potential risk to participants if they exposed issues such as ineffectiveness, malpractice or unprofessionalism. There is also a concern that other participants may feel they are being judged or even mocked. It may be possible for participants to identify themselves in the text and feel offended by the way they are being portrayed. It was therefore concluded that anonymity could not be guaranteed, so I decided to not include my own governing body.

Despite not including my own governing body, it was important to recognise my close proximity

to this study and the participants because of my personal experience of school governance. I was acutely aware how this may form part of conversations in the interviews for example. In using personal experience researchers identify themselves and by doing so implicate others. A term used to describe this is 'relational ethics'. Relational ethics recognises and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work (Clandinin, Caine and Lessard, 2018).

Relational ethics was given deep consideration when preparing this research into school governance. It was recognised during the data collection and analysis stages that the connectedness to the participants and data formed a significant part in the decision making. To make the relational ethics explicit I drew on my own reflexivity and included auto-ethnographic commentary throughout the thesis. This included extracts from my own notes and the inclusion of a jointly written reflective post-script with participant Claire. I also responded to the affective force of the data which drew me towards, for example, the maternal dimensions in the data.

To address any issues that may have arisen from my connectedness, I implemented practices to protect the participants. To ensure anonymity, I used pseudonyms (Goodwin, Mays and Pope, 2020) and made some minor alterations to identifying characteristics (Clough, 2002). Transcripts were shown to participants, allowing them to respond to and/or recognise what is being written about them. Participants had the right to withdrawal up until the last few months before submission. I followed University procedures for gaining approval from the Ethics committee. I have included authorised documentation in the appendix (1-4).

3.3 Research methods, data collection and analysis

The purpose of this section is to explain how the study was implemented. Data was collected using three different methods as part of the bricolage approach. As previously discussed, these methods and the order in which they were employed, was not predetermined before entry into the data collection in a fixed way. These methods evolved authentically in response to the data (section 3.4).

3.3.1 Data collection

In this section I will provide an overview of the data collection (figure 1) to present a chronology of collection and decision making. Further discussion of each method used can be found in section 3.3.3.

Firstly, school governance documents in the form of meeting minutes were collected as a

source of data. A sample of minutes from two schools across a six-month period were analysed (section 3.4). These documents provided examples of performative speech acts[3], however it was recognised during the analysis that the meeting minutes are transcripts, summarised by governance professionals to capture key points and evidence that the meeting has taken place, creating lists of actions. Their main purpose is to document that statutory requirements are being met. I also knew from my personal experience that some discussions are not captured in the minutes at the request of either governors or the headteacher, in particular those of a more personal or less 'objective' theme. I therefore decided there were a number of limitations to this source of data alone and would need additional methods of data collection. I therefore made the decision to interview (section 3.3.3).

I initially conducted two preliminary interviews, the first with Matt, a headteacher and governor, the second with Hannah, Chair of governors. It became clear in these interviews that the headteacher as a governor offered a very different and unique perspective of governing, performing governing in very different ways. This offered an alternative avenue of exploration which I decided I could return to but would not be the most useful in answering my research questions. Therefore, the data collected in Matt's interview is not cited in the analysis chapter and was not used to form any conclusions. The interview with Hannah, however, provided data to answer the research questions and prompted adaptations, such as the use of a stimulus, to be made for future interviews.

Four further interviews were conducted. Interviews were each approximately an hour long with each of the four governors. Due to the exclusion of the first preliminary interview with Matt, all participants were women. This was not necessarily intentional, but only women responded to my call for participants. During the interviews, two participants, Claire and Naomi made reference to significant moments in their governing that I felt particularly drawn to because of their injurious nature. Analysing the transcripts, these moments felt intense and I thought it would be a missed opportunity to not explore these further. In response to this, I invited them both to write about those particular experiences in their own words, providing additional data to analyse. I followed up each written account with a second interview to discuss the written accounts.

It was clear from Claire's second interview that she wanted to share how her thinking on governing had changed. In her role as Chair, she had been reflecting on the way the board operates, its culture and values. I recognised my own reflections in hers and we agreed to engage in a reflective discussion which would then co-construct into a piece of bricolage

[3] Refers to extract from full governing body minutes p.69.

writing for a post-script (section 4.5). The data was read and re-read with Butler's concepts and theories throughout the data collection process. Responses in data collection were made to the moments of felt intensities that would have been impossible to anticipate. These responses included inserting new and unplanned methods, further enhancing the study. The number of participants remained small because the data produced was dense, rich and intimate. It was not necessary to generate more data through additional participants because it was the closeness and connection to the data that made the analysis successful.

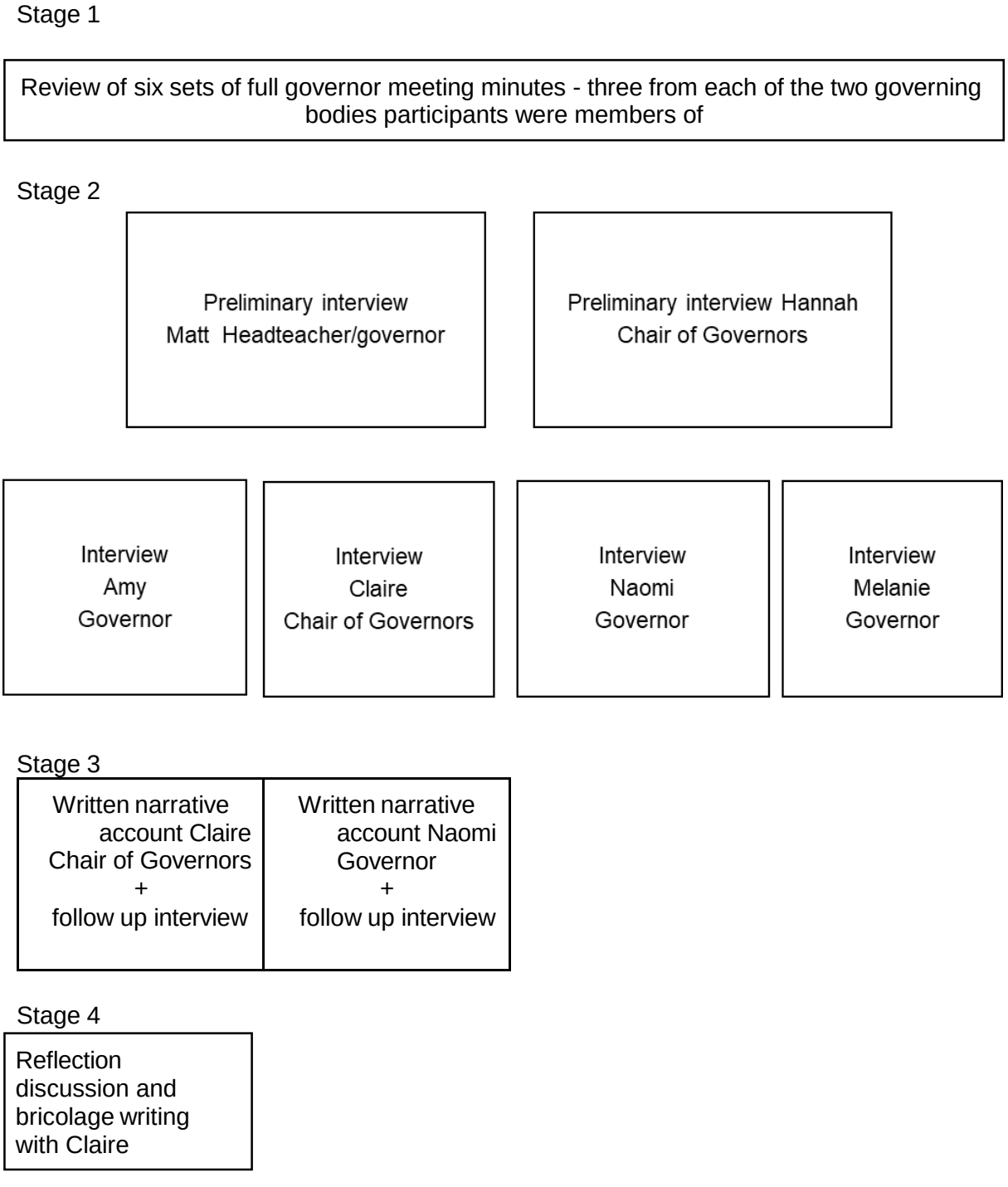

Figure 1: An overview of data collection

3.3.2 Participants

Working in a professional education setting and serving as a school governor, I was able to recruit governors to participate in this study through professional networks and connections. I sent emails to six Chairs of primary school governing bodies as well as their respective headteachers. I received responses from two schools who gave me access to their non-confidential meeting minutes. I arranged preliminary interviews with one Chair and one headteacher initially. After preliminary interviews were conducted, each participant made other governors aware of my study, provided them with the information and consent and invited them to make contact if they would like to participate. Four governors from across the two schools made contact and interviews were arranged and conducted virtually using an online platform. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

When deciding 'who' the participants in this study would be, I was drawn to the work of James et al., (2014b) who asserted that primary and secondary school governing was significantly different. Their conclusion was that primary school governing is less complex and more informal (ibid, p.104). They state that 'it is as if secondary school governing is akin to steering a big ship while primary school governing is a more intimate affair' (p.116). These findings reflected some of my own experiences of governing in a primary school as opposed to presenting to governors in the secondary school in which I was senior leader. Although I disagreed with their understanding of primary school governance as less complex, I did agree that there is a greater proximity between governors and school, which offers a rich space for a performative analysis.

I therefore decided that it was primary school governors that would participate in this study. Both primary schools were located in the South East of England. School A is a small, single form entry school in a semi-rural area, there are about 200 pupils on roll. The school is a maintained local authority school and currently graded 'requires improvement' by Ofsted; the leadership and management of the school was graded 'good'. School B is a small urban Church of England primary academy situated in the heart of the town. It is on the 5th quintile for deprivation. There are 204 students from reception through to year 6. The school is part of a very small multi-academy trust made up of three one form entry Church of England primary schools. In the last Ofsted inspection the school was graded as 'good'.

All the participants identify as white, cis-women. A short biography for each participant is presented on the next page.

Hannah

Hannah is a scientist and the Chair of Governors for a governing body she has served for over 15 years. Hannah initially joined the board as a parent governor but took on a co-opted position when her children left.

Naomi

Naomi is a nurse. She joined the governing body as a parent governor but now holds the position of co-opted governor.

Melanie

Melanie owns and runs a local business. She joined her governing board as she had two young children who started their education journey, and wanted to lend support and skills in a meaningful way.

Claire

Claire is a secondary school English teacher and senior leader. She became a parent governor in a primary academy because she felt it related to her professional expertise, skills and knowledge in education. She was quickly nominated to Chair of Governors after the unexpected resignation of the previous Chair shortly after she joined.

Amy

Amy works in higher education. She joined the governing body as a parent governor when her son started school. She became the vice-chair shortly after joining the board.

	Preliminary Interview	First Interview	Narrative account	Second interview	Reflective discussion
Hannah	x				
Naomi		x	x	x	
Melanie		x			
Claire		x	x	x	x
Amy		x			

Table 1: An overview of participants' role in data collection

3.3.3 Methods for data collection

The field of qualitative research utilises a myriad of means to collect data. Creswell (2007) asserts that while there are several kinds of data, all data falls into four basic categories, observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials (ibid, p.129). The data in this study was performed and collected from five interviews, six school governor meeting minutes and two written narrative accounts. In the following sections, each method employed will be discussed in turn, providing a justification for its use.

Meeting minutes

Documents in the form of non-confidential meeting minutes were gathered with the permission of the Chairs. Cavanaugh (2016, p.691) argues that 'documents performatively constitute and effectively govern what they purport to depict'. Focusing on the connections between practice and documentation, documentary performativity depends on the form of documents as much as their content: it is not just what a document says but how it says it (ibid).

In school governance, the meeting minutes can be understood as more than a simple translation or record of fact, making the document can be considered a constitutive act and exercise performative power. The analysis of the meeting minutes proved a useful method for identifying acts of 'naming' and 'interpellation', important concepts in the bringing of the school governor into being. The collection and analysis of minutes was the first stage of data collection. Direct reference to these documents features only once in the analysis presented in Chapter Four.

Interviews

Following an analysis of the meeting minutes, preliminary interviews were conducted with two governors initially. There is no claim that interviews provide a mirror into the world of governing, nor that the data provides readers with authentic, plausible or trustworthy representations. In contrast, the interviews are conceived as a performative space.

It is important to emphasise the situated and temporal nature of the interview data, discouraging the citing of data as a fixed representation that mirrors a 'reality' that pre-exists awaiting capture. The interviews were viewed as performative; constituting the governor as subject, as well as myself as researcher by way of utilising my own experiences as a primary school governor. Penny Dick warns us of the extent to which researchers' understandings are 'as much constituted by their own discursive practices of researching, writing and theorising as by the discursive practices of their research participants' (2013, p.648). Riach, Rumens and Tyler (2016) assert how this can result in 'unreflexive assumptions about the types of

subjectivities constituted through the research process'. They extend this to the researcher too, and draw attention to how this can unintentionally make the research process complicit in repeating exactly what a performative approach aims to disrupt.

In an effort to avoid this Butler's 'Giving an Account of Oneself' is drawn on to consider the 'accounting' for oneself as not simply telling a story but providing a convincing ethical defence of one's claim to recognition (Tyler, 2019, p.110). It was important to resist the lure of an easy story; by which I mean not seeking the voice that I can easily name. The poststructuralist approach within which this study is situated demanded that I decentre some of the traps in humanistic qualitative interviewing, by which I mean removing the assumption that the individual controls their own world. Reminded that 'the subject is an effect rather than a cause' as asserted by Butler's theories of performative identities (Salih, 2002) the focus of the interviews analysis is on how subjectivities are formed and sustained.

In order to comprehend the complexities, contradictions and struggles in the participants' accounts, important consideration was taken in how to approach the interviews and what type of structure, if any, I should follow. An unstructured interview was selected with the emphasis very much being on encouraging the participants to talk about school governance unimpeded. The unstructured interview is based on a limited number of topics or issues or prompts, whereby the interviewer develops and adapts their questions, asking them in response to what the interviewee says (Bryman, 2008). The extracts from transcripts in the appendix (6-7) have been included to demonstrate how little was asked/said by myself in the interviews.

The purpose of the first interviews was to explore school governance as broadly as possible as I was concerned that any attempt at pre-planning could place too much emphasis on what I as a researcher wanted to hear rather than what the participants wanted to tell me. In addition, I employed the concept of a 'stimulus'. Use of stimuli bring 'not now' moments and 'not here' events to the interview's 'here and now' interaction (Torronen, 2002). However, the use of stimulus departed from its typical application in interviewing because I did not provide the stimulus. Instead, I asked the participants to identify an object that they felt represented them as a governor. Their choice of object formed the stimulus which offered lines of coherence to explore in the interview.

Interviews took place in two different stages of the study. All interviews were conducted online, in virtual platforms on google meet. Due to the thesis being conducted during the global COVID-19 pandemic there was no option to meet with participants face to face. The interview process was unhindered by the move to virtual, it made it easier to organise and made the

participants more accessible in terms of being easier to arrange times to meet. The second interviews only took place with two participants, Claire and Naomi. This was because the purpose of the second interviews was to follow up their written narrative accounts.

Written narrative accounts

As previously stated, two participants, Claire and Naomi, were invited to write about particular experiences and moments they had referred to in their first interview. Butler's (2005) understanding of narrative was drawn on to insert this additional method into the process, offering a methodological opening for 'gaps and fissures' in the accounts.

The purpose of these written narrative accounts was to explore complexities, contradictions and struggles within their accounts (Tyler, 2019, p.121). Highlighting rather than concealing the labour required to produce and maintain semblances of subjective coherence (ibid, p.122). The purpose is therefore 'anti-narrative' and was inserted as a 'reflexive undoing' (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2016). This approach was inserted into the design to 'undo' the constraints imposed by the compulsion to perform seemingly coherent narratives of self (ibid, p.2070). Claire and Naomi independently typed their accounts over a few weeks and emailed them to me.

3.4 Data Analysis

The purpose of this section is to explain how the data was analysed and why it was analysed in this way. Inspired by Teija Rantala's (2019) feminist poststructuralist approach to fluidity, the data analysis was understood as a process of constant change 'data production in motion' (ibid, p.xvi), whereby being responsive to the data has facilitated movement in different directions than those initially anticipated. I describe the process as 'kneading dough'. It was a constant working and re-working. Regularly immersing in the data, coding and re-coding, writing and re-writing. This was then coupled with introducing further data collection methods, responding to the data and following themes. Through this process the analysis began to take shape and evolve over time.

I would argue that the responsiveness to data and analysis has been one of the most successful aspects of the methodology; welcoming disturbances and irruptions as possibilities and using these to steer the exploration into areas of new knowledge within the field and laying the foundation for the transformative thinking demonstrated in the collaborative post-script (4.5).

In line with a poststructuralist approach and a performative ontology, this analysis places ontological significance on the 'acts' through which governor subjectivities come into being. The data is not read as 'real', but instead as 'performative', with the aim of highlighting the normative expectations governing the performance of such acts. In its widest sense, the aim of this analysis is to broaden the sphere of recognition in which those acts can be culturally intelligible.

Thorne (2000) characterised data analysis as the most complex phase of qualitative research, and one that receives the least thoughtful discussion in the literature. When conducting data analysis, the researcher becomes the instrument for analysis, making judgments about coding, theming, decontextualising, and recontextualising the data (Starks and Trinidad, 2007). A performative analysis approach was identified through readings of Butler's theories and concepts in the literature review. The application of Butler's performativity concepts as analytical tools will work against essentialism

Two concepts selected from Butler's performativity theory as analytical tools were recognition and intelligibility. Butler states that 'the very possibility of subject formation depends upon a passionate pursuit of recognition' (1997, p.113). She uses words such as pursuit, longing and desire, stating that we always desire recognition and that 'the individual always has a longing for recognition' (2006, p.17). Butler defines recognition as a process of desire to be constituted as a socially viable subject in accordance with the established norms of intelligibility (Butler, 2004, p.2). She adds:

> *Our very sense of personhood is linked to the desire for recognition, and that desire places us outside ourselves, in a realm of social norms that we do not fully choose, but that provides the horizon and the resource for any sense of choice that we have*
>
> *(Butler, 2004, p.33)*

In terms of intelligibility, Butler (1997, p.11) states that 'individuals are said to acquire their intelligibility by becoming subjects' and it is through this intelligibility that they become recognisable and can perform their identities.

Initially the application of 'recognition' and 'intelligibility' drew on Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, later developed into reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021), to foreground norms and practices that highlight normative expectations of school governance. The use of thematic analysis may make the reader question the intention of the

researcher. They may perceive the intentions of the study to be one where the participants are homogenised through a narrow focus on consistency and commonality, presented as the essence or image of governor or woman. This would undeniably perpetuate the system it seeks to criticise. This would most be a misunderstanding. The reflexive thematic analysis variously draws on norms, practices, contradictions, absences, avoidances, inconsistencies, and contradictions, not simply the identification of unity.

The coding process played a significant role in this. Coding was conceptualised as a reflexive process. Codes were thought of as 'entities that capture (at least) one observation, display or facet; themes, in contrast, are like multi-faceted crystals, they capture multiple observations or facets, often rich and complex (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Transcription of the audio recorded interviews were completed prior to analysis and transcription was considered part of the analytic procedure (Bird, 2005). Analysis was completed by hand with a highlighter and a pencil for making annotations. The table below summarises the first order codes generated using Butler's concepts of 'recognition' and 'intelligibility'. The transcripts were analysed using these codes which then generated second order codes. This then led to the theme development. The same first order codes were applied to the written narrative accounts. The next section describes the reflexivity of these processes in further detail.

First order code	Second order codes	Themes
Ideology of governance	Commitment Objectivity Challenge Position	Performing school governor
Recitation of organisational norms (intelligibility)		
Acts of recognition		
Consequences of recognition		
Limits of recognition (intelligibility)		
Securing recognition	Femaleness Nature Emotion	Performing the gendered school governor
Maintaining and sustaining recognition		
Misrecognition		
Limits of intelligibility	Costs Labour Repair work Mothering ideology	Performing the mother governor
Regaining recognition		

Table 2: Overview of data analysis codes and themes

I felt intimately connected to the data by analysing in this way. The affective dimension permeated the data analysis, notably, whilst reading Claire's written account, I cried; an affective reverberation (Martin, 2018). This is further explored in section 5.4. Reflexivity was mobililised throughout the data analysis as I was acutely aware that both my experiences as a governor and mother played a significant role in the decisions I made and which second order codes were explored. There were many points in all the interviews where the discussion resonated with me personally and professionally; I was notably drawn to these when analysing the transcripts. For example, early on Claire's first interview she described becoming a governor compensating for 'not being present at the school gate for pick up'. This reflected my own feelings of inadequacy as a mother. Therefore, when I was analysing for securing recognition as a governor I was also able to highlight securing recognition for maternal subjectivities.

3.5 Reflexive analysis

Reflexivity was an essential aspect of the methodology, particularly the coding and analysis. The coding and analysis were rooted in an acknowledgement and respect for valuing subjectivity. The analytic process relied on nuanced judgements (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022) and involved an 'immersion in the data: reading; reflecting; questioning; imagining; wondering; writing; retreating; rewriting' (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p.340). Being intertwined with the data meant personal and contextual factors brought the research into being and shaped the inquiry. Rather than seeing this as a bias to avoid or neutralise, I capitalised on my position to give me access and made decisions, emphasising subjectivity's importance as an analytic resource.

I demonstrated this in a number of ways. I included personal reflections, memories and autobiographical descriptions (personal and contextual reflexivity). I was acutely aware that both my experiences as a governor and mother played a significant role in the decisions I made and which second order codes were explored. There were many points in all the interviews where the discussion resonated with me personally and professionally; I was notably drawn to these when analysing the transcripts. For example, early on Claire's first interview she described becoming a governor compensated for 'not being present at the school gate for pick up'. This reflected my own feelings of inadequacy as a mother. Therefore, when I was analysing for securing recognition as a governor I was also able to highlight securing recognition for maternal subjectivities. I engaged in collaborative reflexive practice with participant Claire and included this as a post script. I made explicit the affective force the data collection and analysis had on me.

I felt intimately connected to the data by analysing in this way. The affective dimension

permeated the data analysis, notably, whilst reading Claire's written account, I cried; an affective reverberation (Martin, 2018). This is further explored in section 5.4.

3.6 Summary

In this study, school governors as observable, describable objects (and product) of the scientific gaze is put under erasure. This does not mean that the governor as subject is eliminated, but that the work done to constitute it is made visible, its existence independent of discourse is called in question. This methodology offers a fresh look at how discourse shapes reality in school governance and how school governors enact it.

This thesis is feminist because it identifies norms and questions whether existing practices in school governance privilege certain groups and marginalise others. It challenges the presumption that governing is a neutral act and how the field overlooks the way gender and other categories operate and negotiate systems of power within school governance. It is poststructuralist because it rejects a shared focus on essentialising governors' experiences, alternatively drawing attention to how the social relations of gender and other identity categories are produced and constituted.

A performative ontology offers us school governors who are subjects that are neither voluntary nor passively constructed. School governing, therefore, is understood as a series of performative acts, open to constant change and redefinition. Such an understanding has invited critique because of the tensions that arise in relation to agency. This tension is resolved by re-asserting that the performative subject exhibits agency as it constructs itself by taking up available discourses and cultural practices yet at the same time is forced into subjectivity by those same discourses and practices. This understanding offers a space to explore normative acts but also a methodological opening to critically reflect on the conditions of these acts.

A bricolage methodology provides a fluid and intuitive approach to utilise various methods and acknowledge the data's complexities. Being a bricoleur made me more responsive to the data. Through layering different types of data in the bricolage I can prevent the predominance of authorial voices (Handforth and Taylor, 2016). However, epistemological tensions with Levi-Strauss' and Kincheloe's bricolage were exposed that needed resolving. This was done through a re-imagining of bricolage in a poststructuralist study. Drawing on the etymology of the *bricole* as a 'catapult', greater emphasis is placed on deconstruction of sedimented understandings rather than the usual goal of bricolage to create a more meaningful, ordered whole. This bricolage did not seek 'meaning-making' as its aim.

Bricolage provided space to engage with multiple methods which were not predetermined. Data collection was therefore broad in its scope but narrow in terms of its sample. Generalisability was not the aim, and a small sample provided a richness, depth and nuance that would not be possible in a larger sample. Data analysis was a circular process whereby new data was continuously being analysed as it was produced (lived and sensed). The data was read and re-read with Butler's concepts and theories and responses were made to the moments of felt intensities that would have been impossible to anticipate. Letting the data take the lead in the inquiry offers space for creativity and flexibility to think with theories, methods and techniques. This goes beyond attempts to examine something in order to 'know' it but instead aligning within a feminist poststructuralist approach to staying with the trouble, residing with emergent potencies to know differently.

4. Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Presented in this chapter is an analysis of the discursive construction of the primary school governor. Judith Butler's theoretical concept of performativity was the central approach for analysing intertexualised discourses of governors' talk (interview data), participant written narrative and official documented accounts of governing (meeting minutes). Specifically, the Butlerian analytical tools of 'recognition' and 'intelligibility' were applied to performative acts of school governance (data). These tools were used as a lens to explore the evocation of 'school governor' through the recitation of particular cultural and organisational norms (Butler, 1990). This performative approach to analysis was further supplemented by drawing on Butler's (2005) writing in 'Giving an Account of Oneself' to analyse the data as not simply telling a story, but as a performative lens to explore the processes of becoming a school governor subject. Tyler (2019, p.110) describes this as 'the response we are compelled to provide within the context of the desire for recognition of oneself as a viable subject'. By analysing the data through these writings, the labour and costs attached to securing this recognition are brought to the fore.

To reflect this study's feminist aims, the analysis is used to provide insight into, rather than conceal the labour required to secure recognition and interrogates the consequences of its maintenance. The analysis is authentic to its bricolage methodology through a commitment to unravelling and taking apart seemingly coherent narratives (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2016), and telling them differently (see post-script in 4.5). This analysis challenges the sureties of modernity; providing a means to explore the all too often taken for granted assumptions of subjectivity.

This analysis chapter is presented in three sections (4.2 - 4.4) followed by a post script (4.5) a summary (4.6). Any difficulty in presenting a non-linear analysis was overcome during the collection of data by making explicit the poststructuralist position that underpins the study, as well as regularly returning to the research questions. In this analysis chapter, it was necessary to define and be explicit with the presentation of themes so as to not keep repeating the same points and allow the reader to follow the threads. As such, I present each section of analysis with a focus on one of three empirically grounded themes, although it is important to re-assert that they were not analysed in silos and each section is inextricably linked to the other. Figure 2 below shows the broad relationship between the three themes, visually depicting how they interrelate in an increasingly narrow and more focused way.

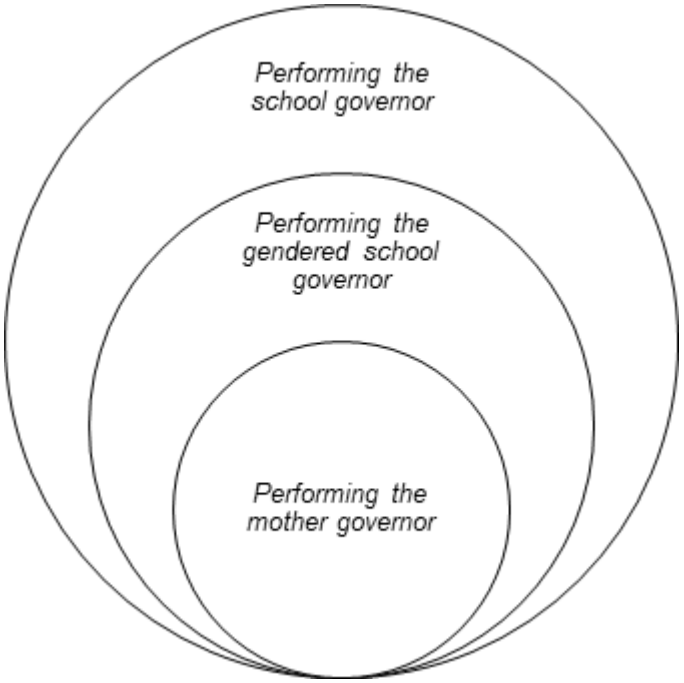

Figure 2: The relationship between the three sections of analysis in this chapter

The first theme of 'Performing the school governor' (section 4.2.) was generated through the repeated complex and shifting roles, norms and practices highlighted throughout the data (as described in section 3.4). The numerous subject positions, gazes and types of 'knowledge' that compete and complement within the norms of governance performances, both conscious and unconscious, were coded and themed. This analysis of the data is therefore presented in four sub-sections: the governor subject (4.2.1); Normative expectations - commitment, challenge and objectivity (4.2.2); Positioning the governor self (4.2.3) and The gaze of significant others (4.2.4). Within this first stage of analysis, the gendered nature of governing norms and practices which were performed through speech acts during interviews, were identified. This was a significant theme identified in all participants' data, highlighting its influence on conditions of viable subjectivity. This is presented in section 4.3 'Performing the gendered school governor', where analytical emphasis is further placed on the gendered performativity of school governance. This section is divided into three sub-sections: 'Naturally' skilled (4.3.1); Female domination (4.3.2) and Emotional dimensions (4.3.3).

Further analysis of gender in the data drew attention to maternal subjectivities and the paradoxical tensions, labour and costs of performing the expectations of 'mother' and 'governor' concurrently. This section of analysis draws attention to how maternal subjectivities are constituted and (re)produced through an intelligibility matrix of competing

discourse. This final section of analysis 'Performing the mother governor' (4.4) presents the maternal governor as a theme in two subsections: (M)Othered governor (4.4.1) and (In)visible mother (4.4.2).

The chapter concludes with a summary of the analysis, re-asserting the main features that are further discussed in Chapter Five.

4.2 Performing the school governor

4.2.1 Becoming the governor subject

> *I don't think people really understand the role of what a governor is… and why we're there or why we're doing what we're doing* [...] *I mean it's probably one of the least appreciated unpaid voluntary roles you can possibly do*
>
> *Melanie*

The starting point for this section of analysis is that 'school governor' be understood as a performative rather than a representational term. By acquiring the position of a school governor, you become one, interpellated into discourses of school improvement, disciplinary regimes and professionalisation (Wilkins, 2015). Officially, the act of governing occurs during governing body meetings where a series of documented utterances are recorded and transcribed into minutes by the governance professional, formerly known as the clerk. These minutes are checked for accuracy by the Chair of the governing body then signed and filed away. The minuting of governors' utterances are crucial for demonstrating that the governing body is compliant and meeting its statutory obligations. The consequences for failure to provide such evidence can be significant, potentially leading to legal ramifications and/or the removal of the governing board (DfE, 2019).

The analysis foregrounds how language acts in school governance. How it interpellates, calls into being and constitutes a subject through the repeated existence of sanctioned forms of address that put us in our place (Butler, 1997a, p.1).

> *Speech is always both more than itself and less than itself in any given speech act, that what it speaks is not simply its own speech but it speaks a life of discourse and it is installed, as it were, in a life of discourse, that exceed the subject's own temporality.*
>
> *(Bell, 1999, p.166)*

How governors come to speak reiterates the discursive conditions of their own emergence (Butler, in Bell, 1999, p.165), both enabling agency and foreclosing autonomy (Butler, 1997a, p.26). The sedimented effect of speech acts are re-enforced boundaries of intelligibility. But speech is always unstable which opens up space for agency (McNay, 1999). The indeterminacy inherent in speech, including hate speech, can produce unintended effects, subversive effects. Analysis highlights examples of this instability, indeterminacy and ambiguity in governor speech acts, these will be signposted throughout this section and the rest of the chapter.

The governing body meetings provide a 'scene', rather than *the* 'scene' in which governors are 'hailed'. By this I mean that governors' subjectivities are produced and constituted in and through a number of inter-subjective encounters; they are not necessarily reduced solely to official acts of governing, as later discussed. 'Hailing' is a term Butler borrows from Althusser's (1971) writings on interpellation as 'subjective act of recognition and a corresponding response to the call of another'. In Althusser's examples there is a physical response to the call, but for Butler, who considers it through a performative lens, 'turning' is not necessary as the subject can be constituted without being aware of it. Claire illustrates this when she describes being treated '*like some sort of important visitor*', which she finds '*interesting*' because as a governor she feels she is part of the school and not external to it.

The notion of an 'important visitor' provides a 'discursive terrain' (Youdell, 2006, p.512), on and through which governors are subjectivated. This is an example of the subject being constituted by ideology that constitutes the individual as a subject (Althusser, 1971). Recognition is central to these processes. The designation of 'important' appears to describe pre-existing subjects, understanding these and other designations as performative provides an example that the very act of designation constitutes governors.

According to Tyler (2019), Butler hints at organisational interpellations hailing the subject into being in an embodied way, but without requiring the presence of an actual speaker. This is important to our understanding of the process of 'naming' as what enables the subject to come into effect (ibid). The ratification of a new governor identified through analysis of governing body minutes provides an illustrative example of 'naming'.

> Extract from FGB 1 9/11/19
> *Co-opted Governor Vacancy – Details of a potential Co-opted Governor had been circulated with the FGB paperwork for Governors to review. The Chair said that she was more than happy to nominate xxx. Governors discussed and agreed with the Chair that*

xxx would be an excellent Governor with her extensive exclusion appeal panel/difficult issue resolution experience. Governors agreed unanimously to nominate xxx as a Co-opted Governor. The Clerk would send a welcome letter to xxx. The Clerk would advise Governor Services of her appointment. She would also add xxx to all FGB circulation lists and attendance lists.

Through this series of documented utterances a governor is brought into being through 'naming' even though they are not present and as such their initial 'naming' only occurs in documents. Through this example of 'naming' the justification for their appointment (re)produces the embodiment of certain ideals to become intelligible, in this case having a knowledge of education. Drawing from Butler (1999; 1993), we can understand these utterances as continuously brings into being a subject and that 'by saying something, a certain effect in discourse is produced' (Butler, 1993, p.225). Butler (2005, p.22) states 'we are incited, hailed, to recognise ourselves in their terms. That is to say, 'a regime of truth offers the terms that make self-recognition possible'. In the extract above, the Chair of Governors, the governance professional and a quorate governing body are all required for the speech act to be successful, even though the actual subject is not necessarily physically present. Once ratified, the subject can now say 'I am a governor' and as such becomes one in the process of doing so.

But the performativity of the position alone is not enough (Centrewell, 2019); what s/he makes of that position, the actions and practices, constitute who the governor becomes and how identity is constituted. If their practices do not cite an intelligible discourse from within the regime of truth then their performatives and subjectivation will fail. For example, Hannah describes how '*members that maybe weren't as active so we reduced the size of the governing body*', changing the structure of the board to remove the requirement for certain governors. Amy also provides an example of failure, questioning *'is it really his role to be sharing expertise as such, is that crossing boundaries do you think on the operational side*?'. Both fail to cite an intelligible discourse as they threaten the unity of the board and its regulatory norms.

Later sections of analysis further explore and draw attention to some of the terms in which governors offer and confer recognition and how 'not everything counts as recognition in the same way' (Butler, 2005, p33). Butler emphasises that recognition is never a pure offering (2005, p.27), but instead dependent on the 'social dimension of normativity that governs the 'scene' of recognition' (ibid, p.23). By considering the social dimension of normativity in an analysis of school governance, the 'scene' becomes far more complex than current literature purports, and offers a much richer understanding of its norms and practices. The coherent

narrative we are compelled to maintain obscures the complexities of the lived experience, hence why this analysis focuses additionally on the struggle for recognition, not just what is recognised; contributing more nuance and additional dimensions of governing such as gender and maternal subjectivities.

4.2.2 Normative expectations

In 'Giving an account of oneself' Butler writes of the need to 'count' as a compulsion that is both ontological and normatively compelled and constrained (Tyler, 2019, p.109). Governors describe how they 'count' variably and in doing so offer empirical examples of how certain ideals form the organising process of what constitutes a viable subject. Participant governors describe variably the ways they perform their governor role in alignment with the DfE (2019) Governance Handbook's key features of effective governance. Claire states:

> *obviously we do monitoring visits and going in and doing walk arounds [...] looking at the environment and seeing whether it promotes our Christian values, doing that and meeting the student panel*
>
> *agreeing the budget, questioning the budget erm checking for understanding of the budget, you know looking at how much is being spent on staffing*
>
> *looking at data, how groups are performing, how SEND is performing, asking more questions around that, go through highlights of the headteacher's report*

Alternatively, governors also describe engaging in activities outside of their statutory responsibilities. Melanie states:

> *I generally just send an email to either the chair or the head and say "what about this, have we thought about this"…*
>
> *I go in quite often and do reading with kids*
>
> *it's talking to the parents as well and making those connections in the playground*
>
> *standing up for the school, being an advocate to the school*
>
> *Making links with other businesses in the area [...] I use some connections to forge some links for the school and put that all into place.*

Governors also state '*at parent's evenings we will be the ones that hand out the parent surveys to the parents [...] handing out clipboards'* and '*we are seen to be someone else to be approached'.* Claire feels it is important to make herself visible to the staff by '*sending in letters thanking them for things and you know buys them wine at the end of the year*'.

It is important to re-assert that 'accounting' for oneself in these ways, is not simply telling a story but providing a convincing defence of one's claim to recognition (Tyler, 2019). These

extracts provide empirical examples of how governor subjectivity is constituted and produced by means of the process of providing an intelligible 'response' to being 'hailed' or called to 'account for oneself'. These examples are varied, the broad range of practices by which governors perform their 'role' with the aim of making themselves count is notable.

Analysis highlights that normative expectations and associated practices provide governors with the preconditions attached to production and maintenance of subjective coherence. Three particular conditions are most significant in presenting forms of recognition that bring credible governor subjectivities into being: commitment, challenge and objectivity.

Commitment

The governors participating in this study place a significant emphasis on the importance of being committed. A norm reinforced by training and advertising.

> '*there is an expectation that you are committed, when we're trained we're told that too, it's voluntary but obviously there's a you know even the adverts that go out for governors you know there's a job role but an unpaid job*'

The understanding of this role as a 'job' draws and re-draws some of the boundaries from within which governors' recognition is and isn't conferred. Adverts for governors are very '*corporate looking*' and positioned as a group that's '*higher than the headteacher*'. In response, governors are compelled to perform a recognisable narrative. Analysis foregrounds 'commitment' as a significant normative expectation. Through demonstrating their commitment, albeit in a variety of ways, most notably within a discourse of professionalisation, governors construct responsible 'good' governors and repudiate 'bad' or 'problematic' governors.

> *If the Trust invite you to the governor conference you are expected to attend [...] its hard because its voluntary but it is an expectation, it's about being a professional and committed*

Governor viability demands commitment behaviours consistent with what Hodgson (2005) calls a 'professional conscience'. Claire refers to *'behaviours they think they should be exhibiting in that forum really, acting in a professional way, having that respect that you are not in their everyday running the place'.* The 'professional conscience' is further illustrated in the following description by Naomi:

'I am here, as always, for the regular meetings. I am here having attended training sessions, having spent my time preparing, reading through the relevant documents, considering the data, preparing for critical questioning, knowing that every child matters'.

Great importance is placed on being seen, being useful, getting things done. Melanie draws further attention to this. She states '*it's something that's always in the back of my mind you want to be able to be committed to the schools'.* Those that don't demonstrate commitment form the 'Other' and become excluded. They fail to sustain a performance that conforms to normative expectations and the terms of recognition. The consequences of this can range from '*letting the other governors down*' and being given less significant roles, to more severe actions such as being removed from the governing body. Claire explains how there are a certain number of meetings you must attend and if you send your apologies too many times then '*as Chair of governors I will say you're off, we're not keeping you here anymore*'.

Hannah also draws attention to this when she compares her current governing body to previous. She states '*I think we've got a really positive and engaged governing body at the moment who are willing to get in there and get stuck in whereas perhaps some of the older governing body members were not so proactive and weren't so open to, they were more of the old school of sitting on a committee type*'. This evokes a commitment discourse that requires more than simply attending meetings. Her references to the physicality of '*getting stuck in*' contrast with the sedentary nature of '*sitting on a committee*' which forms a boundary of normative expectations in terms of recognition.

Being recognised as committed requires far more than simply being in attendance at meetings; you can be physically present yet still be unrecognised as committed. This creates tensions and becomes a point of frustration for Amy. She states '*as a whole our governing body is not that engaged. They will turn up to the meeting, they will not always participate in the meeting, in between meetings nothing much goes on there is very little momentum*'. Claire is also frustrated by this, in reference to other governors she says '*[they] rock up and you sit round the table and you talk a bit and then you go away and you forget that you've ever done it but it should be an ongoing thing really*'. She adds '*don't come to the meeting if you haven't got time to read the paperwork that's been sent out a week before because you need to do that preparation'.*

In a later interview, Claire describes a strategy she has put in place to address her governing body's inaction. She describes how governors are now required to send their questions in advance of the meeting, *'we agreed a way of working*'. This compels governors to engage

because lacking commitment is now very visible, creating panoptic effects and another new boundary of recognition. However, she does feel that the questions she requires to be submitted in advance can be '*a bit tokenistic [..] just to ask something about the budget but they don't really understand*'. This shows that not everything counts as intelligible.

From this section of analysis, we can see how intelligibility involves far more than simply being recognised as performing competencies, it requires a far more substantial reconstruction of 'commitment' and 'professional'. The complexity of maintaining the semblances of 'commitment' is further highlighted through the evocation of gender in the discussion of board vacancies. In reference to recruiting more governors, Claire states '*I've got to go out on recruitment because we've lost three men, so we did have four men but now we've only got one man and the rest are women and we lost three men because they just couldn't commit*'. In this example, the 'men' on Claire's board failed to demonstrate normative expectations and left, yet, paradoxically, they were specifically and homogeneously sought out by Claire to bring '*neutrality*' to her governing body. The notion of the gendered governor is further analysed in section 4.3.

Challenge

The significance of demonstrating commitment is linked to the need and ability to challenge 'effectively'. Emphasis has been purposely added to 'effectively' to draw attention to its subjective and interpretive nature. Naomi states that '*if you haven't prepared, if you haven't completed training you cannot effectively challenge'*. Governor training, understanding acronyms and interrogating progress data are all a prerequisite of being able to challenge. Melanie states:

> *I don't want to be a sort of governor that picks up the minutes a week before the meeting, reads the minutes, doesn't you know, doesn't really have an opinion on them or hasn't got any challenge to them…*

There appears to be a hierarchy to challenge, not all challenge is intelligible. Hannah refers to some challenge as '*trivial feedback*' and expects some governors to *'iron out silly things before the meeting and not discuss them in the meeting*'. She is referring to governors who consider correcting formatting and spelling errors in policy documents as evidence of challenge, but she states '*that takes time and it's not as value added as the real challenge on strategy'.* The notion of 'real' challenge being linked to strategy could further reduce some governors to the boundaries of viability where they are not recognised. In response, these governors must work harder to align with the established norms of intelligibility. Examples of

this include engaging with significantly more training.

Challenge materialises most notably through asking the headteacher questions during meetings. However, there are rules on questioning, and challenge more broadly. For Claire, who works in education, she states '*I do understand data when I look at it I don't need anybody to explain that to me*'. However, her acquisition of this knowledge does not free her from any labour in regard to the maintenance of viability. Drawing on an example of another governor whom she had planned to '*have a talk with, but he resigned before I got to*', she demonstrates her awareness that her performances as a governor requires self-discipline and control, she states:

> *when he started he was really full on, stepped across the line really around what his role was, he went in and told the headteacher what he thought on the curriculum, ripped it apart [...] it was just a bit too much you know*

The labour required by Claire is perhaps best illustrated in the extract below where she describes examples of her self-discipline and control, referring many times to '*checking*'. Knowledge of this type of invisible labour is absent in the current body of school governance research.

> *So, I always do challenge. Well first of all I check in my mind I think and check whether this could be completely just to do with my own child because you cannot have a, you can't suddenly bring it back to your child. You are governor and your job is to ensure that all of those 204 children have got a good deal at that school, that's your job. It's not about if your kid*

The invisible labour of self-monitoring is also linked to her position as a parent on the governing body, further intensifying the labour and costs through the tensions of evoking the ideology of motherhood. This is a point further analysed in section 4.4. Furthering the understanding of intelligible challenge as complex and shifting, Claire states there are *'rules around challenging the senior leadership'* and that some governors *'may be being over polite'.*

> *I think there are some unwritten rules around how far you're going to challenge the leadership, you've got to challenge the leadership but how far you're going to, how you make that challenge not sound like a personal challenge on their leadership at the end of a very long day when they've just covered a class and all the rest of it, if you are challenging the solution but you can't offer another solution*

It is clear from the extracts above that there are much wider considerations taken in account when establishing norms of intelligibility in regard to challenge. For example, workload and well-being are significant social and organisational norms that constitute Claire's boundaries

of challenge. Yet, this is juxtaposed with the concept of '*over politeness*' and governors holding back challenge as a weaker example of practice. This, and the previous examples, draw attention to the ambivalent and contradictory nature of governor subjectivity both excluding and admitting them into normatively established intelligibility.

In the previous section on commitment, Claire's example of implementing a strategy of submitting questions prior to meetings, was highlighted as an example of increasing engagement of governors. This can also be seen as a way of increasing governors' challenge. Hannah also described a way she had made changes to her governing body's operation to increase their ability to challenge.

> *different models for our governing body as part of self-review and improvement process really because it's never good to sit on your laurels and just continue the way you are. We all need to improve in everything we do and that includes the governing body. The governing body isn't moving on and using best practice and improving and becoming more effective or as effective as it can be with time. And really you can't say the leadership of the school is being effective or that we're pushing the right strategy errm… So I think the governing body felt that there were certain inefficiencies in our operation*

School governing bodies are typically structured in one of two ways, the committee model or the circle model. The circle model is described by The Key (2020) as a 'governing board without committees', whereby the 'task of monitoring specific areas usually assigned to committees is delegated to individuals or pairs instead'. With the removal of committees, the circle model required two key changes, the creation of monitoring pairs and the attendance of all governors at all meetings. This increases the visibility of all governors, not just in a physical sense but also in their expectations to write, read and challenge reports. There are greater expectations to know about all aspects of the school's performance and contribute to the full governing body meetings.

However, there are limits and rules around challenge. Linking support to challenge was important to governors, as the four extracts below demonstrate.

> *so a good governor I think helps support the staff and supports the improvement plan, asks the right questions to get to the truth of it and challenge their thinking, so maybe the impact of that may be change a strategy or shape it slightly differently - Claire*
>
> *I think the governing body needs to challenge slightly more so that we've got a more supportive role as well if that makes any sense. Laughs - Melanie*
>
> *pulling out things and pulling out what you need to pull out in order to challenge and to..*

support, because obviously we need to be supportive - Naomi

we want to support the headteacher but also provide that challenge and we want that to be focused in the areas that matter most can make most difference to the school - Hannah

As we have seen in this section there are constraints on challenge, there are rules which means that not all types of challenge conform with intelligibly established norms and gain recognition. It is also shown how the boundaries of these norms are conflating, contradictory and shifting. Governors, therefore, engage in labour, both visible and invisible, as part of a process of desire to be constituted as a viable subject (Butler, 2004, p.2).

It is also clear that governors' performances of holding leaders to account, through challenge, is not solely determined by simply possessing or not possessing managerial or educational knowledge, a point of divergence from current thinking in the field (Farrell, 2005; Farrell et al., 2017).

Objectivity

As shown in the previous section of analysis, there are intelligibly established norms of performing challenge in school governance. One of which is ensuring 'objectivity', as Claire states:

It's about getting that objectivity when challenging around certain classes that their kids are in or like certain teachers staffing choices

Claire makes indirect reference to governors with children in the school. They are marked out as a concern because of their personal connection to the school, its pupils and the teachers. Amy describes this as creating tension. She states:

I have that tension quite often round the table [...] there have been moments before if you're looking at data of your child's class and it's a one form entry, first of all you can find your child on that data sheet which is problematic I think. Then you're kind of in a meeting, listening and looking at it, trying to be objective but you're kind of guessing where all the others kids are, do you know what I mean.

The demand for objectivity positions governors within unrealistic expectations which place a costly burden on parents' shoulders. These tensions generate invisible labour as governors try to work even harder to gain intelligibility. Naomi is aware *'it can sound personal'* and Claire recognises how the other parents act to try and achieve a performance of objectivity. She states:

> *they phrase their challenge in a different way, they won't say….hmmm example, so one of my governors children are extremely able so he does bang the drum about what are you doing about the most able because that is what she is thinking about and I'm sure she has got experience of her own children perhaps not being stretched errrm but she does not say oh my so and so came home the other day and his homework blah blah blah [...] it doesn't become a personal anecdote if you like it will just be posing the question of what are you doing*

These examples illustrate how important it is for parents as governors to monitor and censor their speech acts in order to establish intelligibility. However, governors must also be recognised as intelligible parents, 'good' parents within the dominant social norms. The demand for careful censorship therefore puts at risk the performativity of parenthood and the expected emotional capital (Gilles, 2006). Naomi, in reference to difficulties her daughter faced at school whilst she was a governor, recalls '*I never questioned it*'. When this matter surfaces in a meeting, she describes '*anxiety, flushing, tears welling up'.* The injurious effects of school governance are highlighted through governors performatively constituted acts.

This demand for objectivity is not restricted to the traditional governing spaces. Naomi describes how in the playground her subjectivities interplay, specifically in relation to other parents.

> *So you know there are a number of children in that school who I only need to glance in their direction and I think "oookay"... you do need a referral [..] but supporting somebody as a mum you sort of almost have to drop into conversation that "Oh, I'm a nurse for people with learning disabilities"[...] Then maybe over time they come to you and go "actually, is there something that you can help me with?" so that's been really interesting*

This is not an easy task to manage and she herself makes the point that she cannot separate out the facets of her identity. She states '*but, again separate that out from me as a nurse, me as a mum and me as a governor'*. Her reference to the playground suggests that the performativity of governing does not only take place in settings typically associated with acts of governing, such as meetings in boardrooms or perhaps classrooms. The spaces in which governing occurs are not considered in governance research. Gregson and Rose (2000, p.442) call for a recognition of 'performative spaces' arguing that they are another source of 'performative instability'. This presents an opportunity for further exploration but is beyond the scope of this study.

This section of analysis highlights the complex, shifting nature of subjectivities. Normativity in school governing can create unity through exclusions and as such constrains and enables. Butler (2004, p.207) calls this the 'doubleness of the norm'.

4.2.3 Positioning the governor self

Analysis showed how governors position themselves within, in-between and outside discourses, bodies of knowledge and other subjects within the field. Most significantly, we can see how governors position themselves in relation to knowledge of education (policy and operations). This is illustrated by Claire, who works as a secondary school leader and is a Chair of Governors at her children's school. There appears both privilege and tension in having an educational identity and knowledge. She states *'it's quite a lot of weight to bear really as well, when you actually think that you are part of that leadership team of that school*' but also adds in trying to remain strategic and not operational '*pushed my ego back down which was good for me, erm, but also just not appropriate really because, were not, leading the school in that way'*. Her knowledge of education makes her recognisable and intelligible, she can challenge and knows what questions to ask. This gives her confidence *'it's about support but also about this questioning, and this kind of you know keep on going with that questioning, erm, for want of a better phrase it's terrible because I know you are recording it, like you're being fobbed off with an answer, like you have to keep going until you get to the actual truth of it'.* This gives her preferential access to certain subject positions, but in managing this she positions herself both inside and outside of the school's leadership team. This makes her positioning complex and contradictory.

Claire goes on to describe a meeting where the governing body needed to elect a new chair shortly after she had joined *"Oh Claire you should do it, you should do it" because you understand education, like you should do it, you should do it, and we are gonna have an Ofsted, and you'll know what you're talking about.* In reference to electing a chair, Claire's education expertise privileges her over others thus making her hypervisible. Yet, simultaneously this same knowledge enables her to make decisions that she perceives as failure and unviable.

> *When I rang her to talk to her about it, you know, I was really nervous about it because I work with this woman.. short pause.. professionally almost, as a governor and she knows that I'm a senior leader as well. We have lots of conversations and we get on quite well and then suddenly I'm criticising, the leadership of the school*

Discussed in more detail later in this chapter, Claire's position leaves her in conflict when an issue arises with her own child at the school. Tensions also arise with regard to friendships. In reference to a friend who is also a parent of a child at the school, Claire states

> *she sent me a message just going on and on, moaning about the school because the school hasn't done enough for her child's SEN and all the rest of it. And that's a really difficult position to be in because firstly I don't even know if that's true*

Amy also finds this difficult as 'sometimes parents expect you to tell them stuff'. In contrast to Claire, Amy positions herself on the periphery of education *'I've always toyed with being a teacher, but I never really decided that was what I wanted to do, so always done stuff that links with schools and focuses on children (pause) so I always feel like I have been on the periphery of education'.* Amy finds her position as a governor '*hard going'*. In reference to joining the governing body, Amy recalls '*[I knew] it was hard going erm, erm (pause) as a governor there is going to be a lot of stats that I am going to need to understand'.* Knowledge of data and '*stats*' forms an intelligibility boundary of which governors position themselves in relation to.

Hannah furthers the significance of understanding and monitoring the data and in the process positions certain governors as more intelligible than others.

> *we also realised that the way the governing body was operating we weren't necessarily getting the right information in the right ways to be able to do, I don't know, to be able to evaluate data and things properly*
>
> *I think there was obviously a couple of governors who work in education so it was good to get them involved with the data, the progress, the quality of teaching because they being those skillsets and then teaming them up with the parents as well in those monitoring pairs*

Melanie positions herself on the outside - she says things like '*coming from my background'* and *'[it] felt like diving in at the deep end'.* She makes reference to how things don't '*translate'* as if school governance has its own separate language, an exclusionary language that positions her as other. She is frustrated by how this position doesn't align with her position within the business sector *'it takes a long time to understand that actually you can't just get that done straight away you've got to tick all of these other boxes first… and I think that's difficult'.*

> *I think it's quite difficult actually coming from my background which is.. more private sector to an educational setting because actually, there's so many levels of… different.. erm just guidelines for the education..*
>
> *You bring elements up to the headteacher who then obviously speak to the caretaker errm and then those elements need to be referred back to the local council or the parish council. We were talking about the saaaame things that needed to be resolved eight months after they were initially brought up… and it seems to be one of those things… you can't just deal with anything directly*

She compares herself to governors with a knowledge of education *'I think the educationalists are really more realistic in the… in the framing of how things are gonna get done, as to us*

that are not from that sector'. In one sense this makes her invisible; unable to engage in the discussion that governors with educational knowledge can, the language they can speak. She feels that '*it's gonna take me a lifetime just to learn the acronyms that everybody uses'*. But, simultaneously this makes her hypervisible, standing out as different, as a token '*there's always so much more expected of you'.* This is also a concern for Naomi, who says *'I do wonder if people think "I don't know anything, I'm not an educationalist, I don't know anything about education therefore I am not going to be useful" so somehow getting across to people that you don't have to know about how to look at the data'.*

Legally governing bodies in England are required to be constituted by staff, parent and co-opted governors, the headteacher is usually a member of the governing body. In addition to particular committee roles or monitoring pairs, individual governor roles are also assigned for statutory responsibilities such as safeguarding and finance.

> *we have a governor whose got a good background in accountancy which I'm really grateful she's there because I don't have that and we need to make sure that… that knowledge is at the meeting but she decided to unpick the whole budget talking about things that none of us really understood and perhaps she didn't either because she'd not actually been looking at school budgets before and so it just went on for aaaages and ages and ages and you could just see everybody switching off and it wasn't useful, it wasn't meaningful - Claire*

The parent governor role provides the most precarious position.

> *the role of the parent governor – what is that? Are they representing the views of the parents or are they there because someone once came up with something that said there should be a parent governor and a staff governor so then we do, we tick the box. What's the purpose of them being there, you know?*

Melanie provides an example of the tension between her self-defined roles of being a parent and co-opted governor. Both of which she sees as having different purposes. She states:

> *I think I try to sit somewhere between, I have to sit with my parent hat on erm although I sit in a role with a co-op governor I have to still, I've got children at the school [...] so I have to… try and also remain slightly impartial in that role because I do have to see it with the slightly tinted lenses on*

But this is not always straightforward. Naomi states:

> *I come to the meetings trying very hard to separate. I'm not a parent I'm a governor even though you're called a parent governor, I mean I'm co-opted. But errrm… I'm a parent but I'm a governor at that meeting.*

Governors struggle to perform the parent governor role within the expected norms of objectivity and rationality. In Naomi's first interview she referred to a particularly difficult

experience that required her to draw on her position as a parent of a child at the school even though she was officially a co-opted governor and not a parent governor. She recalls '*I just remember I felt really, really vulnerable. It was really bizarre actually when x sort of said "what's it been like as a parent of a year 6 or year 5?" whatever it was at that time and I immediately thought "I can't answer this, I just can't answer this, please don't ask me that question".* Butler states that subjects are vulnerable because their identities depend on recognition to live a livable life.

Governors without an 'educational knowledge' engage in strategic performative acts to position and re-position themselves as recognisable and intelligible subjects, analysis highlights the effort and energy that goes into those acts. Governors position themselves variably within organisational norms; a network of power that produces and reproduces certain authoritative definitions of governor positions. Some of these positions are constrained by determined governing body roles; however, these are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Governors are positioned within, in the middle, or in between, the micro level of the school leadership and community and the macro level of the state. In academies there is the added level of the Board of Trustees and for maintained schools the local authority. Both the Trust and local authority sit in the meso space, between the school governing body and the Department for Education. These layers of complexity result in invisibility, feelings of tokenism and exclusion, feelings of frustration. Amy states '*I feel we are a bit tokenistic and they [trustees] don't really worry (pause) how effective we are'.* She gives an example *'That's probably the perfect example, Covid we weren't really consulted on anything, (pause) erm it all just happened'.* The desire to be recognised is met with feelings of frustration.

There appears a constant struggle over how to accomplish a position where the governor is recognised and accepted by others. Discourses of strategy and rationality are constructed through repetitive acts. Naomi increases her mastery by '*beaver[ing] away in the background and just pull[ing] everything together'* she refers to the '*spreadsheet*' and '*can put things in order*'. However, the greater the mastery, the more vulnerable she becomes '*I know that I can become out of control emotionally'*. Her becoming stems from a desire to be seen as appropriate in the gaze of the other (Butler, 1997b).

4.2.4 The gaze of significant others

As stated in the beginning of section 4.2, governors are constituted in relation to significant others: school leaders, teachers, competencies, policy, disciplinary regimes and other members of the governing body. Baxter (2017) states that headteachers and Ofsted are highly influential regarding the ways governors make sense of their environment and accountability, a finding that aligns with the data in this study. However, Baxter's study applied Goffman's frame analysis, a dramaturgical approach that explored phenomenon through headteacher discourses and inspection reports. She concluded that there are complex and conflicting discourses of what 'good governance' actually is. Baxter (2017, p.35) states 'there are two distinct discourses [...] well-meaning but ineffectual volunteers and professionals performing a professional function'. In this study, I am less concerned by what these discourses are, but more the extent to which they constitute governors in a performative process. Therefore, in this section of analysis I particularly focus on governors' desire for recognition within the norm in relation to the 'gaze' of the three actors most significant in the data - the headteacher, Ofsted and other governors.

Butler (1997b) argues that a becoming that stems from a desire to be seen as appropriate in the 'gaze' of the other. The 'gaze' is a concept frequently applied in school research to describe the way a normalising framework is developed in order to dictate how a subject is thought about and discussed (Naz, 2021; Colman, 2022; Perryman et al., 2018; Ball, 2008; Perryman, 2005, 2006, 2009). This concept draws from the work of Foucault, most notably his writing on how 'permanent visibility ensures the automatic functioning of power' (Foucault, 1979, p.201).

In the following extracts we see how norms remain hidden and unquestioned but are 'discernible most dramatically and clearly in the effects they produce' (Butler, 2004, p.41). Ofsted induces panoptic vertical and horizontal surveillance (Page, 2017) that materialises in practices of self and peer monitoring.

> *we have to keep on top of the latest advice on what Ofsted are using as their criteria and what they are looking for - Melanie*

> *you can attract obviously much better staff if you've got a higher Ofsted rating, one of the things is you will attract a higher calibre of staff which means it self-perpetuates then that you can provide the best education to the children - Hannah*

> *then I took her out, and I kept thinking I'm the chair of governors and I am removing my child from this school and I'm putting her in a different school, if Ofsted were to even, sniff at this, do you know they would have a field day [...] doesn't that kind of (pause) clash with me being the chair of governors, should I step down? - Claire*

However, governors are aware of its dramaturgical effects. Claire states '*I have thought is this literally a performance, a tick list, a show and I am going to be the show girl that goes in and does the Ofsted [...] every time Ofsted comes in there is a performance, you know (pause), but I would like that performance to have integrity and based on something that was real and what we are doing'.*

In Hannah's governing body, the circle model means that monitoring takes place through pairs or triplets of governors. Hannah makes a number of references to the pairs/triplets, she states:

> *The fact that it's pairs or triplets means you've got some automatic support and peer review in there as well in what you are doing as a governor.*
>
> *I suppose almost peer review ourselves in what we're doing*
>
> *It also gives an opportunity I think for governors who are strong in a particular area to lead that and a governor that maybe who isn't as strong to be paired with them to develop and learn*

Through monitoring in pairs governors become responsible for each other's performances. This serves as an opportunity to negotiate and discipline governors' performances and highlights the way institutionalised practices regulate people by establishing normative criteria for judgement and technologies of visibility (Youdell, 2010). In school governance, governors come to regulate themselves according to the normative criteria of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977). In reference to a meeting with the Trustees Amy states 'part of me felt like we were being put in the spotlight [...] we were being scrutinised to see what we knew about the school'.

The headteacher is also presented as a significant figure. Hannah states '*a good governor I think builds a good relationship up with the head teacher'*. It is clear that governors want the headteacher to feel supported as well as challenged, this is of great importance and is referenced many times in all the interviews. Significantly, support of the headteacher is usually always referred to when governors talk of challenging the headteacher.

> *having that direction and focus again makes us more effective really with and increased level of scrutiny, support and challenge to the school and hopefully more able to support the headteacher - Hannah*
>
> *we've evolved and we want to get in there and help with the school priorities, we want to support the headteacher but also provide that challenge and we want that to be focused in the areas that matter most can make most difference to the school*

Naomi recognises that '*the headteacher is the one who does the majority of the work'.* This

aligns with Farrell et al's., (2017) findings that headteachers are significant in the codes of accountability such as agenda setting and meetings. Melanie also links the headteacher to governors' ability to question and challenge. She states:

> *you know and I don't think anybody would be afraid to raise an opinion or raise an idea or you know… I don't think they're gonna get shot down for it I think it would be openly discussed and I think that's possibly where the positivity is coming from because actually it's… it's quite a welcoming environment at the moment. I should imagine if we had a different head or a different leadership team and things weren't going in the right way, it would be an entirely different experience.*

In this section of analysis, the performativity of school governance is brought to the fore by the identification of the recitation of particular norms and practices. Governors engage in both conscious and unconscious performances to achieve recognition and intelligibility, by evoking the ideal of committed, objective and challenging.

Butler (1997b, p.113) states that 'the very possibility of subject formation depends upon a passionate pursuit of recognition'. Butler emphasises how this process must be understood as gendered and in doing so draws attention to the constraints imposed by gender norms according to which the struggle for recognition takes place. In this section we have seen how the desire for recognition underpins governors' performances, highlighting a 'doing' that evokes a gendered governing identity. This is presented in further breadth and depth in the next section of analysis.

4.3 Performing the gendered governor

In this section of analysis, critical emphasis is placed on the gendered organisation of intelligibility in school governance. By this I mean, the need for performances that acknowledge and respond to the ways in which we present our gendered selves according to the terms of the heterosexual matrix whilst also adhering to coherent governor subjectivity.

This section of analysis is organised and presented into three subsections that each focus on a specific gendered concept identified in the data. The three concepts of 'naturalness', 'domination' and 'emotionality' that bring performativity to the fore, foregrounding the gendered imagery of school governance through speech acts. Secondly, the exploration of these concepts highlights governors' attempts to convey a gender-neutral discourse, where gender appears to lose significance through the importance of a competence discourse.

4.3.1 'Naturally' skilled

In the previous section of analysis, commitment, challenge and objectivity are shown to form the normative grounds of intelligibility and recognition. They begin to shape the boundaries of viable and unviable subjectivity, albeit only ever temporarily. However, as Butler (2005, p.33) reminds us 'not everything counts as recognition in the same way'; there are different forms of recognition and the viability of the subjectivities they bring into being.

Governors subject themselves to these norms through humanist understandings of a stable, coherent and a fixed self, that is 'naturally' acquired. Hannah describes how governors are allocated to particular roles and responsibilities in the governing body because they '*[fall] naturally into one or more of the priorities because of their skillset or because of their natural, I suppose, tendencies'.* She adds a further example by stating that a female governor working in the health sector *'naturally fell into the school community, the wellbeing and that side of things so that was her strength'.* She also adds in relation to working in monitoring pairs *'you've got a natural person to bounce ideas off'.* Amy also states that '*when this opportunity came up to be a governor at my children's school it just seemed like the natural thing to do'.*

The idea of a natural inner essence and natural attributes is inextricably linked to gender, where 'femininity' is homogenised and exaggerated. According to Naomi, 'women's *tendency is towards the emotional*' and Melanie states '[women are] *emotionally charged but I think again that's another perk of being a woman isn't it'.* The concept of 'naturalness' is simultaneously constituting and productive, it is not a simple fact, biological or otherwise, it is instead an effect of discourse (Miron and Inda, 2000).

The references to the 'natural' constitution of the role appears contingent with judgements about the 'skills' required to be an 'effective' governor. However, at the same time governors distance themselves from a belief in gender differences, describing themselves as (gender) neutral by a focus on skills, experience and knowledge over gendered attributes.

> *I wouldn't think that anybody is undervalued. I think everyone is… taken.. taken for their skills and their voice and I wouldn't say that anybody at the moment is.. I think it's the fairly levelled playing field - Melanie*

Which skills are and aren't valued is compounded by a 'skills matrix'; a list of competencies, experience, knowledge and skills developed by the DfE (NGA, 2021) for measurement against. In discussing a skills matrix, Melanie refers to *'true skills*' and Naomi talks of '*professional skills*'. She adds *'each person who comes to the table needs to have the right skills [...] you have to show what your skills are and learn what your skills are I suppose within that'.* In this sense, the governors are subjects of professionalisation discourses (Wilkins,

2015) that precede their subjection to the organisational matrix of intelligibility. But, analysis provides insight into the materialisation of these professionalisation discourses as gendered, a dimension not drawn attention to in the school governance literature before. There is a paradox in the way they were, at the same time, reproducing and transcending traditionally gendered norms. A focus on skills and interests cannot escape from gendered imagery even when it is evoked through a discourse of gender blindness.

> *we then looked at who had some experience in areas and skills in the skills matrix of the governing body and also the interest because you want people to be motivated and actually a lot of people fell naturally into one or more of the priorities because of their skillset or because of their natural, I suppose, tendencies. - Hannah*
>
> *however, we have a very… a very interesting and eclectic group of women erm who do come from really, really diverse backgrounds. Having a chair that works for xxx is really, an engineer, it's interesting. Although I'm saying we need more men we've actually got some interesting skills that might usually be attributed to a male profession involved in our team - Naomi*
>
> *But each person who comes to the table needs to have the right skills whether they're male or female - Naomi*
>
> *I think that.. there's probably a lot of men out there that could bring more to the table and a different opinion and I think that sometimes we're too errm.. this is going to sound really unpolitcally correct now but sometimes we're too set on getting the right levels of diversity that we then miss out on some true skills. - Melanie*

According to Hannah's '*skills matrix'*, Naomi's '*right skills*' and Melanie's '*true skills*', there is an illusion that gender disappears, for it to only reappear, evoking and reproducing a gendered hierarchy of naturalised and normative difference. Although the objective may be to achieve greater gender equality, gender hierarchy may actually be reproduced through these particular discursive constructions. Within the competence discourse the 'skills matrix' surfaces as a tool of gender neutrality, where governing is constructed as gender-neutral practice. Despite attempts to escape essentialist and gendered thinking, such as through evoking the competence discourse, gender in school governance always seems to manage to find its way back.

4.3.2 Female domination

At the very beginning of her governorship Melanie recalls her attention being drawn to the '*female dominated*' training sessions which she found '*eye opening*'.

> *'I actually sat in on a virtual training session last week […] I think there were 15 all female*

governors'. She later adds 'I don't know what the percentages are but actually whenever I've been to training sessions it is a really female dominated session. I probably say thinking back now I'd say it was probably an 80/20 split, female heavy [...] it was quite eye opening… I remember the first training session that I went to… my introduction to being a governor, there was 40 people on the course and actually there was only three men there'.

Similarly, both governing bodies in this study are composed of a significantly higher proportion of men than women. The unevenness of such a composition is of notable concern. With the lower number of men on the board perceived as 'lacking'.

We need men as well as women otherwise we don't function in society for various reasons and are not..we all have various skills and attributes that we bring to the table so to have too much of any one thing, is uneven and unequal - Naomi

This notion is further cemented by the headteacher at Claire's school. Claire recalls the female headteacher telling her they needed more men round the table. She states:

what was interesting was that the head teacher said to me was we need some men round the table as it was really female dominated and primary education is quite female dominated ,um, and I don't know if that's really what we needed, we needed people from different backgrounds around the table

Here again the concept of 'domination' surfaces as a significant concern. The idea of female '*domination*' and female ways of thinking are constructed as a problem that creates shortcomings in governance that only the addition of men can overcome. As previously shown in an earlier extract, Naomi was also concerned about the number of women on her governing body. Further expanding on this she adds:

I do feel that we need more men, I really do. However, when I started there were a lot more men …. I don't want to get too far down that road, it's about having the right men you know but yeah errrr I think the nature of the governing body has really changed, we are much more effective for various reasons. You know it was very much a sort of a top down well tail wagging the dog when I first started, it's much more of a collaborative approach now

Naomi's point is significant because it is contradictory in its argument. She is very adamant that her governing body needs more men, even reinforcing her position by stating '*I really do*', but then counters this point by describing how they are the most effective and collaborative they have ever been. Her rationale for '*need[ing] more men*' does not appear to be underpinned by a logical justification in terms of the board's performance or effectiveness. Such an antithesis provides an example of what Jill Blackmore (2010, p.45) described as 'problems depicted as the lack of 'the Other'.

In addition, the concept of '*female dominance'* is paradoxically evoked within a masculine imagery of 'strength', but this is not in portraying any type of physical strength typically associated with masculine gender norms. Melanie states:

> *I think erm there's definitely four or five very strongly opinionated people.. laughs.. and I think sometimes it can all get a bit errm… emotionally charged but I think again that's another perk of being a woman isn't it. Laughs. Like I said, we got quite a strong female governing board so you're gonna get that*
>
> *I do think we're quite, we are quite a female heavy governing board and I think sometimes that does come across because we're all strong maternal women and I think that's actually, that is something that I'd say collectively that we… I wouldn't categorise any of us on our board as not strong and independent women, which is great. But I think sometimes there could be a bit more of a balance to it and I think we probably do need some more male voices and we possibly, you need that bit of variety, you need that cross section of people to bring a nice balance to it.*

In Melanie's extract above, the strength afforded to this group of women comes with a price. They are framed as being opinionated, emotionally charged and unbalanced. The 'maternal strength' is positioned as deviant from the norm of objectivity; it is 'risky'. As such, it is quickly neutralised by the need for 'a bit more balance to it'. This balance is purportedly achieved by acquiring 'more male voices'. Balance is necessary because 'maternal strength' is stereotypically presumed to bring unwanted performances such as emotion, which are not part of the normative imagery of governance - '*they are harmful*'. This is illustrated when Naomi states '*what I was trying to say was that in general, women's tendency is towards the emotional', e*mphasising commonalities amongst women governors, distancing 'good governance' from traits and performances that are associated with femininity and dominant feminine gender norms.

This section of analysis draws attention to, through empirical examples, how not everything counts as recognition in the same way. The maintenance of intelligible governor subjectivity requires the navigation of shifting and contradictory gendered terms. This is further explored in the next section by specifically focusing on the concept of 'emotion'.

4.3.3 Emotional dimensions

In the previous section we have seen how the normative expectation of objectivity is 'dangerously' put at risk by women's '*emotional tendency*' which is '*harmful*'. Emotion appears to be frequently homogenised and judged by others. Linked explicitly to femininity, assumed attributes are positioned unfavourably through naturalised gendered dichotomies. Aligning with Fournier and Smith (2006, p. 144), the feminine stereotypes afforded to women

governors ends up representing emotional weakness, whereas the male body represents rationality and organisation. In reference to co-opting a male, non-parent member onto the board, Claire states '*I think it made the questions (long pause) erm, more, erm, neutral rather than emotive.* A narrative that further cements emotionality in opposition to, and lesser than rationality in highly gendered ways (Sachs and Blackmore, 1998, p.268).

However, in contrast, the concept of emotion was also evoked in relation to strength as opposed to weakness. The concept of '*female dominance*', as previously discussed, offered an alternative view of emotion, yet one where governors were equally put at risk of being '*emotionally charged*' or '*strongly opinionated*'. This offers us an example of the 'doubleness of the norm'; norms that are composed of ideals that are never fully inhabitable (Butler, 2005, p. 39). Therefore, as Shakeshaft (1989) described it you're 'damned if you do, damned if you don't'.

In this way emotional displays are directly connected to the ways a woman's body is expected to perform in governing spaces. A quiet, unemotional, objective body takes up less attention and space and therefore aligns with idealised feminine qualities of being small and contained (Versluis, Agostino and Cassidy, 2020). In a school governance sense, this could materialise in women governors not wanting to challenge or ask difficult questions for fear of this being recognised as 'emotional' or 'opinionated'. However, such a body fails to adhere to the semblances of intelligible governor subjectivity, whereby being 'challenging' is required for recognition. This finding aligns with Muhr (2010), who states that cultural expectations of feminine passivity can make it difficult for women to achieve recognition.

The perceived opposition between emotion and reason/rationality, played out as one of mutual exclusion, requiring the suppression of any shown emotion; thus, making emotions political (Beatty, 2000). Claire states *'everyone is very nice to each other in governor meetings nobody gets stressed out or super passionate*'. In particular, '*passion*' materialises as another example of an ambivalent and contradictory notion, again, notably both gendered and paradoxical. For example, 'passion' is depicted as a concern when Claire recalls 'a*nother parent governor who was a mum was quite passionate and I was thinking in my training I was told not to do that'.* However, 'passion' is also repositioned in relation to commitment; passion as purpose and determination, particularly for mothers, as further discussed in the next section. Naomi demonstrates this in the extract from her written account first presented in section 1.1. For ease I have repeated a small section below.

> *I can't answer this question. I am not usually lost for words, I don't usually feel anxiety, flushing, tears welling up from being asked a question during these meetings. But another identity has suddenly been called in, has been asked to attend the meeting in my place! Me, as a Mum – here; now.*

Recognisable governor performances demand the necessity of hiding felt emotions. Therefore anxiety, vulnerability and need for approval go unnoticed. The control of emotion is termed 'emotional labour'. The concept of emotional labour is defined by Hochschild (1983) as the understanding, assessment and management of one's own emotions and the emotions of others. Emotional labour is a gendered experience that results in high levels of self-monitoring (Hort, Barrett and Fulop, 2001). Crying is also a gendered process (Soares, 2003) and linked to the impossibility of carrying out the role within the norms of expectation. Tears are associated with weakness and other essentialist notions of femininity such as menstruation (ibid). Performances of emotion performatively generate gendered boundaries (Schurr, 2013).

Governors, therefore, engage in 'repair work' through the concept of depersonalisation, with separateness being the 'professional' thing to do (Crawford, 2004, *my emphasis*). Amy states:

> *I spoke positively about it but not in lots of detail because I'm never sure if I am allowed to talk about my own personal experience of it.*

> *What would be good is if parents just did that for a local school, I'll go and do that because I know what it's like to have children in school and you know I won't be emotionally involved*

Through governor speech acts, a Cartesian rationality manifests and persists, however, it is a fallacy that we can leave our emotions at the threshold of the meeting room door or virtual waiting room (Morris, 2018). A false dualism between emotion and reason is frequently invoked in the data, this demands a suppression of emotion in order to achieve recognition. The suppression of these emotions may well be unhealthy (further discussed in section 4.4).

The investment of governors' time is recognised but emotional investment is not. Emotional investment carries risks and is therefore rendered invisible through emotional labour. The costs of performing emotional labour include feelings of inauthenticity, tokenism and anxiety. Ignoring the emotional labours demanded by governing renders invisible the costs governors experience.

Linking back to the literature review, we can understand emotions as neither essentialised inner reality of the subject nor as being socially determined entirely. Emotions are shaped and performed, interwoven with issues of power, identity and resistance (Zembylas, 2005). This understanding better helps analyse the complexities of 'emotional rules' and the boundaries entailed by those rules. The costs of the emotional dimensions of school governing are further explored in the next section.

4.4 Performing the mother governor

I have explored in the previous section the paradox of gender performativity in school governing, where governors are caught within a matrix of gendered organisational and social norms. In this final section of analysis, it is argued that the maternal governor body represents a further deviance from the governor norm; the discordant and unruly body. I have shown how the school governor is compelled to present a coherent account of commitment, challenge and objectivity, but the terms of this recognition are complex, coded and contradictory. The aim of this section is to use both the interview data and written narrative accounts to unravel seemingly coherent accounts and explore in greater depth the labour and costs of securing and sustaining coherence through the lens of mothers[3] on the governing board.

4.4.1 (M)Othered governor

During the first interviews it became apparent that all participants were mothers and four of the five participants' children attended the school in which they were appointed governors. The literature states that parental involvement in education is a gendered concept and practice (Hutchison, 2012), with expectations for mothers to engage in an 'all-giving, all present mothering' regardless of other commitments (Sutherland, 2010; Rodriguez Castro, Brady and Cook, 2020). As with other aspects of parenting, involvement with, and support of, children's educational activities typically falls more to mothers, an 'implicit ought' of mothering (Lawler, 2005). It is also mothers who were held more responsible when children did not measure up (ibid). It is therefore perhaps not surprising that becoming and being a governor was intimately related to being mothers. Four of the five governors cited their children in relation to their reasons for becoming governors. Governors incorporated their children into their subjectivities so that they became a part of who the women were as both governors and mothers.

So, I am a mother of two. I've got a soon to be seven year old and soon to be five year old, that started school, so two years ago and that's really why I got into governance - Melanie

you look at the newsletter every week and it says oh we are looking for governors and I thought it will help me to focus more on my daughter and her education rather than being so caught up in emotional stuff at work, that I'm not emotionally there for my daughter [...] I wanted to be able to do something practical that supported my daughter's education as well - Naomi

as a working parent I didn't feel like I could contribute to the PTFA or, you know really kind of get involved in that kind of thing because I wasn't actually there to drop off and pick up, I had a child minder doing that for me, erm, and so when the parent governor role came up, I thought well I could bring what I know about education - Claire

It could be argued that the act of becoming a governor contributes to the securing of viable maternal subjectivity, constituted by 'mothering ideologies'. Pressure to conform in accepted ways reproduces and maintains the ideology of good mothering. A number of examples are provided in the extracts above, including '*being visible at school*', '*being there'* and '*supporting their education*'. However, this comes with a price. Amy states '*sometimes you wish that you didn't know some of the things that go on'.*

These findings align with the research previously referenced. Analysing the interview transcripts through a performative lens highlights a relationship to domesticated labour and the normative social expectations of being a mother. The performativity of motherhood reveals itself:

I also felt… not err emotionally secure in being a parent and errm a health visitor. So having that as a job and almost errr…assessing my skills as a mother based on my job role. Laughs [...] You know completely judging myself based on that ideal of the perfect mother, the perfect parent.. laughs. So I wanted to separate myself a little bit from my job and then basically the role came up - Naomi

I took her out, and I kept thinking I'm the chair of governors and I am removing my child from this school [...[.I've done what I need to do as a mother - Claire

When I talk to friends who are my age that don't have children and I say to them "oh I'm doing a governor training session tonight" or "no I can't do that because I'm doing this" and they're like "oh is it school related? Why are you doing that?" and I sort of say to them "because I have got a vested interest in this school doing well, they are in charge of my children five days a week. I want to know that that school is a happy, safe place to be and that my children enjoy going there". Errm.. and I think that had a really big pull on the reason of why I wanted to join as a governor - Melanie

The construction of motherhood as caring and nurturing is counterbalanced by the vilification of mothers who are not caring enough, and fail to properly nurture and care for their offspring (Barnett, 2006; Douglas and Michaels, 2005). Being a good mother therefore

requires governors to perform gender and maternal subjectivity in a way that conforms to the dominant norms of femininity to which she, as a mother, is held accountable. These intensive mothering ideologies and the demand of governor normative expectations pulled these women in competing directions resulting in experiencing feelings of guilt, anxiety and vulnerability. This materialises in confusion, contradiction and speech censorship (Kenny, 2018). Naomi variably states throughout the first interview:

> *'it's not about my daughter'*
>
> *'I thought it will help me to focus more on my daughter'*
>
> *I have never once errrm, 'gone down the school' and said you know "this isn't good enough, my child isn't getting the education she needs".. short pause. I've never questioned it*

Speech censorship is highlighted as another type of invisible labour, one with significant costs to both adhering to and failing to comply. Speech censorship is required to maintain recognition as objective.

> *One of the challenges for us was and still is a little bit is that (umm) a lot of them were mums of kids in the school, so the staff governor even had a kid in the school, the chair of governors had a child in the school [...[and then the two parents obviously had children in the school, so there were four mothers around the table (pause) so that was interesting to watch them try not to say in that letter you sent home, or my kid really likes such and such, you've kind of got to detach yourself from that*
>
> *So I always do challenge. Well first of all I check in my mind I think and check whether this could be completely just to do with my own child because you cannot have a, you can't suddenly bring it back to your child. You are governor and your job is to ensure that all of those 204 children have got a good deal at that school, that's your job. It's not about if your kid*

The expectation of objectivity becomes even harder to perform on occasions when governors are directly asked to draw on their maternal experiences. Amy states '*it's hard because sometimes they want me to talk about my experiences of my son'.* Recognition demands mothers demonstrate their capabilities to remain unbiased and focus on the whole school. Therefore, they must '*detach*' but this is not easy and results in invisible labour.

> *It's really difficult to detach the "oh right, so that's the environment my child is in. That's what that class looks like" do you know what I mean? Because obviously that's different to maybe what the story your child's told you when they've come home and all the rest of it.*

However, in resistance, being a mother is also positioned within an alternative discourse of commitment and knowledge which makes for a better governor. Amy associates the rest of the governing body's lack of engagement to not being a parent *'I think it would be really hard being a governor at our school and not be a parent, I don't know how effective those people are'.* Her reasoning lies in her perception of non-parent governors' ability to to perform for inspection regimes '*I don't think if they were called to speak to Ofsted I don't think they would really know that much about the school'.* The extracts below also support this notion:

> *I also think the amount of time that you have to donate to it also puts some people off because erm I know two or three people that I think would be excellent governors and actually when I've spoken to them about it they're not parents of school aged children…*
>
> *they seem to have their own commitments, time pressures and things like that and they just can't guarantee them donating that time*
>
> *Now if I wasn't a parent at that school I wouldn't have had the same impulse to do that. I probably... but having children in the school, again it's that want, need or desire to do it.*
>
> *Know about decisions being taken but I wouldn't say the non-parent governors have that much awareness*

However, this is entangled within the limits of performing an intelligible governor. Mothers as governors are 'othered' in an effort to make governing more 'neutral' and 'detached'. There is a perceived greater risk of making it solely about their own children. Thus, in school governing, being a mother must be invisible. Mothers must work harder; stricter codes of emotional rules may intensify for mothers and they undergo more extensive emotional labour and self-monitoring. This is further discussed in the next section.

4.4.2 (In)visible mothers

This section focuses most specifically on Claire and Naomi, although there are a few short extracts from other transcripts. Claire is a secondary school English teacher and senior leader. She lives with her husband and two primary aged children in what she called '*a little suburban life with a Volvo and a cat'.* She became a parent governor in a primary academy because as she described *'it's in my skill set*'. By that she was relating to her professional expertise, skills and knowledge in education. As a working parent she felt she couldn't *'contribute to the PTFA or get involved in that kind of thing because I wasn't actually there to drop off and pick up, I had a child minder doing that for me'.* The parent governor role

provided an opportunity for her to engage with her children's school, *'I thought well I could bring what I know about education'.*

Naomi is a nurse. She describes herself as someone who likes '*structure*' and '*processes*' but is 'not creative or inspirational, I'm functional [...] I'm a completer finisher, I like to bring things together in order to make sense of them'. Naomi recalls getting into governing because she wanted to '*separate myself a little bit from my job*'. She thought '*it will help me to focus more on my daughter and her education rather than being so caught up in emotional stuff at work, that I'm not emotionally there for my daughter*'.

In the following extract Naomi illustrates this by talking about herself as represented by her chosen object. Prior to interview participants were asked to reflect on and identify any object that would help them to verbalise themselves as governors. Naomi chose a pencil case.

> *I decided I was a pencil case. Laughs. Which is really boring…laughs.. really functional. It's not inspiring, it's really practical. Errm, if you left home without your keys or your purse you'd.. you'd go back for it. If you left home without your pencil case you'd probably go "ahh d'you know what I'll be okay, I'll cope it's alright, it's only one day". But actually you kind of need that pencil case and it's really boring and really functional and really practical erm.. short pause. But if you go out without your pencil case you spend the entire day going "I can't find my pen, I can't find my pencil, I haven't got my highlighters, I haven't got" you know all those things that bring things together… I feel lost without it. [...] Because all that stationary.. laughs.. makes me feel like I can err organise things, I can bring everything back and stop the sort of, you know… I can catastrophise, I know I can catastrophise I know that I can become out of control emotionally and practically with all the things that you need to do and I just need to bring everything back. Almost into a spreadsheet… contain it errm and that's me, I'm a pencil case. Cos then I can just put everything into the pencil case, I know it's all safe, I know it's there, I know it's there when I need it. I've got lots and lots of skills. Probably people wouldn't notice if I wasn't there errm.. they wouldn't necessarily erm, you know I'm not inspirational, I'm not creative, I'm not firing lots of "ooh I know what we could do".. but, I can beaver away in the background and just pull everything together and can put things in order and yeah…that's it really*

Naomi's viable subjectivity requires sustaining a performance that conforms to normative expectation and the terms of her own recognition. In this extract we see a reflexive undoing of Naomi's subjectivity and her coherent narrative unravels, emphasising her vulnerability. According to Lloyd (2015, p.7), Butler understands vulnerability as a constitutive condition of subjectivity which has a certain 'normative force'. The risk of 'embarrassment' in the event of failure increases, becoming 'emotional' and 'out of control'. In an interview with Sara Ahmed (2016, p.485), Judith Butler talks of 'vulnerability in the name of which one acts, and which informs one's very acting [...] vulnerability is there in the concept of subjectivation, being acted on from the start by norms we never chose, but also, concretely, through gender assignment'.

When Claire joined the governing body it was a difficult time for the school. *'There was no Chair, and it went round the table and the pressure built up because I was the only one with an educational background'.* Claire's concerns turned to home, *'I thought, well, if I say yes to this my husband's probably gonna kill me because I'm already working and erm you know we're just kind of holding everything together'.* But despite Claire's initial apprehension she is supported by her husband who she recounts saying '*but of course you're gonna do it, but you have to do it because like it's the right thing to do'.* In the first interview with Claire she mentioned a specific experience that had created tensions for her in performing the governor role. In response to a question about her different identities interacting she said *'I've got a story on that actually [...] do you want to hear the story?* Claire told me about her daughter who had special educational needs and was performing well in school, however, a few things '*went wrong*' and she made the decision to move her daughter to a different school. She recalls:

> *'it was all very very difficult, erm, (pause) then I took her out, and I kept thinking I'm the chair of governors and I am removing my child from this school and I'm putting her in a different school, if Ofsted were to even, sniff at this, do you know they would have a field day [..] and doesn't that kind of (pause) clash with me being the chair of governors, should I step down now and I've taken her out, do you know what I mean?'*

After the first interview I could not stop thinking about this particularly intense experience Claire had shared with me. If I am completely honest it resonated with my own personal guilt and the toxic shame I have battled as a mother, school leader and governor; the latter being an additional role I chose to take on for my own professional development and demanded more of my time away from family (Jordan-Daus and Austin, 2020). I recognised the personal toll, my own self-punishment and the 'repair work' I had to do at home. I asked Claire if she would write about that particular experience in more detail. Her written account is presented below. I have made a deliberate decision to present the written extract as a complete whole so the reader can take in the full experience. When it first landed in my inbox and I read it, I cried. I titled the piece 'Her quiet little blondie'.

> *Her quiet little blondie - written by Claire*
>
> *She sat, motionless for a minute, in the school library. She felt detached from what was happening around her as she gazed ahead, unwilling to engage with the conversation. In front of her she suddenly noticed a display of books about the Romans and was reminded of the quiet performance of her gentle daughter in her year 4 assembly on the*

same topic. Her daughter's class had been a crazy little bunch, well a team really. Their energy and exuberance as they belted out "party like a roman" had the audience beaming and clapping along. It was an assembly of legends. She felt a pang of sadness and regret that all of that went wrong for her quiet little blondie. The pain of what came next almost took her breath away as she tried to avoid the memories.

She shook her head and came back to the table, back to the room. Around the table sat the same faces she saw every quarter of the year - her governing body. Their faces turned towards the headteacher as the headteacher continued reading with a monotonous and hypnotic voice. "SEND provision has had a positive impact on children and there is more support for key groups being developed," the head proudly claimed as she read out her report. Why was the report always read out? This was something she should probably address in her role as the Chair of governors. Surely we could all read the report before the meeting and come armed with questions?

Data on the SEND students was poured over by the group. She could sense which governor understood it, and which didn't and she knew that she needed to draw on her knowledge and experience to explain the trends and the narrative. On paper it really did look as though the children with special educational needs were doing fantastically. In fact, they were flourishing, and "flourishing" was a key word in the school's vision, so all must be well. Nods of appreciation and murmurs of approval reverberated around the room. Everyone was satisfied. Children with special educational needs were doing jolly well.Tick. Move on to the next agenda item.

As her eyes glanced back to The Romans display though, she couldn't move on. She was haunted by her daughter's anguished cries as she screamed her sadness about going to school every morning. She was haunted by the dark circles under her eyes caused by sleep deprivation and anxiety, an anxiety then noticed by both a doctor and a dentist. She was haunted by the story a well meaning TA told her about (and that the teacher had hidden from them) about her daughter pulling her hair over her face and shrinking so low in her chair that she almost became invisible. As she remembered that joyful assembly in year 4 she contrasted it with the misery of year 5, and the desperate plea in her daughter's voice when she sobbed eloquently, "Mummy, it is not me. It is the class. I can't handle being in there when they are so loud. Please find me another school!". And so she did. She had taken her baby out of this school - this school where she was the Chair of governors - and she had put her in a new school. Her daughter, who happens to have special needs, was now happy again.

Claire's written account provides a vivid insight into the painful and complex processes endured by performing the role of both a governor and mother. In an effort to conform to

performative cultures, Kenny (2018, p.1028) states 'we are 'undone' by such processes; we can be compelled into painful and difficult subject positions because of our need to exist in the eyes of others'. Butler (1997b, p.104) also states 'I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me'. Similarly, Riach, Rumens and Tyler (2016) introduce the term 'organisational undoing' of one's complex self as paradoxically fuelled by an inescapable desire for recognition on the part of individuals (Tyler and Cohen, 2008).

Claire's subjectivity is paradoxical because the norms of governing intersect with maternal norms. The social expectations attached to these norms force Claire into difficult and injurious positions which she must navigate because 'subjective viability and organisational recognition depends upon the capacity to maintain a performatively credible conformity to the processes, rules and procedures' (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2016, p.4). Claire states:

> *horrible feeling inside, you know and how difficult it was and how upsetting it was, my son was there in a different classroom having a lovely time you know*

Social norms and mothering ideologies circulate a discourse that a mother's place is with your child and you will be seen as a 'bad' mother if you fail in this. However, this is produced within the competing governance discourse whereby you will be expected to put the needs of the school first, and you will be unrecognised if you do not do this. This aligns with Bradley's (2011) findings of governance in social housing where board members are expected to unite in pursuit of the interests of the housing company, dispensing with any other loyalties or values. Claire felt that she represented something questionable, disloyal even.

In an effort to perform the intelligible governor (neutral, objective, rational) she puts constraints around her own ability to challenge and hold leaders to account. Instead of questioning the headteacher, she doubts herself and actively engages in repair work. In a follow up interview she states *'it was a mistake, and they know it was a mistake and I know it won't happen again for anybody, so I will just crack on and do that governor role and keep going with it'.*

In the second interview, a follow up from her written piece she explains '*so I actually had to go through to the CEO to tell her, [...] "this is my plan and I need you to know exactly why I'm doing it and that I'm gonna work hard to not have that compromise my role as the chair of governors.* Her daughter had been let down, she had made a decision to move her but now she needed to work hard to prove herself in her governor role and reconcile her

position.

Returning to Naomi, in her first interview she drew attention to a significant moment of tension between her maternal and governor subjectivities. In response to being asked a specific question about her experience as a parent, she recalls *'I felt really, really vulnerable. It was really bizarre actually when the Headteacher sort of said "what's it been like as a parent of a year 6 or year 5?" whatever it was at that time and I immediately thought "I can't answer this, I just can't answer this, please don't ask me that question". It was strange [...] because I've always… ensured that it's not about my daughter.'*

> *Maybe good was enough, maybe stable, solid, standard, average was enough for her. Maybe, in time, my feelings of being let down as a parent will ease. Maybe the feeling that 'outstanding', 'exceptional', 'inspirational' were just too late to make a difference for her will pass. Maybe the feelings of guilt as a parent, of not challenging enough will improve; the shared responsibility of not seeing enough as a Governor would heal over time. Maybe it is enough to know that the future of the school, of each and every child still engaged in the journey, being excited by their school and being empowered to be the difference they want to be will be enough. Maybe being part of the journey to outstanding will be enough.*

Through Naomi's account performativity reveals itself. Trouble occurs because of the potential failure to do governing properly. This is explained away and talked down so that Naomi avoids trouble and 'do governor' in an acceptable way, conforming to what may be more generally expected of her. However, this is not without costs, the '*the feelings of guilt as a parent, of not challenging enough'.*

The discursive construction of the school governor is intertwined with issues of gender, motherhood. The analysis has given empirical examples to argue that both gender and motherhood, is constituted and produced through a governor intelligibility matrix of sedimented idealised norms. Exploring primary school governance through this lens helps us to argue that the viability of subjects is relational and connected, not independent of the organisation and other subjects. What seems to be shared by the subjects is the experience of being 'threatened with unviability' (Butler, 2004, p.3).

In both accounts, Claire and Naomi are constituted and (re)produced through a governor intelligibility matrix of idealised norms that create tensions between the viability of governor and maternal subject positions. Continual maintenance is thus required and achieved in two key ways. Firstly, through strategies of (in)visibility and secondly, through censorship (speech and emotion). In both of the experiences Claire and Naomi have written about

above, speech acts have been important. By variably speaking out and not speaking out about their daughters, each found themselves outside the conditions of intelligibility that govern rules.

Initially, both mothers did not speak about their concerns. Naomi states she '*did not challenge enough*', however, later they both engaged in speech acts. Claire did this privately, with the CEO, and for Naomi this was done publicly in a meeting, after direct questioning by the headteacher. According to Kenny (2018, p.1029), speech and its censorship can represent powerful mechanisms of recognition-based control, defining boundaries and excluding subjects as a result. In 'Excitable Speech' Butler states that subjects are produced in accordance with norms that govern the kinds of speech considered to be 'legible as the speech of the subject' in a given situation (1997a, p.133). Censorship therefore materialises shifting boundaries that marginalise those whose speech is not recognised on the other. School governors engaging in 'impossible speech' that is not granted recognition within the 'domain of the sayable' can find themselves outside of viable subjecthood. As a result, both Claire and Naomi engage in repair work.

Repair work is a strategy for admitting 'problem' governors back into viability. The terms in which we are recognised/intelligible in governing may make life unliveable, yet the option of not fitting in or being recognised may also lead to a life not worth living. This feature aligns with research by Crawford (2004) whose participant Mary, a primary headteacher, who had a daughter in a failing teacher's class in her school. Mary felt she would have acted quicker if her own daughter had not been in the class, she had to work very hard to render herself invisible as a mother.

In both written pieces, powerful narrative accounts refer to a myriad of emotions: sadness, regret, pain, frustration, disappointment. Emotions that must remain invisible and controlled. Exposing their love and care for their daughters is dangerous, it comes with risks of appearing irrational and biased. This intensified the emotionality for Claire and Naomi. As shown previously, this must be neutralised or even eradicated. However, this is only possible by removal from the board.

> *What would be good is if parents just did that for a local school, I'll go and do that because I know what it's like to have children in school and you know I won't be emotionally involved*

> *I was looking forward to not being a parent governor and just being a governor of a school that I'm not connected to. Although you're a parent governor, you're not a.. parent when you go into that meeting other than those sort of experiences in the back of*

your mind erm and I try really hard not to.. short pause. Errm… think about the microscopic impact that it might have had on my daughter

For mothers, an increased visibility of their work (or even their mere existence) in a public space means their personal and emotional investment becomes an indelible part of these interactions. It is not enough for mothers to be knowledgeable or skilled in their work. Rather, others must first notice and then move past this observation of emotional investment in order to acknowledge their competence. For these women there was a double burden. As Jill Blackmore (1996) points out, these are the aspects of the role which tend to be neglected, played down, absent in the literature, largely because emotionality has been cast in opposition to, and lesser than rationality in highly gendered ways.

The maternal female body is even more constrained by the dictates of performativity due to the precise and narrow definition of 'governing' as rationality, objectivity and neutrality. The demands for gender performativity become ever greater, as the body exists within a female- populated environment that sits within the male-coded governance sphere. Women and mothers in governance are expected to perform the female-coded work of providing care and nurturing, while simultaneously receiving pressure to remain objective, rational and neutral.

Maternal bodies are seen as biased and emotional and as a consequence are not ideal. Because it falls short, the maternal body therefore works harder to establish itself as a viable intelligible body. The desire for recognition, enacted according to the heterosexual matrix - configuration of our need for interaction that acknowledge and respond to the ways we perform, albeit, 'improvising within a scene of constraint' (Butler, 2004 p1). Constantly working on the self - governor identities are a work of becoming not being. The expectations around how and to what degree femininity must be performed are heightened in governance due to the simultaneous invisibility and hyper-surveillance of mother/parent governors.

Butler argues norms become subverted at the boundaries by those who lack legitimacy in the terms of the norm and become excluded from it. These women are figures on the boundaries of the norms of 'governorhood'. Thus, identification with those norms and the norms of womanhood/motherhood are partial and conflicted. Can I be a good mother and a good governor? In her paper on Play School's 'two mums' Mary Lou Rasmussen (2006) draws on Butler's gender melancholia to ask what counts as admissible in certain education contexts. Although her specific focus is sexuality, her question of 'What happens

when my process of becoming leads me to be unrecognisable as a mother? And we are challenged to think up new questions pertaining to recognition and intelligibility' (ibid, p.486).

Conflict leads to a questioning of those norms. Therefore, the transformative aspect of this study lies in exposing arbitrary relationships of constitutive acts. Its radical potential lies in destabilising gender/maternal fabrications by playing with them in order to demonstrate their performativity. In tribute to this, the next section is a co-constructed critical and reflexive engagement with governing, an attempt to reappropriate and reinscribe. A resolution for change in one's own practice.

4.5 Post - script

'I'm bolder now' - Reflections written with Claire

Back in March I interviewed Claire for the second time after she had written her narrative piece that I titled 'My quiet little blondie'. During that interview Claire told me *'If I were to do it again or if I were to suggest it to anybody I would say go and be a governor in a school that isn't your child's school. You know, go and use what you know and go and be that kind of governor because I think it is a really difficult role to be a parent governor'.* Six months later we sat down together, me at my desk and laptop, Claire on the sofa in my office, both women, mothers and chairs of primary school governing boards.

The point of our meeting was for collaborative reflection; a researcher and participant engaged in the co-constitution of subjectivity through a process of mutual engagement (Harding, 2008). By working together as participant and researcher through the project, what had we learnt? What knowledge had we gained, if any? We discussed at length the notion of power in school governance which reminded me of Hekman's (2014) notion of the 'paradox of power' as power that constitutes us is at the same time the power that gives us the means to resist and the agency to employ those means. According to Butler (1995), the question we should be asking ourselves is where are the possibilities of reworking the matrix of power by which we are constituted? So, this became our start point.

Below is our co-constructed reflection, presented in a bricolage of our transformative thinking that borrows from Handforth and Taylor's (2016) style of feminist bricolage writing. In this piece we weave together two threads of writing. We use this arial font to denote our collaborative reflective commentary and *italics* to denote our identification of an alternative

discourse of governing and a reconceptualisation of what and who is valued in school governance. The verbal face to face reflective discussion was voice recorded then jointly worked into this written piece through shared editing on a google doc.

> We found ourselves leafing through the all too familiar first few pages of the DfE's Governance Handbook. It's resolutely masculine, no shock there. However, something felt a little different this time. 'Confident, strong, robust, assurance, effective, efficient, ambitious, passion'. *What if those words were re-written under a feminist lens? What if we should/could re-articulate our understanding of that text? If we consciously choose to look at the key language of governance with our identity as a mother central to our thinking?*
>
> Reflecting on the perceived discord between the role of mother and governor, it is interesting that we have accepted that there is incongruity, and that when we take on the role as a governor we just accept that we will be experiencing the internal battle of silencing our motherness in order to remain neutral. Our discussions have challenged this status quo for me and I feel bolder about including my identity as a mother in my role as a governor. *Surely, it can embolden and strengthen my ability to challenge on behalf of the children of the school. Having taken the time to really consider what my identity is - a woman, sister, daughter, wife, teacher, mother - I can see how strongly aligned my values are with with the governor attributes because of my identity, rather than in spite of it; and that this 'femaleness' does not need to be subdued.*
>
> *Arguably, a mother is her child's greatest advocate, and this can be aligned to a governor being an advocate for the children in a school. Who has more 'passion' on the governing body than the mothers of children in the school? Might we, as mothers of children, apply our passion and hope for the future of our own offspring to the work we do to improve and strengthen the provision for our fellow mothers' offspring?* This is definitely something that I have been thinking about since the start of our discussions on this. In the role of a governor leading on SEND, for example, why would I not refer to my own 'determination' as a mother of a SEND child and apply this to ensure that I challenge appropriately, yes, but with real passion and determination?
>
> Why would we hide the fact that we are parents who, arguably because we are parents, possess the 'resilience' and 'humility' needed to participate in governance? Do we not want all of the children in our schools to have the very best start in life? Is that not what called us to governance; a calling to channel our values for the good of other children? *Since exploring these questions, which has even made me question why I became a governor, I have encouraged the other parents (who happen to be mothers) on my board to listen to their maternal inner voice and allow it to sit alongside the subjective and*

open minded voice of a governor; to allow the passion with the dispassion so that their questions and challenges in meetings and monitoring visits are more authentically aligned with not just their identity as a mother, but also the core role of a governor. Rather than leave their role as a mother at the door of the school library, where we meet, they bring it in with them. And this surely applies to all parents on governing bodies, regardless of whether their own child attends the schools they govern.

According to (McNay, 1999), resistance takes place at the boundaries of the corporal norm in the domains of the excluded and delegitimated. As both a researcher and participant, rather than being separate entities, we have engaged in this piece of reflective writing to re-position our school governing as a mode of resistance to the dominant understandings imposed on us through the governance discourse. The subject of a Butlerian lens is capable of resisting norms, and not solely determined by them even if we are 'improvising within a scene of constraint' (Butler, 2004, p.1). This writing demonstrated the transformative effect of our engagement in this piece of research and its potential implications for Wilkins' (2019) call to create welcoming, inclusive spaces that engender forms of debate, collaboration and participation in school governance.

4.6 Summary

In this summary, I will draw together the key contributions of the chapter and reflect on the major significances of my interrogation of the data. I draw together the main features (figure 3) to show how this analysis has brought sedimented ways of thinking about school governance to the fore, challenging it and queerying supposed fixed subject positions. The purpose of this section is to reflect on and evaluate how successful the methodological and analytical approach was in enabling me to explore and answer my research questions.

The purpose of this chapter was to analyse the data in order to answer the research questions. The significance of this analysis chapter lies in its commitment to highlight the processes by which school governor subjectivities are formed and sustained. The following questions were asked:

1. To what extent do norms and practices operate in school governing:
    a. to achieve recognition?
    b. to acquire intelligibility?
    c. to perform gender?

2. To what extent do repudiated identities circumscribe and materialise viable governor subjectivities?
3. To what extent do the above impact school governors' ability to perform their core functions?

Judith Butler's theoretical concept of performativity was applied to analyse intertexualised discourses of governors' talk (interview data), participant written narrative and official documented accounts of governing (meeting minutes). Specifically, the Butlerian analytical tools of 'recognition' and 'intelligibility' were applied through a reflexive thematic analysis to performative acts of school governance (data). These tools were used as a lens to explore the evocation of 'school governor', drawing attention to rather than conceal the labour required to secure recognition.

4.6.1 Key contributions

This chapter has made a number of key contributions to the thesis. I have summarised the contribution into four broad bullet points below:

1. Governor subjectivities are continuously brought into being through organisationally compelled and rule-bound performative acts and utterances that are both ambiguous and unattainable.
2. Gender is brought into being through governors' performative acts and utterances which are embedded in stereotypical, naturalised social norms and expectations.
3. Some governors occupy positions which are more precarious than others, for example, the parent governor. The injurious nature of precarity can result in tensions, costs and both visible and invisible labour, which includes emotional labour and speech censorship.
4. Governor and maternal subjectivities are simultaneously brought into being through a complex web of social intelligibilities and mothering ideology.

The chapter also contributes six key features which were highlighted in the data and provide further insight into the points stated above. Each feature provides empirical examples of the ways governors are performatively constituted and produced. For ease, each feature is presented as a separate entity but they are all intimately connected through multifaceted processes of being brought into being. For example, there are gendered dimensions to all the components presented on the next page through concepts such as naturalness, emotionality and motherhood.

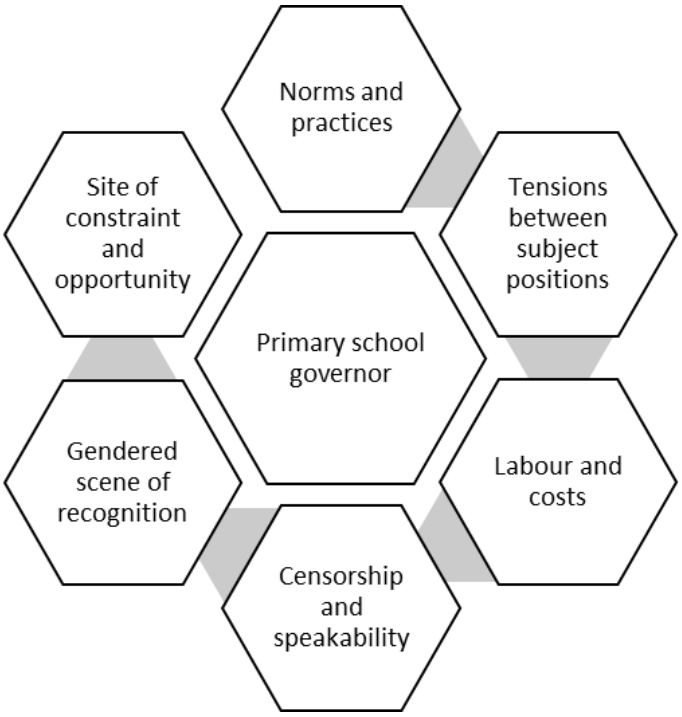

Figure 3: Summary of analysis key features

The next chapter explore these contributions in greater detail. Discussion and interrogation of these features link the analysis in this chapter with the field of research, making explicit where it aligns and where it contributes new knowledge. These features will also be explored in relation to future practice recommendations.

4.6.2 Reflections of analysis

This analysis has brought sedimented ways of thinking about school governance to the fore. A feminist poststructuralist lens has provided insight into how power operates in less predictable ways than the school governance literature would suggest. There is no single locus of power in school governance. It has been a successful approach to answering the research questions because the discursive construction of the school governor as constituted and (re)produced has been brought to the fore. The chapter presents a far more complex understanding of accountability in school governance; challenging the notion that school governors' holding of leaders to account is solely linked to the presence or absence of any expert or 'professional' knowledge.

The research questions and the analytical tools were pivotal in firstly, ensuring there was focus on the doings and sayings of governors rather than on the person's core being, and secondly, on how subjectivities are formed and sustained rather than a construction of narrative or a (re)interpretation of them. In order to do this successfully, the most intense experiences of governors, along with the subtle processes underpinning them, were responded to via a fluid approach to the methods.

After initially conducting stimulus interviews with governors, I responded to two particular moments where I felt the costs of subject coherence were particularly intense and injurious. My response to this data was to insert an additional method of 'narrative writing', whereby two governors were invited to write about a particular moment in governing. The objective of this was to 'undo' the compulsion to perform convincing narratives of governing in the interviews. This was achieved by drawing on the 'anti-narrative' approach proposed by Riach, Rumens and Tyler (2016); an approach premised on an ethics of openness (Tyler, 2019). These writings were then followed up by further interviews to discuss the written submissions.

It was at this point that the performative reading of the data was supplemented with Butler's (2005) 'Giving an Account of Oneself'. In this book, Butler (2005) argues that 'accounting' for oneself is not simply telling a story but providing a convincing ethical defence of one's claim to recognition, and particularly one's difference. Butler locates narrative as an attempt to cohere and convey a liveable life, and the desire for recognition of oneself as a viable subject. This reinforced the importance of implementing further methods where not just the norms, practices, compulsion, costs and complexities of governor subjectivity could be analysed, but also how these narratives may be re-told to move beyond the subjective constraints of the accounts we are compelled to give. This thinking prompted the second stage of the bricolage; a piece of feminist writing, inspired by Handforth and Taylor (2016), and produced jointly with participant Claire into the post-script (4.6).

By situating this analysis within a bricolage methodology, both change and uncertainty have been a welcome alternative to the usually pre-determined and fixed methods approach. Inspired by Teija Rantala's (2019) feminist poststructuralist approach to fluidity, analysis was understood as a process of constant change or 'data production in motion' (ibid, p.xvi), whereby being responsive to the data has facilitated movement in different directions than those initially anticipated. I would argue that this responsiveness has been one of the most successful aspects of the methodology; welcoming disturbances and

irruptions as possibilities and using these to steer the exploration into areas of new knowledge within the field, for example, governors' maternal subjectivities. As a result, the data collection and analysis were the first creative stages of the bricolage, laying the foundation for the transformative thinking demonstrated in the collaborative post-script (4.5).

The analysis has been a circular process whereby new data was continuously being analysed as it was produced (lived and sensed). The data was read and re-read with Butler's concepts and theories and responses were made to the moments of felt intensities that would have been impossible to anticipate. At times it was difficult to know which to follow as numerous possibilities became apparent during the first set of interviews. For example, the materiality of school governance: school data; skills matrix; adverts; meeting minutes and 'paperwork' were frequently referred to, drawing attention to the material nature of governing. The way certain objects are 'picked up' or 'put away and forgotten about' was notable, as well as the furniture such as the 'table' that governors '*sit around*' or '*rock up to'*.

The alternative performative spaces of school governing were also highlighted, such as the playground and the Parish council car park, as well as virtual spaces such as 'Governorhub' where much debate and decisions occur. These spaces presented as another source of 'performative instability' (Gregson and Rose, 2000, p.442) that could have been further explored. Additionally, the omnipresence of disciplinary regimes, most notably Ofsted, were significant in creating panoptic effects in school governance. Whilst it is important to recognise the scope of the data, which demonstrates the success of the methodological approach, it was critical to keep my inquiry focused to remain within the criteria and word count limits of the EdD. Therefore, returning regularly to my research questions and the analytical tools of 'recognition' and 'intelligibility' was crucial in guiding the data production. The aforementioned lines of inquiry can be returned to in the future.

The number of participants was kept intentionally small to enable the production of data that was extensive, dense, and appropriate to the aims of feminist poststructuralist research. By this I mean, producing different and disruptive knowledge that examine grids of regularity (Barrett, 2005). The participants had a wide range of personal and professional experiences to draw on, however, it must be acknowledged that the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the participants was narrow. This limitation is further discussed in section 5.4.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis by discussing the main features of the analysis, their implications on the practice of school governing, the wider field of education leadership and the application of my methodological approach. Section 5.2 presents six key features, summarising the most salient points from the analysis and drawing together conclusions from across the three main sections of Chapter Four. The purpose of this section is to present the conclusions in a concise and coherent way.

In section 5.3 the research questions are specifically addressed. The features from section 5.2 are further discussed and link directly to both the literature review and the broader field of academic research. The purpose of this section is to reflect on and evaluate the extent to which the research questions have been 'answered' by the evidence from my analysis. I have placed emphasis on the concepts of 'answers' so as to re-assert that there is no quest to produce any kind of single or representative truth, but instead question what appears to 'just be' normal or common sense (Weedon, 2004, *my emphasis*). In this section, I draw on the work of others as a comparison, making explicit where others' findings align and where the originality of this thesis is added to the field, saying something different to other researchers.

Following this discussion, section 5.4 describes the implications of this thesis for both practice and research. As a professional doctorate it is important to explain the implications for practices of school governing, but also position this research in terms of further research of educational leadership and the methodological enquiry of both, feminist poststructuralist approaches and performative analysis in education settings.

Lastly, the chapter and thesis concludes with a final reflection. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate the impact that conducting the research and writing this thesis has had on myself as both a school governor and researcher. I make explicit the transformative effect that this work has had on me; most notably the 'affective force' (Sedgwick, 2003, p.90) and the 'political promise of the performative' (Butler, 1997a, p.161).

5.2 Key features

1. Norms and practices

Despite there being no written rules that define or clearly mark out ways of 'doing' the school governor, participant governors variably expressed their obligation to perform the recitation of certain norms and practices in relation to fixed and specific ideas such as the 'right' and the 'professional' way or what 'Ofsted want to see [in the minutes]'. Ofsted formed a normalising framework of practices, particularly in relation to governors evidencing 'convincing' performances of holding leaders to account. The panoptic effects of disciplinary regimes were personal, self-monitoring and self-censorship, as well as organisational, the removal of committees and a change in structure. These features mark the semblances of what Wilkins (2015, p.182) refers to as the evocation of 'good governance' which he defines as 'an appeal to professional standards, technical expertise, and performance evaluation'. Governors can be more or less successful in evoking 'good governance' within a discourse of professionalisation and therefore perform in variable ways, usually in relation to the knowledge afforded from certain subject positions, for example, being an education professional.

Analysis showed that governors recognise commitment, challenge and objectivity as the organisational terms of normativity, but these are coded and there are rules; creating normative expectations that govern subjective viability. Practices within the terms of recognition included completing various skills matrices, reading the paperwork, writing reports, asking the 'right' questions, being supportive and helping out in various ways that were useful to the school. However, there are also codes of behaviour that govern how these practices are performed, for example, suppressing bias, personal experience or emotion.

Within the terms of normativity not everything counts as recognition in the same way and some governors have to work harder than others to achieve intelligibility. As a result, governors engage in both visible and invisible labour to achieve this (feature 3), and perform alternative practices and strategies to compensate. Governors without a knowledge of education for example, do not engage in certain discussions because 'educationalists are more realistic', instead focusing on demonstrating professional skills to secure recognition. These can be operational, something the DfE Governance Handbook states governors must not do, therefore highlighting the shifting and contradictory nature of governor viability.

It is also through the analysis of norms and practices where we can see how the 'Other' comes to be formed. For example, how passion/being passionate is positioned outside of the terms of normativity because of its presumed conflict with objectivity. To ensure a performance of objectivity, governors with children in the school do not always challenge through fear of appearing biased, instead just 'watching what goes on' and 'detaching yourself'. Through analysing norms and practices it is highlighted how subjectivities of governors with children in the school are more precarious than others. Even a knowledge of education which secures recognition for governors such as Claire is not enough to overcome the necessity for her to manage her difference marked out as a parent; setting the limits of governor intelligibility.

The norms of governing (commitment, challenge and objectivity) are both constituting and productive. The recitation of these norms govern who will be accorded recognition and on what basis, resulting in labour and costs as well as forming the domain of the sayable, further discussed later in this section.

2. Tensions

Analysis highlighted how performing the role of the school governor results in a number of tensions between different subject positions. The pressure imposed on educational professionals to take up certain governing positions such as the Chair creates tensions in relation to the additional time, effort and commitment which can conflict with social expectations of family responsibilities; it is felt as a '*weight to bear*'. In addition, this hails governor subjects into being through hierarchical modes of recognition; reinforcing the value of certain knowledge over others. There are also costs attached to the absence of this knowledge such as feelings of tokenism and the personal toll of '*wondering if people think I don't know anything*'.

Governor subjectivity also conflicts with school leader subjectivities because of the constraints around operational versus strategic practices, which can be difficult for some governors to manage. Their educational knowledge may secure them recognition and privilege them a position within a hidden hierarchy, but it also offers frustration as their powers are restricted to the strategic.

There are also tensions between governor and other professional subject positions such as those from the business sector, who find governing 'frustrating' and its language exclusionary. They draw on their wider professional skill set and business contacts to try and 'get things done' but this 'can take a long time'. Tensions with friendships for parent

governors was also highlighted as '*sometimes parents expect you to tell them stuff*'.

The most intense tensions materialised between governing and maternal subjectivities. These arose due to a range of factors which included the terms of normativity situating objectivity as a necessity, requiring governors with children in school to place greater importance on the school than their own personal priorities. However, conforming to these normative expectations creates tensions with mothering ideologies, highlighting the social dimension of normativity that governs the scene of constraint (Butler, 2005, p.23). Analysis that focused on this particular tension also drew attention to the injurious nature of governing and the personal toll.

3. Labour and costs

The sheer effort required to sustain governor intelligibility was very apparent in the data. Governors engage in much labour, both invisible and visible. Visible labour included the amount of training governors invested time and energy in; the additional activities they engage in outside of their statutory requirements: being present at parents' evenings; listening to children read and getting quotes from businesses. In addition, there is self and peer monitoring through frequently completing a skills matrix, attending conferences and supporting other local governing bodies.

However, perhaps most significantly, because it has never been written about before, is that analysis provided insight into the invisible labour done by governors. The self-monitoring of their doings and sayings in relation to attempts to fit norms, which creates anxiety and stress as they doubt their competence. This then creates an additional layer of invisible labour as they work even harder to conceal this stress. Analysis captured the emotional dimension of governing, highlighting how governing is an emotional process. Drawing from a performative lens, emotions are not simply something we have, they are a site of control and resistance (Boler, 1999). Emotions do things, they align collectives, 'both repeat[ing] past associations as well as generate their object' (Ahmed, 2004, p.32). Governors may be uncertain, confused, overloaded, feeling compromised, angry and disappointed. These are misjudged as intruding on rationality, with governors aware of the implications of performing these emotions (in)appropriately.

Governors also described positive emotions such as passion, but as previously discussed, these are partially disrupted by preconditions attached to gendered and maternal subjectivity. In response, governors work hard to avoid these displays. They manage their emotions in accordance with entrenched emotion rules. As such, they suppressed or

fabricated emotional expression in their meetings, in order to maintain a professional façade, believing that their emotion regulation results in higher levels of viability. Hochschild (1983) defines this as emotional labour. Naomi described moments when it was not always possible for her to control her emotions, leaving her vulnerable to exclusion.

The emotional labour done by governors has costs. It affects their feelings of authenticity, which creates a debilitating effect of emotional dissonance. Claire makes this clear on a number of occasions both during interviews and in her written narrative piece. She refers to sleep deprivation, anxiety, anguish and dark circles under her eyes, the personal toll of trying to secure recognition as both a viable governor and mother. This leads to feelings of inadequacy, self-deprecation and the conduct of 'repair work' as she identifies the necessity to manage her precariousness. To fit in again when she recognises she may have marginalised herself she tells the CEO '*I'm gonna work hard to not have that compromise my role as the chair of governors',* thus creating further visible and invisible labour for Claire.

For both Naomi and Claire, emotional labour is performed to forge an identity that is liveable, a concept Hort, Barrett and Furlop (2001, p.13) describe as 'hard labour'. Linked to both Naomi and Claire's 'hard labour' was 'a labour of love', defined by Hutchison (2012, p.195) as invisible labour 'done by women in support of their children's education'. Analysing through a performative lens highlights a relationship to domesticated labour and the normative social expectations of a 'good mother'. Governors describe variably their reasons for getting into governance but most are linked to their performances as mothers and some, the guilt they experience in relation to cultural and social expectations of their involvement in their children's education (ibid), e.g. being visible at the school gate. Therefore, being a school governor can constitute 'repair work' as a type of labour in the production and constitution of maternal subjectivity. In conclusion, analysis provided insight into the labour and costs experienced through performing a complex constellation of subject positions that must recite not just norms of governor intelligibility but gendered and maternal intelligibility too.

4. Censorship and impossible speech

Analysis has foregrounded how norms and practices compel and constrain governors into convincing performances which includes speech acts. Performative utterances are a site where governors are required to sustain a performance that conforms to the terms of recognition. Some imposed boundaries of speech are marked out in official documents

such as the governance handbook (DfE, 2019) where it is stipulated that governors must be strategic and not operational; you cannot tell the school's leadership how to run the school. However, it is the unwritten rules of speech in school governance that this analysis highlights.

The boundaries by which viable and unviable governors come into being produces and reproduces types of 'impossible speech', constituting a 'domain of the sayable'. Kenny (2018, p.1029) defines 'impossible speech' as a 'speech act considered to be unacceptable or illegitimate'. An example of 'impossible speech' is talking about your children or appearing to prioritise personal interests. This perceived bias is in conflict with objectivity which is a term of normativity. Governors that talk about their children are 'Othered' and could experience exclusions because they have engaged in 'impossible speech'. This risk sticks most notably to maternal bodies who try to reduce this precariousness by 'just watching' and 'not challenging'.

As we have seen with Claire, this creates tension and conflict because of her significant concerns with SEND provision which her attention was drawn to via her daughter's refusal to attend school. She had previously internalised these speech rules by *'check[ing] in my mind whether this could be completely just to do with my own child'.* Even though on this occasion it was unlikely to just be about her child, Claire did not speak up or raise a challenge. She engaged in self-censorship and was '*unwilling to engage with the conversation'.* Claire demonstrates how even her viable subject position of 'education expert' does not grant her secure subjecthood; the boundaries are shifting and paradoxically constructed through inescapable instability (Butler, 1993).

Censorship creates further labour and costs for governors, with Naomi questioning herself as a mother '*had I settled on behalf of my own child for good enough?'* and Amy feeling that '*sometimes you wish that you didn't know some of the things that go on'.* Kenny (2018) draws on Butler to state that subjects are produced through regimes of censorship, where boundaries are created and illegitimate subjects excluded. Governors who do and don't speak out can find themselves actively contributing to this process. Normativity creates unity through exclusions and as such constrains and enables, Butler (2004, p.207) calls this the 'doubleness of the norm'.

These features identified through the analysis present a far more complex understanding of why some governors do not always challenge or are less engaged in holding leaders to account. It challenges the conclusion that school governors' ability to hold leaders to account and their purported 'amateurism' is solely linked to presence or absence of any expert or managerial knowledge, as stated by Young (2017a) and Farrell et al., (2017).

This demonstrates how my engagement with Butler's writings has shed alternative light on governing practice and challenging existing thinking and creating new knowledge.

5. Gendered scene of recognition

The analysis of these norms and practices has drawn attention to the governor as gendered. This would align with research from other fields of study such as school leadership (Sachs and Blackmore, 2012; Coleman, 2005), organisation and management research (Tyler and Cohen, 2010; Kyriakadou, 2011) and journalism (Jenkins and Finneman, 2018) where it is asserted that the feminine body is one that must be watched and surveilled, is judged more harshly and with narrower margins, maintaining greater control over itself.

Governors' performances are inextricably tied to the ways that the broader culture assesses women and femininity, thus the demands for gender performativity are established in school governance. Gender difference is naturalised (it is the way things are) and normalised (it is the way things should be). It is the concept of 'naturalness' which gives governing particular strength in perpetuating unequal gender regimes. This 'naturalness' of being a woman and a mother is an important feature of gender performativity. 'Male voices' on these governing bodies are framed as a scarce and valuable resource; a source of neutrality and balance, while women's value is made invisible or in some cases problematic, risky and even harmful.

Weaved throughout the features presented in the sections above is a hierarchical gender binary thread that configures intelligible subjects. Drawing on Butler (Butler, 2004, p.3) [governors] 'are produced as a consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms'. Attempts to secure recognition are caught in a matrix of performing femininity appropriately within a dominant masculine norm. The normative expectations of objectivity and rationality that are intelligible in a governor and the feminine traits that would generally be valued in a woman create a paradox. This could position women governors in a constant lose- lose situation in which they fail to present themselves as either women or as governors.

The dominant centre of rationality, displaces women and femininity to their seemingly emotional margins. A (pre)dominantly female governing body is constituted as being a risk. Women governors are positioned as lacking in objectivity and rationality through presumed 'emotionally charged' interpretations. Contrastingly, men are presumed as more rational and objective; they supposedly ask more neutral questions, it is less emotive, less

personal.

The emotional labour is gendered; the costs are gendered. We have seen that forsaking your mothering responsibility has a price to pay when enacted by women (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001), this is the double bind. Women are often unable to win ‘damned if you do damned if you don't’ highlighting the social dimension of normativity that governs the scene of recognition (Butler, 2005, p.25) and how the desire for recognition is shaped by heteronormativity (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2014).

6. School governance is a site of constraint but also opportunity

Bucking the norm, women are in the majority on both governing boards in this study. It could therefore be presumed that being a woman was invisible, and gender does not matter. In many organisations, females make up a small proportion of the overall board membership. Women are often in the minority and as such become particularly visible through their physical ‘otherness’. In studies from outside education, hypervisibility associated with being a female in the minority is largely associated with a negative state of exclusion and difference (Simpson and Lewis 2005; 2007). In the past, Kanter has asserted that ‘rarity and scarcity rather than ‘femaleness’ per se shaped the environment for women’ (Kanter 1977, p.207). Although it is recognised that we are still a long way from true equality, Kanter’s argument is far from adequate in exploring the gendered nature of governing.

Kanter’s view would find its roots in a liberal feminist perspective, where disadvantages can be overcome by an increase in numbers of women in organisations and hence a more numerically gender balanced group (Lewis and Simpson, 2012). However, to view governance in this way would be to miss the point, to misunderstand an all female governing board as not being embedded in sedimented social and cultural gendered norms norms; the taken for granted and neglected, and thereby reproducing and reinforcing gender norms (Lipton, 2017; Billing and Alvesson, 2000). Fahlgren (2013) argues that when gender equality is rendered a question of numerical balance (50–50 or 40–60), instead of accomplishing an equalisation of power between men and women, it conceals society’s hierarchical gendered order and the way in which one the masculine is privileged.

A narrow focus on women's numbers and deficits over organisational culture is naive as it is not a systematic approach to re-visioning. This thinking situates women as the problem rather than culture. Thinking with and through Butler’s writings accounts for both constraint

and the potential for transformation through discourse. Central to this conception is the focus on temporality, historicity and the effect of repetition, where identity formation occurs through a forced re-iteration of norms (Butler, 1993, p.94). But this is not deterministic as the reproduction may go 'awry or with a difference' (Lovell, 2003, p.2), thus providing space for 'adaptation and a practical pragmatic form of resistance' (Hodgson, 2005, p.56).

The analysis has provided new knowledge that combined with Butler's concepts provides space for ways of knowing differently. The analysis highlights some examples of governor resistance, for example, queerying the expectations of challenge (in relation to governance handbook) to proffer a more supportive approach and engaging in certain practices that were more operational than strategic. For example, Amy '*knows her role is to challenge*' but '*see[s] it as someone who supports the school'.* This demonstrates how governing is 'done' differently; how it is not fully determined by organisational norms and discourses but is still constrained from within them. This presents school governance as a site of constraint but also opportunity.

> *The 'I' draws its agency in part through being implicated in the very relations of power it seeks to oppose*
>
> *(Butler, 1993, p.123)*

5.3 Responding to the research questions

In this section the research questions are specifically addressed. The main features from the previous section are discussed using the work of others as a comparison, highlighting where evidence from my analysis aligns with the field but also says something different, demonstrating the originality of this thesis.

I have addressed the research questions by departing from theoretical and conceptual tools dominant in the field, providing a feminist poststructuralist intervention into the discussion. In line with this research approach, the 'answers' to my research questions are not offered as a 'representation of truth' but an attempt to make apparent the ever-present relationship between truth and power (Trinh, 1989). St Pierre (2000, p.498) quotes Belsey (1993/1989, p.555-556) stating 'you can tell it like you know it without having to claim that you're telling it like it (absolutely, metaphysically, incontrovertibly) is.

Question 1

To what extent do norms and practices operate in school governing:

i) to achieve recognition?

ii) to establish intelligibility?

iii) to perform gender?

In the literature review, norms and practices of school governors are presented as the outputs of autonomous agents that freely 'choose' how to govern. As a result, school governors are over-simply positioned as the 'problem' within a complex educational leadership system and culture.

School governance research has led to conclusions being drawn that depict school governors as 'locally powerful' (Deem, 1994), supporters (Levacic, 1995), followers (Thody, 1994), meddling (Earley, 2000) and amateurish (Ofsted and Wilshaw, 2015; Nash, 2013), to name but a few. However, what has not been explored in any great depth is the 'how' and 'why' they have been fixed in this way. I do not make this point to suggest that there are answers to these questions that we can 'get to the bottom of', but simply to suggest that we should interrogate what has been taken for granted.

Through Butler, I understand that discourse demarcates the necessary conditions for the embodiment of personhood (Butler, 1993, p.171-180). Butler (1990; 1993) states that identities which do not conform to these conditions are denied intelligibility and recognition. This offers an alternative view of governors' norms and practices as discursively constituted and produced. Through this understanding we can answer the research question with the knowledge that recognition can never fully be attained because of the inescapable instability within the normative structures that produce us as subjects (Butler, 1993). In Bodies that Matter, Butler (1993, p.30) states:

> *The temporal paradox of the subject is such that, of necessity, we must lose a perspective of a subject already formed in order to account for becoming. That 'becoming' is no simple or continuous affair, but uneasy practice of repetition and its risks, compelled yet incomplete.*

She later adds '[gender] is an assignment which is never quite carried out to expectation, whose addressee nevers quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate' (1993, p.232). The establishment of intelligibility and the achievement of recognition, therefore, is

only ever temporal and partial.

In returning to the research question, this understanding might suggest that it is 'pointless' to ask a question where, in essence, there is no answer; but such a critique would be to miss the point. It is the process of interrogating how a structure has been constructed, what holds it together, and what it produces (St Pierre, 2000), that is the aim here.

Through Wilkins (2015), we can understand that the discourse of 'good governance' demarcates the necessary conditions for the embodiment of a viable school governor. 'Good governance' is defined as 'an appeal to professional standards, technical expertise, and performance evaluation'. The features identified in the analysis align somewhat with this notion, for example, Hannah frequently mentions the skills matrix in relation to making decisions about changes, roles and responsibilities. The skills matrix was presented as an important tool in forming intelligibility boundaries, particularly in relation to parent governors. Its application contributes to the sedimenting of binaries by placing significant value on certain types of knowledge such as education and business. Understanding and challenging school data or 'stats' as Amy describes it, is significant in forming boundaries of intelligibility. Claire is quite clear that she '*knows data and doesn't need anybody to explain it to her'* whereas for Naomi and Melanie there is concern others will think '*they don't know anything*' or '*haven't got any challenge to them*'. As a result, they engage in visible labour through completing extra training in an effort to perform the semblances of normativity.

This thesis extends the field by highlighting the contradictory, paradoxical and constantly shifting nature of governor constitution and production, rather than presenting it as static fact. Performances of normative expectations to establish intelligibility and achieve recognition are understood as illusionary because they can never be fully achieved. Failure, however, to achieve these hallucinatory effects threatens unity and coherence of the board, so actions are taken which range from changing board structure, to change in governor roles to removal of governors. The terms of recognition require continual maintenance.

Illustrative examples can be drawn from the analysis through the normative expectations highlighted. These materialised through three key performances of commitment, objectivity and rationality, which mark out the realm inhabited by both successful subjects and the abjected or excluded who define the limits of the norm by falling outside it (Loxley, 2006). Examples of this 'outside' include: not acting in a professional way, overstepping the mark

and not respecting that you don't run the school, ineffective challenge, showing emotion such as passion and exposing personal interests. However, discerning the 'inside' from the 'outside' of the norm is not clear and not all performances simply confer or do not confer recognition. The conflating 'rules' around challenge offer an illustrative example. There is a hierarchy to challenge which ranges from '*trivial feedback'* to '*interrogating progress data'*, yet simultaneously constraints are placed on challenge in order to be 'supportive' and not 'step across the line'. This is further contrasted with the risk of being 'over polite'.

The analytical features further extend the literature on school governance by providing examples that constitution is not the same for everyone and it is not deterministic. The skills matrix evoked gendered notions of school governance by materialising 'natural tendencies' and a 'natural person', concepts embedded in biological essence that can be exclusionary. For example, Hannah describes how a governor who worked in the health sector '*naturally fell into the well- being side of things*' and Melanie refers to '*women's emotional tendencies'*. The gendered emotional dimension of governing demarcates intelligibility because its presumed incongruence with rationality and objectivity.

Analysis of Claire's interview transcripts and written narrative account were particularly illustrative of the impact of the desire to achieve recognition and establish intelligibility. Despite having 'possession' of the highly regarded 'education knowledge', she is compelled to navigate a challenging terrain to establish intelligibility; even when its effects are injurious. The injurious nature of school governing has not been previously explored. Her subjectivity as a parent makes her position precarious. Even a knowledge of education, which purportedly secures recognition for governors, is not enough to overcome the necessity for her to manage her difference marked out as a parent; setting the limits of governor intelligibility. Claire also finds herself in conflict with her experience as a school leader and her role as a friend and a mother. Claire's performatively constructed subjectivities combine to demand performances that never quite achieve the ideal, thus continual maintenance is required. This is further discussed in response to the next question.

A multiplicity of influences can affect normative understandings at any one moment in time. Youdell (2005) defines this as a 'complex constellation' of discourses. The current literature has little to say about how the evocation of the intelligible school governor intersects with other subjectivities and the social norms that govern gendered and mothering ideologies, an important conclusion in this study. The analysis highlighted how the discursive construction of the school governor is woven through the materialisation of both gendered

and maternal performances despite attempts to convey school governance as gender neutral. As previously discussed, gender is supposedly neutralised through evoking a competence discourse in the form of the skills matrix, yet still surfaces through the concept of 'natural tendencies'.

Performances of gender were evoked through stereotypical and essentialised notions of 'natural' essence and 'emotion'. They were also paradoxically evoked through 'maternal strength' and 'female domination' both of which position women governors in lose-lose situations. School governors implicitly devalued perceived 'femaleness' and engage in performative acts to conceal it, neutralise it, render it invisible; emphasising performative shifts that parody, exaggerate and further dominant norms. The appointment of 'more men' on the board was seen as a 'solution' to the risk of having too many women.

Through the performative analysis of norms and practices, examples have been identified that demonstrate the temporality and partiality of intelligibility and recognition. Findings have provided empirical examples that intelligibility is never fully established and recognition can never be fully achieved. The understanding that it can be is an illusion. Norms only exist on a temporal basis, therefore, governors can never accomplish the ideal, it must always be attempted again as the 'impossible project' whereby one is only constitutively capable of being complete (Butler, 1993, p.231). The compulsion to achieve intelligibility and recognition results in an on-going process of 'becoming' which demands gendered labour, costs and repair work.

Question 2

> To what extent do repudiated identities circumscribe and materialise intelligible governor subjectivities?

In order to answer this research question, it is firstly important to mark out examples of repudiation as identified in the data. In its widest sense 'bad' or 'problematic' school governors are marked by a range of norms and practices both noted in literature and newly highlighted in this study. As mentioned previously, commitment, challenge and objectivity form the organisational terms of normativity and set out boundaries of viability. However, these are coded and bound by unwritten rules that govern practices of suppressing bias, personal expression and emotion.

‘Problem’ governors are ‘not active’ or ‘cross boundaries on to the operational side’. As the dominant understanding in the literature is humanist, there is a conception of choice which positions governors as having free will to consciously perform in this way. This understanding negates the complexity of such a positioning and the shifting, paradoxical nature of ‘simply’ being determined as ‘*not active’*. A lack of activity, for example, in challenging school leaders is linked in the literature to a lack of knowledge. This is further discussed in the next question, however, it is how this repudiation ‘sticks’ (Ahmed, 2014) to certain governors rather than others is of particular interest here.

Aligning with the literature, parents in this study are identified as more precariously positioned than non-parent governors. Olmedo and Wilkins (2016) consider parents as governors to be interpellated through dividing practices which sets skilled parents apart from non-skilled parents, placing a premium on knowledge and experience which has business application. In answering this research question, we can extend this understanding by drawing on the performativity of gendered and maternal subjectivities.

Parent governors are repudiated because of their presumed bias and inability to suppress this and perform the normative expectation of objectivity. Analysis provided insight into the price of parent precarity as particularly expensive for mothers who are homogenised, positioned within governor norms as a ‘risk’. However, the feminist lens exposes this precariousness as gendered. Women governors are repudiated for being an ‘emotional risk’, which is considered ‘dangerous’ and ‘harmful’. ‘Passion’ is depicted as a concern when related to ‘mums’, especially for Claire who recalled being told in training ‘not to do that’. This repudiation materialises in relation to a discourse of rationality. Butler (2005, p.121) writes that when forms of rationality ‘become naturalised, taken for granted, considered as foundational and required, if they become the terms by which we do and must live, then our very living depends upon a denial of their historicity, a disavowal of the price we pay’.

Mother governors’ discursive constitutions of identity are at once censured by the school organisation, which includes other mother governors’ speech acts, as undesirable and simultaneously deployed as ‘proof’ of this undesirability. They remain at the edges of the norm working hard to gain access. Naomi further demonstrates this when she describes feeling ‘vulnerable’ when asked a direct question as a parent, recalling ‘I can’t answer this, please don’t ask me that question’. This aligns with the concept of (in)visibility (Simpson and Lewis, 2005, 2007; Lewis and Simpson, 2010; 2012; Settles, Buchanan and Dotson, 2019), which is connected to power, marginalisation and the reinforcement of norms. Both Naomi and Claire work hard to make their repudiated maternal subjectivities invisible but

this is in tension within the demand of mothering ideologies. Both recall examples of not speaking up in an effort to remain invisible. For Claire this created injurious effects because of her significant concerns with SEND provision which impacted directly on her daughter. She engaged in self-censorship and was '*unwilling to engage with the conversation'.* However, such performances are incongruent with a dominant discourse of mothering, that of the 'selfless mother' (Raddon, 2002), thus creating further 'hard labour' (Hort, Barrett and Furlop, 2001).

Censorship creates further labour and costs for governors, with Naomi questioning herself as a mother '*had I settled on behalf of my own child for good enough?'* and Amy feeling that '*sometimes you wish that you didn't know some of the things that go on'.* Kenny (2018) draws on Butler to state that subjects are produced through regimes of censorship, where boundaries are created and illegitimate subjects excluded. Governors who do and don't speak out can find themselves actively contributing to this process. Lollar (2015) adds that strategic invisibility in organisations further embeds gender bias. Therefore, the demand for such performances is an example of school governance's damaging structures.

Just as the school governor subject is brought into being through gender and maternal subjectivity, gender and motherhood are too simultaneously constituted and (re)produced. This further demonstrates the ways in which schools are sites within which the labour of being a 'good parent' is exercised (Gilles, 2006). This understanding can now be extended to include school governance as a site too. Ellen Ross (1995) illustrates that viewing mothers as performative 'subjects' means learning about the political positions stimulated by women's practices as caretakers of children. This study on school governance contributes to this. The performativity of motherhood and the signification of good/bad mother is mutually and reciprocally materialised through the taking up and subsequent performances of the governor role, an unanticipated feature.

Question 3

> To what extent do the answers to the above questions affect school governors' performance of their core functions?

Governors core functions are described in the DfE (2019, p.13) governance handbook as:

- *Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction*
- *Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of*

staff

- *Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.*

In responding to the research question, I am specifically focusing on addressing the second bullet point of holding leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation. The data and analysis does not extend to offer a consideration of the other two core functions in this thesis. This presents an opportunity for further exploration in the future.

The holding of school leaders to account by school governors has been researched and written about in the literature. In Chapter Two, the review of the literature cited a number of studies which have drawn conclusions about, for example, governors' low-level engagement in strategic challenge and decision making (Farrell, 2005). More recently, school governing has been likened to a theatrical performance, whereby the headteacher presentation is more like giving an account rather than being held to account (Farrell et al., 2017). The literature places sole responsibility on governors for their holding of leaders to account, emphasising its causal relationship with a possession of certain knowledge. According to Young's (2017a) research there are two significant forms of expert knowledge in play in school governing: educational and managerial. These both occur in relation to 'lay' knowledge in a complex rather than binary relationship. It is further asserted that parent governors' lack of knowledge hinders their involvement and participation, inhibiting them from holding school leaders to account (Farrell, 2010).

However, the conclusions in this study both challenge and extend this thinking to present a far more complex understanding of accountability in school governance. These conclusions challenge the notion that school governors' holding of leaders to account is solely linked to the presence or absence of any expert or 'professional' knowledge. Through a performative analysis, the complex constitution and production of governors' subjectivity, along with the materialisation of gender and maternal subjectivities, would suggest that it is more than a simple 'lack of knowledge' which affects the holding of leaders to account. There is evidence that educational leaders tend to suppress many of their social responses that are part of their emotion systems, including the display of empathy (Oplatka, 2017).

The contradictory, paradoxical and constantly shifting nature of governor constitution and production results in governors, including those with a strong expert or educational knowledge, engaging with performative acts that inhibit the holding of leaders to account. Governors censor themselves through 'impossible speech' (Kenny, 2018) and 'emotional

labour' (Hochschild, 1983) to perform idealised norms within a governor intelligibility matrix. This challenges current binary thinking that governors' ownership of 'professional' knowledge' is the sole determinant of 'strong, dynamic and cohesive governance' (Ofsted and Wilshaw, 2015), an issue that is wrongly believed can be simply fixed with 'mandatory training' (ibid).

In conclusion to this section, I argue that I have been successful in answering my research questions. I have shown that the school governor is an on-going form of doing, a constant activity, performed together with or for someone else. Melanie states *'It is almost like being at school yourself, it's forever changing'.* The main features of the analysis highlight how boundaries are constantly being drawn and re-drawn because cultural, organisational and social norms shape intelligibility.

These conclusions draw attention to the incoherencies and paradoxical performances of allegedly stable and fixed subject positions (school governor, women, mother). By emphasising performative shifts that parody, exaggerate and further dominant norms, governors have provided insight into their own performativity. Regulatory norms materialise 'school governor' through a forcible reiteration of those norms. The necessity of this reiteration indicates that materialisation is never complete and thus open for re-construction.

5.4 Limitation, implications and further scope

By reconsidering knowledge making processes in school governance, an alternative light has been shone on governing practices, challenging existing thinking to show how governing is more relational, connected and embodied than the literature would suggest. The desire to be recognised within the terms of the dominant norms placed costly demands on the participant governors. The contradictory discourses surrounding the 'good governor' and the 'good mother' align with the wider field of education research (Raddon, 2002). These create tensions and conflict, yet, simultaneously creates and validates 'knowledge' that paradoxically, through the ideological practices that discourse creates, puts constraints on governors' ability to challenge and hold leaders to account, ironically resulting in the reduced operation of core functions.

The implications of these conclusions are primarily the necessity to remove the burden of unrealistic expectations of narrow views of governance, an outcome perpetuated through

the lack of methodological diversity in the field. It is concluded that humanist and functionalist accounts of school governing are opaque to the complexities of performing the role. Although this thesis' philosophical framework and methodology has inserted new knowledge into the field of school governance research, it has limitations which are further discussed later in this section.

Currently, school governing cultures support the notion that the normative viable demeanour is rational and carefully controlled emotionally. Connolly and James (2022, p.1) assert the need for rational, well-grounded reasoning for effective governing processes and practices. This rationale may be considered pragmatic, but it fails to recognise its role in the materialisation of the exclusionary culture of school governance. These issues cannot be solved by enforcing more mandatory training or introducing a system of financial remuneration. This understanding raises significant questions about the consequences of school governance's regulatory imperatives and has implications for the culture that governs the scene of recognition, for example female non-chairs being less likely to become chairs (NGA, 2022). Significantly more effort to make school governing an inclusive space is required if boards are ever going to be truly reflective of the communities they serve. This has implications for policy and research practices.

Porritt and Stagg (2022, p.5) view working towards a diverse governing board as an ethical action. Therefore, a greater incorporation of The Framework for Ethical Leadership (ASCL, 2017) in school governance is a practical implication. This framework increases recognition of different 'effective' leadership practices, foregrounding a values led reconceptualising of governor roles. This could impact the contents and application of tools such as the 'skills matrix' which currently advocate primarily for a technocratic accountability led system.

With these important points in mind, it is recognised that the lack of diversity in the small sample in this study is a limitation. Thus, the application of an intersectionality lens and its navigational tools would offer a more diverse exploration to include race, class and age (Collins and Bilge, 2020). The intersections shaping school governance and governor subjectivities including but also beyond gender would add valuable contribution to an exploration of governing board composition, recruitment and retention. To inform professional development and progression into leadership roles such as Chair and Vice-chair. This provides further scope beyond this thesis.

Further opportunities to develop this thesis emerge from aspects of the data that was sidelined and limitations in the methodology. Resistance to dominant governance norms was identified in the data analysis but not further explored, additionally the refusal of

recognition was not explored. On reflection, this is identified as a limitation to answering my research questions. The questions were stemmed with 'to what extent' therefore not looking beyond the normative limits and not considering anti-performative approaches (Fournier and Grey, 2000) suggests the answers were lacking in balance and analysis predominantly negative.

A limitation of the analytical tools 'recognition' and 'intelligibility' is their sole focus on the discursive, negating the materiality of school governing. Supplementing the analysis within intra-actional, post-human, relational entanglements, could provide a "diffractive" reading that goes "beyond" performativity as a difference driven analytic and displacing the fear-terror that too often characterises women's experiences with theory-enrichened data analysis (Lather, 2013).

It may be considered a limitation of this study that the unity of the school governor as liberal subject is questioned. The idea of a subject with no pre-discursive identity, only invariably produced through discourse raises concerns among scholars with regard to the notion of agency. Critics have argued that Butler's notion of agency is fundamentally negative (McNay, 1999; Mills, 2000). Webster (2002, p.197) argues Butler's account of agency ultimately lacks strength; it provides neither an account of how individual subjects might actively and deliberately contest their social construction nor an account of precisely what makes their actions uniquely their own. But agency is, in part, contingent upon our awareness of how we are being constituted within discourse which opens up spaces for considering alternatives (Davis, Krieg and Smith, 2015).

Nevertheless, exploring school governance as performative space has emphasised the provisionality and fragility of school governors' subject positions and the cultural reference points of which they depend. A performative analysis has identified simultaneously operating norms which require continual repetition. The gaps and fissures opened up in repetition provide a moment for the citational chain to introduce difference, the location of agency. This lens has provided a shift in the focus of responsibility from the school governor alone, opening up the school and culture to critique.

It is recognised that this thesis has engaged most significantly with Butler's earlier writings on performative ontology, drawing most notably on 'Gender Trouble'. It is acknowledged that Butler's more recent work on a performative theory of assembled bodies (Butler, 2015) has the potential to offer an exploration of school governance in a more sustained and collective way. This work foregrounds the dynamics of public assemblies and performative subversion through collection action. This moves her work beyond that of 'speech acts'

and places greater emphasis on assemblies of bodies, and thus, provides a theoretical start point for future exploration of understanding and challenging enduring inequalities in governance.

Opening up school governance to a wider critique of culture demands an extended exploration, Butler's theories and concepts can only take us so far because of the focus on discourse and exclusions of materiality. In the data analysis, empirical matter (data/objects), humans, non-humans and objects made themselves visible, emerging from the data as entangled words, concepts and objects. These material aspects were noted but sidelined due to the limitations of scope in this study. Nelson (1999) argues that Butler does not account for how material surroundings form the subject, and materiality has much to offer in explaining the construction of the subject. Therefore, Karen Barad's (2003) theory of performativity would provide further scope by building on Butler's work through interweaving discourse and materialities (Harding, Ford and Lee, 2017). Such entanglements and inra-actions offer opportunity to delve deeper into moments and provide further sites to analyse resistance as well and conformance.

Barad's theory also offers a focus on data 'hot spots' (Maclure, 2013), that 'glow' for the researcher. I identified, what I described as intensities, which led to the insertion of the written narrative accounts. Paying greater attention to these and including more in the analysis could have enhanced the thesis. Diffractive analysis could have been applied to further explore intra-action between myself and the data.

The exploration of materiality in school governance can draw from and extend the application of bricolage as a methodological and analytical tool. Odegard (2021) states that bricolage offers a non-hierarchical relationship which captures intra-actions between humans, non- humans and artefacts. Thus, bricolage can produce alternate entanglements that offer a shift to different ways of thinking, being and becoming. She further adds that bricolaging different matter can disrupt dominant discourses. I am intrigued by exploring what these entanglements might offer in a future study of school governance.

Employing bricolage in this thesis opened up different and complex ways of analysis where I let myself be affected by the data. The notion of being moved or disturbed by the data lies in the concept of affect. Findings have also drawn attention to the affective aspects of school governance. James, Crawford and Oplatka (2019) advocate for establishing a central place of affects in educational leadership theory and practice, whereby educational

leadership practice is understood and interpreted from an affective standpoint.

This discussion has presented a summary of implications, limitations and further scope of this thesis. It is clear that the conclusions drawn can have practical implications for both school governing and the further application of this methodology. Through exploring the limitations in the data collection and analysis I have provided a number of potential lines of future inquiry to further these research questions and the methodology.

5.5 Final reflection

I cannot conclude this thesis without making explicit some of the ways this process has impacted on me as both a researcher and a school governor. As a researcher, I have learnt the importance of resilience, intuition and adaptability. Conducting this study during a global pandemic meant overcoming issues that I was not prepared for. It could have been too easy to put this on hold and wait it out, but embracing virtual platforms and using creative, fluid methods meant that I could continue during uncharted times and still produce rich and useful data.

I will not pretend that working with the writings of Judith Butler was always easy, it was not. Her dense and difficult writing style is well known, often regarded as asking more questions than it answers. However, my perseverance paid off because her concepts have been such a significant part of creating new knowledge in this thesis. I am reminded of a paper early on in my readings by Valerie Hey (2006, p.442) where she describes the best way to read Butler's work 'is as an act of rumination', pointing to the need for 'slow cogitation as a form of intellectual engagement that is not easily achieved'. This sums it up perfectly.

I plan to disseminate the findings in this thesis through both written submissions to journals such as Journal of School Leadership and Gender, Work and Organisation, as well as contributions to BELMAS' governance and governing research interest group (RIG). This is a forum which facilitates regular collaboration and discussion on contemporary issues relation to governance and governing. I have already begun the dissemination process by submitting an abstract to the Chartered College of Teaching's Impact journal and presenting at conference for my local authority. I will be supporting colleagues at the multi-academy trust where I work to develop a programme of professional development for our governing bodies.

In addition, I will continue to develop myself as an active school governor, I found the confidence to put myself forward to become the Chair of my governing body. I am also supporting other new and existing Chairs in their role. I plan to become a local leader of governance.

As demonstrated in the post-script, I used my transformative thinking to make some changes, particularly in relation to how I involve parent governors. More recently, I was asked to present at a conference to over 150 school governors. I have included my reflection here.

> *Yesterday (11/03/2022), I presented at a virtual conference to over 150 school governors. I was asked to share with other governors how the governing body I was Chair of monitored its strategic plan and school improvement plan. Our practice was considered innovative because we had developed a three phased approach, where trios of governors monitored three strands - teaching, targeted intervention support and wider strategies at one phase, either planning, implementation or embedding. I thought for a long time about what I was going to say and if/how this would be impacted by my conclusions in this thesis. I thought about my words, language, body language; how these might constitute, reinforce the boundaries, the scene of recognition, coherence. I decided to make explicit reference to the importance of an inclusive culture in school governance, the significance of the too often unheard voices, especially the ones most invested in our schools. I spoke of the emotional investment, passion, vulnerability and censorship. I used my voice to acknowledge the labour, costs and repair work that school governors experience in their voluntary role. I thanked them for all they do.*

I recognise that whilst these identified features may not provide 'the answers' that the many are searching for, I believe that my contribution will go some way to provoking some alternative thinking or starting a different conversation about school governance. As I started this thesis with Naomi's words, I will finish with them also. Naomi stated '*I never questioned it*', well now I have.

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Appendix 1 – Ethics Checklist

For Research Office Use ONLY:
Checklist No:
Date Received:

IMPORTANT: *The Ethics & Governance Monitor within Research Space should be used for all **staff** and **postgraduate research** ethics applications from 25 November 2019.*
We will not be accepting any paper/email applications for Faculty Ethics Panel or Chair review after Thursday 2 January 2020.

PROPORTIONATE ETHICAL REVIEW FORM

ETHICS REVIEW CHECKLIST

*Your application **must** comprise the following four documents (please tick the boxes below to indicate that each section is complete):*

Ethics Review Checklist	✓
Consent Material(s)	✓
Participant Information Material(s)	✓
Research Health & Safety Risk Assessment Form ***(NB. This MUST be signed by your Head of Department/School or nominated signatory)***	✓

Please attach copies of any research materials/tools i.e. documents to be used in the study: (NB: These must be attached where they form part of your methodology)

Relevant permission letter(s)/email(s)	☐
Questionnaire	☐
Introductory letter(s)	☐
Data Collection Instruments	☐
Interview Questions	☐
Focus Group Guidelines	☐

ETHICS REVIEW CHECKLIST - PROPORTIONATE ETHICAL REVIEW

Sections A and B of this form **must** be completed for **every** research or knowledge exchange project that involves human or animal[1] participants, or the processing of data not in the public domain. These sections serve as a toolkit that will identify whether a full application for ethics approval needs to be submitted.

If the toolkit shows that there is **no need for a full ethical review**, Sections D, E, F and G should be completed in full and the checklist emailed to red.resgov@canterbury.ac.uk as described in Section C.

If the toolkit shows that **a full application is required**, this checklist should be set aside and an ***Application for Faculty Research Ethics Panel Approval Form*** - or an appropriate external application form - should be completed and submitted. **There is no need to complete both documents.**

IMPORTANT

Before completing this form, please refer to *Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants* and the *Code of Practice for the Use of Sentient Animals in Research and Teaching* on the University Research website.

Please note that it is your responsibility in the conduct of your study to follow the policies and procedures set out in the University's Research Ethics website, and any relevant academic or professional guidelines. This includes providing appropriate information sheets and consent Materials, and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data. Any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the study should be notified to the **Faculty and/or other Research Ethics Panel** that received your original proposal. Depending on the nature of the changes, a new application for ethics approval may be required.

The principal researcher/project leader (or, where the principal researcher/project leader is a student, their supervisor) is responsible for exercising appropriate professional judgement in this review.

N.B. This checklist must be completed, reviewed, any actions taken and approved before potential participants are approached to take part in any research project.

Type of Project - please tick as appropriate			
Research	✓	**Knowledge Exchange**	☐

Section A: Applicant Details

A1. Name of applicant:	Lacey Austin	
A2. Status (please tick):	Postgraduate Student ✓	Staff Member ☐
A3. Faculty/Department & School	Education	

A4. Email address:	simonandlaceyaustin@hotmail.co.uk ld131@canterbury.ac.uk
A5. Contact address:	Swallows, Heath Rd, Boughton Monchelsea, Maidstone, Kent ME17 4JD
A6. Telephone number	07814696195

Section B: Ethics Checklist

Please answer each of the 17 questions below by choosing 'YES' or 'NO' in the appropriate box. Consider each response carefully:

		Yes	No
1	Does the study have the potential to impact on professional relationships? (e.g. If your own staff, colleagues, students, or partner organisations are participants within your research does your study have the potential to impact those relationships (either positively or negatively)? If you answer 'NO' to this question but intend to involve your own staff, colleagues, students, or partner organisations please see C1 in Section C- How to Proceed.	☐	✓
2	Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (N.B. The list of vulnerable groups is extensive, please consider the answer to this question carefully)	☐	✓
3	Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to any vulnerable groups or individuals to be recruited?	☐	✓
4	Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without usual informed consent procedures having been implemented in advance? (including but not restricted to; covert observation, certain ethnographic studies, involve the capturing of data from social media sources)	☐	✓
5	Will the study use deliberate deception? (N.B. This does not include randomly assigning participants to groups in an experimental design)	☐	✓
6	Will the study involve discussion of, or collection of information on, topics of a sensitive nature personal to the participants? (including but not restricted to sexual activity, drug use)	☐	✓

7	Are drugs, placebos or other substances (including but not restricted to food substances, vitamins) to be administered to human or animal participants?	☐	✓
8	Does the study involve invasive or intrusive procedures such as blood taking or muscle biopsy from human or animal participants?	☐	✓
9	Is physiological stress, pain, or more than mild physical discomfort to humans or animals, beyond the risks encountered in normal, life likely to result from the study?	☐	✓
10	Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences in humans (including the researcher) or animals beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	☐	✓
11	Will the study involve interaction with animals? (N.B. If you are simply observing them - e.g. in a zoo or in their natural habitat - without having any contact at all, you can answer "No")	☐	✓
12	Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	☐	✓
13	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	☐	✓
14	Is the study a survey or activity that involves University-wide recruitment or a representative sample of students from Canterbury Christ Church University? (N.B. The Student Survey Unit and the Student Communications Unit should be notified of plans for any extensive student surveys (i.e. research with 100 CCCU students or more))	☐	✓
15	Will the study involve participants who may lack capacity to consent or are at risk of losing capacity to consent as defined by the Mental Capacity Act 2005?	☐	✓
16	Will the study involve recruitment of participants through the NHS? (N.B. For CCCU Staff members this excludes NHS staff. For students please see the guidance in Section C – How to Proceed)	☐	✓
17	Will the study involve participants (Children or Adults) who are currently users of social services including those in care settings who are funded by social services or staff of social services departments?	☐	✓

NEXT: Please assess outcomes and actions by referring to Section C

HEALTH AND SAFETY - RISK ASSESSMENT

Hazard	Persons at Risk & Nature of harm	Current Control Measures	Risk Rating Severity x Likelihood	Additional Control Measures Required *(Further action required)*	Revised Risk Rating	Action by who	Action by when	Date action complete
Risk of physical harm	Researcher	Researcher will be recruiting research participants that are already in trusted professional roles. Research will take place in the school (private office or other mutually agreed private space). Research may take place in the evenings at governor meetings.	Low					
Risk of threat or abuse	Researcher	Researcher will be recruiting research participants that are already in trusted professional roles eg Headteachers, governors.	Low				.	
Risk of psychological trauma as a result of a disclosure to the researcher	Researcher	Disclosure of upsetting content by participants to the researcher is possible but unlikely. The researcher is an experienced school leader and trained designated safeguarding lead who would follow appropriate	Low	Participants made aware that they can stop the conversation at any point if they feel upset.				

Hazard	Persons at Risk & Nature of harm	Current Control Measures	Risk Rating Severity x Likelihood	Additional Control Measures Required *(Further action required)*	Revised Risk Rating	Action by who	Action by when	Date action complete
		procedure in the event of a disclosure or safeguarding concern.						
Risk of being in a compromising situation	Researcher and participant	Highly unlikely, research participants are professional leaders. Meetings will take place on schools sites in the day time, governor meetings will be attended by more than one participant.	Low	Small possibility of a disclosure about someone known to researcher and this will part of the confidentiality agreement				
Exposure to other physical risks (accident etc.)	Researcher	Low risk of accidents in travelling to meetings etc	Low	If driving, take care to park in appropriately lit place if it is dark				
Other emotional safety risks	Researcher	It is possible that participants share unpleasant experiences.	Low	This is addressed as part of the consent to take part and acknowledged				

All members of staff and where relevant students affected by this risk assessment are to sign and date to confirm they have read and understood it and will abide by it

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: School governor identities

Name of Researcher: Lacey Austin

Contact details:

Address: Faculty of Education
N Holmes Rd
Canterbury
Kent
CT1 1QU

Tel:

Email: ld131@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial box

1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
2.	(If applicable) I confirm that I agree to any audio and/or visual recordings.	
3.	I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential and in line with the University Research Privacy Notice	
4.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, without giving a reason.	
5.	I agree to take part in the above project.	

—

Name of Participant:	Date:	Signature:
Name of person taking consent *(if different from researcher)*	Date:	Signature:
Researcher:	Date:	Signature:

Copies: 1 for participant

1 for researcher

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

A research study is being conducted at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) by **Lacey Austin.**

Please refer to our Research Privacy Notice for more information on how we will use and store your personal data.

Background

This research study focuses on the structure, organisation and identity of school governing bodies in Kent primary schools. This research is not funded but part of a thesis for the Doctorate in Education.

As both a Vice Chair of Governors and research student, I am interested in exploring school governance; specifically, how governors' identities are constructed and sustained.

What will you be required to do?

Participants in this study will be required to share their views and experiences of school leadership and governance in interviews.

To participate in this research you must:

Be a Headteacher, senior leader or governor in a Kent Primary School.

Procedures

Governors will be invited to take part in two virtual interviews over a 6 month period. The interviews should last approximately 45 minutes.

Feedback

Copies of transcripts of the interviews will be fed back for your amendments and approval.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

The following categories of personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)) will be processed:

- Name
- School Name
- Role and responsibilities

We have identified that the public interest in processing the personal data is:

- To study the structure, organisation and identity of school governing bodies. These bodies are part of the accountability processes for ensuring quality of education and financial health in England's schools. Schools are publicly funded by tax payers

through the government, therefore it is of public interest to use personal data to carry out this research.

- Personal data will be used to compare and analyse trends, patterns and experiences of Headteachers and governors. Pseudonyms will always be used to ensure anonymity. It would not be possible to capture the lived experiences of participants without the collection of this personal data, it is crucial to the fulfilment of the research aims.

Data can only be accessed by, or shared with:

- Researcher
- Supervisor

The identified period for the retention of personal data for this project:

- The data will be retained for 3 years to ensure adequate time for the successful completion of the qualification and any possible moderation/verification and/or extension granted by the University.

If you would like to obtain further information related to how your personal data is processed for this project please contact *Lacey Austin* on *xxxxxxxxx and ld131@canterbury.ac.uk*.

You can read further information regarding how the University processes your personal data for research purposes at the following link: Research Privacy Notice - https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/university-solicitors-office/data-protection/privacy-notices/privacy-notices.aspx

Dissemination of results

The results of the study will be published in my thesis which will be stored in the Canterbury Christ Church University Library. The findings and conclusions of this research may be presented at conferences and published in academic journals.

Process for withdrawing consent to participate

You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in this research project at any time up until 1st July 2021 without having to give a reason. To do this please email Lacey Austin ld131@canterbury.ac.uk to confirm you wish to withdraw your consent to participate.

You may read further information on your rights relating to your personal data at the following link: Research Privacy Notice - https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/university-solicitors-office/data-protection/privacy-notices/privacy-notices.aspx

Any questions?

Please contact *Lacey Austin* on *xxxxxxxxx and ld131@canterbury.ac.uk.*

Faculty of Education
N Holmes Rd
Canterbury
Kent
CT1 1QU

Appendix 5 – Naomi's written account (full)

And there it was the sucker punch. The crucial question…'Maybe our Parent Governors could share with us the journey their children have had in the past few years?' I paraphrase. Maybe this wasn't the exact question. Maybe what preceded this genuine query hadn't sunk in; or maybe it was the encapsulation, the realization of the fear I'd had for the last 4 years.

But, here, now, in this room? I am not here as a parent; I am here as a Governor. I am here, as always, for the regular meetings. I am here having attended training sessions, having spent my time preparing, reading through the relevant documents, considering the data, preparing for critical questioning, knowing that every child matters. I am not here as a parent – am I? I have always tried to separate the 'being the parent of a child at the school' with 'being a Governor of the school my child attends'. I can't answer this question. I am not usually lost for words, I don't usually feel anxiety, flushing, tears welling up from being asked a question during these meetings. But another identity has suddenly been called in, has been asked to attend the meeting in my place! Me, as a Mum – here; now.

Did I not see this coming?

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'….So, we have identified that our current year 6s have had a challenging time; we have tracked back through their school journey, checking their attainment in the early years and looking at their progress; it has not been good. The legacy of inconsistent teaching and a lack of challenge for the children who always attain good grades; they have achieved the 'expected' level of attainment but have made little progress since key stage 1….' I had suspected the teaching had not been good. I knew she hadn't been challenged, not like before when she had the same amazing teacher for 2 whole years, the most outstanding teacher who took theory out into the playground, who built with them, challenged them, taught with creativity and inspiration, who fostered their imagination and inspired them to learn more. Since then, I knew it had not been as good – or, maybe I thought that the teaching was 'good', 'ok', 'fine', but not 'better', not 'amazing', not 'memorable' not 'stimulating' not 'outstanding'. Had I relied on the passage of time, on good faith in the system? Had I settled, on behalf of my own child, for good enough?

Entry into key stage 2 felt like a transition, a time for reflection, consolidation of the learning and skills taught before; maybe not as exciting, more conservative, more stable, solid, scripted. She didn't come home as enthusiastic, or motivated, but maybe she was maturing, developing a different way of learning. Then it was the end of year 3. Year 4 came and went. A disrupted year of maternity leave and supply teaching. The Headteacher retired early. The atmosphere around school felt tired; treading water in preparation for a new Headteacher…. And what a new Headteacher, inspirational, outstanding, committed, wanting to make a positive impact; to inspire excitement and freshness into every aspect of

the school; so exciting and motivating. Everyone knew it would take time to embed new ways of working, a new vision, a new way forward. There were no illusions - there were some difficult months ahead. The coasting could be challenged; the malaise would be whipped up; the average performance could be improved. In time. Year 5 came and went, another solid performance, not great, not bad. Good feedback, good engagement, meeting expectations, all fine. But… was there something more? Could there be more? Could it be better, could there be more challenge, more depth? Could the same love of learning from the early years be recaptured? Well, as long as I didn't ask how Science went… 'Urgh, Science! I can't bear science, Mummy!'. 'But you like watching the weather forecast in the evenings, you like listening to your Daddy talk about the weather and explain how it changes by season or depending on which part of the world you're in; you love understanding what makes rainbows, you enjoy seeing the moon in all it's different guises – when it's full and fat on a Summery evening, or faint and slim on a cold winters afternoon while the sun is still trying to keep us warm; you love asking how things work; you enjoy going for walks and pointing out different creatures or flowers you see on the way; you enjoy baking and making crystals and growing things….' 'Well yes, but that's not like "Science", Mummy……..'

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And now we're here. FGB. She is in her last year at Primary School. She has enjoyed her time, she has been happy, she has made and kept friends, she has always done well, and is looking forward to going to secondary school. Maybe good was enough, maybe stable, solid, standard, average was enough for her. Maybe, in time, my feelings of being let down as a parent will ease. Maybe the feeling that 'outstanding', 'exceptional', 'inspirational' were just too late to make a difference for her will pass. Maybe the feelings of guilt as a parent, of not challenging enough will improve; the shared responsibility of not seeing enough as a Governor would heal over time. Maybe it is enough to know that the future of the school, of each and every child still engaged in the journey, being excited by their school and being empowered to be the difference they want to be will be enough. Maybe being part of the journey to outstanding will be enough.

Appendix 6 -Extract from Claire's transcript

L: What, how long had you kind of been governing and how did that sort of come about?

C: Yeh it was actually a very difficult time for the school, because the school was a small erm , it's a church of England school, erm, run by and it was run by the council, but it got kind of pulled into a multi academy trust and I use the word pulled because it kind of felt like, as a governor, I was quite new to being governor, it felt to me that not everyone round the table wanted this to happen

L: Umm

C: That it kind of had to happen

L: Umm

C: Financially it made sense to be part of this trust, erm, but during that transition I didn't really know the politics but I could see, I've been around long enough to realise that some people wanted this and some people didn't want it and it was gonna happen and basically I don't know the details but the chair of governors and the vice chair of governors resigned and id only been the governor for perhaps a year and you don't have many meetings so when you're new , like I still had to do my governor training, I was still kind of learning and sort of figuring out what this governor thing was all about really, so they left (pause) and we got taken over by the trust so then there was a board of trustees and I think that (pause) probably around the scheme of delegation that had sort of upset them perhaps because things got moved up to the to the trustee level

L: Umm, yeh

C: And then, and so there was no chair and so we all turned up to a meeting without a chair and , erm , the clerk erm, a really lovely lady, who was basically keeping us altogether said we need a chair, and it went round the table and erm, the pressure built up because I was the only one with an educational background

L: Umm

C: And I guess I had been quite confident in all the meetings prior to that, even though I hadn't totally felt confident, erm, "Oh Clairee you should do it, you should do it" because you understand education , like you should do it, you should do it, and we are gonna have an Ofsted, and you'll know what your talking about, and, (pause), and I thought, well, if I say yes to this my husband's probably gonna kill me because I'm already working and erm you know were just kind of holding everything together so I went home and I said to him, there saying this to me but I , I , maybe I wont do it, and he said but of course your gonna do it, but you have to do it because like it's the right thing to do, so, erm, I invited the rest of governors out for a drink at a pub and we had a gin and tonic and I was like, il do it but I need your support, like, like I need to not feel like I'm the only person doing anything like

L: Umm

C: If, Il do it il be the front person but we need to really work as a cooperative in terms of kind of the monitoring visits and the overall, sort of, governor strategic vision, it needs to be a together and il just , il be the one, doing all the talking and that's fine, il meet the DFE il, il do all of that, I feel really comfortable doing that its in my skill set, erm but I'm not gonna be just on my own, and they were like, "yeh, yeh, yeh, yeh that's fine Claire" and so that's how that happened really, and then my time as a parent Governor was meant to come up this Christmas finished but because and it would have kind of worked out quite nicely because we were due an Ofsted (pause) and a Syams visit, erm , which is like the Church of England

L: Yeh,

C; Kind of the

L: Yeh

C: We were due that and then Covid happened and so neither of those things happened ,erm and I was kind of thinking, right il do that and then il leave and il hand that over, erm, (pause) and then in the September meeting it came up and I said I'm, so my time as a parent governor comes to and end like and you cant just hang around (pause) your time comes to an end and actually I really think a new parent should (pause) should take this on because (pause) my youngest is now in year 4 like I think it would be good if somebody who had younger younger children took this on, and erm, (pause) then later on I got home and the CEO rang me and er, well no, the Head rang me first of all and said "No Charlie, I can't, no you got to carry on" I said well that's not my choice really, I cant

L: Huh yeh yeh

C: Its like like this is the , il have to finish, and she was like but I , it was really sweet because, we'd done a D, DFE visit together, erm , and it had gone very well and we'd worked really well together as, yeh we were quite sort of, finishing each other's sentences and picking up when we weren't sure about the answer and it, it had gone well, she was like no I need that to happen with Ofsted, I need you to be there too with Ofsted, so she spoke to the CEO, and the CEO called me and then, suddenly I was writing to the trustees going "oh please could you, erm appoint me as a governor id really like to apply, there's a space, erm, so I can carry on being the chair and they said yes and that's it really so I'm still doing it for however long.

Appendix 7 – Extract from Melanie's transcript

M: So, I am a mother of two. I've got a soon to be seven year old and soon to be five year old, that started school, so two years ago and that's really why I got into governance but my background is in business. So, I run a couple of local businesses in the area, I've got a bit of a varied work life really when I look back at it. So I've got experience in building management and design and sales and marketing and from there I've gone on to run my own businesses, both in retail and.. road haulage which are two really different areas.. erm and I am just always busy. I am always doing something, I just like a challenge… yeah I don't know. Laughs. Otherwise when I'm not in the office we're out and about with walking the dogs, we're quite active, we like a bit of hiking and just the outside. Errm, yeah just a crazy lifestyle, I wouldn't say that we ever sit still as a family, as a person, we are always on the go, we are always doing something. Erm so yeah that sums up my crazy life in a nutshell. Laughs

L: No, sounds amazing. So, if we go back to you talking about getting into governance can you sort of just expand on that and tell me a little more about how or why?

M: Erm, so, when I started looking for schools for H – who's my eldest – I… really went to look at the local schools and to be perfectly honest before he started pre-school I didn't have a clue about the primary schools. I hadn't look at them, I hadn't really looked into that much depth into them and when I then started researching into the schools, for me it was.. it was quite an eye opener about the different levels of school and it wasn't so much that I wanted him to be in an outstanding school, I wanted him to be in a school that I had faith in the vision force, the ethos. I wanted to know that, as a child because, this is going to sound really mean, but H's not my most academic. He's very outdoorsy and I always think probably later in life he'll go on to do something that's very hands on

L: Mmmm

M: and I wanted a school that I felt had that sort of like, whole package to nurture him to do a little bit of forest school but not book heavy that they had something or a value in place that they would do something along that line. Errrm and it really become apparent, I only went to see about seven primary schools errm and some of them… they came across quite fierce in their… "we're solely academic" they felt errrm… they felt quite errm… soulless, I'm going to say soulless and for a primary school that's not what I wanted. I went to our school, really really just gelled, felt that presence, talking to them, the ethos was there… you could see it evidenced around the school as well. But I was also really aware the school that we were joining was under a big transitional period. They were just changing heads and… it was sort of like a slightly nerve wracking time and then we started and I enjoyed it but obviously as you start school you then start interacting with the other parents and there was such a negative vibe in the.. just in the

Silence

M: What was I in the middle of waffling on about? Laughs… Oohh, amongst the parents. Errm yeah and I hadn't experienced the negativity. I was in a positive place, I was happy with where my child was in school with what he was doing and very shortly after, I think in the new year, so within about three months the letter came out about requesting a parent governor. I just read it, felt like I had some skills to bring to the table and I thought well why not. Let's get on board, let's help do it. I've got quite a strong leadership background so I thought, well hopefully I'll bring something to the table. Errm… yes, they said yes come join. Laughs

L: What did you think when you first joined, what were your initial feelings around either yourself as a governor or the governing body?

M: Erm so, laughs. My first perception of governance was that it was… I'm going to say, organised chaos. That's how it feels and it's quite, and I think it's quite difficult actually coming from my background which is.. more private sector to an educational setting because actually, there's so many levels of… different.. erm just guidelines for the education.. which is.. which just doesn't translate into anything else and it's gonna take me a lifetime just to learn the acronyms that everybody uses erm and then you've got… it was really sort of..erm… felt like diving in at the deep end. For something that although I thought, well I've got the skills to do this but actually when you start getting into it, some of those skills translate but you've really got to apply them to that educational settings. It's not just, when you want to do something in your private sector you get "right well I want to take this idea, this is the idea" and you quite quickly follow it through and you embed that into what you want it to be. With the education side of things it's just not that simple. There's always… there seems to be multi channels and multi paths of things that need to be done first it's not just quite as simple as "well this is what we wanna to do, this is what we want to achieve, this is how we get to A to B", it seems like to get from A to B in education you've got to go via B F and Z to get there first. I think that was really eye opening to me… how difficult it actually is for the leadership teams to run anything in education

L: Is there a specific memory or a specific example of that, sort of, what you've just described that you can think of. Either of when you first joined or since?

M: Errrrrrrm so, I've been quite focused on the health and safety in the school errm and there are a few elements that needed to be resolved around the school and so… in sort of a hands-off approach we mentioned it. You bring elements up to the headteacher who then obviously speak to the caretaker errm and then those elements need to be referred back to the local council or the parish council. We were talking about the saaaame things that needed to be resolved eight months after they were initially brought up… and it seems to be one of those things… you can't just deal with anything directly. There's always… there's so many different bodies involved in making that single decision. Something as simple as.. there's a tree causing a problem, is still going to be talked about in two years' time. It's not as simple as, right this is causing a hazard now let's do something about it. You've got to follow those absolutely appropriate channels, you can't sort of go through that unless there is a key factor, an absolute life or death. Laughs. You know, that regulation has got to be followed and obviously it's… that I think to me it's more of a frustrational thing… that the land, the building, isn't, although it's the schools responsibility they don't have the whole responsibility for it. It's.. everything seems to be outsourced and I think from that side of it, it's difficult. Errrm…