"I was radically both" Girls Reading Gender in 19th Century GCSE English

Literature Set Novels

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Abstract

This thesis presents a study of the perceptions of pupils and teachers of GCSE English Literature concerning their experiences of learning and teaching the 19th century novel requirement. It includes a theoretical discussion of the ways in which 'power' can be conceptualised (Foucault, 1976a; 2020b, Hearn, 2004 and Connell, 1995), as well as context concerning neoliberalism and Girlboss feminism. Additionally, the opening chapters provide context for the development of the National Curriculum for English Literature, including political context and an overview of the forms of culture in relation to the English literary canon. I also draw upon and provide detail concerning Cox's Five Models of English (HMSO, 1989).The research strategy for this study is presented in the following two chapters, with a detailed account of the pilot phase included. The main study is composed of focus group data involving twenty-eight pupil participants, and nine responses to follow-up questionnaires. Three in-depth interviews were collected from teachers of English to add a staff perspective. Analysis of the data then follows, where the concept of "Radically Both" applies to the ways that pupil participants read gender in 19th century novels, and how their teachers must balance multiple factors in order to facilitate successful lessons. In conclusion, recommendations for future changes to the priorities of the National Curriculum for English Literature are made, and an argument presented for including Cox's Models (HMSO, 1989) more prominently within the framework for GCSE English Literature.

Keywords: 19th century literature, GCSE English Literature, English education, girl studies, Cox's Models

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The Declaration:

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis presents a study of the ways in which girls who are studying for their GCSE in English Literature read and understand gender relating to their allocated 19th century novel. Also included are the perceptions and opinions of teachers of English Literature from the same schools as my pupil participants, concerning the texts that they teach and the conditions in which they work. Finally, a critical discussion concerning the composition of the National Curriculum for English and its contents is presented, which compliments the data collected from my participants. This introduction will outline how the study was conceptualised, as well as its main aims, its methods, and its contents. The structure of this thesis is made up of nine chapters, which includes this introductory chapter.

1.1: Origins of the Study

This study originated when I, the researcher, was working on my Masters dissertation in Education and Social Justice. At the time, my research focussed on how a sample of girls based in one school read and responded to themes concerning gender in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813a; 2003b). It was during this study I realised that my participants (aged between 15-16 years old and studying towards their GCSE in English Literature) made connections to their own lives based on the characters and themes in the novels they read. This was data that I had not considered would present itself, which caused me to develop a new research project. I planned to focus on asking questions specifically to see how a different set of participants 'read' gender in the set 19th century English GCSE novels that they were studying.

It was also as a result of this Masters dissertation that I decided to seek the views of teachers in my PhD research. When spending time at the school where I was collecting my Masters' data, I found that many teachers opened up to me informally about their experiences of teaching subject English. Additionally, they all had strong views about how English could be better taught. I reflected that I wished to have planned on collecting the responses of these teachers. As a result, I have devoted a research question specifically to capture these ideas in this study. This extra perspective is valuable to the overall success of this research, as the data from both pupil and teacher participants is connected, and further contextualises my findings and discussion.

My focus on the National Curriculum's 19th century novel requirement stems from my own enjoyment of novels of this period, in addition to identifying that more research is required compared to the study of poetry or drama, for example (Blake, 2020; Elliott, 2014; Naylor, 2014). My earlier research, combined with my passion to explore 19th century novels with participants, provided strong incentives to develop a study that would expand upon my Masters research, which includes the addition of teachers' perspectives.

1:2: Aims of This Research

The following thesis presents and analyses the viewpoints of pupils who were studying a 19th century novel as part of the requirements to obtain a GCSE in English Literature, as well as the perspectives of their teachers concerning gender within the novels and perspectives on teaching English. There are three main goals that this research aims to achieve.

Firstly, to provide an insight into the needs and experiences of girls in relation to their experiences of studying subject English at GCSE level. As Francis (2010)

notes, research funding in English and Education tends to be directed more towards investigating the needs of boys, and often research that concerns the needs of boys receives far more attention from the media and policymakers (p. 19). Often girls are portrayed as a "simple success story" (Allen, 2010, p. 59) when summer exam results reflect higher grades, but this research aims to provide some nuance to this picture, by exploring their feelings and relationships with the 19th century texts they study and to see what lessons can be learned beyond grades.

A second aim of this research is to establish whether the portrayal of women in English GCSE texts influences how a selection of students studying these texts view themselves. Construction of the self and self-image undeniably occurs at a rapid rate during schooling (Verhoeven et al., 2019), therefore characters, events and themes in novels that occupy a prominent space in the minds of my participants have the potential to coexist alongside this development and link to real events that my participants are experiencing. Indeed, studies that link self-perception of individuals with literature (such as Rudine Sims Bishop's *Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors* (1990)) show that literature has the ability to allow for reflection and access to different worlds as experiences for readers, as well as familiar ones. In this way, reading is a way in which to grow personally and shape the self.

Real world experiences also include how my participants understand and interpret what feminism is and what critical readings of texts are, as well as what connections they make between the 19th century novels they study and their present lives. Linked to this aim, my research will assess how learning literary theory, for example feminist readings of texts, is useful to consider as a potential method to enhance learning and understanding when studying a novel in the context of GCSEs. Additionally, I will explore if any of my participants who already engaged with critical

theory alongside their English literature GCSE felt it made any difference concerning their understanding and enjoyment of the texts they read.

   A final aim of this research is to discuss some of the factors that are behind teacher reasoning when selecting the novels that they choose to study with their classes. Text selection and what is studied in schools is hugely important in shaping reader identities (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2018). The relationship between what is selected for the teaching of English and the wider context of what is valued in society is vital from not only the social values learned through English, but also the career options and skills provided (Eaglestone, 2017). Linked to this aim, I am also interested in whether the factors behind teacher choice link in any way to the politics of austerity that have been present in the UK since 2010 in the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, but now more strongly in the solely Conservative one. These could manifest in the form of limitations as a result of time, cuts to school budgets for resources or the general devaluing and attack upon the arts.

   This research hopes to contribute to the wider field of debates concerning text selection and the teaching of English. The possible audience for this research includes teachers of English in secondary schools in the UK and policymakers concerned with education who are seeking insights from key stakeholders when considering how and what is taught for a GCSE in English Literature, particularly with reference to 19th century novels. I also hope that other researchers in this field will be able to use this research to support and enable their own work, contributing to the wider field and highlighting the role that the teaching of English can have societally.

1.3 : Research Questions

The primary research question for this study is:

RQ1: How do girls read gender in the assigned 19th century texts for GCSE English Literature?

In the context of this study, the subject of 'English' explored is secondary school GCSE level English Literature, specifically with a focus on the 19th century novel requirement. I define the 'reading' of gender as the ways in which participants describe certain traits or ways of being when referring to the men and women characters in the 19th century novels discussed. The reading by participants may be mimetic, thematic or synthetic (Phelan, 1989), which I provide more detail on in Chapter 2.2.1 of this thesis.

RQ2 Does the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English Literature curriculum have an impact on how pupils view themselves?

The aim of this question was to go beyond what participants might identify as gendered traits and probe for links that they make to the characters, plots or settings to their lives beyond reading. Essentially, this question aimed to explore connections that they make to their lives and experiences when reading their assigned novels. In addition to these questions exploring data from pupil participants, I wanted to examine:

RQ3: What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in class?

This question intended to capture perspectives from teachers of English concerning their experiences of teaching and views about the 19th century novel selection for GCSE English Literature. I draw upon the work of Bowles and Gintis

and their research surrounding the Hidden Curriculum (1976a; 2011b), as well the internal and external factors to my staff participants that influence their experience of teaching the 19ᵗʰ century novel requirement. I also refer to Cox's Five Models (1991) of English teaching when discussing the ways that texts are taught.

1.4: Research Design

This research was conducted using qualitative methods and was interpretivist in nature (O'Donoghue, 2018). I conducted two pilot focus groups with one and five pupil participants, and a total of six responses (one per pilot participant) were received to the follow-up questionnaire. In addition to this, a pilot interview was conducted with a staff member based at that first school.

The main data is compiled of five focus groups from three schools, adding up to a total of twenty eight pupil participants. There were four to seven participants within each focus group. Each focus group lasted on average forty five minutes to allow for school timetabling, but also to provide very rich data. Nine online follow-up questionnaire responses were also collected. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three staff members, all were teachers of secondary school English with varied years of experience (between two years and twenty three years), based at the same schools as my pupil participants.

1.5: Structure of the Thesis

The literature review for this thesis is split into two sections across chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 provides context into research around working with girls and their experiences of reading. The forms of reading mimetically, thematically or synthetically in fictional texts (Phelan,1989; 2007) are defined. In addition to this, different theoretical frameworks are discussed in detail in order to provide a strong foundation for the ways in which they are used in the findings sections (Chapters 6-

8). An exploration of the history of 'Girlboss' Feminism (Ewens, 2019) is also included. Through this, Chapter 2 provides important theoretical background and context to conducting research with girls, as well as some key concepts which appear in the data analysis as a result of their contributions. Chapter 3 explores the political context of the UK, with a focus on the creation and implementation of the National Curriculum for English. The end of the 20th century saw big changes in the content of subject English, but also in what was prioritised to be assessed. Following this, Chapter 3 also examines the ways in which different forms of culture are valued in the UK and how this has had, and continues to have, a very strong influence on the content that is included in the English curriculum. Political ideas related to valued cultures still resonate today in debates concerning text selection within the National Curriculum for English Literature. Chapter 3 also contains an exploration of Bowles and Gintis' research surrounding the Hidden Curriculum (1976a; 2011b), and provides a key knowledge foundation ahead of my discussion of data which relates to my staff participants.

Following the literature review chapters, a rationale for the research methodology used in this thesis is presented in Chapter 4. The main aims of the study and its rationale are discussed, as well as the research questions. Chapter 4 also includes a description of the general research approach adopted, and a justification of the sampling and sample sizes achieved. The advantages (and potential drawbacks) of focus groups as a data collection technique are discussed, as well as those of interviews and questionnaires. The online format of the data collection is also addressed in the context of adapting the original research methods to the conditions stemming from the global Covid-19 Pandemic. The selection of participants is addressed as are ethical considerations taken, validity, reliability and the significance of the role of researcher. Chapter 4 concludes with an explanation of

the codes used when analysing the data, referring to Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis, which was used alongside the NVivo12 data analysis program (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2018). In Chapter 5 I present an outline of the pilot study, as well as a brief analysis of its different aspects. Following this, the conclusions of the pilot study are made clear and the adaptations to the research based on these are defined. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 all present the results of this thesis, and are organised by RQs 1-3. Data from students is the focus for Chapters 6 and 7, whilst Chapter 8 concentrates on data from the staff. Each of these chapters includes analysis alongside the findings that are presented under a range of themes relating to each RQ.

Finally, Chapter 9 provides a conclusion to this thesis, and draws together the main themes explored in the results and analysis chapters to highlight how I have answered the four research questions which make up this research. The caveats of the study are also addressed, followed by suggestions for further research.

1.6 : The Concept of "Radically Both"

Within my thesis, I have created an analytical concept of "Radically Both". I will briefly explain my reasons for using the terminology, as well as its origin, before progressing with this thesis. The decision to use "Radically Both" as a theme of discussion, and then as my title for this thesis, originated in working with Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr.Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886a; 2012b) as part of my pilot study. The quote (taken from *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Stevenson, 1886a; 2012b) refers to having two halves or sides: Dr Jekyll explains that his intentions were to split the two personalities apart into a good and an evil being. The concept of good and evil is not applicable to my findings, or my participants, but a recurring theme in my data is that many aspects of my findings

embody something which is "radically both". My pupil participants are teenagers on the verge of adulthood, they are passionate in their engagement with the classic texts but make many pop culture and current links to the characters and stories to make sense of them, and they identify good traits within the characters and themes as well as bad ones. My staff participants need to strike a "radical" balance between teaching texts to guidelines, but also bringing in any aspects of 'ideal' practice (a theme which I develop later in this thesis) to make the experiences of their pupils positive. Therefore, the concept of "Radically Both" shows the different sides to teaching and learning subject English, via the medium of a quote taken from a classic 19th century novel.

1.7 : Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of GCSE-aged (between fifteen and sixteen years old) girl students and a selection of their English teachers surrounding gender in the 19th century novels on the National Curriculum for English, and experiences of teaching GCSE English Literature. The research originated in my academic interest following the successful completion of my Masters degree in Social Justice and Education, as well as a personal interest in 19th century literature. The data in this thesis was analysed with Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and NVivo12 software (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2018). This thesis builds on the existing knowledge surrounding the teaching of 19th century novels, as well as pedagogy concerning teaching critical perspectives alongside the novels selected in schools. This thesis also provides the unique perspectives of girl pupils and explores their relationships with the texts they study in relation to gender.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 : Introduction

The aim of this literature review chapter is to provide essential background, therefore putting my research in its context. In addition to this, I will define key terms and cover the theoretical models and frameworks that I go on to use in the analysis chapters which will illuminate this particular area of research. This chapter provides context for research involving girls, as well as examples of research that includes girl participants with a focus on reading. Following this, I provide an exploration of the key concepts and definitions that provide an insight into data concerning power, which I use in Chapter 6 of this thesis. Then, I provide political and social context for the creation and rise of 'Girlboss' feminism (Ewens, 2019), another key concept which is vital in my later analysis. I describe how as a popular format of feminism, Girlboss feminism forms the basis of my pupil participants' understandings of feminism and gender. The chapter ends with a summary of the above ideas to provide a useful foundation of knowledge for the analysis chapters. By utilising specific ideas and concepts to later examine data from my pupil participants, key themes will be explored and uncovered in the subsequent analysis chapters of this thesis.

2.2 : Reading with Girls

The following section highlights a research gap regarding the ways in which girl students engage with 19th century novels beyond the traditional success metrics of the grades they achieve. Much research focuses on boys' experiences of English, for example Younger & Warrington (1996), Gorard, Rees & Salisbury (1999), Gorard, Rees & Salisbury, (2001) and Cavaglia et al. (2020) working on the

assumption that girls are more successful at English than boys. Essentially, the focus has been on how to enable boys to 'catch up' instead of considering what other factors influence the educational experiences of girls. This ignores the reality that higher levels of achievement are not present in every socioeconomic or ethnic grouping of girls (Yu et al, 2021). Therefore, this means better performance in general on literacy and language tests does not equate equal levels more widely of underachievement amongst girls as boys (Clark & Millard, 1998, p. 229). In my research, I aimed to move away from the narrative focussing on grades as metrics to explore the experiences of girls studying English. Instead, I explored in more detail girls' experiences and aesthetic engagements with the novels that they encounter. In this context, aesthetic reading refers to what 'happens' to the reader during their engagement with a text, and how that a 'transaction' takes place that allows the reader to experience feelings which lead to pleasurable and/or aesthetic reading (Rosenblatt,1978;1982). The field of research undertaken specifically into the learning experiences of girls concerning 19th century literature in a UK secondary school setting is sparse, and as such, this thesis contributes towards building this area. In addition to this, prioritising aesthetic engagements with texts over a purely grade-based approach offers necessary nuance to the 'bigger picture' concerning girls' experiences of English education, with the additional insight that their teachers can provide alongside their accounts.

As a feminist researcher, I am committed to building upon the field of Girlhood Studies through my work. Girl-centred research is not new, but it remains a relatively small sub-discipline within feminist studies. Historically, there has been an issue with the higher proportion of research funding that focuses on the needs of boys in education, rather than girls, and this research often receives more attention from the media and policymakers (Francis, 2010). Additionally, my principles align with Cook

and Fonow (1986), who categorise feminist epistemological principles in methodology in five ways. The first of these five ways is especially present in my own research: including women and gender as a main focus of analysis. In addition to this, my research intends to empower women and change power relations and inequalities (which I discuss more in Chapter 4, Section 3). With this considered, my deliberate choice to work with girls in my research offers alternative, and nuanced, narratives concerning their experiences of English education.

2.2.1 : Defining "Girls" and "Reading"

In this thesis, the word 'girls' refers to all those who define themselves as girls, whether transgender or cisgender (Westbrook & Schilt, 2013) and at the appropriate age to sit the GCSE English literature exam in the UK (between 15-16 years old). Gender will be treated as a social construct, rather than the biological definition of sex that is sometimes used in research (Holmes, 2011). Gender as a social construct ties to Judith Butler's (1990) categorisation of "women" and "woman" as complicated by and intersected with factors such as class, ethnicity, and sexuality . Butler (1990) believes that gender is performative in nature, and that a 'performance' of gender is fluid depending on social and cultural expectation. Essentially, gender is not a stable or fixed state of being (Butler, 1990). Specifically included in this literature review are examples that regard gender as a spectrum, rather than a binary based on biological sex (Butler, 1990); this sociological definition of gender is also relevant to the knowledge and understanding of gender that my participants may have had prior to taking part in my study (Goffman,1956a; 2008b).

In order to capture the perspectives of girls, Jones and Samuels (2015) observe that qualitative research is an especially useful tool for creating an understanding of

gender norms and issues that affect adolescent girls. Essentially, the use of qualitative research allows for the voices and perspectives of participants to come through in a deep and meaningful manner. Jones and Samuels (2015) suggest that the use of qualitative methods when working with girls allows for a nuanced understanding of themes that are identified within research relating to gender. They also note that "These insights can be invaluable in challenging received wisdom about how gender norms affect adolescent girls in particular contexts" (Jones & Samuels, 2015, p.1).

The value of choosing to conduct research with girls can be found in the "unique social formations" (Kearney, 2009, p. 1) in the resulting data. Over the previous few decades there has been a rise in interest concerning girl-centred research, which has resulted in Girl Studies becoming even more of a "unique and significant area of critical inquiry" (Kearney, 2009, p. 2). As a feminist researcher located within a field of interdisciplinary research, working with girls is not only a fundamental requirement to answer my research questions and aims, but also speaks to me on a personal and political level in my desire to expand this important area. Following from the historical marginalisation of girls and young women in youth research (Kearney, 2009), it is important to highlight those marginalised perspectives whenever possible when conducting research. McRobbie & Garber (1976) noted that with the rise in research that focused on girls in the 1970s, that there was still much to remedy. This still applies in the current context, especially when concerning past research that included girls where "they are fleetingly and marginally presented" (McRobbie & Garber, 1976, p. 209) or instances when their data was used in "ways which uncritically reinforce the stereotypical image of women with which we are now so familiar ..." (p. 209).In the context of this thesis, 'reading' is how my pupil participants encounter and react to texts as a piece of art, but also how their reactions shape their sense of self and how and if they interact with what they are reading (Goffman, 1956a; 2008b).

'Reading' is also something which can be done mimetically, thematically or synthetically in fictional texts (Phelan,1989;2007). Synthetic reading allows characters to be realistic and 'life-like', thematic reading means the characters represent central ideas within the fiction, and synthetic reading where characters are 'constructed' and artificial in nature (Phelan,1989;2007). The ways that we read influence how we connect to and relate to characters, themes and events in texts. Therefore, this impacts the ways in which something like gender is read.

2.2.2 : Girls reading

When considering the more specific context of the research presented in this thesis (education studies with a focus on the teaching of English), there is a trend of research concerning literacy often focusing on boys' experiences. As a result, this neglects girls' perspectives due to their better academic achievement in subject English. Griffin (1988) takes issue with this historic focus on boys and young men in youth research. She believes that it has "rendered young women either totally invisible or at best marginal to theoretical analysis" (Griffin, 1988, p. 24) and presents boys "as the norm against which young women must be judged" (p. 24). Additionally, educational research which does focus on girls' experiences tends to have very few further evaluations or long-term monitoring (Evans & Yuan, 2022). My thesis aims to alleviate this 'invisibility' of girls, and prioritise their perspectives about the texts they study in my analysis. Furthermore, Clark & Millard (1998) note that public interest in gendered experiences of schooling has been a feature of the English educational system since at least 1868 during the Taunton Commission's work on endowed schools (p. 195). My research will explore gendered experiences of reading within the setting of secondary schools in England.

When considering intentions and interests, my research is similar to Hartman's

(2006) study, which explores the perceptions of gender in texts on a US English Literature syllabus from a group of four girls in the 10th Grade (in an English context, 10th grade students are between 15-16 years old). Whilst other research has focussed on the ways in which gender is 'read' (for example, Davies, 1993; Cherland,1994 and Earles, 2017) research tends to focus on children of a younger age, and not on 19th century novels as source material. Cherland's (1994) study of girls constructing their identities through literature explored the details of the reading lives of seven Canadian 11-12-year-old girls through a variety of methods, which examined their home lives and experiences of schooling. Cherland (1994) captured the individual perspectives of her girl participants via observation and follow-up questionnaires (as well as journals which the girls took home and completed concerning their reading habits). Cherland's (1994) findings exemplified the social nature of reading, and highlighted the impact of a positive home life and being encouraged to engage with reading.

I understand that there is a lack of existing literature in this area in a UK context, therefore Hartman's (2006) study is the closest body of research to this thesis. Hartman's (2006) research situates itself for an aesthetic- enjoyment view of the texts which are studied, rather than one concerning purely grades or academic achievement. She notes that her initial enthusiasm for her study stemmed from an awareness of women authors being a minority on the US syllabus. This resulted in a curiosity concerning the lack of representation found in texts that girls read for school, and a desire to discover if this would have an impact on how girls would read these books. When linking this to a UK context, as is the case with my own research, there is a similar issue of white men authors being overrepresented in the 19th century novel requirement, as well as in other areas such as poetry or drama.

Another similarity between my own study and Hartman's was our shared interest in girls' reactions to and readings of the characters they encountered. Hartman's use of focus groups in her research informed my own research methodologically. A key

finding in Hartman's research was that "girls actively sought out women characters and applied sometimes contradictory notions of gender to their interpretations" (2006, p. 1). According to Hartman, although the majority of the texts in her study were written by men, the real focus of her analysis was the ways in which her participants were more attentive to the characters themselves. This is something that occurred in my own data, which will be presented later in this thesis. In addition to this, Hartman notes that: "Although the overwhelming number of characters that the girls encountered in school were male, all four girls identified female characters as the individuals that they found the most interesting and the most important from the texts they read" (2006, p. 1). This indicates that girls are open to reading different texts which may contain a majority of men characters, but that they are able to draw their own meaning and enjoyment from women characters, even if they are not the main characters. This is evident in my own data, which will be presented later in this thesis.

Additionally, Hartman's study involved participants applying their own interpretations of gender to the characters that they encountered, or the "sometimes contradictory notions of gender" (Hartman, 2006, p. 1). A key example of this from her data is how her participants viewed *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s (1960a; 2010b) main character Scout in a positive manner for her "Tomboy" (p. 1) nature. Hartman's participants valued Scout for her strong will and rebellious nature, but also referred to her femininity and "motherly" (p. 1) characteristics. This in itself could be classified as a "contradictory" (p. 1) reading of gender by participants, however this finding developed further when some of the same participants considered Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*'s (1597a; 1993b) Juliet as a "weak" (p. 1) character for exhibiting some of the same traits as Scout. This finding mirrors aspects of my own data, which I expand upon in Chapter 6. In my data, these "contradictory" readings of gender concern some of the women characters in *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens, 1843a; 2018b) and *The War of the Worlds* (Wells, 1898a; 2017b).

2.2.3: Attitudes concerning context and genre

Hartman's (2006) participants also expressed frustrations about the lack of discussion space for women's history or women's rights in the classroom. This desire for more context, political, historical and social, echoes my own findings from the follow-up questionnaire. The potential to include this level of discussion within the syllabus for English will be expanded upon in Chapter 3 Section 2 of this thesis, where I discuss Cox's Five Models of English (1991).

   In addition to providing more context as part of the teaching of novels, misconceptions about genre and perceived levels of enjoyment depending on gender are important to consider. Loh, Sun and Majid (2020) collected data from a mixed-gender survey sample, and their findings highlight popular misconceptions about gendered reading habits. Their data showed that gendered differences in genres or reading materials were minimal, and that enjoyment of Adventure, Science Fiction and Fantasy was common across their mixed-gender sample. Essentially, stereotypes about what boys and girls enjoy reading lack substance. This finding is echoed in my thesis and reflected in my participants' engagement with H.G Wells' *War of the Worlds* (1898a; 2017b) and the dialogue with their teacher (Stoker) in the staff interview concerning the initial resistance to the choice of text from his colleague

2.2.4: Reading and identity formation

 Building from gendered experiences of reading and different levels of aesthetic enjoyment that young people have when engaging with a text, next I draw upon literature that explores how reading can be a site of identity formation for girls. Scholes (2019) notes that research involving reading as a site for gender and class identity work first appeared in the 1980s. Whilst Scholes' research is based in the Australian education system, the gap she identifies of girls' reading identities within the curriculum mirrors the UK context where I locate my own research. Her results

highlight the complex social and socioeconomic relations that occur in the school setting, as well as her participants' academic successes and understandings of literacy as a social practice. Her findings showcase the necessity of accounting intersections of gender and social class when considering the "idealised feminine reader" (Scholes, 2019, p. 1) as not every girl is a successful and motivated reader, and their motivations and levels of engagement can be complex.

Scholes describes so-called "discourses of femininity" (2019, p. 1) found in her data, where social relationships and standings are also associated with reading practices. Within my own findings, the ways in which participants categorise women characters and link them to real women in the world outside of the novels they study mirrors the social aspect of these "discourses of femininity" (2019, p. 1). This is evidenced when my participants outline positive and negative character traits and negotiate these with their peers in the focus group setting.

The social aspect of reading, particularly with girls, is something that Finders (1997) also explored in her US study of junior high school girls (aged between 12-13 years old). Finders does not present reading as a purely school-centred practice, but rather explores through her participants the impact of literacy and reading beyond grades. In asking her participants about their relationships with reading and the connections to their lives beyond text, rich data showing the perspectives of teenage girls in the US was co-constructed. This has clear ties to my adopted research methodology, as well as my aims as a researcher in showcasing the views of my participants.

Finders refers to Christian-Smith's (1993) findings, which show that girls "construct and reconstruct their desires and gender subjectivities, as well as their awareness of social differences and power relations" (, p. 1-2) through reading. With this considered, I was attentive to the possibility of my own participants having the potential to showcase awareness of social issues. I therefore created my study in a way to allow my participants to share any views they may have had concerning

inequalities and social justice, which resulted in some of them sharing their

perspectives on race, gender and class during the deep discussions facilitated in

focus groups

The next section of this literature review chapter will discuss some of the ideas and

theoretical frameworks used to analyse the data in this thesis.

2.3: Power

As there are many ways to define the concept of "power", it is important to

explore the key ideas which will be included later on in this thesis. As a result of

engaging with the previously outlined literature and studies, I anticipated that the

following ideas would be relevant to my own data. I will now outline key ideas from

Foucault (1976a; 2020b), Hearn (2004) and Connell (1995) concerning forms of

power (as productive and gendered), social class and hegemony. The section

concludes with a brief summary of the concepts discussed, before progressing to a

discussion of neoliberal and 'Girlboss' feminism.

This section will focus on three aspects of Foucault's definitions of power. The

dialectic presented by Foucault between repression and transgression has informed

my framework for analysis, and I designed this analytical framework to be receptive

to those two potentially quite contradictory moves. Firstly, Foucault notes in *The*

History of Sexuality, Volume 1 (1976a; 2020b) that power is not a repressive

concept, and instead should be viewed as productive. This essentially means that

ideas about sexuality (but in this thesis I argue about gender) do not stem from

individuals being repressed and limited, but instead are produced through social and

cultural norms. When an individual is exposed to these norms and values, ideas are

formulated about sexuality (or, I later argue, gender) that stick and surface once

they have developed over time.

Secondly, Foucault argues that whilst there might be a centre of power that can be

pinpointed, the best way to analyse power is through a 'bottom-up' lens. This is

because individuals are exposed to power (or, ideas and constructs) in diverse ways. Power should not necessarily be viewed as infallible and immoveable, forced upon the less-powerful from a top-down hierarchical position, but instead as a network which lacks stability and can be challenged or changed from lower levels. In Foucault's own words: "Where there is power, there is resistance" (1976a; 2020b).

In relation to my own research, I class the institution of the school as a site of power. Additionally, reading (which all participants in my research do before discussing their ideas with me in focus groups) as a 'softer' form of power is a potential site for cultural production, as it instils norms and values in readers. My understanding of Foucault's sites of resistance to power (or encountered ideas and norms) informed the way that I analysed and discussed my data in the later chapters of this thesis.

For example, I show that my participants do express support for traditional gender roles and norms, but also that there are instances in my data of resistance at the site of this power.

Thirdly, Foucault views power as something which is "embodied and enacted rather than possessed" (Gaventa, 2003). When conducting my analysis, Foucault's definition of power enabled me to identify instances in my data where participants refer to characters as being powerful or embodying power, when those same characters do not possess power within the context of the story and/or the society in which the story took place. Additionally, my foundation of knowledge that power can be *"diffuse"* (Gaventa, 2003) informed my analysis, as I could identify that my participants were reading both gender and power in the setting, plot and historical and social context of the novels and not only in characters.

Finally, it is important to note that these ideas refer to the attitudes towards and experiences of sexuality, but for the purpose of this thesis I applied them towards attitudes towards and experiences of gender. I believe that there are strong

parallels between Foucault's "microphysics of power" (1975a; 2020b) and where my participants formulated some of their own ideas about gender when reading the 19th century novels discussed. The "microphysics of power" (1975a; 2020b) refers to the ways in which sources of power are spread in different ways until they reach individuals. This can be through institutions such as the family or the workplace, but also can be found in everyday practices and cultural productions, such as reading.

2.3.1: Masculinity and Power

Building from Foucault's conceptualisations of power, once power is considered to operate at the most micro levels of social relations it links to Hearn's ideas about masculinity and power (2004). Specifically, Foucault considers power to be omnipresent at every level of the social body in the same way as attitudes concerning gender and gender norms. Foucualt's analysis does not address gender, therefore Hearn's research builds on the foundation of knowledge concerning power and spotlights the ways in which gender and power interlink, observing that: "While power functions, flows and re-forms in multiple ways, it is difficult to avoid the fact that in most societies, and certainly those of western, 'advanced' capitalism, men are structurally and interpersonally dominant in most spheres of life" (2004, p.51). One of the key areas that this power is located in for men is within men's violence towards women (Hearn, 1998). Hearn notes that men are the main perpetrators of violence against women in most societies, which can include planned, repeated, sexual, economic, collective and institutional violence (2012). Whilst this violence is not applicable to the everyday routine of all men, men are widely complicit in enacting these (and other) forms of violence against women (Pease, 2008). Hearn observes that violence, and violence against women, is not a fixed set of behaviours and instead relates to intersections of power which relate to gender, social division, ideology and hegemony (2012). The knowledge of these links between power and

violence allowed me a useful perspective for my analysis. For example, there were instances in my data where my participants would associate strength with women character's abilities to be violent or commit violence in *The War of the Worlds* (Wells,1898a; 2017b). I will show examples where my participants valued women characters who were able to reverse the narrative regarding their positions in relation to men. Essentially, sometimes my participants read women characters as powerful as a result of their ability to exhibit violence or fight

It is important to note that power does not always need to be associated with violence, or that all men are powerful as a result of their advantageous position under patriarchy. Hearn highlights that: "This is not to say that all men are (all) powerful or men are all powerful…Rather it is that power is a very significant, pervasive aspect of men's social relations, actions and experiences" (2004, p. 51). This helped to inform my own analysis, as my participants did not view all men and men characters as being 'powerful'. Additionally, the differences that surface (for example: age, social class and ethnicity) within men impact their proximity to power in a "complex interplay of unities and differences" (Hearn & Collinson, 1993). With this foundation of knowledge, I was able to identify instances in my data where participants deemed certain women characters more powerful than others, and note how intersections of these women characters' identities factored into this.

Essentially, certain groups of men hold more power than others (with white, cisgender, heterosexual men holding the most power) and are therefore more likely to enact violence than groups with less power. Therefore, intersectionality and power connect to position some people as more powerful than others.

Within Hearn's (2004) Critical Studies on Men (or CSM) he highlights the ways in which men have power, and what power looks like from a gendered perspective. Hearn also highlights that "power and dominance can be structural and interpersonal, public and/or private, accepted and taken-for-granted and/or

recognized and resisted, obvious or subtle" (2004, p. 51). This informed my own analysis, as there were instances in my data where participants located power as something that different characters possessed or enacted in multiple ways. One example which I explore later in this thesis is power and its relation to social class.

2.3.2: Social Class and Hegemony

This section will build on the ways in which hegemony relates to social class, and then forms of masculinity via hegemonic masculinity. I will draw upon Butler (2000), Connell (1995) and Hearn (2004) in order to highlight the intersections that hegemony has, which favour the predominantly powerful groups within a capitalist patriarchy.

Hearn cites Gramsci's theory of hegemony (1971) to illuminate how the dominant economic social class has more power, and as a result, control over society. The construction of hegemony is not a simplistic matter existing between the dominant social class and the state. Hegemony involves "collective political actors" (Hearn, 2004, p. 54) such as the state, the law, capitalists and intellectuals to both construct and legitimise it. When considering this construction and legitimisation, the granting and maintaining of power has strong ties to traditional forms of masculinity. It is therefore easily identifiable that these traditional forms of masculinity are reinforced and strengthened by the same "political actors" (Hearn, 2004, p. 54) as hegemony. Having this as a base of understanding clarified how factors such as ethnicity, social class and sexuality all impact the levels of power that an individual has based on how well they align with perceptions of traditional masculinity. This informed my analysis when associating the alignment between characters in the novels my participants read and traditional masculinity which informed their perspectives.

Butler (2000) notes that hegemony: "emphasizes the ways in which power operates to form our everyday understanding of social relations, and to orchestrate the ways in which we consent to (and reproduce) those tacit and covert relations of power" (p.13). There are two key aspects of this quote to consider in more depth.

Firstly, when referring to the formation of everyday understandings, it is important to consider how these are fashioned. Understanding that there are sources of the construction of ideas concerning "relations of power" helped me to plan to capture data to reveal where these sites may be for my participants. Secondly, when considering "the ways in which we consent to (and reproduce) those tacit and covert relations of power" (Butler, 2000, p.13), I was able to identify points in my data where participants shared common ideas and values about what constituted "power". Through engaging with Butler's ideas about what power is and its path to being reproduced, I was able to consider how my participants might perceive the characters within the 19ᵗʰ century texts they studied in my analysis.

Related to ideas of hegemony, Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (1995) highlights how groups of men are impacted differently depending on the power they have under patriarchy. Hegemonic masculinity encompasses social relationships within different groups of men, and highlights the different levels of subordination that women face depending on those social relationships (Connell, 1995). Connell's research shares commonalities with Gramsci's (1971) analysis of socioeconomic class relations, and highlights that hegemonic masculinity is prone to challenge and alteration. In brief, hegemonic masculinity is defined as: "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." (Connell, 1995, p. 77).

Hegemonic masculinity thus embodies and enacts forms of power over men and women in diverse ways depending on where they are socially located. Knowledge of this theory enabled me to design my focus group questions in a way that would allow me to capture data relating to intersecting identities and different levels of power depending on these intersections. I also utilised hegemonic masculinity in my analysis, for example in the instances where my participants considered particular qualities associated with traditional masculinity (i.e. cisgender— where an

individual's gender determination at birth matches their self-identity (Westbrook &

Schilt, 2013) —, heterosexual, white) as their basis for understandings of what

constituted positive and/or powerful traits in the characters of the novels they read.

At times these were identified in women characters by my participants, adding to

Connell's (1995) distancing from the "traditional male role" and forming

understandings of why certain traits are perceived to be valuable in the context of

capitalist patriarchy. Connell emphasises that hegemonic masculinity is reflective of

societally accepted forms of masculinity, but also that those who hold its 'power' or

have traits associated with it may not be reflective of the social ideal of masculinity

(1995). This knowledge informed my analysis, as I was able to understand the ways

in which some of my participants classed women characters as powerful, and

highlight which instances linked to masculine traits.

  Conclusively, Foucault's "microphysics of power" (1975a; 2020b) highlights the

ways in which power is distributed in order to reach individuals, and in addition to

the role of institutions, everyday practices and cultural productions enable this

process. Relevant to this thesis, the practice of reading is an example of this.

Additionally, tying this conceptualisation of power to gender, Hearn notes that

hegemony's "collective political actors" (2004, p. 54) such as the state, the law,

capitalists and intellectuals to both construct and legitimise the granting of and

maintaining of power. Individuals who possess inordinate amounts of power tend to

have ties to traditional forms of masculinity, which will become manifest in how my

pupil participants read gendered traits within the novels we discuss. Butler's ideas

concerning sources of the construction of "relations of power" (2000, p. 13) link to

the ways in which my pupil participants identify common norms and values

concerning gender in the novels they read. Finally, Connell's concept of hegemonic

masculinity foreshadows which gendered traits which might be perceived as

'powerful' by my pupil participants, as a direct result of their relationships to

societally accepted forms of masculinity (1995).

The next section of this literature review chapter will explore the context behind so-called 'Girlboss feminism', and explore its ties to hegemonic masculinity's alignment with capitalist and patriarchal values. Understanding this particular form of popularised feminism allowed me to note its influences on my participants when analysing my data.

2.4: Girlboss Feminism

Hegemonic masculinity shares many commonalities with the relatively new concept of Girlboss feminism. Whilst the term "#Girlboss"' had not emerged until 2014 following the publication of the founder of clothing brand *Nasty Gal'*s Sophia Amoruso's autobiography (Amoruso, 2014), the ideas underpinning it have been developing since the 1980s. After providing historical background and an overview of the neoliberal origins of Girlboss feminism, this next section clarifies the positioning of this specific form of feminism as a theoretical framework which is later relevant in my analysis chapters of this thesis. The specific focus on Girlboss feminism relates to popularised forms of feminism that young people, such as my participants, encounter. Additionally, my research contributes to filling a gap in the literature in which girls' readings and interpretations of 19th century set novels will link to their understandings of gender outside of those novels. I anticipated that these understandings would involve the particular brand of feminism that my pupil participants would be aware of outside of school, such as Girlboss feminism.

Following the fall of the Labour government in 1979, a Conservative succession followed, led by Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher won with a significant majority as a result of her promises to "tame" the public sector's trade union power, and struck a chord with middle-class supporters as a result of her meritocratic outlook (Harvey, 2005, p. 58). Her terms as Prime Minister showcased her strong determination to privatise social housing, public utilities and core public services such as the National Healthcare Service (NHS) (Harvey, 2005). Meanwhile in the US, President Ronald

Reagan was elected to head a Republican government in 1980. Whilst Thatcher and Reagan had some political differences, there was strong commonality during this period politically between the US and the UK (Harvey, 2005). For example, Reagan was also strongly anti-union and shared a similar outlook on foreign policy to Thatcher (Harvey, 2005). Thatcher and Reagan first met in 1975, and soon bonded over their shared political outlooks and their desire to promote neoliberal values within their respective administrations (Harvey, 2005).

Neoliberalism can be defined as a late stage of capitalism that emerged as a result of the structural and economic changes during the 1970's (Duménil & Lévy, 2013). It favours a free-market approach to capitalism, as well as deregulation and reduction of government expenditure (Duménil & Lévy, 2013). Within Thatcher's desire to promote a neoliberal agenda in the UK during her time as Prime Minister, she had a particularly strong focus on the idea that the state is not responsible for looking after its people, and that anyone can succeed through hard work (widely known as meritocracy (Fox, 1956)) even without this level of support from the state (Harvey, 2005). This is of particular importance to remember when considering the origins of Girlboss feminism, as one of its key components is based upon women embracing an individualistic career-focused brand of feminism (Ewens, 2019). Mastrangelo defines Girlboss feminism as an emergent strand from neoliberal feminism, meaning that it has common values with neoliberal feminism, but also has key differences such as the environments in which it is co-opted and its target audience (2021). Both Girlboss feminism and neoliberal feminism equate feminist empowerment with financial success and are heavily individualised (Mastrangelo, 2021). Girlboss feminism also values a lack of work-life balance (favouring 'hustle culture') and encourages its participants to curate their digital and physical selves as 'brands' (Mastrangelo, 2021). In addition to encouraging 'feminists' to brand themselves, Girlboss feminism relies on engagement with representational politics and individualistic meritocratic aspiration to promote widespread interest in

conceptualising feminism in ways that are divorced from collective, intersectional struggle (Mastrangelo, 2021). Essentially, Girlboss feminism shares a common foundation with neoliberal feminism, but seeks to perpetuate existing inequalities that help maintain capitalism whilst 'challenging' patriarchy through its dominance in certain spaces, for example social media, in order to connect with a young, online audience.

In 2014 Sophia Amoruso, founder of clothing brand *Nasty Gal*, published her autobiography *#Girlboss*. This marked the beginning of use of the term 'Girlboss', and as a result grounds the popular form of Girlboss feminism firmly in its obsession with working women, women 'having it all' and becoming high-flyers in their working environments, which is all based on Amoruso's experiences of starting a well-known clothing brand from scratch. Whilst the origin of the term 'Girlboss' is an autobiography, the mobilisation of Girlboss feminism as an ideology by myself and other researchers allows for the application of its original terminology to form a wider academic concept. The mainstream popularity of this term (Girlboss) is a result of Amoruso's brand being named one of the fastest growing companies by Inc. Magazine in 2012 (Amoruso, 2014), which was followed by her being named one of the wealthiest self-made women in the world by Forbes (O'Connor, 2016). Amoruso's 'self-made' outlook and her successful rise to fame in the business world are key identifiers of Giriboss feminism.

Even after following a tumultuous period where Amoruso's brand *Nasty Gal* was forced to file for bankruptcy in 2017, she pivoted and founded *Girlboss Media* (Bahler, 2019). This new venture, *Girlboss Media*, could be considered as an even closer interpretation of the core values of Girlboss feminism. The company essentially creates content for typically millennial women to feel equipped to advance in their careers, for example editorial content, videos, podcasts and 'Girlboss Rallies': weekend-long retreats costing between $500-$1400 to attend (Bahler, 2019).

2.4.1: The Anatomy of a 'Girlboss'

When considering Amoruso's impact (by coining the term 'Girlboss'), Ewens (2019) observes that whilst the concept of being 'a Girlboss' and Girlboss feminism emerged in the 2010s, its neoliberal roots are almost certainly traceable to Thatcher and Reagan. Ewen notes that the stereotypical image of a 'Girlboss' is similar to: "The Working Woman of the Thatcher and Reagan era, strutting in wearing her power suit, had both the boss and the baby on a leash" (2019, para.2). Understanding this informed me as to what my participants might class as an 'empowered' woman, and how that might impact their readings of gender when discussing the 19th century novels they had been assigned for GCSE, due to the pervasive nature of Girlboss feminism and the notable progression in feminist thought since the beginning of liberalism. Social class and the image of meritocracy also play a part in the anatomy of Girlboss feminism. Both Amoruso and Thatcher derive from working class backgrounds which helps to solidify the image of self-sufficiency and the ability to overcome all obstacles through hard work. Maguire (2020) describes the 'Girlboss' as: "a powerful, if controversial, cultural icon" (p. 3). This described controversy highlights the view of Girlboss feminism being a hollow form of feminism by some feminists (Mastrangelo, 2021; Pierce, 2022 and Solow, 2017). Ewens (2019) notes that if a Girlboss is a multi-tasking woman who is able to balance a family and a career, that she is also guilty of being someone who "deceptively dissolves class without understanding or interacting with it" (para.3). Essentially, Girlboss feminism is divorced from intersecting forms of oppression, and that privilege (such as class privilege) deters Girlboss feminists from deeper social and political analysis.

Austin (2021) describes Girlboss feminism as a form of feminism that allows it to be 'marketable' for a mass audience . Therefore despite its mainstream popularity and cultural impact, Girlboss feminism's neoliberal origins dilute any radical political or progressive agendas that other forms of feminism include (for example Marxist or

Black feminism). In some ways, this mirrors 'Lean-In' values (Sandberg, 2013), as forms of oppression are reduced to being 'overcome' by putting effort in in the workplace and individualising wider social issues. However, Maguire (2020) explains that: "It's important to remember that girlbossing isn't feminism, it's capitalism. Girlboss rhetoric often works to propagate sexism, racism, and class elitism, among other forms of oppression." (p. 4). Despite this, Girlboss feminism is a mainstream form of so-called feminist thought for many, and 'girlbosses' and their attitudes towards what constitutes equality provides a fascinating lens for analysis (Maguire, 2020). My knowledge of this specific form of feminism through reading and encountering elements of it via social media allowed me to identify instances in my data where my participants' views were shaped by it. Additionally, it shaped my expectations prior to data collection that research involving discussions about gender and feminism relating to 19th century novels would reflect the understandings that my pupil participants would have. I will now explain how I identified my participants' levels of awareness about gender and feminism at the coding stage of this research, as a result of their possible exposure to Girlboss feminism prior to taking part in my study.

2.4.2: Exposure to Girlboss Feminism

When considering the mainstream popularity and awareness of Girlboss feminism, it is no surprise that it is highly prominent on social media platforms. This is where I, the researcher, encountered many of these ideas outside of data collection in my personal life. I therefore understood how these same ideas could be transmitted to my pupil participants. Social media plays a major role in modern life for many people, but a key demographic who have high levels of engagement with social media platforms are teenagers and young people. Ringrose (2010) notes how social media is highly influential and gendered in its content and how it is engaged with. This links to McRobbie's (1978) concept of the 'culture of femininity' that is

created by young girls, and how a key site for formation of gender identity is in girls'

bedrooms and houses through play and through interactions with peers. This key

site of the home environment also happens to be one associated with social media

usage amongst young girls and teenagers. Prolonged exposure to ideas on social

media, including ideas such as Girlboss feminism, helps to contribute towards what

becomes part of the constructed identity for individuals. In relation to my research,

the constructed identities of my pupil participants surfaced in the focus group

discussions concerning the 19th century novels they study when they revealed their

attitudes about gender. Understanding how these identities have been shaped and

what understandings of feminism and gender they might have is important to

contextualise their responses.

  Martin (2010) highlights that young children are actively involved in constructing

their own gender identities, and direct exposure to and interactions with ideas can

have a bigger and more lasting impact at certain stages. The construction of gender

identity therefore can be linked to the wider reaches of structures such as the media,

advertising, schooling and social media. Whilst these structures are unavoidable as

forms of influence on young people's identities, the ideas that they are exposed to

can still be viewed with a critical lens. Given the significant impact media has on youth

gender development, it is necessary to critically examine some of the key themes--

relevant to this thesis--that my pupil participants may be internalising. For example, in

the case of Girlboss feminism it could be considered bad to reduce women's

liberation and feminism to shallower and highly marketable traits such as "girl

power" (Taft, 2004). Girlboss feminism is heavily depoliticized and neoliberal in its

origins, and this is what may be influencing how girls perceive themselves and

feminism. Martin (2010) suggests that this can sometimes make feminism seem "no

longer necessary" (p. 136) as any struggle has long been concluded now that girls

and women "have it all" (p. 136). This specific understanding of feminist politics then

has the potential to decrease incentives for critical and political thought, thus

undermining possibilities in which girls might seek to establish identities independent of what a capitalist patriarchy presents via the 'girl power' self (Martin, 2010)- or the 'Girl Boss' (Amoruso, 2014).

   However, it is important to consider the positive influences social media can have on young people and on feminist activism. In addition to the negative influences that I have outlined, social media also presents potential sites of activism and resistance (Mendes et al., 2019). Therefore whilst I anticipated that my pupil participants may have fixed or limited perspectives on feminism, the literature shows that they will have been exposed to these ideas in the same manner as they might encounter more developed understandings.

2.4.3: Postfeminism

In some ways, Girlboss feminism shares commonalities with postfeminism. Gill (2007) describes 'postfeminist' sensibility, in which an individual might incorporate certain feminist ideals but also reject them simultaneously. McRobbie also discusses this particular paradox, where feminism is assumed as a base as well as resisted and rejected (2009, p. 1). Where they differ, however, is in their relationship to 'the body.' Press (2011) describes postfeminist thought as:

> Postfeminist sensibility, feminism is rejected by those who should 'know better', and thereby the rejection itself is made 'naughty' – which, in effect, sexualizes it or makes it pleasurable; and this leads to a certain fetishization of 'anti-feminist' symbols of femininity such as an objectified sexualization of women's bodies, a militantly 'feminine' appearance, etc. (p.117)

This shows that whilst postfeminism also prioritises the neoliberal self in the same manner as Girlboss feminism, postfeminism has an overt link to bodily self-expression and sexuality while Girlboss feminism does not. Postfeminism seeks to make feminist politics more compatible with and palatable to the neoliberal self (Gill, 2008; McRobbie, 2009; Press, 2011). The ties to the body encompass third-wave feminism's (which responds to the theoretical issues of the second wave through an intersectional and multi-perspectival version of feminism, and emphasises an inclusive and non-judgmental approach (Snyder, 2008)) outlook of women having

the choice to be sex-positive and embracing of their sexualities. As a result of this focus on the body, Press highlights that postfeminism "makes it naturally economically compatible with a consumer society which offers a plethora of products to a liberal self concerned with self-expression through the mode of an ever-more-perfectible appearance." (2011, p. 118). As the third wave encouraged women to express themselves as "sex-objects" if they so choose (Press, 2011, p. 117), the choice to do so in a postfeminist world is accompanied by a seemingly endless supply of products and procedures to aid with this. This consumer culture ties in with neoliberalism and capitalism, as the body is viewed as something that "must be continually constructed and transformed, that it is endlessly perfectible, and that it must be continually policed to maintain this perfection" (Press, 2011, p.118). With Girlboss feminism, the focus is less on the body and more on the idea of the self. As I have previously outlined in the literature, the 'self' is expected to balance a successful career alongside hobbies (sometimes referred to as 'side hustles') in order to be a 'good feminist'. This form of 'liberation' relies on engaging with capitalism in order to ward off the consequences of patriarchy.

   Additionally, postfeminism ignores the criticisms of the second wave (categorised broadly as including three or four branches of feminism: liberal, socialist, radical, and sometimes cultural feminism, and the beginnings of antiracist feminism (Thompson, 2002)) in having a high amount of focus on self-worth through self-image and the body (Press, 2011). Postfeminism accepts that some of the ideals of the second wave (e.g women's empowerment, autonomy, the chance to have a career, and sexual and emotional lifestyles) are valid (Press, 2011), but at the same time takes them for granted and at times even rejects them (McRobbie, 2009). Feminist scholars would argue that this means feminism has 'moved on' (Press, 2011), but postfeminism shows that there are still similarities with the second wave with added elements of consumerism. Press notes that "Feminists today, therefore,

are much more embedded in consumer society and its ideals than were feminists of a generation ago" (2011, p. 118). Postfeminism combines this consumerist element with maintenance of the perspectives that 'universalize' upper-middle-class, white heterosexual women (Press, 2011).

Girlboss feminism shares the emphasis of the narrative of the upper-middle-class, white heterosexual women, but also encourages others to embrace it through false meritocratic promises. In Girlboss feminism, consumerism is not the main event. Instead, it is the view that labour is liberating for women. There, Girlboss feminism engages with capitalism similarly to postfeminism, but there are key differences that classify the different strands. The knowledge of this particular configuration of feminist thought encompasses the ways in which many young girls and women think and act today as a result of its popularity and virality (especially on social media). Understanding the different types of feminist thought that my pupil participants are exposed to and consider as their foundations of theory informed how I coded their ideas about gender in the 19th century novels they studied as well as how to assess their views on the social and historical conditions for the women characters they encountered.

2.5: Conclusion

The aim of this literature review chapter has been to provide essential background on similar studies to mine, therefore putting my research in its context. In addition to this, I have also defined some key terms and covered some of the theoretical models and frameworks that I anticipated I would go on to use in the analysis chapters later in this thesis.

This chapter facilitated the contextualisation of my thesis within existing research involving reading with girls and exploring girls' experiences of reading. Since there is

no research that specifically explores girls' reading of gender in 19th century GCSE texts, this section highlights how my thesis addresses a gap in the literature. Discussions with girls about texts they read can provide rich understandings of their perspectives concerning gender. I have provided examples of current research involving reading with girls, and shown that there is a gap of focus on 19th century texts in contrast to other elements of the National Curriculum for English. I have explored some of the ways that ideas about power, gender and feminism could manifest in my data. I also introduced part of my theoretical framework that I used to conduct my analysis later in this thesis. This chapter closed with a historical overview of the development of the concept of Girlboss feminism (Ewens, 2019). I outlined the differences between Girlboss feminism and postfeminism, as well as the ways in which my pupil participants may have been exposed to these ideas. Knowledge of the specific form of Girlboss feminism and its assumed prominence in the lives of my pupil participants presents a potential model foundation of their understandings of feminism.

In the following chapter, I will outline the political context in the UK of the National Curriculum, and then go on to discuss the role that forms of culture play in text selection for GCSE English. I will then discuss Cox's Five Models of English (1991) and highlight which elements are present in the current model of English teaching associated with fulfilling the requirements of the National Curriculum. Following this, I link the neglected elements of Cox's Five Models of English (1991) to Bowles & Gintis' theory of the Hidden Curriculum (1976a; 2011b) to provide important theoretical context ahead of my analysis later in this thesis. I then conclude the literature review, before discussing my methodology.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1: Introduction

This chapter will place the National Curriculum for English in its historical context and show how its current form has developed over time. I then go on to discuss the role that forms of culture play in text selection for GCSE English, and the background of the English literary canon. I then explore research relating to the teaching and reception of pre-twentieth century literature with pupils. This relates to my decision to focus my research specifically on 19th century novels used as GCSE English text choices. It also relates to RQ 3: *What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in class?*. To provide the reader with a base of understanding for the novels which feature in my pilot study and main study, I discuss Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr.Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886a; 2012b), Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843a; 2018b) and H.G Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898a; 2017b).

Following this, I will outline and discuss Cox's (1991) Five Models of English, highlighting which elements are present in the current model of English teaching associated with fulfilling the requirements of the National Curriculum. Subsequent to this, I combine the elements which I perceive to be neglected of Cox's Five Models of English (1991) to Bowles & Gintis' theory of the Hidden Curriculum (1976a; b, 2011). Finally, I conclude this chapter and the literature review as a whole, before presenting my methodology.

3.2: The Political Context

There are several avenues to explore thoroughly that provide background to my research. The following will provide an insight into the political landscapes that existed prior to having a National Curriculum, and the impact that the implementation of a National Curriculum for English had on English teaching at GCSE level. I also discuss some of the changes that have occurred within the

English Literature component of the National Curriculum at GCSE level. Whilst this thesis has a strong focus on the current curriculum for English Literature, it is important to examine the origins of not only having a set curriculum in place, but also who is responsible for creating it. In addition to the following, Goodwyn (2021) provides an interesting and comprehensive summary of the teaching of subject English which could be valuable for extra historical context.

The 1944 Education Act was the main influence for English education during the 1950s up until the early 1960s (Ali, Benjamin & Mautherner, 2004). This informal curriculum was based on pre and inter-war ideas of ethnically homogenous and classed societal requirements, instead of the developing post-war awareness composed of more liberal social ideas (Ali, Benjamin & Mautherner, 2004). Because of this, it would be fair to say that the informal curriculum reinforced the status quo and existing social and economic inequalities, and served the purpose of maintaining a structured and "hierarchical labour market" (Ali et al., 2004,p.124). During this time, all literature that was taught was at the discretion of teachers and local education authorities, and often based on which public examination syllabuses were chosen by each school (House of Commons, 2009). Two of the main criticisms of the literature canon—beginning in the 1940s and lasting until the 1960s—were that it was male-dominated, which meant that important women writers were extremely neglected, and that the corpus was dominated by white writers (Cox,1991). This is also the case in the present day, where maleness and whiteness reinforce the informal curriculum and reflect the dominant groups of society.

3.2.1 : The Great Tradition

Teaching ideology during the period following the 1960s is noted by Brian Cox (1991) to have mainly focussed on the ideas of literary critic and Cambridge professor F. R Leavis, who had been active since the 1930s. Leavis was mostly

concerned with a "great tradition" (Cox, 1991, p. 75) in the English canon, but was also very aware of the responsibility of good English teaching for literature and language to best equip pupils to be able to identify propaganda and be critical of texts that they encountered, to have the ability to "discriminate and resist" (Leavis, 1943, p.3). Leavis' *The Great Tradition* (1948a; 2011b) prioritised four authors to be noted as especially good for teaching the connection between literature and morality: Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad (Leavis,1948a; 2011b). The selection of a small corpus of "traditional" texts has origins in Leavis' ideas, but Leavis was never a gatekeeper for what should and should not be included for students to study. All four of the previously listed authors are still highly respected, with Austen long holding a place on the National Curriculum to this day, as well as multiple film adaptations (Sadoff, 2009). I will go into more detail about forms of culture and the canon in Chapter 3, Section 3 of this thesis.

  Ultimately, the Leavis programme was labelled as not broad enough or aware of the social and political issues of the 1970s (Cox, 1991). This led to a re-imagining of the curriculum for English in the 1970s by a Labour government. Eagleton (1996) writes that the issue with attempting to reach a single definition of 'good' literature is that everyone will have a differing opinion, as such classification is highly subjective. Whilst some may accept Leavis (2011) for his preferences on close reading and ideals of English literature as a means to resist fascism, Eagleton (1996) highlights that the authors he chose to hold above all others are based on his social constructs and ideologies, and that there is a heavy reliance on an almost singular definition of traditional literature for teaching practice. This does not necessarily imply that Eagleton disagrees with Leavis, but is instead noting that any singular definition of "good" literature will have the same issues. With this considered, I did not feel it appropriate or necessary to focus my research on constructing a literary canon that I felt would be the best to teach. Instead, my research connects the texts themselves

with the ways in which they are taught, and what the relationships and experiences of learning these texts were for my participants.

3.2.2 : The Kingman, Cox and Swann Reports

In the late 1980s, the succeeding Conservative government created two committees to advise and plan the teaching of English (Cox, 1991), which then went on to produce the Kingman and Cox reports. The Kingman report mainly focused on language teaching and was aimed at teachers (HMSO, 1988a). The Cox report centred on the teaching of English as a whole subject, including the literature component (HMSO, 1989). Both of these reports, Brian Cox notes, were "not welcomed by leading right-wing Conservatives" (1991, p. 1). This is potentially due to the framing of English as a tool for social mobility and social justice, which goes above and beyond learning English for purely cultural preservation and nationalistic reasons.

Following the resistance to these ideas from the Conservative government, the first major government report to look at concerns affecting educational attainment of ethnic minority pupils was commissioned in the form of the Swann Report (HMSO, 1985). Whilst this report was aimed at addressing and identifying educational inequalities for ethnic minority pupils, the report is relevant to include in this literature review due to its findings concerning the teaching of English. One of the key findings of the Swann report was that a good grasp of English was fundamental for an individual to be academically successful, to have equality of opportunity and to participate as a full member of society (HMSO, 1985). Essentially, the report highlighted that English was more than a subject concerned with traditional culture and English heritage; it was a tool with the potential to empower. Cox (1991) agreed with these findings, writing that: "All children should be enabled to attain a full

command of the English language, both spoken and written. Otherwise they will be disadvantaged, not only in their study of other subjects, but also in their working life." (p. 95). This will be important to note in Chapter 3, Section 4 of this thesis when I go into detail about Cox's Five Models of English (1991).

A key element of the Swann Report was its call for 'Education for All', which was a revolutionary new attitude towards teaching and the curriculum that presented more sophisticated and differentiated research findings concerning differential educational achievement (Modood & May, 2001). Similar to the Kingman and Cox reports, the Swann Report did not get much support from the Conservative government or their Education Minister Sir Keith Joseph. This context informs my study in regards to what sort of experiences of teaching English my staff participants will share as a result of Conservative educational policies. For example, although there has been (and continues to be) evidence of inequalities in how the educational system works, I anticipate issues behind these inequalities such as access to funding and resources will surface in the responses from my staff participants.

3.2.3 : Education for All

When considering 'Education for All' in relation to the National Curriculum for English Literature, the core selection of texts in schools that are examined for GCSE's or their equivalents remains largely unaltered since a National Curriculum was introduced in 1988. More recent reforms have focused on examination formats instead of the specifics of what is being taught (OFQUAL, 2013). Alexander (2008) argues that changes to the curriculum in England are founded by political expectations of employable skills and standards for pupils, and often neglect pedagogy. There have been multiple debates and discussions about what should be taught as part of the National Curriculum, for English literature and other subjects

(Maunder, 2011; Braw, 2014 and Coles, 2012). This thesis does not situate itself in those debates about which texts are "better" or which texts "don't belong". Instead, my research focuses on the experiences of girls who study the texts that are prescribed, and the ways in which the teaching of those texts influences their readings of gender and engagements with the texts.

In 1991 Cox called for a National Curriculum for English that would "bring about revolutionary changes in the schools, and indeed have some influence on our national character" (p. 152). Cox did not suggest a censorship of what texts would be taught within these changes, but instead placed emphasis on the values taught as part of English education and the skills that young people need to be taught in English. In line with Cox, my study will not result in a final recommendation of texts that I view as the best to teach, and will instead explore through the accounts of my pupil and staff participants which values and concepts are taught relating to gender.

The following section of this literature review will examine and explore the literary canon. This will provide context of the wider debate beyond the scope of my research, and situate this thesis in not being concerned with the contents of the canon but instead with the reasons behind the canon and priorities of English teaching practice.

3.3 : Forms of Culture

Culture is a key theme that runs through the heart of the text selection for the National Curriculum for English Literature. This manifests in a variety of ways, for example F.R Leavis' *Great Tradition* (1948a; 2011b) or ex-Education Secretary Michael Gove's cry for 'British Values' when axing certain novels from the text selection for the GCSE in English Literature (Gove, 2014). Whilst the push for culture to be a key aspect of corpus selection takes on many forms, it is important to

examine why this is the case, and teacher perspectives are invaluable in unpacking this. As a result, I designed my study to capture the views of my teacher participants in order to address RQ 3 *What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in class?.*

The debate concerning text selection spans further than the realm of academia and research, and surfaced as a priority for the Coalition (2010) then Conservative (2015) Governments in the United Kingdom. In 2014 the Secretary for Education Michael Gove pushed for several American texts to be purged from the GCSE syllabus, including John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Tait, 2017). Despite the texts being popular with pupils and teachers (Kennedy, 2014), they were removed under the guise of meeting the Department for Education's standards that students should study a range of 'high quality' texts, including at least one play by Shakespeare, at least one nineteenth century novel and a selection of poetry from the British Isles from 1914 onwards (Department for Education, 2013).

This decision received strong media attention, showcasing both support and resistance to Gove's actions. Originally Gove decided to brand those who did not agree with his decision as "culture warriors" (Gove, 2014) and wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* that the claims that he would be looking to eliminate certain texts were "rooted in fiction" (Gove, 2014). He defended future actions as looking to approach exam boards for a broader, not narrower, selection of books available to study for GCSE (Gove, 2014). In the same article the then- director of Education and Learning for Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) Paul Dodd accused Gove of letting his personal literature preferences influence his important policy decisions (Gove, 2014).

In more recent years, the Conservative government has both valued and devalued

the arts at the same time. The 'levelling-up' scheme proposed by former Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries will rely on more than £70 million to be cut and redistributed across the UK (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022), but whilst this seeks to solve imbalance of the distribution of arts funding the scheme relies on cuts to generate this money and does not call for much-needed additional investment. This strategy allows the Conservatives to save money, but also gives the perception of wanting to support a more equal funding of the arts. Since the Conservative government came into power in the 2010 general election, they have overseen a halving of local funding and spending for the arts (Andrews, 2022). Additionally, Perry (2019) notes that due to neoliberal reforms in education, teaching focus has been encouraged to become narrow and functional, especially for subject English. Perry argues that the main purposes of developments in English teaching are to meet "the perceived requirements of the National Strategies, Ofsted (the government schools inspectorate) and the various examination boards" (2017, p. 248). Perry also observes that these recent developments are a result of the Conservative government's mistrust and resulting distancing from university-led research, most explicitly expressed by ex-Education Minister Michael Gove and his "loud comments about the educational establishment." (2017, p. 248). The result of the Conservative's focus on the cultural value of English education creates a system that prioritises the "idea of the grandiose value of literature to be studied in schools" (Goodwyn, 2012, p.213) which results in the rigid nature of forms of assessment which are not necessarily fit for purpose (as will be outlined by my staff participants later in this thesis).

3.3.1 : 'Good' Literature

The idea that certain books 'belong' where others do not (in this circumstance, on the National Curriculum) can be traced back to F.R Leavis' *Great Tradition* (1948a; 2011b), or indeed to Bloom's *Western Canon* (1995). When considering what is classed as 'good' literature, there is an instinctive value judgement of certain texts over others. For example, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) or Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1886) might trigger an acknowledgement of serious literary value, even if the individual has not actually read the aforementioned texts. There is a base level of understanding that texts like these are lengthy, complex works of art, but also that they compose part of a canon of literature that showcases the 'very best' of Western Culture (Bloom, 1995; Tait, 2017).

In contrast to this, when considering widely-read works such as Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* (2005) or Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games Trilogy* (2008), it is their very popularity that excludes them from membership in the canon. Tait (2017) highlights that texts like these are simply "considered something else" (p. 217). When a text has the "something else" (Tait, 2017) label associated with it, it is also implied that the text cannot belong as part of the curricular canon. Olive (2015) summarises Gove's speech that took place at the University of Cambridge on liberal education which provides further context to this mind-set:

> He unfavourably compared William Gladstone's penchant for talking Shakespeare, Virgil and Dryden with labourers and miners to Tony Blair's reference in the House of Commons to the soap opera *Coronation Street*. He then proceeded to criticise Gordon Brown's declaration to the public that he is a fan of the Sheffield indie-rock band, *The Arctic Monkeys*...for Gove, it would seem, to admit knowledge, let alone enjoyment, of popular culture, or advocate that it had a role in public life and education, is to confess ignorance, childishness and general bad taste. (p. 5)

The above shows that a text's popularity does not allow it to qualify to be part of the curriculum. Additionally, it highlights that Gove's views are representative of the

notion that appearing as 'cultural' is only the case when associated with "high culture"', and engaging with and enjoyment of "low", or "pop", culture such as Meyer's *Twilight Saga* (2005) is something to be hidden and not celebrated or showcased on a National Curriculum.

Williams (1993) defines high culture as encompassing "cultural objects of aesthetic value, which a society collectively esteem as exemplary art" (p. 91). Herbert Gans links the definitions of different forms of culture with socio-economic and educational classes, and notes that each should appeal to their respective members (1978). This is where the intersection between class and culture can be observed most clearly. Often when the term is used in a critical manner, high culture is contrasted against terms such as "low culture", "popular" or "pop culture" and "mass culture". Whilst high culture is viewed as the ideal to source curricular content from, T. S. Eliot (1948)noted that both high culture and low/popular culture are necessary to benefit society as a whole. F. R Leavis defined high culture as being embodied by the Western canon of literature (1948a; 2011b). Leavis' link between high culture and the canon is reflected in the National Curriculum, with the inclusion of "genuine timeless classics" (Tait, 2017, p. 217). Gove's choices for the National Curriculum for English Literature could therefore have been rooted in a mission to best represent a snapshot of English culture, but his attitudes concerning certain texts do not display the balance that T.S. Eliot argued to be beneficial to wider society.

Additionally, Gove's attacks on popular texts showed that he possessed awareness about what they were. In 2013 Gove stated that: "Stephanie Meyer cannot hold a flaming pitch torch to George Eliot. There is a Great Tradition of English Literature- a canon of transcendent works- and Breaking Dawn [*Breaking Dawn* is the final book in the *Twilight* series, a Young Adult romance series that's widely popular with young girls] is not part of it" (Tait, 2017, p. 214). Gove's attack

on popular literature and popular culture provides an example of the ways in which

cultural products which are popular amongst young women and girls are viewed as

low on the cultural hierarchy (Huyssen,1986; Modleski, 1986). Gove could have

named many other examples in his attack on popular texts, but instead chose to

reinforce a cultural hierarchy of tastes which poorly positions feminine culture

(Strong, 2009). Driscoll notes that 'middlebrow' literary culture has eight main

features: it is middle class, feminised, reverential towards elite literature,

commercial, emotional, recreational, earnest and mediated (2014). The trait of it

being 'feminised' links to the assumption that things women (and indeed, young

women) enjoy are therefore not 'high culture'. Bourdieu highlights that taste (such as

Gove's) is not only related to personal preference, but also helps to strengthen

societal power relations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Essentially, that the cultural

tastes of the rich and powerful are viewed as deserving of widespread inclusion and

representation, and cultural outputs associated with the less powerful are "low

culture". Bourdieu uses the term symbolic violence:

> Every power to exert symbolic violence, i.e. every power which manages to
> impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power
> relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to
> those power relations. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p.4)

Gove's association of culture closely associated with girlhood as "low culture"

links to the image of the teenage girl as "an uncritical, overly emotional consumer of

culture" (Strong, 2009, p. 3). This is an example of Bourdieu's symbolic violence

which helps reproduce power relations between men and women, but also

reinforces social class structures and legitimises certain forms of culture to be

superior to others (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). (Additionally, 'high' culture which is

viewed as superior enables privileged members of society to possess cultural capital

(Bourdieu, 1986)). This is an occurrence in many cultural and recreational spaces

for girls and women, Slusser (2021) reflects on the same phenomenon occurring in the context of the music scene: "When we pressure young girls to abandon the cultural spaces geared toward them and encourage them to take on more "mature" interests or hobbies, we are…invalidating them for their interests" (p.1). Whilst Slusser's thoughts concern the gatekeeping of specific bands, they also relate to the gatekeeping of what is viewed as 'culturally valuable'. This invalidation has clear ties with cultural outputs associated with women and girls and 'girlhood'. This does not stop these cultural outputs (music, texts, art) from being enjoyed and popular, but wider societal pressures from leading figures such as Gove cause these to be labelled as lower forms of culture. In relation to my study, I will be actively seeking the cultural opinions from my pupil participants about the literature they enjoy, but also will encourage them to make any links or comparisons they desire between the 'high culture' 19th century texts they study and anything else (which may include 'low' or middlebrow culture artefacts).

3.3.2 : The Canon and The Curriculum

As demonstrated above, the issue with insisting the National Curriculum is based on 'culture' is that there is such a mix of views about what is the 'culture' in question. Harris (1979) notes that you have some people who interpret that to mean socialising the young and immersing them in culture that they will enjoy and build upon, but others will want the curriculum to be concerned with what is 'best' or 'most valuable' (Harris,1979, p. 59). Additionally, culture is not a static entity immune to any form of change, therefore deciding what counts as high culture at one point does not mean that the same label can be applied as time goes by. Harris (1979) suggests that we should adopt a more flexible definition of culture, or 'fluid culture' to allow for these changes. The aim of subject English should not be to belittle the

enjoyment that students have of certain texts, but instead to equip them with the skills to fully understand and interpret what they are reading. (This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, section 4).

In 2010 Gove publicly expressed his personal preferences for the shape of the National Curriculum in a speech, stating that British literature is "the best in the world" and that every British child had the birth right to learn about "the great tradition of our literature - Dryden, Pope, Swift, Keats, Shelley, Austen, Dickens and Hardy" (Tait, 2017, p. 213). The similarities between Gove's personal tastes being reflected in the National Curriculum for English and the *Great Tradition* (1948a; 2011b) origins of the canon are clear to see. Olive notes that the names Gove proposed are almost exclusively white and male, and dead for over 200 years (Olive, 2013). This pattern is something reflected in other areas of the curriculum, and even reaches as far as some university syllabuses, but the reasons why are similar in nature. Elliott (2017) focuses on the debate concerning the authors of the texts which are often included and idealised in curriculum discourse, concluding that there are often authors that are included for the sake of tradition. Where Elliott's (2017) research focuses on exploring the nature of the English canon, my research will have a specific focus on the themes within the texts and the opinions of the students and their teachers about the themes and characters within. I encouraged my participants to share details about other texts they enjoy reading, and allowed them to draw similarities to the 'high culture' novels they read from other forms of culture which they enjoy outside of school without judgement.

3.3.3: The Canon as Colonial

In addition to the misogynistic connotations of the ways in which certain forms of culture are valued, there is also a colonial angle to consider. Hartnell (2014) outlines the importance of the texts that Gove was set on axing for their key themes and messages that had the potential to educate for more progressive and tolerant views that embrace difference during a time where the right was ever-rising in Europe. She wrote that "Gove and his colleagues at the Department for Education are fantasising about a nation unencumbered by racial or cultural difference, or calls for greater social and economic equality" (2014, p. 1). Hartnell therefore considers Gove's list as lacking diversity, but also highlights that the justification of 'British Values' by Gove and his colleagues romanticised colonial attitudes. The association of 'British Values' with certain forms of culture feeds into what Hartnell terms as a "poisonous atmosphere" (id.) and distracts from the real priorities of English teaching: engaging students in reading and equipping them with the tools to succeed once their time in education is finished (Cox,1991).

The contents of the National Curriculum and the valuing of high culture over other forms of culture contributes to a colonial domino-effect on the ways in which the ideals of 'good' literature has been exported as a result of its prioritisation in the UK. Tait (2017) observes that "because we deemed cricket, Chaucer and herringbone uniforms to constitute the very fabric of a good education, it was obviously only natural that people in India would too" (p. 351). This shows the impact of valuing certain forms of culture over others on pupils in the UK, but also how placing a high value on certain categories of literature, music, art for example, reinforces this as a worldview.

Whilst I do not situate my own research in the wider debate about what a National

Curriculum should include, it is important to provide the context about its contents and attitudes towards different forms of culture (with a focus on literature). The labelling of certain forms of literature has a direct impact on how pupils discuss their reading habits both inside and outside of school. The reading of and response to literature is a dominant feature of subject English (Gordon, 2021). Teachers have a level of agency alongside the text choices that their exam boards prescribe in line with the National Curriculum to frame how they discuss literature with their pupils (id). For the majority of pupils, reading outside of school can be solitary and will not necessarily be centred on 'the classics' they are expected to read in school (id). Teachers guide classroom discussions concerning examined texts, allowing pupils to have a space to voice their reactions and thoughts to texts, which in a way mimics an introduction to literary-critical discourse (id). I asked my pupil participants about what they read outside of school, and encouraged dialogues about their 'non-high culture' reading habits alongside the discussion of the 19th century novel they read in school. Based on the previously outlined literature, I correctly anticipated that the culture debate impacted on my participants' feelings about reading and what they are reading in our discussions. I will now provide an overview of research relating to the teaching and reception of pre-twentieth century literature with pupils, having established why the National Curriculum for English Literature includes it as a focal teaching point.

3.3.4: Pre-Twentieth Century Literature in the Classroom

As outlined previously in this literature review, 19th century literature is one of the key teaching and assessment focuses within the National Curriculum for English. Pike's (2003) three-year longitudinal case study of 13–16-year-olds reading canonical texts examined secondary school-aged students studying English Literature, as well as the "curricular value of literature written in England before 1900" (p.356). Pike (2003) notes that whilst works in the canon can present

educators (and pupils) with "a significant challenge" (p.359), that their inclusion in the National Curriculum allows teachers to enable pupils to discover "literature of other generations" (p.359). The students/participants in Pike's (2003) research were only enthusiastic about pre-twentieth century literature when there was "sufficient quality" (p.366) of teaching and potential to engage with historical and literary context. Essentially, there was a requirement for the ways in which texts were delivered and supported in the present (classroom) to illuminate connections with the past. Pike (2003) noted that when this initial step was handled well, that it had the potential to "provide the motivation for further exploration" (p. 366) for pupils.

Building on the ways in which the teaching of pre-twentieth century literature should aim to connect pupils with context to better understand and engage with set texts, Naylor (2013) explored the teaching of early modern poetry via a pilot study composed of a teacher and four pupils. Naylor's (2013) teacher participant noted that she aimed to "trigger the connection between the pupils' ideas and the poems" (p.71) and that her teaching practice centred on "empowering the pupils to contribute and in valuing the validity of what they said" (p.71). Naylor (2013) observed that her teacher participant was able to elicit engagement from her pupils through attentive strategy, which often meant revisiting and reviewing lines of poetry in order for the pupils to understand and connect with the text. As a result of this attention to detail, Naylor (2013) noted that pupils were "able to relate areas of their own experience to the sonnet, such as dealing with death and loss" (p.77). This instance, as well as others in research, supports Stevens' (2007) outlook when working with classics. In his book, *Draw your own conclusions: Teaching pre-twentieth century poetry in an arts context*, Stevens argues that pre-twentieth century poetry is best taught through an artistic lens. Stevens (2007) agrees with Eisner that context (historical, biographical and artistic) allows a reader to look at a text with more care and to build better understandings and connections with texts,

and that providing good context allows for the showing of "how the lives and times which gave rise to poetry in the first place were not after all so very different from the present in terms of anxieties and liberating possibilities" (p.56). This was evident in Naylor's (2013) findings, in which her teacher participant ensured that her pupils were engaged when constructing their meanings of their assigned poem through her attention to detail and inclusion of important and illuminating context.

Lally (2019) explored the teaching of nineteenth century set texts in an Australian senior secondary school context. Lally (2019) created a systematic literature review, which provided an overview of engaging pedagogies for the teaching of literature. The majority of studies included examples of using digital and online formats and content in order to support the learning of nineteenth century literature, but Lally (2019) also noted how vital context and historical background are when teaching in order to allow students to draw "direct links" (p.4) between the texts they encounter and the real world. Indeed, with texts which are around 100-200 years old, Lally (2019) highlights that language choices, setting, and complex themes require a base of historical and contextual knowledge for the students who are navigating them.

In a US context, Gatti (2011) worked with some of her secondary school students by having discussions when teaching a 19th century literature module about their expectations and understandings of historical context surrounding the novels they were studying. Whilst her focus was on US 19th century fiction, Gatti's (2011) justification of approaching 19th century literature in this manner in her teaching practice mirrors research and debates more relevant to the British context of my own research and other research discussed in this thesis. Gatti noted that the inclusion of historical and cultural context enables educators to "contextualize texts in more interesting and robust ways" (p.48), as well as offers opportunities to "engage (our) students with the controversial and fiery debates around the canon" (p.48). Gatti's (2011) students were receptive to the discussions she included in the

English classroom, and she observed their willingness to delve deeper into the texts they studied and independently contribute historical and contextual knowledge as a result.

Judith Baxter noted in Chapter 2 of Andrew Goodwyn's *Literary & Media Texts in Secondary English* (1998) that one of the dangers of teaching pre-twentieth century texts is where fiction has the potential to be taught in a "superficial and piecemeal way…(unless there is a tender love and care from a teacher)" which results in pupils "failing to appreciate the full social context, generic links and histories of such texts" (p.28). This connection with context is embodied though one of Cox's (1991) Five Models for English, which I will now provide more detail on in the following section. These provide a theoretical framework and conceptual tools to understand how pupils engage with texts, and highlight what different elements of English teaching can look like.

3.4 : Cox's Models & the Hidden Curriculum

The following will provide important background concerning Cox's Five Models (1991). It will explore the specific elements of each of the Five Models (Cox, 1991) and draw out the ways in which certain models are included or excluded from the teaching of subject English in the present day. After detailing Cox's Five Models (1991) I then proceed to an outline of the concept of Hidden Curriculum (Bowles & Gintis,1976a; 2011b) with a specific focus on the way that knowledge is transmitted in compulsory education. This section concludes with a summary of ideas discussed to provide a clear foundation for my research and theories which I use for analysis later in this thesis.

3.4.1 : Cox's Models

In 1989 Cox and a committee of English experts called for a National Curriculum for English inclusive of their Five Models of English (HMSO, 1989). The historical political background to this concerning the creation of a National Curriculum has already been discussed in Chapter 3, Section 2. These models were titled 'personal growth', 'cross-curricular', 'adult needs', 'cultural heritage' and 'cultural analysis' (HMSO, 1989). Each model provides a vital skill or perspective for students of subject English. For example, 'personal growth' involves learning to be creative and imaginative with language; it centres the student and emphasises the relationship between language and learning in the individual, as well as highlights the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives (HMSO, 1989). The 'cross-curricular' view outlines how much English influences pupil performance in other subjects and emphasises that teachers have a level of responsibility to help their students with the language-concerned demands of different school subjects that appear on the curriculum. Essentially, this model focuses on the school itself (HMSO, 1989). The 'adult needs' view describes English as a lifelong requirement, and that English teachers have an element of duty to prepare pupils for the ways in which they will need to use their language skills upon leaving compulsory schooling, which includes tasks such as applying for jobs, filling out paperwork, and engaging politically (HMSO, 1989). 'Cultural heritage' is the view that focuses on the need for English culture to be celebrated in text selection, and that schools should endeavour to provide a platform to enable appreciation of English literature for students (HMSO, 1989). Finally, the view of 'cultural analysis' portrays the role of English as a tool for helping pupils work towards a critical understanding of the world around them and the ways that meaning can be analysed and conveyed (HMSO, 1989). The 'cultural analysis' view is also crucial in enabling students to understand and interpret media and print media in addition to the texts that they encounter during

their time at school, as it facilitates the ability to form a deeper knowledge about the ways in which media can carry and promote certain values (Goodwyn, 2010).

3.4.2: Cox's Models Today

Despite Cox's Five Models (HMSO, 1989) of English being coined just over 30 years ago, they can still be argued to be extremely relevant for addressing the needs of students in English classrooms today. For example, Gardner (2017) highlights that the Five Models were based on teachers' views of the subject, and that their perspectives were informed by what would benefit students the most. In Gardner's comparison of the English and Australian curricula for English Literature, both were found to have the same level of attention given to the 'personal growth' (15%) and 'cross curricular' (1%) models (2017). The reduction in priority given to the 'personal growth' model shows a sharp decline since Goodwyn's (1992) study, whereas teachers showed a strong preference for the inclusion of the 'personal growth' model in their practice. This shows evidence of a strong shift in the levels of inclusion that Cox's models have in the National Curriculum. Therefore, subject English is strongly focused on the study of literature, and this literature aligns with the Cultural Heritage model (HMSO, 1989) as a result of the Conservative government's obsession with 'high culture' literature. This prioritisation, combined with the ways in which assessments are structured, has a negative impact on how pupils can engage with literature and thus, diminishes the level of positive impact it can have (Goodwyn, 2012). Additionally, the priority placed on reading Great English Literature (Eagleton,1975; Mathieson, 1975) resonates strongly with the Cultural Heritage model (HMSO, 1989). Of all of Cox's Models, Cultural Heritage (HMSO, 1989) manifests the clearest within the priorities for subject English. It could be argued that this is a result of the Conservative Government's occupation with 'high culture' and desire to incorporate 'British Values' through the inclusion of canonical works in the National Curriculum (Tait, 2017)

Gardner (2017) also found that the English curriculum gave no explicit attention to

the 'adult needs' view. This confirms Alexander's (2008) criticisms of the English curriculum, which argues that the reductionist model that has been adopted does not extend to the teaching of decontextualized skills. In contrast to this, the 'cultural heritage' model was found to be prioritised in the English curriculum by Gardner (2017). He notes that whilst there was a stronger emphasis on 'cultural heritage' than some of the other models, that there is "no mention of cross-cultural literature" (p. 183) resulting in the representation of 'cultural heritage' being "narrow in both scope and content" (p. 184). This reflects Ball's (2013) classification of the English curriculum being composed of "traditional subjects and canonical knowledge…a curriculum of…eternal certainties" (p. 19). Kalantzis et al. (2016) observe that a curriculum full of "old basics" (p. 3) reflects the nature of the society of which learners are a part. They note that this line of thinking causes citizens to be more complacent with "received authority" (p. 3), which is incidentally something that Cox's 'critical literacy' model helps to improve. Therefore, although Cox's Models are not the only possible way to categorise the different elements of teaching subject English, they do provide a broad overview of the key areas that English should seek to equip students with.

Goodwyn (1992a; 2008b) reflects that the initial response to Cox's Five Models (HMSO, 1989) was extremely positive from both The National Association for the Teaching of English (or NATE) as well as teachers of English generally. Goodwyn's (1992a; 2008b) research focused on the views of teachers following some changes to the National Curriculum which had origins in Cox's ideas. Whilst Goodwyn (1992a; 2008b) noted that their sample and study was by no means a complete picture to represent all teachers of English, their findings have three key elements which I will now outline. Firstly, the response to whether English teachers should use all five models in their teaching was an "almost unanimous agreement" with "the majority of responses being strong agreements" (Goodwyn, 1992a; 2008b, p. 6)

Secondly, whilst all Five Models (HMSO, 1989) were viewed as important, 'personal

growth' was recognised as the one that should be prioritised in English teaching, but not that it necessarily was treated as such on the National Curriculum (Goodwyn, 1992a; 2008b). Thirdly, that 'cultural analysis' ranked as the second most important feature of subject English, but that there was a discrepancy between how valued it was by English teachers and how prominently it featured in their teaching as dictated by the curriculum. It should be noted, however, that this was thought to be slightly improved by the time that students reached the study of A Level English (id).

Goodwyn's (1992a; 2008b) findings help to form a base of understanding in advance of addressing my RQ 3*: What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in class?.* Understanding teachers' pre-existing attitudes and priorities in their English teaching from the literature will enable me to interpret their views on the factors that influence their teaching practice. For example, it could be argued that the text selection for GCSE English Literature allows teachers to have a range of choice for what they teach, but research from Cremin et al. (2008) suggests thatteachers tend to choose books they read as children. This therefore implies that pupils are limited in which texts they are likely to be taught. Building from this, I will now provide an overview of sociologists Bowles and Gintis' concept of the Hidden Curriculum (1976a; 2011b). This links to the more neglected of Cox's models, as well as the idea that a National Curriculum does not mean all texts are as widely taught as others or taught in the same way.

3.4.3: Hidden Curriculum

Althusser (1971a; 2001b) labels social institutions such as the government as Ideological State Apparatuses (commonly shortened to ISA's). Stemming from these ISA's, are institutions labelled as Repressive State Apparatuses (or RSA's). The educational system is considered in Marxist theory as an RSA that functions by the transmission of a set ideology, that being the promotion of capitalism (Althusser,1971a; 2001b) alongside, for example, patriarchy (Penny, 2011). As the

education system promotes dominant ideology, while it would seem as being above question– having been instated by authority–it is often promoting the values and interests of the ruling class (Marx & Engels,1846a; 1976b). Education's connection with the ruling class therefore implies that there are particular values and interests that are promoted through the National Curriculum for English (for example, forms of knowledge which are valued over others), which is evidenced by the fact that skills such as critical literacy are underrepresented. The lack of representation of critical literacy enables the ruling class to maintain their power and influence socially, for example through utilising the media to push particular agendas. Bowles & Gintis (1976a; 2011b) suggest that there is a correlation between values and ideologies taught in a school setting and the way in which the workplace operates once the individual leaves school. These values are grouped by the term Hidden Curriculum (Bowles & Gintis,1976a; 2011b).

Of course the process of choosing what is taught in schools is not one to be taken lightly, especially when one considers Eagleton's (1996) previously mentioned concerns about agendas based on personal ideologies. However, as previously mentioned, my research focuses on moving beyond the debate about what to include in the text selection and considering the impact of what is selected on both students and staff. This is therefore why Hidden Curriculum (Bowles & Gintis,1976a; 2011b) is an important theory to consider in the context of my research, and later analysis.

Hidden Curriculum (Bowles & Gintis,1976a; 2011b) posits that learning goes beyond the core subjects taught at school, and also considers how knowledge and values are taught, and what knowledge is held in highest regard. Bowles and Gintis argue that the educational system operates in this way to ensure that students re-create existing social power structures once they leave education (1976a; 2011b) and when considering which of Cox's models (HMSO, 1989) are absent as a curricular priority this viewpoint is strengthened in reference to the National

Curriculum for English.

3.4.4: The Education System as a Repressive State Apparatus

Similarly, Althusser (1971a; 2001b) agrees that RSA institutions such as the educational system exist to reproduce the relations of production, or more simply ensure that future generations maintain power structures that allow capitalism to keep operating. There are of course other factors which contribute to this phenomenon aside from the ways in which subject English is taught. For example, there is evidence that schools reproduce class inequality when the middle classes do much better in education (Reay, 2017) because they have more cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and are more represented in the curricular content that they encounter (Bowles & Gintis,1976a; 2011b).

Through a Marxist lens, the purpose of the National Curriculum as it exists is to reproduce social inequalities and justify them through the myth of meritocracy so that social order does not alter (Bowles & Gintis, 1976a; 2011b). Those who are responsible for choosing curricular content, as well as the ways in which it is taught and examined, are termed Gatekeepers (1971a; 2001b) who select materials and areas to examine based on their merits in acting as an RSA. I have shown some of the evidence for this lens in the context of the National Curriculum for English when highlighting which aspects of the curriculum are viewed as neglected by teachers (Gardner, 2017; Kalantzis et al., 2016).

Counter perspectives in educational policy such as functionalism argue that schools and curricula hold society together (Parsons, 2017). In contrast to the Marxist lens, this opposes the idea that the socialisation in schools that prepares students for working roles in society is inherently negative. Silova et al. (2020) argue that education policy and the educational policy agenda is strongly linked to the functionalist view. If Parsonian functionalism was a success in subject English, I argue that we would see more evidence of skills such as the 'Adult Needs' model being represented in curricular content (Cox, 1991). Instead, as I have previously

shown through the literature, many of Cox's Models are neglected within the curriculum at a cost to not only the functionalist ideals (preparing students for adult life: 'Adult Needs') as well as models such as 'Critical Literacy' which would equip pupils with the skills to have good media literacy and good political literacy. This therefore leads me to favour a Marxist lens when discussing these issues within my thesis.

Cox (1991) noted that when pupils do not have access to Standard English or good qualifications in English then "many important opportunities are closed to them" (p. 29). This extends to cultural activities, further and higher education, as well as professional life and career choice (Cox, 1991) which is essentially a potential lifelong disadvantage. Cox (1991) also believes the relationship between English and politics to be particularly resonant, and therefore policy makers and those who have influence on not only what is included in the English curriculum, but also on how it is taught and examined have a duty to ensure an accessible and representative corpus to allow every student a chance to access and engage with democracy upon leaving school. Returning to Althusser (1971a; 2001b) and his positioning of the school as a form of Ideological State Apparatus, he argues that it "squeezed" the child in knowledge and prioritises methods of learning and assessment that are always wrapped in ruling ideology, such as found within the National Curriculum for English. With this considered, there is room to explore the significance of why some of Cox's models (HMSO, 1989) are absent. Therefore, in response to my RQ3: my English teacher participants can illuminate what they feel the current content and priorities of English teaching are through sharing their experiences of teaching.

Cox (HMSO, 1989) proposed what English teaching could look like in the UK via his models. Society should strive for pupils to have the chance for 'personal growth' and learning to be creative and imaginative with language (HMSO, 1989). Educators should be mindful of the 'cross-curricular' view as a good grasp on English does

influence how well students perform in other subjects (HMSO, 1989). More than ever there is a strong need for the 'adult needs' view (HMSO, 1989), as students need to learn how to fill out paperwork and interact with the media and politics long after they finish compulsory education. In a separate realm to the Conservative label of 'British Values,' the 'cultural heritage' model is a way to celebrate and showcase the unique nature of English literature (HMSO, 1989). Finally, I return to the model at the heart of this thesis: the 'cultural analysis' view, has the potential to enable students to be able to view the world and the media that they consume in a critical manner, and develop their understanding of the world around them (HMSO, 1989). As a result of their importance and relevance to my data, I will draw upon these Five Models (HMSO, 1989) again in my findings and analysis chapters when appropriate.

3.5 : Conclusion

This literature review chapter, combined with its predecessor, has both situated my thesis in a research gap and provided a justification for the overarching research question: *RQ1 How do girls read gender in the assigned texts for GCSE English Literature?*. This chapter first established a base of understanding concerning the historical context of the National Curriculum for English and a summary as to how it has evolved into today's English curriculum. Following this, I discussed the role that forms of culture play in text selection for GCSE English, and the influential background of the English literary canon. An examination of the reasoning behind having texts that hold more cultural value than others, for example the canon, and the difference between forms of culture was presented. Whilst on the surface cultural distinctions may not appear to be that significant, their existence can often feed opinions based in elitism in regards to what is deemed worthy to be taught as part of the National Curriculum. Whilst text selection itself is not the focus of my research presented in this thesis, I felt that it was important to include it for context as often research in a close capacity to my own attempts to offer proposed

alternative selections. Including this context highlighted similarities and differences between debates around text selection and links to Cox's Five Models of English (HMSO, 1989) and Bowles & Gintis' theory of the Hidden Curriculum (1976a; 2011b).

The Five Models (HMSO, 1989) were highly regarded at the time of their initial publication, but are also still well-respected as strong pillars for the teaching of English at the time of the formation of this thesis. The connection between the Five Models (HMSO, 1989) and Bowles & Gintis' theory of the Hidden Curriculum (1976a; 2011b) has been outlined prior to my analysis later in this thesis. In the chapter that follows, I critically discuss the methodology I used to conduct my research.

Chapter 4: Methodology: Pilot Study

4.1 : Introduction

In the following chapter, I present the development of the pilot study that was carried out for this project. Although it is uncommon to have a separate chapter to present the pilot study in a thesis, the changes that I made as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that I needed to provide clarification of what the original research plan was compared to its final form. In this chapter, I will discuss how the research questions were developed, as well as how I selected the research methods used. I then provide a description of and context relating to the novel used in the pilot study *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr.Hyde* (Stevenson, 1886a; 2012b). Following this, I outline the pilot study taken to test research materials and running times of the focus groups and individual interviews. Subsequently, I present the trial coding and analysis of my pilot data. I then outline the changes I made as a result of the perceived shortcomings and obstacles that occurred during pilot data collection: including changes to the methods made as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, I conclude the chapter before discussing the methodology used in the main study of this research.

4.2 : Developing the Research Questions

This study originated when I was working on my Masters dissertation in Education and Social Justice. My original Masters research questions concerned how a sample of girls based in one school read and responded to themes concerning gender in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813a; 2003b), as well as whether the novel had any influence on how they viewed themselves. Following the completion of my Masters research, I noted that there were chances to collect additional data that I had not planned for. I also realised there was a gap in collecting staff and pupil perspectives about experiences of teaching and learning

19th century novels. I then considered how I could develop these areas to specifically target them for future data collection.

For example, my Masters participants made connections to their own lives based on the characters and themes in the novel which they were reading (Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* 1813a;1992b), and which went far beyond the questions that I had asked them. I also realised that a future research project should involve the perspectives of English teachers. When spending time at the school I was collecting my Masters data from, I found many teachers opening up to me about their experiences of teaching subject English. They also expressed their views about how English could be better taught. I decided to create a dedicated research question to capture this data alongside pupil perspectives. With this considered, I wanted to fill a gap in the literature with staff and pupil attitudes about the 19th century novels they were either teaching or studying. I decided to build upon the potential text selection that my participants would be studying, as well as increase my sample size to be beyond one class group based at one school.

The primary research question for my study is:

RQ1: How do girls read gender in the assigned texts for GCSE English Literature?

In the context of this study, English refers to English Literature as a secondary school subject, specifically with a focus on the 19th century novel requirement. I define the "reading" of gender as the ways in which participants describe certain traits or ways of being when referring to the men and women characters in the 19th century novels discussed. The reading by participants may be mimetic or critical (Phelan, 1989; 2007). Essentially, if characters are read as 'life-like' or representing central ideas within the fiction, or if the characters are 'constructed' and artificial in nature (Phelan, 1989; 2007).Relating to RQ1, a subsidiary question was developed:

RQ2: Does the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English Literature curriculum have an impact on how pupils view themselves?

The aim of this question was to go beyond what participants might identify as gendered traits and probe for links that they make to the characters, plots or settings to their lives beyond reading. Essentially, to understand how they perceived they were shaped by what they encountered in the novels they read. In order to explore the ways in which pedagogical practices and understandings of the National Curriculum for English occur, I explored teachers' views on factors influencing their text choice. I therefore conceptualised RQ 3:

RQ3: What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in class? This question intended to capture perspectives from teachers of English, including their experiences of teaching and pedagogical practices and reasonings relating to their text selection of the 19th century novel for their GCSE English Literature classes. Now that I have outlined my research questions, I discuss my role and background as a researcher.

4.3: The Role of the Researcher

It is important to consider how the role of the researcher, and my background as a researcher and personal and contextual background, could have an influence over my research and my methodology. I will first explain my own position in relation to my study, and discuss the ways in which this may have impacted my research or the way I interpreted it. Positionality examines how research is situated by the background of the researcher and the participants involved (Qin, 2016). It also encompasses the debate of the 'insider' versus the 'outsider' in reference to the researcher as an 'insider' who works with participants who are similar to themself, or the researcher as an 'outsider' (id). As a researcher, it is my duty to be

conscious of my position in relation to that of my participants', and clarify any personal experiences that have shaped this study.

As previously mentioned, my Masters research was heavily influential on my topic area and research ideas for this thesis. As someone with a background in Education and Social Justice, I believe that education has the power to be transformative and empowering in addition to its function of providing pupils with key skills to thrive in the world post-schooling. I also have a background in English in Education, which contributed towards my passion for reading and interpreting 19th century novels. I therefore arrived at this research project with a preoccupation with 19th century literature, but also an understanding of how education can be a tool for social change and social justice. My experiences of GCSE English literature were also extremely positive, and I believe that this has shaped my desire to research this particular area. My first encounters with 19th century literature were extremely formative, and as a result this has shaped the structure of the project itself as well as the participants who I wanted to work with. Therefore, my focus on the aspect of the National Curriculum for English is a result of my own enjoyment and fascination with novels of this period, in addition to my identification through the literature that research which includes staff and pupil perspectives on 19th century novels is sparse.

Self-reflexivity in research requires the researcher to reflect on their positionality or background and consider how this might shape their worldview (id). In feminist research, this is especially important as there is no universal form of truth, and all knowledge is impacted by specific contexts and circumstances from where it is produced (Valentine, 2002). Positionality and reflexivity are therefore key in highlighting how research interests are constructed, and the presence and position of a researcher in the field and in their data analysis (Kirsch, 1999). As a white,

cisgender and well-educated woman I am aware that my presence as a researcher holds a position of power over my pupil participants. As an adult, I am also in a position of power in terms of our age dynamic. With my staff participants, this may not be the case, as I am aware that as a young woman in my twenties I may be working with staff who are older than me and more experienced than me, for example if they have taken part in or conducted research in the past. Whilst my level of education might be an advantage to that of my staff participants (and certainly will be for my pupil participants) I do not feel that it is a 'conventional' advantage. I am the first person in my family to obtain an undergraduate degree, the first person in my family to obtain a Masters and I hope to be the first to complete a PhD. My experiences of higher education have often made me feel like an 'outsider' and I do not see myself as someone who holds educational standings above others. I intend to work with my participants, both staff and pupil, as my equals in this research. To do this, I ensured that I did not use overly-complex terminology, concepts or language when working with my participants. I allowed my participants to ask questions throughout the study as and when necessary, and in lieu of payment I offered information sessions about university life based on my personal experiences. I will go into more detail about this in Chapter 4, section 4 when discussing my participants.

  In reference to my position of power in the field of educational research, I am a young and relatively inexperienced researcher. Whilst I do have a relative position of power in relation to my participants, I do not hold a significant amount of power as a woman researcher early in my career. I am, however, a white woman, and my whiteness affords me a level of privilege both in research and in a racist society. This could extend to a power advantage over my participants, but referring to Kirsch's (1999) requirement to assess "how social, historical, and cultural factors

shape the research site as well as participants' goals, values, and experiences" (p.

3) the research site in a city in Northern England and its surrounding residents

meant that it was likely that the majority of my participants shared my whiteness. I

understand that an awareness of privilege is central to identifying unequal or

uncomfortable power dynamics which contribute to the creation of knowledge,

therefore the privileges of education, age and ethnicity are the main areas that I

have identified in my background as a researcher.

Denscombe (2007) notes that in the process of research that the background of the

researcher and the researcher's interests and levels of emotional involvement have

an impact on the study:

> It is recognised that the researcher is the crucial 'measurement device', and that the researcher's self (their social background, values, identity and beliefs) will have a significant bearing on the nature of the data collected and the interpretation of that data. (p. 250)

I have previously acknowledged the origins of my interest in my research topic,

as well as shown transparency about any relevant contextual factors that have

shaped my study. I will now provide detail concerning my identity as a feminist

researcher. Similar to Mackinlay (2016), I position my "scholarly work as feminist"

and at the heart of my work "sits the social construction of gender and the regimes

of power that intersect with gender, race, class and sexuality." (p. 36). Outside of my

role as a researcher for this thesis, I identify as a Socialist Feminist. Socialist

feminism includes a core belief that the economic and class structure of society

(capitalism) is problematic and leads to multiple forms of oppression (Campbell &

Wasco, 2000). In my personal and political life, I adhere to Marxist ideology and

focus on economic inequalities that exist alongside the privileges that men have

over women (id). As a result of this, I understand how my analysis and interpretation

will favour a classed perspective, as it is something important to me politically which

I will notice with more clarity than other interpretations. As a feminist researcher, I

identify as a Feminist Postmodernist.

Feminist postmodernism rejects the idea that there is a single form of truth or reality in line with other constructivist theorists (id). Holding one form of knowledge as the universal truth is a form of "destructive illusion" (Olesen, 1994, p. 164) as researchers have the power to define what they consider to be valuable or universal knowledge (Riger, 1992). I reject assumptions about what is considered to be universal knowledge or valuable knowledge, and view the world as a collection of stories and interpretations, unfortunately many of which serve to sustain the status quo of power and oppression (Olesen, 1994). Knowledge is therefore "always located in a specific historical and cultural context, and always shaped by power" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p.782). The construction of knowledge is therefore highly subjective and limited by the language that it is represented through (id). As a researcher in Education Studies, feminist postmodernism flourishes in my field as well as in other areas of the social sciences and humanities, often favouring qualitative methods (id). As a postmodern researcher, I look at the language my participants use to describe their lived experiences, and identify commonalities and differences between what they disclose.

My ontology therefore, is that I reject the notion that there is a single and objective truth (Katz, 2002). Epistemology is intertwined with ontology, and I believe that reality and truth depends on multiple, socially constructed and subjective interpretations (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). I align with the interpretivist school of thought, which Thomas (2013) notes as attempting to "understand the particular, contributing to building a framework of 'multiple realities'" (p.111). In the context of my research, this is a desire to understand readings of gender in 19th century novels as part of subject English, and explore the reasons behind their selection as taught texts. I opted to follow a qualitative research approach in my methodology, based on the data I needed to answer the research questions I had developed. I felt

that my methodological choices should also have the potential to collect instances of "perceptions, feelings, ideas, thoughts, actions…" (Thomas, 2013, p.111), therefore, I decided that a qualitative interpretivist approach was most appropriate for my research. These beliefs have shaped both the structure and nature of my research project, in addition to the ways in which I interpret my findings. Now that I have outlined my ontological and epistemological position, I will describe my participants.

4.4 : Participants

For the pilot, I worked with a total of six student participants for the focus group and questionnaire aspects of data collection, and one staff participant for the interview. The school where I was able to conduct the pilot study was a mixed-gender state secondary school located in the north of England. There are three main types of secondary school in England: grammar school, state schools and private schools (Gorard & Siddiqui, 2018). State schools are funded by the state and are non-selective in that they do not require an entrance exam to secure a place (id). There are different types of state school, for example faith-based schools, but the state school I conducted my pilot in was not selective in any way. Hatch (2002) notes that the context that a researcher collects participants in has the ability to direct the results in a certain way. When applying this to the choice of school used in this research, there is the potential that data collected in a state school would differ substantially to that collected in a state grammar school, a private school or another form of secondary school. Perhaps future research would benefit from using a variety of schools in a comparative study that would be more representative regionally and of school type.

Access to the school was gained via a staff contact in the Education Department at the University of York that had a connection to the Head of English of the school.

This was extremely useful, as often it can be hard to gain access to carry out research in schools (see Harrell et al., 2000; Oates & Riaz, 2016 and Rice et al., 2007). For example, schools often have gatekeepers to protect access to pupils and teachers, and it can be difficult for researchers to make contact with a gatekeeper that will help recruit for their study (Rice et al., 2007). Piloting the research in a school that was easily accessible helped provide more time to contact other schools to use in the main study. With this considered, I allowed more time to contact schools and to schedule in my visits to conduct research to ensure that this issue did not impact data collection in the main study.

  Time was granted by the school to carry out two focus group sessions and then one staff interview, who happened to be the Head of English at the school. The Head of English recruited ten participants for convenience, based on when they could be taken out of lessons to fit in with the time the study would take place at the school. All participants were current Year 11 English Literature GCSE students, and all identified as female or non-binary. This was a useful approach that would be re-used during the main study, as not having to choose a sample from a register was a factor that added both ease and convenience. However, one issue I encountered was that of the ten participants only six had returned their parental consent forms. Due to the ages of the participants (between 15-16 years old) it was not possible to include those who did not have the forms in the study. This meant that the first focus group had to be adapted to take the format of a one-to-one interview with a participant, as she was the only person in that group to have returned her form and any participants in the full second group could not be taken out of a core lesson. As a result, the first interview had a run time of 30 minutes. The pupil participant gave interesting answers, despite not having the group dynamic that would have perhaps made her feel more comfortable when taking part in the research (more on this will

be outlined in Chapter 4 section 8 with the adaptations that were made to ensure that this situation was not repeated in the main study).

4.5 : Focus Groups

As previously noted, a qualitative research approach was chosen for this study. Based on prior reading there was no solid hypothesis of what was expected to be found; but there was knowledge of the themes that would be discussed with participants. Based on my previous research experience and reading prior to this study, I opted to use focus groups with my pupil participants. Morrow (1998a; 2014b) observes that focus groups allow for the exploration of specific ideas and issues through collective discussion or group activity. Focus groups are characterised as "artificial situations" (Morrow, 1998a; 2014b) used in research to assist participants in engaging with each other and constructing ideas which they then verbalise. Kitzinger (1994) highlights how this interaction between focus group participants is not only detailed and useful for research, but also "illuminating". There are many advantages in using focus groups in research with children and young people. For example, as a method they allow for debate to occur in addition to discussion (Morrow, 1998a; 2014b). Focus groups also allow for a wider range of views to be obtained in a more limited period of time, as well as allowing participants (particularly in a school-based setting) to feel more comfortable amongst their friends and peers (Morrow, 1998a; 2014b). In addition to this, focus groups allow participants to contribute as much or as little as they like, as well as having the potential to produce data which is not pre-empted by the researcher as a result of participants bouncing ideas off one another (Morrow, 1998a; 2014b).

Based on these numerous benefits, I believed focus groups to be the best way to capture the information required to answer my research questions. I also consulted

research conducted by Cherland (1994), Blackford (2004) and Hartman (2006) and observed their methodology, as well as research methods that are favoured in the arts or cultural studies (Pickering, 2008) and within educational settings (Hatch, 2002). To yield rich, qualitative data techniques such as interviews, for example used by Hartman (2006), appeared to be most ideal. However in order to maximise my efficiency at participating schools, as there would be limited time where my participants would be able to be out of lessons, I chose to use the format of focus groups that often work best in an educational research setting (Hatch, 2002).

It is also important to note that focus groups have their limitations. For example, Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher (2009) note that group dynamics that exist prior to a researcher entering the environment can mean that some individuals are shyer than others when contributing to group discussions. It is also not appropriate to interrupt participants during focus group discussions to attempt to solve this issue, for the same reasons as Blackford (2004) provides in her research with participants who were also girls of a similar age looking at their relationships with reading. In light of these concerns, a semi-structured schedule was chosen for focus groups, as Blackford voiced concerns that any interruptions to dialogue by the researcher or too much structure in an interview format could be disruptive to the dynamic (2004).

Focus groups also have the potential for allowing confidentiality to be compromised, although Morrow elaborates that this is more of a concern when working with younger children who are more likely to refer to personal situations and experiences when contributing (1999a; 2014b). Whilst there is no way that the researcher can eliminate these existing dynamics, the provision of a follow-up questionnaire after the focus groups can allow for quieter participants to contribute in a way that they might find more appealing. This gave my participants the opportunity to reflect on what had been discussed in the focus group. Ultimately, I

felt that the majority of the limitations associated with the method were alleviated as a result of using a mixture of data collection techniques. This meant that in theory any marginalised voices could be 'heard' in the follow-up questionnaire, as I made sure that the environment in which I conducted my study was welcoming and without pressure for my participants. I did this by allowing my participants to take their time to get settled in the room, allowing them to contribute as much or as little as they wanted, and encouraged their contributions in a relaxed manner. I decided the positive aspects of using focus groups outlined by Kitzinger (1995) were beneficial enough to justify any minor shortcomings, as the method is well-suited to collecting rich, qualitative data.

  As for the impact on the researcher, there is also the potential for increased difficulties with the transcription process, especially as multiple voices can sometimes be hard to identify (Morrow, 1999a; 2014b). To alleviate this limitation, I kept physical notes in a notebook with rough notes about what each participant was saying when they spoke in addition to recording the audio on a device. This meant that when I was transcribing I could identify when a different participant was speaking, or that I knew roughly the topic that they were talking about if others spoke over them or the audio was not clear enough.

  In taking part in my research, I understood that for some of my participants it might have been their first encounter with feminism or advanced concepts involving gender. I define this as wider discussions relating to their experiences of existing in a patriarchal society or their definitions of feminism and gender. Therefore, the pilot was a chance to ensure that simple, yet age-appropriate, definitions and terms were developed in the focus group and questionnaire. As outlined by Tisdall et al (2009), research that works with children and young people should prioritise being "orientated towards the emotional wellbeing of participants" (p. 63). This does not

only necessarily refer to safeguarding and appropriate content warnings within research, but also providing participants with the confidence in their own competence to partake in the research, so that it is a positive experience for them.

The second pilot focus group consisted of five participants that had all returned their parental consent forms, and ran more smoothly (than the interview) as a result. Participants were more able to bounce ideas off of one another, as was intended by choosing this method for my research. This group lasted 60 minutes, including the time it took to work through the focus group questions and for the participants to fill out the follow-up questionnaires. This was roughly the time I had estimated the study would run for, so I was pleased the pilot confirmed this with the appropriately sized group number. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4 Section 8, where decisions regarding participant numbers would take part per focus group are outlined, but essentially the running time of this focus group confirmed that the ideal group numbers should remain between 3-6 participants.

The second pilot focus group also validated my decision to include a short follow-up questionnaire. Participants were asked to complete these questionnaires after the sessions in case there was anything that they did not want to discuss in front of their peers, or that came to them after a stimulating discussion. It was evident during the discussion, as well as during transcription, that certain group members of this session were dominant in the discussion and others did not contribute as much as their peers. This could be linked to research by Krueger and Casey (2014) or Smithson (2000), who also highlight these as potential issues to consider when conducting focus groups. Specifically, Krueger and Casey note that "dominant contributors can influence overall results" and the direction of the discussion if they are not managed (2014, p.16), and Smithson (2000) comments that there will often, if not always, be a dominant member or members in a focus group

setting.

 I opted to use a semi-structured format for the pilot focus groups, as a structured format would have been too restrictive for research purposes. Whilst there was no hypothesis about what to expect the participants to say in the sessions, it was hoped that allowing them a space to go "off schedule" to open up wider dialogue and bring in outside themes and points to consider that could and had not been predicted. Wilkinson (1998) outlines that a research setting such as a semi-structured focus group allows for a researcher-participant relationship that fosters a different dynamic that encourages the participants to be more forthcoming and part of constructing 'meaning', and this was found to be the case during pilot sessions. During each session I kept to a semi-structured schedule with probes and prompts at each stage if they were required to stimulate discussion. I tried to make sure all of the girls contributed to the discussion equally, however as Smithson (2000) notes, it is often the case that there will be a dominant member or members of a focus group. Now I have outlined the pilot phase format of the focus groups, I will outline my analysis of the data I collected.

4.6: Context:*The Strange Case of Dr.Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

Within the pilot phase of data collection, the 19th century novel my participants worked with was Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr.Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886a; 2012b). I will now provide a short contextual overview of the novel as a useful reference for understanding some of the data which I will discuss.

***The Strange Case of Dr.Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Stevenson, 1886a; 2012b)** was written in 1885 and first published in 1886 (Bloom, 2005). The novel is set in the late nineteenth century in London, England, and follows innovative scientist Henry Jekyll as he tries to keep his evil self (Edward Hyde) under control. The novel is thematically rich, with the central idea of how humans contain a balance of good and evil allowing the plot to progress, as Jekyll tries to contain his inner Hyde. Initially, Jekyll metamorphosizes in Hyde upon consuming a potion which he

developed, however despite his 'success' of splitting his good and evil personas, eventually he cannot contain when he transforms into Hyde. Initially, Dr. Jekyll is happy to transform into Hyde and live free from convention and conscience, however Hyde gradually takes over and commits acts of violence which lead to consequences as the novel plays out (Saposnik, 1971). The novel is considered to be Stevenson's most "sophisticated" (Saposnik, 1971, p.715) narrative, and its gothic elements makes it a personal favourite of mine.

4.7: Analysis of Pilot Study (Focus Groups)

Once the pilot data was collected from the pupils and the staff member, the process of transcription could begin. When transcribing each of the focus group sessions, it was necessary to assign each participant an anonymous identifier that would record accurately who was talking without revealing who they were in real life. To do this, each participant was assigned a number 1-6; for example P1P (Participant 1 Pilot) and so on (shown in the full transcripts, Appendix B and C for the first and second pilot focus group sessions). This also corresponded with the

physical notes that were taken alongside the audio recording to ensure transcription was accurate. Whilst this labelling system was simple and effective, I made the decision to develop it further when transcribing my main data. I wanted to provide pseudonyms for each of my participants to reflect the nature of the data I was sharing as well as protecting their identities (Guenther, 2009). This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 Section 11.

Transcription of the pilot focus groups was conducted via the use of NVIVO software (QSR, 2018). I amalgamated the questionnaire data in the same project in order to best allow for comparisons and links between the different types of data before coding could begin. When coding, notes were made concerning my reasoning when data were assigned to each node, so that if any difficulties arose in choosing appropriate nodes a more formal criteria could be adhered to (Pickering, 2014) (extract included as Appendix D). Occasionally data would appear to belong

in multiple categories and was coded as such. If there was a more appropriate

node, the rationale was noted for why a certain node had been chosen to know

there had been consistency when coding. The following is a presentation and

discussion of the pilot data that was analysed in this manner.

Although there were different numbers of participants in both of the pilot focus

groups, I asked the same questions based on the novel which they were reading for

the 19th Century Novel requirement as part of their GCSE in English Literature

(Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

(1886a;2012b)). These questions are presented below in Figure 1:

Section one: introduction
Q1: Who is your favourite woman character in Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde?
>Why?
(Discussion might lead to the fact that women in the novel are nameless, witnesses to violence or
victims of the plot- 2 maids and a young girl who is crushed)
Q2: Why do you think there are no women narrators in the novel?
>Main characters
Section two: historical vs present day attitudes about gender
Q3: Tell me about your impressions of the lives of men and women in Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde?
>How do you feel about that?
    >How are they different/similar?
    Q4: "The more oppressed women become, the more horror the characters experience"
    >What do you think about this statement?
    Section three: gender and social class
    Q5: Tell me about the lives of the different women in the novel, in what ways are they different?
In what ways are they similar?
    >In what ways/how? (eg ethnicity, social class etc.)
    (If not very talkative, Think about X character, what can you tell me about their social class?)
    Section four: sisterhood/relatability of characters
    Q6: What can you tell me about the attitudes towards gender that existed when the novel was
written?
    >Do you think they are still present in society today?
    (The role of women in this period was to be a caregiver, provider of domestic life etc)
    Q7: What do you think about the way that Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde portrays gender?
    >Can you link any aspects of this to gender in today's society?
    Q8: Can you tell me if there are any themes or events that you have particularly engaged with in
the text?
    >Why?
    Q9: Do you read anything outside of school?
    Q10: Anything else you'd like to say?

Figure 1; Pilot Study Focus Group Questions

The design and formulation of the pilot focus group questions considered both

the age and educational level of the students. The pilot focus group design was

more open than the pilot staff interview to allow my student participants more

freedom in their answers. Between the two pilot focus group transcripts, I developed

a total of eight codes via NVivo computer data analysis software. These were: *RQ1*

and RQ2 initially. I then developed less descriptive codes which fit under the main

RQ codes, which were: *LGBTQ, Nameless/Negative, Power or Lack of Power,*

Reading Culture, Social Class and Gender. Gibbs (2018) notes the importance of

creating codes that are analytical and theoretical and not merely descriptive, and

these codes were a mixture of both of those aspects. Initially coding data under the

relevant research questions (*RQ1 and RQ2*) helped to affirm that the data I had

collected was relevant to answer them. These codes would be described as

"Descriptive" (Punch, 2009) in that they were part of the first cycle of my pilot coding

process and summarised the topic of the data rather than the themes that were

constructed. Some codes also identified potential themes that I would go on to

explore in my later analysis. Some of these codes were altered slightly and used in

the coding process of the data in my main study.

  Upon developing these codes and assigning the relevant data to them, I followed

the steps of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is

used to analyse qualitative data, and aims to find patterns in data across

participants (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is normally applied when a researcher is

working with a set of texts, for example transcripts from focus groups or interviews

(Braun and Clarke, 2006). There are six key steps in conducting a successful

thematic analysis: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes,

defining and naming themes, and writing up (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In

examining the data initially on a descriptive level, it is possible to then generate and

review themes before naming them and including them in the final write-up (Braun

& Clarke, 2006). First, I familiarized myself with my data by reading through it and

printing out hard copies. Next, I coded the data by highlighting sections of the

transcripts and created codes to describe the content I was interested in which

answered each RQ. As previously mentioned, some of the codes I developed for

the pilot focus group analysis were purely descriptive, but others were then developed and used when analysing the data in my main study. When coding I made notes of the reasons as to why I assigned certain parts of data to each node, so if any difficulties arose in choosing appropriate nodes that I was keeping to more of a formal criteria (Pickering, 2014). Sometimes parts of my data would appear to belong in multiple categories, for example when my participants referred to the ways in which they were reading gender but also that a key aspect of their interpretation of gender was rooted in power or a lack of power. My thought process allowed me to decide that it was best coded in multiple ways, as there are different angles to explore when considering specifically interpretations of power, but also the reasoning as to why my participants viewed it as a fundamental part of gender relations.

I then reviewed the codes I created and identified patterns among them in order to devise themes. As themes are broader than codes, this involved combining codes into bigger themes. Some codes were too vague and did not appear often, so were discarded. Other codes then became themes, for example, Power. I then made sure that the themes that I developed were useful to interpret my data with, but this was fairly simply as the themes had developed from codes which were specific to each RQ. Next, I defined my themes before finally writing up the analysis of my data.

There were two key areas which became clear in my analysis of the pilot focus groups. Firstly, in response to *RQ2 Does the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English Literature curriculum have an impact on how they view themselves?* that in the context of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886a; 2012b) the lack of women characters led my participants to reflect on the careers that the women in the novel did have. Within this discussion, the classed nature of these professions was highlighted (for example, the character of the maid) but also the ways in which sex work was a profession that some women

would engage in. This discussion of sex work did not directly link to my participants'

discussion of gender relations in the modern world, but when the discussion did

become focussed on their current experiences of gender being heavily sexualised

and catcalled was a common theme in focus group 2. Therefore, the portrayal of

women in the novel and the social and historical contexts which were discussed in

relation to that did not cause my participants to feel sexualised, but instead enabled

them to have a starting point from which to reflect on their shared experiences.

Secondly, when reflecting on their levels of education concerning feminism and

gender studies I realised that my participants had different levels of exposure, and

as a result, different definitions of what feminism meant to them. The following

exchange from pilot focus group 2 shows an example of my participants discussing

feminism: "P6P: I think it's more to do with like gender equality rather than

feminism, 'cos it's not just females that have...P5P: It's just the females that get

away with more… P3P: With feminism, I think it's over". From this extract, it was

clear that my participants had different ideas about feminism between themselves

(in addition to my own perspective as a researcher). This example allowed me to

explore the idea of my participants potentially wanting to learn different theoretical

perspectives alongside their texts in lessons, as well as identifying a potential need

for such critical learning. Based on how the focus groups were carried out, my

development of codes and the themes that I identified, I made a few changes to my

methods ahead of conducting my main study. These changes are outlined later in

this chapter.

4.8:Questionnaires

As previously mentioned, my research involved multiple methods. Many of the limitations of focus groups, which have been outlined in the above section. were able to be managed through the use of a follow-up questionnaire. Essentially, using a combination of methods allowed for the exploitation of the strengths of a particular method whilst not leaving the research "vulnerable to criticism in connection with that method's weakness" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 141). As outlined earlier in this chapter, methods were chosen for this study that are often favoured in the arts or cultural studies (Pickering, 2014) and within education (Hatch, 2002) due to the interdisciplinary nature of this research. Namely, these were focus groups, follow-up questionnaires, and then individual staff interviews. For the pilot it was necessary to test all three of these methods, although only one of the possible seven novels could be discussed due to time constraints, access to willing schools and the Covid-19 pandemic that would lead to, among other things, widespread school closures. The following section outlines the specifics of the pilot follow-up questionnaire.

After conducting each pilot focus group, I allowed ten minutes for my participants to fill out the questionnaire. I particularly wanted to include questionnaires in my research as they proved to be invaluable in Cherland's (1994) study of girls constructing identities through literature (previously outlined in the literature review) as they aided her data collection greatly and complimented the interview data.

Initially, I had considered providing a definition within the questionnaires concerning both feminism and social class; however after considering that this might have a somewhat leading impact as to how participants responded a different approach was decided upon. Instead of providing definitions, Question 1 of the follow-up questionnaire asked "What do you understand by the term 'feminism'?". Not only did this allow for participants to explore their own understandings rather than be led by a specific definition, it also minimised the potential issue for a

definition being misunderstood; thus putting the participant off from filling out the questionnaire either in part or in full. As outlined by Tisdall et al (2010), research that works with children and young people should prioritise being "orientated towards the emotional wellbeing of participants" (p. 63). As I have previously noted, this means that in addition to necessary safeguarding and content warnings, participants must also feel confident and comfortable when taking part in research.

In addition to ensuring that the questions and definitions were phrased appropriately for participants, I wanted the length of the follow-up questionnaire to hit the right balance. Being too short risked missing opportunities to collect data, but equally being too long could also mean that participants switch off or do not have time to complete the entire thing. It was particularly important to optimise the length before the main study, as I intended the use of individual and anonymous questionnaires after each focus group to allow everyone the opportunity to share their thoughts and not be spoken over or feel self-conscious about contributing.

4.9: Analysis of Pilot Study (Questionnaires)

In total six responses were received to the follow-up questionnaires, one per participant that took part in the focus groups, although participants were given the option to not do this part if so desired. Responses were incredibly varied, and key highlights will be outlined below on a question-by-question basis:

Question 1: What do you understand by the term "feminism"?

This question elicited mixed perceptions of feminism from my pilot participants. All six participants responded to this question, however one participant only filled out a partial answer of "I partly understand about…". The other responses all identified feminism as concerning some aspect about women and women's rights, with one response that was very detailed compared to the others:

I've heard there've been 3 waves, the first two were focused on giving women the right to vote, equal treatment in society as well as in jobs. The 3rd

Wave I've heard a lot of bad opinions about, since a lot of people believe in equality between men and women has been achieved, but there are always improvements to be made (like the Me Too movement and wage gap).

This was also the same (and only) participant that answered YES to Question 2 (discussed below), so it is fair to assume that this detailed answer was as a result of having learned feminism and feminist theory alongside the novel. There were also some negative connotations of the term "feminism" from participants in their responses, for example "some feminists take it too far" and "I think the term feminism is often used incorrectly". With this mixture of understanding and definitions from participants, it is best that a base definition is not included in case it influences how they complete the rest of the questionnaire. The purpose of this first question is to allow participants to think for themselves how they define feminism before answering other questions, and the pilot indicates that this functions well. As a result, this question remained in the follow-up questionnaire for the main study for each novel. The answers to this question align with the varied ideas about feminism which were voiced in the pilot focus groups (as mentioned earlier in this chapter). This further justified my usage of both methods, as even at the piloting stage common themes were being constructed and reinforced in both contexts.

Question 2: Have you had a chance to discuss feminism or gender studies alongside studying Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde? (Please Circle) (Choice was provided of YES or NO or UNSURE)

All participants except one circled NO for this question, and the participant that circled YES was the same participant who gave the detailed answer for Question 1 regarding a definition for feminism. From the pilot it could be concluded that having learned about feminism and feminist theory in some capacity helps participants when contextualising both answers in the focus group and in the questionnaire. Whilst this is on the basis of a single answer in the pilot phase, I believe that this shows the potential that a base of understanding about feminism can have for pupil participants when taking part in my study. This question allows an insight into why

participants answer Question 1 in the way that they do, and therefore remained as part of the questionnaire for the main study.

Question 3: If yes, did it help you understand the themes and characters in the text in a better way?

As only one participant answered YES in the previous question, there was only one response to this question: "Yes because men were more important". Despite the low response rate to this question, the purpose it served meant that it remained as part of the main study. Although it would not be right to draw a concrete conclusion based on one response, the evidence of this question combined with its predecessor indicates that learning feminist theory alongside studying novels has the potential to aid pupils with their interpretations of the novel. However, the phrasing of this question with "better" was a little problematic, therefore whilst I felt the question should remain for the main study, I decided that the wording of this question needed to be changed before the main study to: *"What did you feel were the benefits and drawbacks of approaching the texts this way?".*

Question 4: If no, would you have wanted this aspect alongside your study of the text?

With this question there were the options of YES, NO and UNSURE. Interestingly no participants answered NO, with three answering YES and three UNSURE. This question ties with the previous two, and potentially provides scope for investigating the potential benefits of learning feminism alongside a text when studying for GCSE English Literature. It is currently not a requirement that this is taught at GCSE level, but does make an appearance for AS and A2 level of study.

Question 5: Do you think Robert Louis Stevenson is a feminist author? If so, why? If not, why not?

This was a divisive question amongst participants, three outright said "No" or longer variations, but three had mixed views. For example, "I think it's irrelevant as the views Stevenson expresses were the 'correct' for the time." This response was

interesting as portraying women as vulnerable or as accessories in predominantly male-centred plots is not necessarily something that could be classed as *'correct'* for the time period it was written in. Essentially, Stevenson wrote in a reflective manner of the norms at the time, and in recognising this there is evidence of my participants thinking critically when answering this question.

Another participant answered:"From the context I know, nothing would suggest he is, but it can't be assumed. There aren't many female characters and none that are named, but that doesn't mean he didn't treat women differently to men in his real life." This response is interesting, as it highlights that exclusion of women in a novel does not necessarily make the author a non-feminist from the perspective of my participants.

Finally, one participant considered how the text was 'of its time': "I think he was writing for what was happening in the time and that is how women were seen in that time". This reflection indicates that when considering what counts towards being a feminist author, historical and social contexts are also important to consider. Therefore, without going into a deep analysis of these pilot responses, the examples I have outlined show how this encourages pupil participants to think critically about what they are reading and why characters, themes and motifs may be written the way that they are. This indicates that this question is useful in allowing participants to articulate their own criteria for "being a feminist" and "being a feminist author", as well as bringing in wider themes about historical context. This question remained in the final study and was not altered.

Question 6: Do you feel the characters in Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde are relatable?

The options for this question were ALWAYS YES, MOSTLY YES, SOMETIMES, MOSTLY NO and ALWAYS NO. No participants responded with the 'positive' end of the choices, with four opting for SOMETIMES, one for MOSTLY NO and one for ALWAYS NO. However, as Bishop (1990) tells us, it is not necessarily a bad thing when characters aren't relatable in the literature that we engage with. This question

was kept for the final study without any changes.

Question 7: Do you feel personally represented by the authors, dramatists and poets that you have encountered that feature on the National Curriculum during your study of English Literature?

The options for this question were ALWAYS YES, MOSTLY YES, SOMETIMES,MOSTLY NO and ALWAYS NO. Linking to the neutral or 'negative' categories for answers, this question also mirrored its predecessor in that no participants answered ALWAYS YES or MOSTLY YES. There are multiple ways to consider what the implications of this might be, therefore given the scope for discussion of findings this question remained as it was for the final study.

Question 8: Do you feel personally represented in the novels, plays and poetry that you have encountered that feature on the National Curriculum during your study of English Literature?

The choices for this question were ALWAYS YES, MOSTLY YES, SOMETIMES, MOSTLY NO and ALWAYS NO. Responses favoured the 'negative' end of the scale, with four opting for MOSTLY NO and one for ALWAYS NO. Only one participant felt neutral and answered SOMETIMES. I felt that this question would be useful in discussing implications of representation alongside the previous question, so was included in the final study.

Question 9: Do you feel the novels, plays and poetry that you have encountered from the National Curriculum provide you with an insight into other cultures and life experiences beyond your own?

The options for this question were ALWAYS YES, MOSTLY YES, SOMETIMES, MOSTLY NO and ALWAYS NO. Answers were mostly on the 'positive' end of the scale, which shows that perhaps the end goal shouldn't be to find solutions based in novels that represent every aspect of a reader, but instead to encourage education about alternative cultures and life experiences to that of the reader. Only one participant delved beyond the 'positive' and neutral end of the scale to answer

MOSTLY NO. This question remained part of the final study, as I was interested in how a larger sample would respond and whether in the same way.

Question 10: Is there anything else about your experience of studying English Literature that you would like to add?

Four out of the six participants answered this question, however their answers were all variations of "No". Despite this, including an open final question such as this in questionnaires is still a good idea, as it has the potential benefits of generating "depth data or 'stories'" as outlined by O'Cathain and Thomas (2004). For these reasons, a similar question was used in the main study in the questionnaires as a space to catch any possible final thoughts.

4.10: Interviews

The third and final element of my methodology was a staff interview. I opted to use interviews to gain staff perspectives as part of my research for the reasons outlined earlier in this chapter. I felt that staff themselves were the best individuals to discuss their perspectives of English teaching with, and similarly Darlington and Scott (2002) describe participants involved in interviews as "experts in their own experience and so best able to report how they experienced a particular event or phenomenon" (p. 48). Interviews, as data collection tools, provide an effective way of "accessing people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality" (Punch, 2009, p. 144). Darlington and Scott (2002) note that interviews are particularly good for discovering information which relates to "finding out how people think or feel in relation to a given topic" (p. 50). In addition to this, they highlight that interviews enable researchers to: "talk with people about events that happened in the past and those that are yet to happen. These retrospective and anticipatory elements open up a world of experience that is not accessible via methods such as observation" (p.50).

As part of the pilot phase of my data collection, I was able to conduct one staff

interview. This was with the Head of English at the pilot school. This was particularly

interesting to me, as I hoped that as a subject head that my pilot participant would

have a good overview of English teaching at their school. Similarly to the pilot focus

group sessions, the individual pilot staff interview was recorded on an audio

recording device, and was accompanied by manual notetaking throughout each

session as a backup in case the technology failed. Whilst the pilot focus group

schedule and follow-up questionnaire was catered specifically to the text being

studied at the pilot school, the staff interview schedule applied to all of the seven

possible text choices. This was because I did not need to ask my staff participants

any questions which were specific to the texts for the purpose of my research.

Interview Schedule: English Teachers

Q1: If you could teach any 19th Century Novel what would it be?

>Why?

Q2: What do you think about the current AQA selection for this category?

Available choices: *Pride & Prejudice, Great Expectations, A Christmas Carol, Frankenstein, The Sign of Four, Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde, Jane Eyre*

Q3: What would you say are the factors that drive you to choose to teach the novel that you teach to your GCSE English lit cohorts?

Q4: Do you repeat teaching of the same novel for the next cohort of students?

>Please elaborate on this

Q5: Do you teach critical theory alongside the texts?

(e.g postcolonial, feminist, Marxist etc.)

>Why/why not? What is the point of teaching critical theory alongside texts?

>Do you think that it helps understand the text?

>Do you think that it helps promote aesthetic enjoyment of the text?

Q6: Do you think that AQA should recommend teaching theory alongside texts?

Q7: Are there any limitations that you face when teaching?

(e.g resources, funding, time etc.)

Q8: Do you notice a difference in how students of different genders engage with the texts?

Q9 : Is there anything else you would like to say?

Figure 2; Pilot Staff Interview Questions

4.11: Analysis of Pilot Study (Staff Interview)

Once I had created the pilot interview transcript from the audio recording, I used NVivo computer data analysis software to begin coding (as I had done previously to analyse the pilot focus groups). The staff interview participant was assigned the identity of SP1P (Staff Participant 1 Pilot). I developed a total of six codes following the same process which I outlined concerning the pilot focus group data. I once again reflected on Gibbs (2018) and the idea that codes need to go beyond the descriptive in order to be effective, and that they should have analytical and theoretical aspects. As I have outlined previously in this chapter, for the coding of my pilot focus groups I began on a descriptive level and coded data under *RQ1* and RQ2. For this batch of coding I began with a parent code (the term used by NVivo) of *RQ3* in order to correspond directly with *RQ3: What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in class?* I knew this level of coding was purely "Descriptive" (Punch, 2009), so I then created 5 child nodes (which were themes) which branched off of this parent node. These were namely: *Enjoyment, Exams/Assessment Time, Financial and Resources, Gender* and *Political Change*. These were all possible themes which related to answering RQ3. Once I developed my codes and themes relating code my data, I followed the remaining steps of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. I found that following my initial, more "Descriptive" (Punch, 2009) examination of the data that themes formulated within the initial coding category. As previously mentioned when discussing the pilot focus group analysis, one of the codes I developed for the pilot interview analysis was purely descriptive, but others were then able to be developed and utilised when analysing the data in my main study.

   The code for *Enjoyment* produced data which I classified in two ways. Firstly, the enjoyment of texts by my pilot staff member. It was clear that their passion for literature and reading was a key element in their philosophies, and the levels of enjoyment that they had for texts sometimes made them want to teach the texts: "I

do really enjoy Jekyll and Hyde and am quite delighted to have that as an option" and "I absolutely adore *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. I think that's one they would really enjoy…". In addition to personal enjoyment, the levels of enjoyment of texts by students was the second aspect to theme that I noted: "I did teach Frankenstein which again I think often those gothic texts work well for the students actually, they seem to get a lot out of it and engage with them really well". Wanting students to enjoy, and therefore engage, with the texts was a high priority for my pilot staff member: "Um...I think the primary one was the gothic idea of duality. Um...we thought they'd enjoy ideas about the monster" and: "And I think that we feel that there is some of the enjoyment and some of the depth has been lost because of that, so there are some forms of teaching that I've had to adopt in the course of this spec that I've never had to do before". With this considered, I anticipated this would be a theme that I would identify in my main study data from my staff participants.

The code for *Exams/Assessment Time* was something that I had expected might be discussed, but I did not quite expect the relatively high frequency that it would occur in the space of one participant's interview (thirteen times). In summary, these instances referred to "time pressures", "sheer practicalities really, to do with the amount of time it would take to teach them given the other demands in the curriculum", and: **"**we haven't changed texts with any of them at any point, we've stuck with the same ones in order to support staff workload and to develop our expertise and the quality of the resources that we've got". As a result of the frequency of this code being evident in this pilot data, I strongly expected that these themes would also occur in the main data.

Financial and Resources was a code that did have some instances of crossover with the previous code (*Exams/Assessment Time),* especially if 'time' is considered to be a resource. There was also some reference by this pilot staff participant to political decisions that had been made about the changes to the National Curriculum for English Literature: "think maybe they [the Government] played it safe with things

people were likely to have in their stock cupboards (which we did). When specifically referring to financial and funding issues, my participant noted that the only way to get around this for their school was to share that burden with parents: "Erm, there are funding barriers as well. So some of the decisions I am making at Key Stage 3 are based on the fact that I don't have money to buy new sets of books, er which we're finding quite frustrating. We've got round that at Key Stage 4 because the students buy their own, and then they've got them to annotate and revise from independently, so that's helped with that."

My next child code of *Gender* only had one instance in the pilot data, and reflected more on engagement with texts instead of the themes and characters as gender did with my student participants. I reflected that this was appropriate, as I was exploring multiple factors which influence staff choice with text selection and if gender was not a prominent reason it could contract with the prominence of other factors (such as resources for example).

Finally, the child code *Political Change* included thoughts about political influences on teaching and teaching content by my staff participant. I decided that I would be open to coding this as *Negative* or *Positive* in my main study with more staff participants, as in the pilot all instances of this code were *Negative.* However, I also realised that given the political outlooks of many teachers and teaching staff that I could also be in the same situation as with my pilot staff member.

4.12: Adaptations and Alterations

The purpose of a pilot study is to identify any potential shortcomings and obstacles that might occur in the main study (Ismail, Kinchin & Edwards, 2017). With this considered, the areas to improve in the main study were easily recognised as a result of my pilot study. Because participants completed the questionnaire within the estimated ten minute time allowance, but not overwhelmingly so, the questionnaire was kept at a similar length in the main study. There was also no need to change wording around questions alluding to themes of gender and feminism, as no participants identified anything as being unclear after being asked to say if they had any difficulties when answering the

questions.

I also found that it would be potentially beneficial to add a few more probes and prompts throughout the interview schedule so that a discussion would occur more naturally and easily. During the pilot, it was important that I allowed myself as a researcher to make neutral comments during the focus groups to encourage participants to make their contributions as long as they wanted. Hartman (2006) notes that her use of "that's interesting" encouraged her participants to expand on their points. One could criticise Hartman (2006) for the use of these probes in her research with the potential occurrence of the Hawthorne Effect (Denscombe, 2010, p. 68), however I found that in my pilot it made participants keep the discussion going when it seemed that it would end for certain questions. For the main study I therefore ensured that I had more potential probes and prompts written should they be required. This was not necessary for the staff interview, as the timing worked well and did not need much input from myself to encourage in-depth

responses.

A potential concern with my research design is the relatively low sample size. Denscombe (2010) states that when numbers are small, the researcher is vulnerable to criticism concerned with the generated data not being representative. However, testing materials for one of seven novels prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic was realistically the best that could be achieved. By completing this pilot study before national lockdowns in the UK occurred, it gave ample time to reflect and make changes prior to schools safely re-opening to collect data for the main study.

One issue that did arise that I have previously mentioned, was that some pilot participants did not return their parental consent forms. To overcome the situation of very uneven group sizes (one and five participants), I set an earlier return date in my main study data collection so that staff could adjust the group members to avoid a focus group from turning into an interview.

Taking manual notes whilst recording worked well, and I repeated this in my main study. This allowed me to include details such as emphasis, laughing and pauses when transcribing (Bucholtz, 2007), as my notes allowed me to see that pauses were indeed pauses, and not for example, a skip in the audio. My transcription style could be described as "transcribing for content" (Bucholtz, 2007, p. 788) as I was not prioritising changes in tone or structure or poetics. I did stay true to my participants' styles of speech and did not eliminate "unnecessary clutter" (Du Bois, 2003) such as the use of 'like' or incorrect grammar. Whilst this can help with readability, I felt it was important to represent my participants authentically.

I decided to change my system for assigning participants identities in my main study. Although my method worked well when transcribing pilot data, I felt that presenting the data of my participants (both students and staff) warranted them to have a more "human" voice within my thesis. I will outline my pseudonym process in

Chapter 5 in more detail.

Perhaps the biggest and most noticeable change that I made in my main study data collection was the move from in person to online data collection. This was not as a result of any limitations or shortcomings of the in person methods which I have described throughout this chapter, but instead was an unavoidable consequence from the global Covid-19 pandemic. In March 2020, the pandemic meant that all schools were closed to minimise the spread of the virus, as well as a national lockdown in the UK. The timing of this coincided with the start of my data collection, as I was due to visit two schools in the week that the national lockdown began in the UK. Once schools were open again, they were not able to accept any forms of visitors (including researchers) and The University of York (as well as other HEIs) issued guidance that field work for research purposes should not take place in person.

After considerable delay as a result of the pandemic and then school holidays, I restarted data collection in March 2021. This data collection used the same methods, but was adapted to take place online. Focus groups were conducted on Zoom, with myself on the call in a different location and my student participants on the other end of the call in an empty classroom. There are benefits to using Zoom to conduct research compared to face-to-face, for example the relaxing impact of a familiar environment (e.g. the home), as well as reduced costs associated with commuting (Oliffe et al., 2021). However, there are limitations to this format of data collection, including being there 'differently' and the possibility of poor internet connectivity and technology (circumstances outside the direct control of both interviewers and interviewees) (Oliffe et al., 2021). In addition to this, I also had to adapt the follow-up questionnaires to being hosted online. I used Survey Monkey and sent out the link to staff contacts to distribute, as I was unable to contact my

student participants due to their ages. The teacher interviews took place either over the phone or on Zoom to suit their preferences. Despite the possible limitations, the lessons I had learned from the pilot phase of my research equipped me with the skillset to ensure that my main study data collection was successful: even in an online format taking place in unprecedented times.

4.13: Conclusions from the Pilot Study

There are three main conclusions to draw from my pilot study. Firstly, based on the light level of data analysis which I conducted on all aspects of my pilot findings, I was confident that my methods could address my research questions. The changes that I made ensured even further that I would collect rich data in my main study to use in addressing each of my research questions.

Secondly, from the experience of collecting pilot data, transcribing it and coding it with NVivo12 software, I learned roughly how long it would take when doing the same process with my main study data (when multiplied by the higher number of participants). I realised effective ways to code and classify my codes on NVivo12, and had a foundation of potential codes and themes to use if my main data presented similar ideas from participants.

Thirdly and finally, I realised that the knowledge I had acquired by doing the pilot study could be applied when I had to adapt my research to take place online as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and subsequent national lockdowns in the UK. The next section of this thesis will outline in more detail how I used these online methods, and also describe the data collection process in full for my main study.

Chapter 5: Methodology: Main Study

5.1: Introduction

In the chapter that follows, I outline the methodology which was used to collect the main data for this research. Firstly, I will present the research questions which were at the core of my data collection process. I then describe my participants and sampling, as well as the changes I made as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. I then summarise the research methods I used at each stage of data collection: focus groups, follow up questionnaires, and interviews. Subsequently, I present the coding and analysis used for my main data, some of which was based on my pilot parent and child codes as discussed in the previous chapter. I will then detail my reliability, validity and ethics, before concluding the chapter and progressing onto my data analysis.

5.2: Final Research Questions

The research process includes research questions at its centre. Below are the research questions, as previously presented in Chapter 1. These questions remained unaltered ahead of my main data collection as a result of the pilot phase showing that substantial data could be acquired in order to answer them:

RQ1 How do girls read gender in the assigned texts for GCSE English Literature?

RQ2 Does the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English Literature curriculum have an impact on how pupils view themselves?

RQ3: What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in class?

5.3: Participants

Subsequent to the revisions I made following the pilot phase of my research, the next stage of my methodology involved recruiting schools to take part in my main data collection. I had originally recruited seven schools, as I intended to have one school for each of the potential 19th century novels on the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) examboard's spec: Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886a; 2012b)**,** Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843a; 2018b) and *Great Expectations* (1860a; 2003b), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847a; 2006b), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818a; 2003b), Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813a; 2003b) and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* (1890a; 2001b). However, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, five of seven original schools were no longer able to take part in the study. This was understandable given the immense pressure that the pandemic placed on teachers and students, and whilst it was disappointing from my perspective as a researcher I understood the reasons why.

Following this, I changed my recruitment criteria. Originally, I was recruiting schools in the North of England that were using the AQA syllabus for the GCSE in English Literature. As previously mentioned, my aim was to recruit seven schools. I intended to conduct two focus groups per school for each potential novel choice. Because of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic there were different periods of national lockdown in the UK, and when schools were open in these lockdowns external visitors were not allowed. I therefore needed to recruit schools to take part online, and change my selection criteria to: schools studying a 19th century novel for GCSE English, and schools which were not composed of boys only. I also resubmitted my ethics forms to reflect the change of my methodology to taking place

online, rather than in-person.

This change resulted in the successful recruitment of a total of three schools for my main data, which were all based in North Yorkshire. I recruited these schools by emailing Heads of English, school administrators, and English teachers who were listed on school websites. These three schools that I successfully recruited followed from reaching out to over fifty schools. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the pandemic many schools did not respond, and those who did often apologised that they could not accommodate my request. I attempted to recruit each school a total of three times, through a mixture of email and calling the schools reception in the hope to have my message communicated to either a Head of English or an English teacher. Rice et al. (2007) note that gatekeepers make it difficult to contact certain staff members and pupils in schools, and this was amplified with the barriers that the pandemic created.

Of the three schools that consented to take part in my research, two were studying Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843a; 2018b) as part of the AQA syllabus, and one was studying H.G Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898a; 2017b) as part of the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR) exam board's spec. As a result of the impact of the pandemic on my data collection, I decided to change my original selection criteria of one school per 19th century novel and only schools following the AQA syllabus. This has resulted in a different dataset to what I had originally anticipated, but I believe I made the correct decision in order to be able to complete my study, and as a result, my thesis.

Whilst the benefits of my sample meant I was able to carry out my research under the time constraints of my PhD and under the pressures of the pandemic, I do acknowledge my sample is not what I had originally intended. Hatch (2002) notes that the context that a researcher collects participants in has the ability to direct the

results in a certain way. In the context of my research, I imagine this occurred through my choice to change my recruitment criteria. Additionally, two of my schools were studying the same novel, which resulted in a change from the more representative sample involving a range of novels.

However, I did manage to recruit a variety of schools as part of my main study. Of the three schools: one was a state school, one was a girls-only private boarding school, and one was a mixed-gender grammar school. Data collected from a private boarding school, such as the one used in my study, could be vastly different to the responses of girls in, for example, a state school, therefore I am satisfied that my sample had its strengths despite not being what I originally intended.

My pupil participant sample included twenty-eight girls aged between fifteen and sixteen years old, chosen from a random sample using the class registers by the class teachers. Specifically within the three schools: eleven girls (split in two focus groups) took part from the state school, three girls (who made up one focus group) took part from the mixed-gender grammar school; and fourteen girls (split in two focus groups) took part from the girls-only private boarding school. I was aware that my sample was not completely representative of a population beyond the schools themselves, and all three of my schools were from the same county (North Yorkshire). Nevertheless, accounts from my pupil participants have created a valuable set of findings, which I will go on to discuss in the results chapters of this thesis.

My staff participant sample size included three members of staff, with one staff member per school that took part in my study, and all staff members were the class teachers of my pupil participants. I had originally intended to have a larger sample size for my staff participants, however I believe the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and its increased stresses and pressures on teachers may have resulted in teaching

staff being more reluctant to give up their time to take part. However, a smaller

sample should not be discredited, for example Hartman's (2006) study included just

four participants and still had findings that I could draw inspiration from ahead of

formulating my own research. Now that I have described my participants and the

sampling process, I will describe the methodology I used to collect data in my main

study.

5.4: Zoom Focus Groups

Following the success of the focus groups in my pilot phase, I used the same

methodology to collect my main data. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic I was unable to

enter schools to conduct my research. As a result, I hosted the focus groups online

by using Zoom video calling software. Although this was not a format I had

experience of using for data collection, I was confident that it was the best way to

proceed to successfully collect data in a pandemic. Collecting qualitative data

through the use of online video calling platforms and software is not a new

phenomenon, but the Covid-19 pandemic has made it more common for

researchers. Sullivan (2012) observes that "the potential for video conferencing as a

research tool is almost unlimited" (p. 60). Additionally, Archibald et al. (2019) outline

the benefits of using Zoom to conduct qualitative research over other methods, such

as face-to-face, telephone, and other video conferencing alternatives. Zoom as a

data collection tool is not only relatively easy to use, but it is also simple to facilitate

and very cost effective in that the software itself is free and it saves on commuting

costs for the researcher (Archibald et al., 2019). The main limitation of using Zoom,

or any form of technology, to conduct qualitative research is if any technical

difficulties should occur (Archibald et al., 2019); however fortunately this was not

something I experienced in my own data collection. Technology does present the

issue of creating distance between participants and the researcher (Oliffe et al.,

2021), which could compromise the ability to interpret body language and build

rapport. I felt that I was able to overcome this with my participants via time to chat a

little before the focus groups began, however I also believe that this might have

been stronger if I was able to conduct the focus groups in person.

   I therefore asked each of my three staff contacts to join the Zoom calls in an empty

classroom to facilitate my data collection. Once the call was set up and my pupil

participants were seated, the staff contacts left the room. I then outlined what the

study was about and the consent process before beginning the focus groups, in order to

inform my pupil participants of their rights and allow them to withdraw if they wanted to.

The Zoom focus group process was repeated a total of five times. I had planned for

and collected consent forms for six groups, but one group was impacted by a Covid-

19 outbreak which meant those pupils had to isolate themselves at home. I took

detailed notes throughout each session to balance physical and digital methods in

my research (Murthy, 2008). This was a backup in case the technology failed to pick

up audio clearly at any point, as repeating the data collection was not an option for

me due to the pandemic. I recorded the audio, and not the video, as I had only

sought ethical permission to record audio from the University of York's ethics

committee and from my pupil participants' parents. I stored the audio files on a

password protected laptop, of which the password was only known to myself. Once I

had transcribed the audio, I deleted the original audio files.

5.5: Online Questionnaires

   As well as the changes that were made for the focus group element of this

research, I also had to adapt the follow-up questionnaires to be conducted online.

Originally in the pilot phase of my research, I had printed physical copies and

distributed them to pupil participants. This had ensured a high completion rate of 100% in the pilot phase.

When collecting data in the main part of my study, I used the online survey website Survey Monkey to host my follow-up questionnaire. I created a different version of the questionnaire for each novel for my participants to fill out, in order to cater to the different themes and prominent plot elements of the different novels. I ensured that I kept the lengths of the questionnaires at an appropriate length based on what I had learned during the pilot process.

However, collecting questionnaire data online did not work as well as it had done in the pilot phase. Because my participants were under eighteen years old, I was not able to contact them or have contact with them outside of their taking part in my research. As a result of this, I was reliant on the staff contacts to circulate the questionnaire links to the pupils and request that they complete them. I also asked my pupil participants to fill out the questionnaires upon the completion of their focus group session. Unfortunately, out of my twenty-eight student participants I only received nine questionnaire responses. I tried to remedy the low response rates by following up with my staff contacts, however I limited myself to two follow-up emails. I did this because I was aware that teachers were under a lot of pressure during the pandemic, and that realistically there was only so much that they could do to ensure my pupil participants filled out the questionnaires. I therefore acknowledge that the questionnaire data I collected consists of a relatively small sample, however the responses that I did receive were still of use when combined with my analysis of the focus group transcripts presented later in this thesis.

5.6: Staff Interviews

In addition to working with pupil participants, I also conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with staff members at each of my participating schools. Interviews are particularly illuminating in qualitative research, as they allow for a variety of meaning to be elicited and a deeper understanding of the data from the participants to be generated (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). When compared to other categories of interviews, semi-structured interviews have the benefit of allowing participants to convey their opinions and experiences as well as enabling structured topics to be covered to work towards answering research questions (Heigham & Croker, 2009). Semi-structured interviews also allow the interviewer the flexibility to explore required areas in more detail where necessary and allow participants a greater deal of leeway to make contributions which may be unexpected by the researcher, and as a result may fail to be scheduled in advance (Heigham & Croker, 2009).

Following the successful trial of the interview questions in the pilot phase of this research, I decided to keep the same interview schedule to use in the main study. Each participant had the choice to attend an interview over Zoom or a telephone interview (offered out of which was most convenient to my participants), as due to the Covid-19 pandemic in-person interviews were no longer a possibility as a result of the national restrictions on conducting research. Two out of my three staff participants chose the telephone interview option, and one chose to be interviewed over Zoom. The telephone interviews were conducted over speakerphone and recorded with an audio recording device. For the Zoom interview I recorded the audio only. As with the pupil focus groups, there were certain disadvantages to conducting interviews at a distance and without video recordings. For example,

video allows the research to capture body language from participants and see how

participants respond to questions at any given time (DuFon, 2002). I felt that I was

able to interpret the reactions of my participants well through establishing rapport

prior to starting each interview to atone for the advantages which were lost by not

having video recording. This also ensured that my participants were relaxed before

we began recording, and I would ask them how teaching was going or make small

talk about the pandemic. I did this in order to build a "comfortable communication

environment" (Murray, 2009, p. 50) that would potentially make my participants more

willing to share their narratives and opinions in greater depth.

  Before each interview, my staff participants were informed of the topic that we

would discuss. Additionally, I told them how to withdraw from the study and withdraw

their consent if they decided to do so. I did not send them the questions in advance

to ensure that their answers would not be rehearsed or over-planned. Each

interview lasted between twenty and forty minutes. Once I had conducted the

interviews, I left a two-week window in case any participants wanted to withdraw

from taking part in my study. I will now move on to provide context for the novels

used in my main study, and finally discuss the transcription and coding process.

5.7: Context: *A Christmas Carol/ The War of the Worlds*

Within the main phase of data collection, the novels my participants worked with

were Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843a; 2018b) and H.G Wells' *The War

of the Worlds* (1898a; 2017b). I will now provide a short contextual overview of both

novels as useful reference points for understanding some of the data which I will

discuss. Additionally, I will provide historical context in the discussion of these two

novels, including reference to Coventry Patmore's poem, *The Angel in the House*

(Patmore, 1854 & 1863). When providing an overview of the novels used in my

main data, I will also include some explication of the women characters in the texts in order to aid with understanding my participants' contributions.

Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843a; 2018b) was written at a time when Britain was going through huge amounts of change as a result of The Industrial Revolution, in addition to re-evaluating relationships with Christmas traditions (Ackroyd, 1990). Dickens was by no means a revolutionary and was not strictly speaking a socialist, but he championed the stories of the poor and underprivileged and asserted the rights of working people to be including in literature as a result of his encounters with poor children in the middle decades of the 19th century (Slater, 2011). *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens, 1843a; 2018b) presents the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, an elderly businessman who is visited by the ghost of his former business partner (Jacob Marley) to allow Scrooge to have a chance to reform himself into a better man. The spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come (or Future) visit Scrooge and show him visions and memories to encourage him to change and live as a more generous man to redeem himself. Scrooge is transformed by the visitations of the spirits, and the novel ends with him vowing to live as a kinder man.

There are six women characters in the novel: Belle, Mrs Cratchit, Martha Cratchit, Belinda Cratchit, Mrs Fezziwig, and Fan. Of these women, my participants focussed their discussion on two: Belle and Mrs Cratchit. Belle is Scrooge's ex-fiancée, a beautiful woman who Scrooge was deeply in love with when he was younger. In the novel, we learn that Belle broke off their engagement when she realised that Scrooge had changed and become obsessed with becoming wealthy. Scrooge's greed cost him their future together, and his regret of losing her was something that my pupil participants noted. Belle was respected amongst my pupil participants, as her influence in Scrooge's life made her a notable character (despite her not being a main narrator in the novel).

Mrs Cratchit is Bob Cratchit's wife, and is characterised as kind and loving

towards her family. She takes care of her family, despite their poor socioeconomic circumstances, and looks after her appearance. She does her best to ensure everyone has enough to eat (especially concerning Christmas dinner). She is optimistic (like her husband), and is selfless in her actions. It could be argued that Mrs Cratchit embodies the traits associated with the 'ideal' Victorian woman described in Patmore's (1854 & 1863) poem: *The Angel in the House*.

The Angel in the House (Patmore,1854 & 1863) was published in four instalments between 1854 and 1862. The poem is now divided into two main parts, and was inspired by Patmore's love, courtship and marriage of his wife Emily (Moore, 2015b). The poem characterises the ideal woman as someone who is devoted to their husbands and families, and excels in domestic tasks. *The Angel in the House* (Patmore,1854 & 1863) evidences the Victorian idea of separate spheres for women and men (Moore, 2015b). Essentially, that women and men have 'natural' roles in society, where women preside over the private and domestic sphere, and men in the public sphere with a career and earning an income (id). When a woman, or a woman character, is referred to as an 'angel in the house', it implies that they embody the Victorian feminine ideal. I referred to the concept of the angel in the house as a prompt for my pupil participants (outlined in Appendix E and Appendix F) as a discussion point linking historical context to our dialogue concerning gender and gender roles. The second 19th century text which featured in my main study was H.G Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898a; 2017b). *The War of the Worlds* (Wells, 1898a; 2017b) is a science fiction novel, originally published in a serialised format, and published in full in 1898 (Yeffeth, 2005). The novel is set in the mid-1890s, and follows the invasion of Earth by aliens from Mars through the perspective of The Narrator. Once the Martians land on Earth, they are hostile, and use giant metal tripods to wage war on humanity. Earth tries to resist, but the end of Book One sees the Martians being victorious. Book Two details the Martian's capturing of people and using their bodies to feed red weed plants which mimic the

surface of their home planet. Just as things seem doomed on Earth, The Narrator discovers that the Martians are being killed off by pathogens they have encountered without any immunity. After having a breakdown, The Narrator returns to Woking and is reunited with his wife.

There are three woman characters in *The War of the Worlds* (Wells, 1898a; 2017b): The Narrator's Wife, Mrs. Elphinstone, and Miss Elphinstone. My participants discussed all three characters, but Mrs. Elphinstone and Miss Elphinstone featured the most strongly in their responses. The Narrator's Wife is an unnamed woman who is married to The Narrator. She has little characterisation beyond her initial dialogue with The Narrator, and her embodiment as a goal for The Narrator to be reunited with her at the end of the novel. Mrs. Elphinstone and Miss Elphinstone are written as the opposites of each other in their appearance and in their mannerisms. Mrs. Elphinstone, who is described as short and dressed in white, is extremely nervous in the novel and calls for her absent husband (Dr. Elphinstone). Miss Elphinstone is described as tall and wears dark clothes, all whilst remaining calm and brave in the face of the chaos of the invasion. The contrasting nature of Mrs. Elphinstone and Miss Elphinstone was frequently observed by my pupil participants, as I will show later in the findings and discussion chapters. Now that I have provided context of the novels utilised in my main study, I will continue this methodology chapter by detailing my data analysis and coding process.

5.8: Data Analysis and Coding

The final stage of my methodology involved the analysis of the responses that I had collected. Firstly, I had to transcribe each of the focus group sessions and assign each participant an anonymous identifier. This allowed me to accurately record contributions without revealing who my participants were. I adopted verbatim transcription, where I included all pauses, false starts and words directly from my

participants (McMullin, 2021). In the pilot phase of my data collection, I had

assigned letters and numbers to participants to reflect which session they took part

in. However, I decided that in my main data I would assign pseudonyms to help the

voices of my participants come through and for them to be represented in a more

personable manner. I randomly assigned my pupil participants names based on

characters in Jane Austen novels, as Austen is one of my favourite authors and I

wanted my research to have a form of tribute to her. For my staff participants I used

the names of three 19th century authors: Austen (Jane Austen), Poe (Edgar Allen

Poe) and Stoker (Bram Stoker). I chose these authors to correspond with the

genders of the staff interviewees, and because they are all authors I personally

enjoy. Below, I include a summary table for clarity, which details my staff and pupil

participants.

Pseudonym	Focus Group(s)	School Type
Staff: Austen Pupils: Harriet, Emma, Elinor, Sally, Betty, Julia, Isabella, Penelope, Eliza, Lucy and Clara	3 and 4	State school, mixed
Staff: Stoker Pupils: Kitty, Susan, Martha, Hannah, Clara, Margaret, Esther, Elizabeth, Jane, Lydia, Charlotte, Georgiana, Mary and Catherine	1 and 2	Private, single-sex
Staff: Poe Pupils: Anne, Louisa and Maria	5	State (Grammar), mixed

Figure 3: Pseudonym Summary Table

Following the completion of the data collection for my main study, I collated the data from the focus groups, interviews and the questionnaires into NVIVO. The pilot study had allowed me to identify potential themes to focus on when coding, and so I adapted some of my pilot codes (namely: *Nameless/Negative* and *Power)* as well as came up with a total of twelve new ones to analyse my data. My codes used in my main study to analyse pupil data were: *Admirable, Undesirable/Nameless, Embodied Power, Enacted Power, Sites of Resistance, Celebrity/ Pop Culture, Gender, Housework, Motherhood, Reference to Feminism, Reference to Relationships, Social Media*. The process of coding makes it possible to detect the key themes within data and build arguments to answer research questions (Holliday, 2010). I followed the same method for coding as I had in my pilot phase, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, starting first with more general and descriptive codes (for each RQ) and then moving on to more specific child codes for each research question (listed previously). My initial descriptive codes ensured that I would be able to answer my research questions. I then developed themes, which I include as subheadings in the findings chapters of this thesis.

5.9: Reliability, Validity and Ethics

Prior to collecting my data I filled out extensive ethics paperwork outlining the specifics of what I would be requiring from my participants. I received ethical approval from the University of York to carry out my research. As my pupil participants were under eighteen years old, they would need to provide their assent as well as obtain consent from their parents or guardians. It was vital with my research, as should be the case with all research, that the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Council were followed to ensure that the data and wellbeing of my participants was a consideration above all else (BERA, 2018).

Ethically, my methods all complied with the guidelines highlighted in *The Good Research Guide* (Denscombe, 2007). Contributions from my participants were anonymised once I had transcribed the recordings. Data were treated with

confidentiality, and participants and their parents (as they were under 18) understood what was being asked of them for my research and gave their consent. They had the chance to withdraw from the focus groups during the process, as well as to withdraw their information and responses for a fortnight after I had collected my data.

Additionally, I fully informed the staff contacts at each school of what I would be discussing with my pupil participants, and left my contact details if any participants wanted to withdraw their data in the fortnight period that they agreed to on the consent forms. All the data I collected was kept anonymous (once transcribed) and kept on a password protected laptop. Once I had transcribed both the focus groups and the interviews, I deleted the audio files to help maintain this anonymity. When transcribing interviews I ensured that I was true to my participants in maintaining their patterns of speech, their pauses and any uses of repetition, as is required with verbatim transcription (McMullin, 2021). All data collection took place online to comply with Covid-19 regulations. Before the focus groups and interviews, I explained the purpose of my study to my participants and outlined their rights to withdraw both on the day and in a two week period after I had collected data at their schools. My research treated each participant fairly, without any bias towards protected characteristics or academic ability.

Ethically, I felt that I should offer something in exchange for my participants giving up their time to take part in my research. I was unable to reimburse them financially, and due to the research taking place online my initial plan to bring in snacks for the participants to enjoy during the sessions was no longer possible. Instead, I offered all three schools a session of their choice led by me in the future when I could return to their schools, either about university life or my experiences of doing a PhD as a sort of 'insider careers talk'. Only one school took me up on this offer (and my talk took place in March 2022 to a Sixth Form cohort of girls) but I still felt that I had offered some form of reciprocity in exchange for taking part in my research.

The term 'reliability' is more prevalent in testing and evaluating quantitative studies (Golafshani, 2003), however I will outline how I deem my research to be reliable. A reliable qualitative study can help to "understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing" (Eisner, 1991, p. 58). Instead of using 'reliability' in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 300) use "dependability", in qualitative research. This can refer to the trustworthiness of the process or research, as well as the resulting output. I have documented my research methodology and analysis methods in detail, to ensure that my transparency shows how I have gone about data collection and the resulting analysis. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that: "Since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former [validity] is sufficient to establish the latter [reliability]" (p. 316). Validity is grounded in the details of the research process, and the researcher's ability to follow a research framework. I have outlined the methods I have used in detail, as well as discussed my reasons for choosing them and any changes I have made during the research process. Whilst terminology for reliability and validity can vary (especially in qualitative research), I believe that I have conducted a reliable and valid study and presented my findings in a trustworthy manner.

5.10: Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the data collection process and methodology used in the main phase of my research. I have provided details of the changes I made following my pilot study and as a result of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Instead of in-person methods, I used Zoom to conduct focus groups with pupil participants and sent follow-up questionnaires via Survey Monkey. Staff interviews were conducted by phone or by Zoom and recorded. I concluded this chapter by discussing my coding and analysis methods, as well as my considerations of reliability, validity and ethics. The following chapter will be the first of three chapters in which I conduct data analysis and present my results in accordance with each research question (RQ).

Chapter 6: Findings and Analysis (Students) RQ 1: ***How do girls read gender in the assigned texts for GCSE English Literature?***

6.1: Overview

The following will provide and present an analysis of pupil data relating to research question (RQ) 1: *How do girls read gender in the assigned texts for GCSE English Literature?*

Firstly, I present data relevant to answering RQ 1. This will be presented in relation to the relevant questions asked to my pupil participants in the focus groups and follow-up questionnaires. My analysis then follows the provision of data. I use the Foucauldian concept of power to highlight instances in the data where participants discuss gender in relation to the novels which surfaced in focus group discussions. I also highlight how this analysis involving power can show sites of 'resistance' by my participants to attitudes about gender, e.g traditional gender roles in the West. I furthermore show that power is a useful tool to observe what my participants deem 'powerful' in the characters of the novels discussed, as well as in other aspects such as the plot, themes or historical and social contexts.

Additionally, I draw on alternative conceptualisations of power to provide a deeper understanding of the data. For example, I interpret that participants' conceptions of power can be embodied, material, symbolic, relational, interactional, structural, systemic and fluid. The relevant conceptualisations of power have been discussed in the literature review in more detail prior to their appearance in the data.

6.2: Findings

I present the following data in order to facilitate analysis relating to my first research question: *How do girls read gender in the assigned texts for GCSE English*

Literature? As I have previously outlined earlier in this thesis, "Reading" gender is here defined as the ways in which participants describe certain traits, mannerisms or actions when referring to the men and women characters in the 19th century novels discussed. I will show how my pupil participants attribute certain traits and qualities within a binary split between men/women in the novels, but also apply those ideas more widely when discussing the social and historical contexts. In many instances within the data, it was made explicit by participants what they associate with the masculine/feminine, but I also include more implicit instances that concern traits participants viewed as negative when associated with women or men in the novels.

The subsequent findings are grouped into three main themes: Power; Admirable and Desirable; and Nameless and Non-Desirable. Power indicates that my participants 'read' gender in the ways that they referred to characters, plot and historical and social context, and was highlighted twenty seven times in my pupil data. I will explain in the analysis section of this chapter how this data can be interpreted through different forms of power (for example, power as embodied, material and symbolic). Admirable and Desirable captures participants' valuing of certain traits of characters in the novels, but also in people outside of the texts that they discuss, and was the most prevalent in my pupil data (forty nine times). I will show that participants "read" gender through characteristics that they respect, and how they associated these traits with different genders. Finally, Nameless and Non-Desirable highlights occasions (thirty three times in my pupil data) where I identify participants to do the opposite of the previous category, essentially where they explicitly de-value certain gendered traits in characters and people outside of the novels.

These themes were developed on the basis of common themes and phrases used by participants in the semi-structured focus groups, and are in places triangulated with questionnaire responses by the same participants in the online follow-up questionnaire. Whilst there are some instances of the data belonging to

multiple categories, I felt that there were important distinctions that could be made from having the data coded in this way. Considering Holloway and Todres' association of qualitative research with "thematizing meanings" (2003), often I found in my own coding that "meanings" within my data intersected with other coding categories, and that it was appropriate to code data in this way as more than one interpretation was possible to present in my analysis.

6.2.1: References to 'Power' and 'Strength'

The words 'Power' and 'Strength' were commonly referred to by my pupil participants (a total of twenty two times, with a stronger weighting from the groups studying H.G Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898a; 2017b) with fourteen references compared to eight). I interpret these instances in my data to have different meanings, and to belong to the overall theme of Power. For example, Jane uses the word "powerful" to describe the strength which Miss Elphinstone embodies in her role as a key woman protagonist in H.G Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898a; 2017b): Elizabeth, Jane, Charlotte: "Miss Elphinstone!"*...*Jane: "She is quite powerful…*". In the previous quote, Jane is justifying why she, along with Elizabeth and Charlotte, feel that Miss Elphinstone is their favourite woman character in the novel. Whilst Jane and my other participants could have provided different reasons to value her as their favourite woman character, showcasing 'power' amidst the chaos of an alien invasion in the novel was what ultimately earned her their respect. Jane then builds on this reading of Miss Elphinstone as powerful and explains what specifically about her character she admires:

> Charlotte: She's (Miss Elphinstone) like sensible.
>
> Jane: Yeah! And taking out her emotion, so taking out the emotional side and being really strong and that was really good to see...erm...and powerful that it was a woman. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Here, Miss Elphinstone's power was recognised by Jane as contrasting the "...increasingly hysterical, fearful, and depressed" (Wells, 1898a; 2017b) character of her sister-in-law, Mrs Elphinstone. Miss Elphinstone's ability to remain "sensible" (Charlotte) in the midst of the collapse of society means that Jane's reading of her as "powerful" relates to her "taking out the emotional side". Essentially, Jane and Charlotte classify Miss Elphinstone as powerful because of her lack of traditionally feminine emotional traits and qualities. Here, the 'reading' of gender manifests in the form of a masculinised attribute ("powerful") which is recognised in Miss Elphinstone as the feminised emotionality is absent. Miss Elphinstone does not possess physical attributes associated with power, but that does not mean that she cannot be powerful in the eyes of my participants by not presenting as overly emotional. I will provide an analysis of how this is an example of embodied or enacted power (Gaventa, 2003) later in this chapter.

As well as direct references to women characters as 'powerful', my participants also referred to them as 'strong' when reflecting why they admired them. In another discussion about Miss Elphinstone, Elizabeth noted that she felt "she [Miss Elphinstone] goes up against people!". This was then immediately associated with this display of power as a form of strength by Georgiana: "She's the only strong female character!". Here, Georgiana does not consider power to be a purely physical trait, but something that can be 'earned' in other ways. This is something I also observed with the following data from schools studying *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens,1843a; 2018b): Louisa: "Yeah! Mrs Cratchit. I think because she's always there and reliable and strong for her family.", Betty: "I like the character of Mrs Cratchit. Because, even though she's poor, she still like providing for her family, so I think it's like a really important role…" and Eliza: "And I think like she didn't think of herself much, even though she was poor as well.". These are examples of my participants associating strength with Mrs Cratchit's ability to hold her family together, or navigate uncertainties and hardships that occurred in the novel. Later in

the analysis of this data, I will argue that instances of my participants' reflections

that associate with strength and power are not always due to desirable

circumstances which the women characters face.

Strength was also associated with Miss Elphinstone by Catherine for her ability to

remain stable and help others in *The War of the Worlds* (Wells,1898a; 2017b):

> Catherine: But Miss Elphinstone was like, taking charge and helped other people.

> Lydia: Yeah! But I thought that that showed the limited population out of women that would do that… (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Catherine shows how she perceives Miss Elphinstone to align with the "caring

woman" stereotype (Gray, 2010) : "helped other people", but also embodies strength

and power by "taking charge". Lydia agrees with this reading, but adds historical

context concerning the roles of Victorian women, noting that Miss Elphinstone's

caring nature combined with her strength reflects a "limited population of women"

that would be represented in doing so. I interpret these readings of Miss

Elphinstone's character and the traits that earn her respect from my participants to

show her as "Radically both": a beacon of resistance within the context in the novel,

but also representative of gender roles to reflect the period in which the novel is

written. I will provide more detail later in this chapter when conducting my analysis of

my classification of "Radically both", as well as other examples in the data that

evidence this angle.

When asked about her favourite woman character in the novel she was studying,

Harriet admired the character of Scrooge's sister in *A Christmas Carol*

(Dickens,1843a;2018b):

> Harriet: I reckon probably Scrooge's sister? I think she has the most, she holds the most power over him and over all the characters in the book. Even though she's not actually there, it's like her memory that sort of keeps on going… (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Her association of Scrooge's sister as having significance in the novel directly

referenced the "power" over Scrooge that his sister held, despite only appearing as

a memory. In this instance, Harriet reads Scrooge's sister to have power within the novel due to the impact she had on him in his childhood. Harriet also mentions the "control" that Belle (Scrooge's former finacée) has over Scrooge in a different iteration of power:

> Harriet: Yeah Belle, I think she's got a bit more of that like control. And she gets more of a say in things, and like even though Scrooge...it's like yeah he doesn't want her to like, break up with him, or like break off the marriage, urm...she still does…(School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Harriet reads Scrooge's sister and Belle as powerful characters because of the impact that they have on the main character of the novel (Scrooge). Essentially, Harriet views Belle as worthy of admiration because the memory alone of Belle enables her to "hold the most power" over Scrooge, even though she does not have a voice within the text. This is also something which is admired by Julia, when she refers to Scrooge's regret of having not "changed sooner" in order to have a life with Belle:

> Julia: …you can still see sometimes in the text that Scrooge still, kind of thinks about her. And once he's a changed man, you can kind of see how he wishes he'd changed sooner to be able to marry her. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Both Harriet and Juilia admired Belle's ability to have influence over the main character, and as a result, the plot of the novel, even though she is not a main character in the story herself. I interpret this to show that they 'read' a positive gendered trait (as it was manifest in their reading of Belle as a favourable woman character) as having power and influence over other characters in the novel.

Power and strength were deemed to be positive character traits for multiple reasons by my participants, and a lack of power and strength was read as being negative. For example, Margaret contrasts her interpretation of men characters against women characters in *The War of the Worlds* (Wells, 1898a; 2017b): "Well the males play like the really strong characters like the Artilleryman and the Narrator, and the women are like, in and out kind of? They don't play as strong characters…" Here, Margaret reads strength and being a "strong character" as a

positive trait, and subsequently reflects that there are fewer strong women

characters in the novel. Here, she directly references the idea of being "strong" and I

will argue later in my analysis that her classification of strength as a positive trait can

be understood when considered alongside the concept of hegemonic masculinity

(Connell, 1995).

Now that I have presented findings which reference 'power' and 'strength', I will

provide an overview of my findings in which my participants refer to traits they find

admirable and desirable in the characters of the novels that we discussed.

6.2.2: References to Admirable and Desirable Traits

The following will show instances in my data where my participants valued certain

traits in the characters in the novels, but also in people outside of the texts that they

discuss. As shown in the previously presented data, there were instances of

associations of power and strength of characters were also admirable and desirable

traits for my participants (which occurred with roughly two thirds of data which I

classified as part of the theme of Power).

Additionally, my participants viewed characters having influence over the plot,

themes and other characters as something positive. At times, this also extended to

viewing women's power in society as something admirable or desirable.

Below, Emma reads Belle's rejection of Scrooge's proposal as admirable:

> Emma: I think Belle is a good example as she would sort of speak out about her life. Whereas, I think there are points where Mrs Cratchit would like to speak out but doesn't. Like when Bob Cratchit is like "Oh a toast to Scrooge" and she doesn't want to, but she does it anyway for him…(School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

In a direct contrast to what she admires in Belle, Emma mentions that Mrs

Cratchit's inability to "speak out" in the novel displeases her. Therefore in this

reading of gender, Emma shows that she admires women who are able to speak out

and ties this to Belle's willingness to reject a marriage proposal. This is something

that Harriet and Penelope also found admirable in their readings of Belle:

> Harriet: Yeah Belle, I think she's got a bit more of that like control. And

she gets more of a say in things, and like even though Scrooge...it's like yeah he doesn't want her to like, break up with him, or like break off the marriage, urm...she still does…

Penelope: Um Belle, because like she ended it when it kind of got worse with...with er Scrooge. Yeah she went with her head and just sort of broke it off. Because he wouldn't change. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Here, Belle is viewed as powerful by Harriet and Penelope for her ability to make her own decisions. They both admire her for her ability to end her relationship with Scrooge. In these examples, the trait of independence is read as positive by my participants, showing that their readings of gender in admirable women link to how independent they perceive them to be. In their readings of Miss Elphinstone, Catherine, Mary and Jane also valued her independence as a character trait. Catherine referred to Miss Elphinstone as "pragmatic", and Mary agreed with this interpretation straight away. Following this, Jane noted that she (Miss Elphinstone) is "much more independent" than her sister-in-law (Mrs Elphinstone).

Later in the focus group, Elizabeth connected the valued trait of independence which she, and others in her group, identified in Miss Elphinstone with young women in the real world outside of the novel: "Miss Elphinstone shows the younger generation talking, like being more independent". This shows that my participants value and admire the trait of independence both within characters of the novel and as something to embody in the real world. Lydia builds on this interpretation, by saying that characters such as Miss Elphinstone "represent the independent woman" by being included in the novel. Later in my analysis, I will offer an explanation as to why the trait of independence is valued so highly by my participants, connecting it to Girlboss feminism. These examples show that independence in women was viewed as an admirable and desirable trait when my participants reflected on gendered representations in the novels they read.

In addition to independence, some of my participants also admired women characters for their levels of influence on the plot and themes within the novels they read (which made up eighteen instances in my pupil data, with the majority (eleven)

occurring in groups who studied *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens, 1843a; 2018b)). When discussing the roles that women characters had in *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens, 1843a; 2018b), Betty and Penelope provide an example of this in my data:

> Betty: Well I agree on a certain level. Er...because it revolved around men. However, the women do play a small role in it…
>
> Penelope: I sort of agree with this, but if it wasn't left to the women during some of the novel I don't think the plot would have been the same. For example with Belle and Scrooge and how much he loved money that was sort of about a woman… (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Penelope's admiration of Belle mirrors some of the reasons why Mary and Elizabeth viewed Miss Elphinstone from *The War of the Worlds* (Wells, 1898a; 2017b) in a positive light. Penelope indicates in the above extract that Belle's actions within the novel impact the plot to the extent that without Belle, Penelope feels that the plot would not have been the same. Meanwhile, Mary and Elizabeth agreed that Miss Elphinstone had "a key role!" (Elizabeth) in the novel, which I interpret as them admiring. I will develop this point more in my analysis, but here the reading of positive and admirable traits by my participants is reflected in how much influence a character has over the plot of a novel.

Participants also found admirable traits in men characters. Eliza's reading of Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens, 1843a ;2018b) is a strong example of this from my data:

> Eliza: I feel like stereotypically, there he [Scrooge] does show like the good side and the emotion there when he's like connecting to his sister. Like with his thoughts and his imagination and stuff. And I feel like maybe, it's not stereotypical that men like express that side of them. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Eliza shows in this extract that she admires Scrooge's ability to show "emotion" when she refers to it as his "good side". This is a stark contrast to data I have previously included which showed other participants valuing Miss Elphinstone from *The War of the Worlds* (Wells, 1898a; 2017b) for her ability to not be emotional. Scrooge being valued for showing his emotional side reflects a double standard of sorts, in that the same character trait of being emotional is viewed as non-desirable

in women by some of my participants. Lucy, Clara and Penelope develop the reading of Scrooge's past as "vulnerable" (Lucy) in the following excerpt:

> Lucy: Yeah I feel like when he was younger he was more vulnerable, that's quite feminine normally I think.
>
> Isabella: Yeah!
>
> Clara: Yeah and that sort of went away as he grew up.
>
> Isabella: Yeah as he got older he probably just sort of got...got into society…
>
> Penelope: Yeah into society and the idea that it...he might be wrong if he like cries or shows emotion. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

The above shows that these participants valued and admired Scrooge's historical ability to show his emotions. Essentially, my pupil participants valued when characters went against traditional gender stereotypes. Julia also voiced her admiration for Bob Cratchit when referring to the expression of his paternal feelings and emotion regarding his daughter:

> Julia:...one of Cratchit's daughters has a doll. And I think when it was like, when it said erm... cause they sort of made a joke about like he hid it with his other daughters kind of thing, and then they told Bob that he had to work on Christmas Day, I was like, when he got really upset about that, that like, kind of resonated with me. Because like, they say like he's upset because of his daughter, because he wants to spend Christmas with her and everything. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

The above ties to instances in my data where participants valued Mrs Cratchit's ability to be a "strong" mother and wife in her family role, and Julia builds on this showing that familiar connection is an admired trait that applies to their readings of both men and women characters. This is expanded on below by Elinor, Harriet and Emma in their readings of Bob Cratchit:

> Elinor: Also maybe Mr Cratchit?
>
> Harriet: Yeah I would think so, because he is very loving.
>
> Emma: Yeah and although his family didn't have a lot he was very loving towards his family. And those things were like sort of a Victorian priority, but I think also though in comparison he was a bit more loving. As opposed to that extreme maternal trait that women can have when all they do is worry about their kids, he sort of was the man version of that? (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Julia, Elinor, Harriet and Emma all value and admire aspects of Bob Cratchit's

behaviour that reflects a changing masculinity (as traditional masculinity requires a

lack of emotionality), one where men are encouraged to be open and emotional

(Butera, 2008). This is also evident in the exchange between Eliza, Lucy, Isabella,

Clara and Penelope when discussing the character of Scrooge. Penelope and

Isabella specifically noted how societal pressures can impact men's expression of

themselves emotionally (Connell, 1995). I interpret these comments, as well as

others I have previously outlined, to indicate that my participants read men who are

emotionally expressive as admirable and desirable. This data therefore shows that

men are perceived positively for expressing emotions and for strong family outlooks.

This differs however, to women displaying emotion, as I have previously highlighted

in the contrast between readings of Miss Elphinstone and Scrooge. It should also be

noted that the positive view of family relations for women characters does not extend

to my participants' views of women expressing an "extreme maternal trait" (Emma).

This is another example of where there is a double-standard of sorts in the traits that

some participants admire and respect, and those that they actively dislike. I will

expand on this later in the chapter when offering my analysis.

  Finally, there were also instances in the data of when some of my participants

highlighted privileges that they perceived men to have (both in and outside of the

texts they studied). I interpret these to be examples of them finding these

advantages desirable. Isabella notes that the lack of women's voice in *A Christmas

Carol* (Dickens, 1843a; 2018b) makes her feel that men have more representation in

the novel: "I agree to an extent, like the women don't really speak much in the novel

so it does feel that it's about men more just from that point of view". This instance in

the data shows that something that Isabella perceives as desirable has manifested

almost as a form of envy, but also with a wish for things to be different. The

desirable outcome therefore, is representation. This is something that Georgiana,

Elizabeth and Lydia also mentioned in their discussion concerning *The War of the

Worlds* (Wells,1898a; 2017b). Georgiana noted that "Men have more opportunities

in it [the novel]. I feel like, women aren't represented as well…" and then Elizabeth and Lydia both agreed with her and expanded on her point: "Yeah! Like there's way more male representation." (Elizabeth) and "Yeah" (Lydia). This did not mean that they did not enjoy the novel, (as was evident elsewhere in the data) but it is clear that they felt there was a deficit in representation of "strong" women characters.

In addition to finding representation desirable, Penelope and Eliza found the privilege men have in the workplace, including the pay gap (Blau & Khan, 2003) noteworthy:

> Penelope: Yeah, and like how much money women get compared to men. It still seems bad and unfair.
>
> Eliza: Yeah like and men at work have it a bit better, like if you're a man you get like advantages and stuff. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

The above shows that circumstances beyond the paradigms of the novel they were studying were brought to light when reflecting on gendered privileges and character traits by my participants. What was desirable for my participants in the above exchange was not the existence of the pay gap, but the benefits of being on the 'winning side' in terms of gendered privilege. Later in my analysis I will reflect on why my participants particularly associate workplace advantages with desirable traits in their readings of and reactions to the novels they study.

6.2.3: References to Non-Desirable Traits

Before moving to a deeper analysis of my findings, I will present data where I have identified my participants explicitly de-valuing certain traits in characters and people outside of the novels discussed in reference to gender.

One way that this manifested was through instances of 'namelessness' in my data. This 'namelessness' refers to instances in the data where my participants were unable to name or remember the names of certain characters, who were often women. I argue that this is potentially due to them having non-desirable traits which participants mention in more substantial detail. Emma, Elinor, Sally and Harriet struggle to name women characters in *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens,1843a;

2018b)Emma: "There's like 2…" [women characters in *A Christmas Carol*], Elinor: "Who even are there…", Sally: "There's...there's...Scrooge's sister and Mrs Cratchit...oh and Belle." Harriet: "I reckon probably Scrooge's sister?". This also happened in an exchange between Julia, Emma and Betty:

> Julia: I agree with that! I also think that er, I can't remember her name now, but the person that Scrooge is supposed to marry.
>
> Emma: Yeah the fact that we don't even know the wife's name, wait the fiancé's name...wait is she?
>
> Betty: Yeah fiancé.
>
> Emma: Like yeah they obviously didn't say her name . And like, yeah she didn't seem to be that important overall. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

These examples did not indicate that my participants did not like or respect Scrooge's sister (Fanny) or ex-fiancé (Belle), as elsewhere in the data I have shown there were traits they admired in both characters. It could be that namelessness in these instances ties to their other discussion about a lack of female voice and representation within the novel. Isabella's comment adds to the likeliness of this as a potential reason in the forgotten names of these women characters: "Erm...is there even any women to pick from?". Additionally, Louisa forgets Mrs Cratchit's name in the following example: "Ah I forgot what she's called but like the wife?" which could add depth to my interpretation of namelessness within the data. Mrs Cratchit's namelessness (despite being one of the most notable women characters in the novel) reduces her to her 'family relation': "wife". It is also worth noting that this did not happen with any of the men characters across all my focus groups.

At times, the names of the women characters that were nameless were also characters with a lot of traits that my participants viewed as non-desirable. For example, Charlotte, Mary and Elizabeth all refer to *The War of the Worlds'* (Wells,1898a;2017b) Mrs Elphinstone:

> Charlotte: The sister- in- law?
>
> Mary: Yeah sister- in -law! And she…

Elizabeth: She's a bit naff.

Mary: Ah yeah haha. It just shows like two sides, like one of them she was just waiting for her husband to come and save them… (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Mrs Elphinstone is established to be the non-desirable sister-in-law to Miss Elphinstone, who is mentioned often by my participants when referring to admirable traits (as I have shown with previous examples). In the above example, my participants used the women's 'family identifiers': "sister-in-law" to fill in for their namelessness. Whilst there were non-desirable traits that my participants identified in men characters from the novels they were studying, they never forgot their names or rendered them nameless. I will discuss this further when conducting analysis concerning instances of my participants mentioning non-desirable traits in the data.

Finally, when discussing social class, there are examples in my data of some participants associating a lack of economic security as a non-desirable trait. Betty observes that "Mrs Cratchit. Because, even though she's poor…" is a character she likes in *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens,1843a; 2018b). Here, although Betty has included Mrs Cratchit as a character she admires, she focuses on her economic status as a shortcoming with "even though she's poor". The significance of this statement is that it implies that poverty, or being poor, is indicative of being a bad, or non-desirable, character trait.

Betty also noted that a good character trait would be to balance the running of a home with a job to earn income, and not to "just" be "providing for the family and looking after your husband.":

Betty: Well for some of them it's the fact that they were still to get married, but obviously Mrs Cratchit was married with children. Erm maybe they'd be more respected though, because they could get a job, erm, to provide the family with income instead of just providing for the family and looking after your husband. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

This is later explained further in her focus group session, as Betty equates the privilege of Belle being of a higher social class than Mrs Cratchit to having the ability

to have more options and "choice" within her storyline: "Could you also say though like she is lucky to be able to break it off and make that choice, because it is like, other characters are poor and…". This does not purely imply that Betty's comments means that she views those of a lower class as negative, but rather that she can realise the significant impact that social class has on the characters in the novel she is studying.

This discussion of social class was also present in the other focus groups which discussed *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens,1843a; 2018b). Penelope, Clara and Louisa all expressed similar thoughts to Betty, whereby poverty and belonging to a lower class was viewed as a non-desirable trait:

> Penelope: Erm, yes. Well, I'm not really sure. The difference between all the characters I guess is their class. Belle was obviously a bit more...well off. The other women and characters in the novel don't have as much money.
>
> Clara: Yeah Belle is like middle class, so....
>
> School 2 (A Christmas Carol)
>
> Louisa: Well I think like Mrs Cratchit is like poor, and low class compared to Belle. Like she's poor and not as like posh. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

As with Betty, the above from Penelope, Clara and Louisa does not indicate that they view being "poor, and low class" (Louisa) as something negative in a character, but they do show that the associated lack of security from belonging to a lower class is not desirable for reasons relating to freedom of choice for characters in the novel. The non-desirable aspect of belonging to certain social classes therefore, links to the perceptions of limitation of choice of characters by my participants.

Now that I have presented a selection of my data, I present an analysis relating to research question (RQ) 1: *How do girls read gender in the assigned texts for GCSE English Literature?* This will be split thematically, with the first area of discussion being data that relates to forms of power.

6.3   <u>Power: Analysis</u>

There are multiple ways in which to define power, and the frameworks which I will apply in order to analyse my findings have been presented in more depth in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The subsequent analysis will draw on three aspects of Foucault's definitions of power: power as embodied and enacted (Gaventa, 2003), power as productive (1976a; 2020b) and sites of power (1976a; 2020b). Power was found to be "diffuse" (Gaventa, 2003) in the data, essentially that participants read it as embedded in the setting, plot and historical and social context of the novels and not only embodied in characters.

<u>6.3.1: Embodied and Enacted Power</u>

Applying the definition of power as something which is "embodied and enacted rather than possessed" (Gaventa, 2003), there were multiple ways in which I interpret my participants' discussions to be representations of power. For example, beyond characters there were several ways in which my participants read gendered power in the texts: they found it in influence over men characters, control with regards to the storylines of the women characters, in reference to social class and found in the themes of the novels discussed.

Power in the data I have shared surrounding discussion of Miss Elphinstone manifests in Jane's recognition of her as her favourite woman character in *The War of the Worlds'* (Wells,1898a; 2017b). Whilst Jane did not elaborate on what she meant by "powerful" in her initial use of the term to describe Miss Elphinstone, other instances of the use of the word "power" were often associated with "strength" or the idea of being a "strong woman". I consider this combination of terms to be examples of my participants classifying Miss Elphinstone as powerful in the data, showing that

they valued her ability to function beyond fear and chaos in the face of collapse within the novel. In the contexts of the discussions, power and strength were valued by my participants and viewed as a positive trait.

Power (when embodied or enacted) appears to manifest with a cost in other areas of the characters' personality. As previously shown through my data, Miss Elphinstone does not possess physical attributes associated with power, but that does not mean that she cannot be powerful in the eyes of my participants. Charlotte and Jane note that Miss Elphinstone is "sensible" (Charlotte) and Miss Elphinstone "…taking out her emotion, so taking out the emotional side..." (Jane) means that she is respected by my participants. As I have previously observed when presenting my findings, the 'reading' of gender in this instance presents power as a masculine trait which is recognised in Miss Elphinstone because she does not have the feminine trait of being emotional. Therefore, I conceptualise this reading of power to be embodied and enacted, as my participants respect the lack of emotion that Miss Elphinstone projects, which is not a physical trait and is instead something that she does, tying back to how power is enacted. Essentially, Miss Elphinstone is considered to be "strong" as a result of her not being emotional and not due to physical attributes by my participants in their reading of her character. When examining traditional gendered attributes in patriarchal societies including the present-day UK, 'being emotional' or carrying out emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012) is a duty which falls on women disproportionately to men (Reay, 2004). Emotional capital (building on Bourdieu's concept of capitals (1986)) is understood as a form of capital which is gendered and which society specifically expects women to provide (Reay, 2004). This 'emotional' form of capital is not one which is seen to have a concrete value in the same manner as other forms of capital, with the exception of for example Bell (1990) who labels emotional labour falling on women as "an economy of emotion".

Instead, there is an overall patriarchal consensus that emotions are bad because emotions are weak and, precisely because of these connotations of weakness, show evidence of femininity which is under-valued in this system. For specific connotations of power, I argue that in order for my participants to consider a character embodying or enacting power, they must not be 'emotional', as emotions are not deemed to be powerful both in the context of the novels they read and in the society where they live. Therefore, whilst emotions and emotional labour are an essential form of capital which are not necessarily valued under patriarchy (Reay, 2004), in this instance not showing emotion grants the label of embodied power to Miss Elphinstone by my participants.

  Miss Elphinstone's 'power' can also be located in examples where participants admire her actions in the novel. Elizabeth admires Miss Elphinstone's ability to "go up against people" which immediately follows with Georgiana's comment: "She's the only strong female character!". My participants interpreted Miss Elphinstone as powerful because she took action and did not shy away from conflict. Again, this can be analysed through power being conceptualized as embodied and enacted, as here my participants did not base their views of Miss Elphinstone's strength or power on any physical power that she might have had.

Essentially, my participants did not consider power to be a purely physical trait, but something that could be 'earned' in other ways, such as through behaviour. I argue that this is the case due to the fact that certain traits are inherently valued in a patriarchal society (as well as de-valued as discussed previously), and power in this context is a concept that provides legitimacy to the way in which society is structured. One of the potential sources of this values system can be found in Connell's definition for hegemonic masculinity: "...the configuration of gender

practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." (Connell,1995, p. 77). Applying Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (1995) to my data, male dominance and female subordination under patriarchy can be identified in the format of the nuclear family. This provides context for how my participants read Mrs Cratchit in her capacity in maintaining and supporting her nuclear family structure. Whilst instances of participants' reflections on what can be read as hegemonic masculinity do not always show family values as a desirable characteristic, they did respect women characters who held families together or the abilities of women characters to navigate uncertainties and hardships that occurred in the novels. As I have previously shown, this can be identified in my participants' readings of Mrs Cratchit. Louisa associated strength with Mrs Cratchit's ability to support her family: "Yeah! Mrs Cratchit. I think because she's always there and reliable and strong for her family.". Betty also viewed Mrs Cratchit as strong for her ability to provide "for her family" and Eliza noted that (Mrs Cratchit) "didn't think of herself much". These examples show that Mrs Cratchit's strength lay in her ability to maintain a gendered status quo in the eyes of my participants.

This contrasts with the traits that Jane, Elizabeth and Georgiana respect in Miss Elphinstone, which are not traditionally feminine. Here, the traits which some of my participants valued (and I interpret as forms of strength or power) were generally representative of a form of masculinity which prioritises and idealises dominance, aggressive behaviour and optimum masculine heterosexual performance (Donaldson, 1993). Donaldson (1993) observes that hegemonic masculinity can present in a cultural format, which would be reflected in the novels my participants were discussing. When discussing Miss Elphinstone, often the behaviours which

some participants find to be 'strong' show dominance and exhibit 'aggressive'

behaviour. For example, Elizabeth's previously shown admiration of Miss

Elphinstone "going up against people" links to Jane's perception of Miss

Elphinstone's execution of optimum masculine (heteronormative) performance

"taking out the emotional side and being really strong".

This cultural manifestation of hegemonic masculinity is something my participants

picked up on in other focus groups and, whilst they do not explicitly name it as such,

they do outline its key features:

> Emma: …without intending, not like that, but like it's still there in that the
> male characters have masculine expectations and the female characters do
> kind of reflect the things we were saying, like being homemakers?
>
> Harriet & Elinor: Yeah!
>
> Betty: Yeah it's kind of reflective of the societal expectations in a way…(School 2,
> *A Christmas Carol*)

In the above extract, participants discuss that the novel portrays a traditional

heteronormative performance of masculinity in the roles that the characters have (as

voiced by Emma). Participants also conceptualised their own versions of 'traditional'

masculinity, noting when characters do not conform to it (Eliza:"...it's not

stereotypical that men like express that side of them."). In these examples, in

relation to RQ1 my participants were "reading" and noticing the cultural

manifestations of hegemonic masculinity in aspects of the novel, including but not

limited to the characters, historical contexts and themes surrounding them. In some

instances, participants were reading critically, thinking about what their expectations

were of the texts and characters, specifically in this case regarding their conceptions

of masculinity, as can be seen through Lucy's analysis: "Yeah I feel like when he

[Scrooge] was younger he was more vulnerable, that's quite feminine normally I

think."

In addition to reading critically, some participants also showed evidence of reading mimetically, where they reflected on the contexts in which the novels were written and forged opinions based on how they related to historical and social expectations: Betty: "Yeah it's kind of reflective of the societal expectations in a way…".Therefore, when reading gender in characters such as Mrs Cratchit, Miss Elphinstone and Scrooge, my participants identified perceived gender roles and found those associated with traditional heteronormative masculinity to be superior to those associated with femininity. This is reflected in their admiration of characters who they perceive to be strong and powerful–traditionally masculine traits–which I have conceptualised in different ways.

Participants also noted instances in the novels they encountered concerning gendered representation and the gendered division of labour when reading mimetically:

> Lucy: I feel like, the women's parts aren't really as big as the men's roles. So I feel a bit sorry about that. And they're like the victim, sort of?

> Eliza: Yeah!

> Lucy: And it's like...men did the work whilst women were in the kitchen. Yeah. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Here, Lucy and Eliza clearly outline the ways in which they notice the cultural expressions of hegemonic masculinity within the novel. Additionally, Lucy makes a comparison between the women within the novel to "victim(s)". When considering Connell (1995) again to draw upon the hierarchies associated with forming a dominant form of masculinity, Lucy and Eliza's discussion reflects Bryson's (1999) argument that hegemonic masculinity also involves the oppressor/oppressed binary of men and women under patriarchy. I interpret Lucy and Eliza to 'read' the gendered representations in the novel in their verbalisation of a more critical reading

of gender in the text when referring to how traditional gender roles would look. This critical reading of gender also links to Connell's (1995) definition of masculinity, as men holding the 'breadwinner' role is one of its pillars. My participants' readings of gender show that not only do they 'read' gender in a way that associates certain forms of power with different genders, but also that certain actions (such as the roles of men as providers and women performing domestic tasks in the texts) build on their understandings of gender. I now move on to discuss instances in my data where my participants simultaneously value traditional masculine and feminine traits and qualities within the same characters.

6.3.2: "Radically Both"

Before presenting an analysis relating to the concept of "Radically Both" I will explain my reasons for using the terminology, as well as its origin. As I have highlighted in the first chapter of this thesis, the decision to use "Radically Both" as a theme of discussion, and then as my title for this thesis, originated in working with Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886a; 2012b) as part of my pilot study. The quote (taken from *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Stevenson, 1886a; 2012b) refers to having two halves or sides: Dr Jekyll explains that his intentions were to split the two personalities apart into a good and an evil being. As previously mentioned, a recurring theme in my data is that many aspects of my findings embody something which is "radically both". I thought this was an interesting way to bring all of my participants together who were all studying different novels (of the GCSE selection) with different themes and characters, but making sense of them in similar ways. I will also apply the idea of "Radically Both" in later analysis of findings from my staff participants in a different way.

Within my participants' readings of Miss Elphinstone, her femininity is one which allows her to be "Radically both": a beacon of resistance within the context of the novel, but also representative of gender roles to reflect the period in which the novel is written. In the eyes of my participants, Miss Elphinstone is able to embody power (Gaventa, 2003) and be a dominator (Bourdieu, 1979) (holding a form of power), whilst still partially performing gender in a way which lines her more to Connell's "subordinate" femininity (1995) under hegemonic masculinity. For example, Catherine observed in earlier presented data that Miss Elphinstone "helped other people", thus embodying the "caring woman" stereotype (Gray, 2010). Miss Elphinstone is able to be "Radically Both" in her ability to exude multiple femininities (Schippers, 2007). Additionally, these multitudes do not need to be classified as subordinate to masculinities (Connell, 1995) to exist. Whilst Connell (1995) does discuss other forms of femininities, they do not fully describe the spectrum of possibilities in the same way as the 'types' of masculinities do (Messerschmidt, 2018). The below extract provides an example of this from my data:

> Jane: Also though for H.G.Wells to say that like Mrs Elphinstone uses weapons and stuff, I think that's quite...Oh Miss Elphinstone sorry! Uses weapons, I think that that's quite brave, well not brave of him but…
>
> Catherine: Kind of goes against what was expected at the time?
>
> Elizabeth & Charlotte: Yeah!
>
> Jane:...yeah it's very bold! (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Jane, Catherine and Elizabeth both value and idolise Miss Elphinstone for her encapsulation of the concept of "Radically Both". This can be seen in Jane's acknowledgement that the character being written to use weapons is "bold" as a weapon's connection to violence situates their use as inherently masculine. Additionally, this is evident in Catherine's statement that Miss Elphinstone went against traditional roles of femininity at the time, which my participants also viewed Miss Elphinstone and

the other woman characters as presenting elsewhere in the text. Finally, my participants

find Miss Elphinstone's implicit violence (in her ability to carry weapons) palatable

compared to other forms of violence. For example, Kitty's discussion of colonisation and

the British Empire is seemingly based on the idea that its association with violence made

it a male-committed act:

> Kitty: Yeah very male dominated...and erm just...there wasn't really any like any pinnacle female things going on at the time. When Wells was writing it. Erm...cause obviously there was like The British Empire, but being a woman...like colonising these places but again that wasn't women that was all males doing that. So there just wasn't...any female driven things really… (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Violence in this example from Kitty is associated with the "male dominated" social

and historical context of the novel, rather than directly through a specific character

or character's actions in the novel. In the novel, the "male dominated" colonising is

replaced with the actions of the Martians to present as a key theme. Kitty considers

a violent and impactful action such as colonisation to be "very male dominated" and

places strong emphasis on this idea: "obviously there was like The British Empire,

but being a woman...like colonising these places but again that wasn't women that

was all males doing that." This insight from Kitty mirrors some of Hearn's (2012)

ideas regarding the ways in which representations of hegemonic masculinity often

associate masculinity with violence. This, combined with earlier 'readings' of Miss

Elphinstone, shows that if there is an association of violence–a typically masculine

trait–with a female character, that character can still be admired if they balance said

violence with other desirable feminine traits. Essentially, the character of Miss

Elphinstone provides an insight into 'acceptable' forms of violence in the eyes of my

participants, and embodies the ability to be "Radically Both" through the traditionally

feminine traits she has alongside it.

With men characters however, they did not need to be "Radically Both" in order to reach a balance and be respected by my participants. For example, Anne and Maria discuss the characters of Bob Cratchit and Scrooge:

> Anne: I think that like Bob Cratchit kind of like shows kindness, because he is so nice to Scrooge.
> KS: Yeah?

> Maria: Maybe you could say like when it's "warm Scrooge" and he's feeling in love or loves his sister. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

Anne and Maria do not view Scrooge or Bob Cratchit as going against normative masculinity for their kindness or exhibition of emotions, even though this is against hegemonic masculinity or other traditional masculinity. Although Anne and Maria did not read this emotionality as against masculinity, arguably Scrooge and Bob Cratchit are a different kind of "Radically Both", as they're also breaking traditional gender roles through their showcasing of emotions. Whilst for these men characters, even when expressing non-masculine traits, this did not detract from how my participants viewed their masculinity or character validity. In contrast, it was necessary for women characters to exhibit traits associated with traditional masculinity in order for them to be considered strong when held up against their traditional feminine traits. Hence, creating a double-standard of sorts in order for a character to be "Radically both". For example, other participants viewed Miss Elphinstone as going against normative femininity for her strength and exhibition of power. When considering the binary my participants created regarding rationality and emotion in other focus groups with women characters, there appears to be a framework for my participants' interpretation of different gendered characters: when men characters behave in the emotional and therefore traditionally 'feminine' ways, participants admired them for it, yet they did not admire female characters for the same behaviour. Here, I argue that Bob Cratchit and Scrooge do not need to be "Radically both" to earn admiration from participants. Put simply, men are valued when they show emotions, but for the women characters certain definitions of power no longer apply to them if they are 'too emotional'. For men characters, their open display of emotions is valued by my participants, but also their expected gender performance is not viewed as fragile as a women character's.

Considering more specifically the ways in which this intersects with gendered attributes and expectations, traditional forms of masculinity do not place

expectations on men to express emotions or be "warm" (Maria) or to show
"kindness" (Anne) (Connell,1995). With reference to RQ1, participants "read"
expressions of emotions differently depending on which gender they associated
them with. The conclusion which can be drawn from this is not that emotions are
bad or viewed as negative by my participants, but my data does showcase the
complex ways in which emotions and being emotional intersects with traditional
gendered attributes and expectations. Men characters were admired for displaying
emotions and acting outside of perceived normative masculinity by my participants,
but for women characters they needed to strike a balance of normative femininity
and break past it at the same time in order to receive the same level of respect. I
now move to discuss which traits contributed to this balance of being "Radically
Both" for characters by interpreting my participants' responses.

6.3.3: Girlboss Values

I will now outline and consider why there is such a delicate balance to be struck
to be "Radically Both" by women characters for my participants. Some of the traits
which my participants valued in women characters mirrored traits associated with
"Girlboss" femininity and feminism (Beck, 2021). As I have outlined previously in the
literature review of this thesis, Girlboss feminism is associated with a marketized
form of feminism, which predominantly captures the interests of white women
(Beck, 2021). At its core are strong neoliberal values which encourage women to
"excel" in the corporate realm (Beck, 2021). Traits such: as being a "strong woman"
and being "independent" are associated with Girlboss feminism (Beck, 2021). I
have identified instances of these occurring in my data, for example when Jane
values Miss Elphinstone for being "much more independent", and Elizabeth also
reads Miss Elphinstone to show "the younger generation talking, like being more
independent". This trait was also 'read' as present in Belle from *A Christmas Carol*
(Dickens,1843a;2018b): "because like she ended it... Yeah she went with her head

and just sort of broke it off." (Emma). I interpret these examples to show that my participants all "read" Girlboss values in the texts we discussed. Independence is conceptualised in different ways by my participants in the above quotations, but all versions are still viewed as positive. Independence from a man or relationship can be found in Emma's description of Belle, and independence from societal expectations and norms are described by Elizabeth and Catherine to contribute to their admiration of Miss Elphinstone (Wells, 1898a;2017b). Along with independent income, these are all key elements of Girlboss feminism (Beck, 2021).

My participants did not express admiration for independent income, but they did value how a woman character could function without one. For example, when Eliza and Betty discuss the character of Mrs Cratchit (Dickens,1843a; 2018b) her lack of income and ability to "stay strong" (Eliza) is mentioned. This focus on the neoliberal values associated with Girlboss feminism by my participants reflects a shift in how society views individual success, particularly away from viewing success as an outgrowth of social and economic forces and instead as a result of the individual's own responsibility or merit (Rottenberg, 2019). Essentially, this new form of feminism is highly individualistic (Rottenberg, 2019) and my participants do not question the circumstances around Mrs Cratchit's socio-economic standing, but they do value her ability to "stay strong" (Eliza) and be a good Girlboss role model for her family despite her economic hardship. It is for these reasons that she is viewed positively by my participants.

The absence of these Girlboss values is also noted by Jane: "Whereas Mrs Elphinstone is just the complete opposite" (of independent). I interpret this to show that when characters possess Girlboss traits, they are perceived in a positive way by my participants. A character such as Mrs Elphinstone who lacks these traits, was consistently 'read' in a negative way during the focus groups by my participants. Girlboss feminism goes hand-in-hand with embodying power: no physical traits are required, and its sway for my participants potentially comes in their constant

exposure to it, as it grows as a movement in their formative years (Beck, 2021). In summary therefore, if we consider the ways in which participants note that power can be embodied and enacted within the novels they study, it is highly possible that their definitions of what it means to be powerful and enact power have been influenced by the modern concept of Girlboss feminism. I believe that the implications of Girlboss feminism having such an impact on my participants' understandings of gender and power move them away from any sort of deeper, collective analysis and towards neoliberal and individualistic attitudes. Essentially, Girlboss feminism encourages the 'branding' of the self, flattening critical context and replacing it with tokenistic support for the appearance of, if not material, feminine success. This success, similar to neoliberal feminism, is marketised and economically focussed. What separates Girlboss feminism from being purely finance focused however, is its simultaneous expectation that girls and women must balance 'hustle culture' and incorporate hobbies, romantic relationships and other pressures from patriarchy in their everyday routines.

I will now present an analysis for instances in my data where my participants read characters as admirable, or showcase a level of desire or envy concerning social gendered dynamics. I will also highlight that they enjoyed or desired the opportunity to learn theory alongside the novels they studied for English.

6.4: Admirable and Desirable Analysis

I have presented examples in my data which showed the traits my participants valued in characters in their readings of their assigned 19th century novels. I have previously outlined how strength, power and 'Girlboss' traits were admired in women characters in the novels we discussed. Whilst I have previously conceptualised power as being embodied or enacted (Gaventa, 2003), there were also examples where women characters had influence over the plot, themes and other characters which my participants interpreted as admirable or desirable. For example, when

Harriet admired Scrooge's sister and Belle, it was due to their ability to hold power within the novel and impact Scrooge's storyline. Essentially, Harriet feels that Belle is worthy of admiration as the memory of Belle enables her to "hold the most power" over Scrooge. I have also shown in the findings how Julia admires Belle for the same reasons, portraying that the power to influence a main character and the plot grants women characters admiration from my participants. Additionally, whilst Betty did not refer specifically to Belle she admired the "small role" that women could play within *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens,1843a; 2018b).

I have presented data that highlights admirable traits my participants identified in men characters, as well as privileges that men have in the real world outside of the texts. This differed to what was valued in women characters by my participants, and as I have discussed previously, there was a delicate balance expected of women characters in order to be admirable that was not present for men characters. Traits that my participants admired in men characters included the display of paternal feelings and open expression of emotion. I have shown how my participants' readings of desirability almost manifested not as envy, but rather as the desire for things to be different. Specific examples of this that I have highlighted include references to the pay gap (Blau & Khan, 2003) and levels of representation.

Miss Elphinstone from *The War of the Worlds* (Wells,1898a;2017b) was admired for her "key role" in the novel (Mary and Elizabeth). Her relative power reflected in the plot was viewed as an admirable trait, and Miss Elphinstone was the most admired character across all of my data. Mary and Elizabeth linked their admiration of Miss Elphinstone to current attitudes towards gender relations present in society: Mary "Well we are more respected now. So like Miss Elphinstone was…", Elizabeth: "And just more of us are standing up for ourselves.". I interpret this reading of Miss Elphinstone by Mary and Elizabeth to show that the traits they admire in her are representative of what they would admire in the modern woman outside of the novel. Here, Mary and Elizabeth have identified what they admire in Miss Elphinstone, but also they draw upon the ways in

which they exhibit these behaviours: "standing up for ourselves" (Elizabeth). Lydia also

links Miss Elphinstone to behaviours she admires outside of the novel, stating that she

feels that characters like Miss Elphinstone "represent the independent women". Therefore

not only have my participants highlighted how much they admire independence as a trait,

but they also link it to things they admire outside of the characters within the texts they

read, which indicates their views on gender roles in their specific social context (e.g. an

endorsement of Girlboss feminism).

   In addition to with their valuing of certain traits, my participants also referred to

celebrities as role models and spoke about the influence that magazines and

celebrity gossip had on their reading habits outside of school in a positive manner:

"Maria: Well I read things I Google, like celebrity gossip if that counts haha!",

Louisa: "Well, I sometimes read like magazines, or things I find interesting. Like

non-fiction. Because it's interesting, it's actually happening". Magazines, pop

culture and social media are key areas where pre-teen and teenage girls are able

to form elements of their identities (Jackson & Vares, 2015). In addition to reading

other texts outside of school, my participants also enjoyed engaging with more

'pop' forms of reading: "Do magazines count?" (Georgiana). In addition to

enjoying and engaging with magazines, my participants also made comparisons

between characters in the novels they read to social media and celebrities: Jane:

"I feel like there are some celebrities out there who do the same sort of thing as

Miss Elphinstone." and Georgiana: "I feel like the book was like our social media.

Like showing Miss Elphinstone standing up is like our social media". I argue that

this data shows that pop culture, social media and celebrities play a role in what

my participants consider to be worthy of their time and attention, and also that

elements of these outlets contribute to what they consider to be admirable and

desirable traits, specifically with regards to gender both in and outside of the

novels they read for their GCSEs. Young girls are often familiar with celebrity

culture (Read, 2011), therefore it stands to reason that they would use something

they are familiar with to draw comparisons to characters within the novels they study. The above also shows that they are drawing these comparisons for positive reasons in a character they admire (Miss Elphinstone) to pop culture that they enjoy (magazines, social media and celebrities). In this instance, my participants 'read' gender through a contemporary lens and match a character they admire with actions and traits they admire in the real world: "showing Miss Elphinstone standing up is like our social media" (Georgiana).

The above data also shows the willingness of my participants to interpret the novels they read with alternative lenses and theories. I have presented data previously in this chapter where my participants form their own ideas about gender and gender roles, as well as what they found admirable. Something they appeared to find desirable was the opportunity to learn feminist theory alongside the texts they studied in school. Based on the responses I received from the follow-up questionnaire (nine in total), six participants stated that they had had the chance to learn feminist theory alongside the texts they were studying (one participant was unsure, and two said that they had not had the opportunity to learn feminist theory yet). Of those who did have the chance to study feminist theory alongside the text, when asked if studying theory alongside the text benefitted them, all six indicated that it did to some degree:

> Yes! Because he introduces strong female characters (Miss Elphinstone who takes over the situation when her Mrs Elphinstone doesn't know what to do) this would of been very challenging for the contemporary reader helping us understand the impact the book had on people.

> Yes.

> Yes, it did.

> Yes and within the context of when the play was written and how having a strong female character in a book from a male perspective would've been very poignant for a late Victorian reader.

> Yes, it helped to show and understand the character better and in the context she was in.

> Yes, because it gave me a chance to share how I feel about it.

This data shows that my participants found learning feminist theory useful

alongside the texts they were studying for reasons such as "context", "understand (ing) the character" and "understand(ing) the impact". It is also evident from the above that learning feminist theory enabled one participant to "share how" (they felt about it). Considering this through the lens of Cox's Five Models of English (HMSO, 1989), (previously discussed in Chapter 3) this positive response to feminist theory in English classes evidences the positive impact of the Cultural Analysis Model (HMSO, 1989). Essentially, this participant's feelings about being able to "share" how they felt about the novel is one of the key elements of this model of English. I argue that this is something which is desirable to my participants, as their responses indicate that they either like the chance at learning theory alongside texts, or that they wish they could. This is shown through the data of participants who did not have a chance to learn feminist theory alongside the novel they were studying, or those who were unsure if they had. Two of the three remaining responses indicated that they wished they were able to have this opportunity, and one was unsure. This shows that zero of my participants who took part in the follow-up questionnaire did not want to learn theory alongside studying their 19th century novel, and all of those who did have this incorporated into their studies noted benefits and considered it a desirable practice. I argue therefore, that my data highlights the positive impact that learning feminist theory can have, which links to the Cultural Analysis Model (HMSO,1989). This is of course based on my sample of twenty-eight pupil participants, however this nevertheless indicates that there is room to expand the National Curriculum in this manner. My participants were asked their views concerning feminist theory, however this could be expanded to promoting the learning of other critical theories alongside texts to benefit students (for example postcolonial theory or Marxist theory). At present, this is not a requirement on the National Curriculum for English, but allocating the appropriate resources and support to offer this as part of learning texts could potentially lead to a more widespread positive experience, as has been the case with my participants

who had this opportunity in their learning. This reflects the ability to 'read' gender

for my participants, rather than the ways in which they read gender. Simply, in the

words of one participant, "More teachers should teach feminism and give students

the chance to understand it more", which reflects the desire to be equipped to

better engage with texts.

The desire to engage with texts was shown through the enthusiasm that my

participants spoke about their assigned texts with:

> Georgiana: Yeah I really liked it!
>
> Lydia: Well I didn't think I would at the beginning, but by the end it was really good!
>
> Jane: Yeah it was surprising. Some of our teachers didn't want us to read it because it was very masculine. But Mr [redacted] asked us what we wanted to read, and we didn't like the fact that people would think it was too masculine for us. And I think, well that shouldn't be right because…
>
> Mary: Just because we're an all girls' school doesn't mean we can't read books like this!
>
> Charlotte: Yeah!
>
> Mary: It shouldn't be like, just because we're women we can't read like, a more masculine book…
>
> Charlotte: And it was really good, the book we chose. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

As evidenced above, the seemingly critical reading of the text by Georgiana,

Elizabeth and Lydia ultimately resulted in them enjoying the novel and the process

in which they were able to choose to study it. There is a sense of rebellion and

resistance in this entire exchange, especially in Jane's contribution to the discussion

regarding the perceptions of the novel being "too masculine" for my participants to

engage with. The above shows both admiration of the text that some of my

participants studied, as well as furthers the case of a desire to be equipped with the

critical lenses and tools in which to study it as part of subject English.

6.5: Nameless and Non-Desirable Analysis

Before concluding the chapter, I will now provide analysis of instances in my data where my participants identified non-desirable traits, or where they rendered certain characters 'nameless' in the discussions. Essentially, where my participants explicitly de-value certain traits in characters and people outside of the novels discussed in reference to gender. As I have stated previously in this chapter, 'nameless' refers to instances in the data where my participants were unable to name or remember the names of certain characters. This never happened with men characters, and the women who were nameless often had non-desirable traits.

I have presented data where my participants–including Emma, Elinor, Julia, Isabella and Louisa–all forget the names of women characters. This was sometimes justified with a reason as to why my participants forgot a name: "she didn't seem to be that important overall" (Emma) or "she's [Mrs Elphinstone] a bit naff" (Elizabeth). Within my data, Mrs Elphinstone is established by my participants studying *The War of the Worlds* (Wells,1898a; 2017b) to be the Non-Desirable sister-in-law to Miss Elphinstone. In the eyes of my participants, Mrs Elphinstone lacked the strength, independence and power (admirable qualities) and embodied over-reliance on a relationship "just waiting for her husband to come and save them" (Mary) as a non-desirable trait. I believe that the ways that my participants classify non-desirable traits reflect the opposites of what they find admirable, and I argue that these are based on the values they respect which relate to Girlboss feminism.

This is also evident in some of the ways in which some participants discuss social class. I have previously shown with examples in my data that the non-desirable elements of the descriptions of social class tend to centre on the characters that have a lower social class. For example, Betty described *A Christmas Carol's* (Dickens,1843a; 2018b) Mrs Cratchit as a good character "even though she's poor". The significance of this statement is that it implies that poverty, or being poor, is

indicative of a bad, or non-desirable character trait. Social class was also shown to have dimensions of privilege by some participants, particularly when comparing the characters of Belle and Mrs Cratchit. Belle's privileged class status allows her respect from Betty: "make that choice" (breaking off her engagement with Scrooge), and whilst Betty and other participants reflect that belonging to a lower social class is non-desirable, this links to options and power within a storyline. Essentially, my participants do not view anyone belonging to a lower social class as negative, but they can recognize the impact that social class has on the characters in the novels they study as shown through vocabulary such as "poor" (Betty) and "low class" (Louisa). Therefore, I believe that my participants' observations about social class and the importance of a waged income also reflect Girlboss values and priorities. Essentially, when 'reading' gendered traits they do not admire or desire, my participants have highlighted that a lack of independence and economic stability particularly stand out.

6.6: Conclusion

The presented findings and analysis allow me to reach several conclusions in order to answer RQ1: *How do girls read gender in the assigned texts for GCSE English Literature?* Firstly, there were clear gendered traits that my participants admired, including different iterations of strength, power and independence. I argue that these values mirror values which align with Girlboss feminism in some ways. Secondly, when reading gender, women characters need to strike a balance and be "Radically Both" in order to be characters that my participants admire. Men characters do not need to achieve this, and as a result of my participants' readings of masculinity, traits such as showing emotion and paternal love are valued highly

and mean that men characters are approved of. The traits that my participants did not admire (the non-desirable traits) were often the opposite of what they admired. When women characters embodied too many undesirable traits, they were sometimes 'nameless' in the data. This did not happen with any men characters. Finally, my participants expressed a desire to have the tool of critical theory to allow for a better 'reading' of the texts they studied. This finding will be expanded on when discussing my staff data later in this thesis. I will now move to the next chapter and present findings and analysis in order to address RQ2: *Does the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English Literature curriculum have an impact on how pupils view themselves?*

Chapter 7: Findings and Analysis (Students) RQ2: *Does the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English Literature curriculum have an impact on how pupils view themselves?*

7.1: Overview

The following will present the pupil data relating to RQ2: *Does the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English Literature curriculum have an impact on how pupils view themselves?.* This will be structured descriptively in relation to the relevant questions asked to my pupil participants in the focus groups and follow-up questionnaires. I will highlight that participants demonstrated mixed levels of understanding about 19th century gender roles, which were at times incorrect. Participants also appeared to believe that contemporary conditions for women are better than those depicted in the novels they study, but mainly due to working conditions for women.

My thematic analysis then follows the provision of data, and is organised under 3 main sections within the chapter: *Celebrities and Pop Culture, Housework and Work beyond the House,* and *Motherhood and Relationships.* Firstly, in *Celebrities and Pop Culture* I identify instances where my participants made links between the novels and their exposure to, and engagement with, some aspects of celebrity culture and pop culture. Through this analysis, I argue that the portrayal of women in the 19th century texts allows these young women to see themselves through the connections they make to certain aspects of their lives, such as the realm of celebrities and pop culture, which are more familiar aspects of their lives. I analyse these findings in relation to the concept of the Male Gaze (Mulvey,1975), as well as Mendick et al's (2018) study of the role of celebrity in the formation of aspirations and identities.

Next, in *Housework and Work beyond the House* I highlight how the portrayal of women in the texts my participants study encourages my participants to think about current expectations regarding housework. Additionally, this section explores my participants' perceptions of barriers and inequalities in the workplace. I link this focus to the "Girlboss" mentality outlined in Chapter 2, which was also used as an analytical framework in Chapter 6. Additionally, this has ties with Mendick et al's (2018) research concerning 'austere meritocracy' as I interpret some of my participants to view forms of labour as liberating for women.

Following this, *Motherhood and Relationships* concerns my participants' reflections on relationships and motherhood as a result of the discussions around the women characters in the novels they study. I draw comparisons between the comments that my participants make and studies that also examine the ways in which teenage girls express their views on having children and relationships.

I then provide a summary of, and conclusion, to the chapter. The key findings concerning RQ 2 are that the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English Literature curriculum does have an impact on how pupils view themselves.

7.2 Findings

The following questions allowed me to answer RQ 2: *Does the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English Literature curriculum have an impact on how pupils view themselves?.* They featured in the focus group phase of my research, and had different places in the focus group schedule depending on the school I was working with. This was due to my development of different focus group questions which depended on the novel that was studied at each school, but there were certain 'core' questions which were in-common across schools and novels studied.

7.2.1: What purpose do you think the women who feature in the novel serve?

I intended for this question to enable my participants to think about the roles of the women characters in the novels they read, and spark a conversation at the same time to examine their thoughts and feelings concerning those characters. I categorised the answers that I coded to answer RQ 2 in three ways: Negative, Educational or Positive.

7.2.2: Women Character Roles as Negative

Some of my participants felt that women's roles were minor when compared to men's in the novels they read, with one participant (Lucy) stating that she felt in this way women characters were the "victim" in novels: "I feel like, the women's parts aren't really as big as the men's roles. So I feel a bit sorry about that. And they're like the victim….men did the work whilst women were in the kitchen". Lucy's association of women characters with being victims was then tied with domestic responsibilities. Lucy reads women characters as not only having smaller roles, but within the relative limits of those roles she has identified that they are burdened with housework. Lucy also mentions that "men did the work" in contrast to these women characters, and positions men as being more plot-central. This is something that Clara also alludes to: "I personally think like that all of the women's roles they all sort of revolve around men. Like they don't really have their own stories in the novel and they are just sort of there". Clara has also read some of the women character's roles as negative, as she states that they "revolve around men". This lack of agency and perceived insignificance to plot has also been discussed in the previous findings and analysis chapter in relation to RQ 1. In relation to RQ 2, the negative associations of

women characters with, for example, housework lead some of my participants to reflect on how they perceived different forms of labour to be valued in their lives outside of the text. I will expand on this in more detail later in the chapter when I move from descriptive presentation of data to a deeper analysis.

7.2.3: Women Character Roles as Educational

Some participants viewed the ways in which women were written as educational for them in learning about the living and social conditions of Victorian women. For example, in the data below Anne and Maria believe the differences between the lives of men and women characters present an educational opportunity to learn about Victorian gender expectations: Anne: "I think to have highlights of lives that's why, to show the differences between the men and the women". Maria: "I think it kind of shows like the expectations, like this is what life was like for them". It should be noted however, that whilst some of my participants viewed the portrayal of women characters as educational, their views were not always accurate or representative of the Victorian era. I will highlight these instances when presenting my data descriptively, and reflect on the significance of this dissonance.

7.2.4: Women Character Roles as Positive

The differential portrayal of men and women characters were also read as positive by some of my participants. Martha and Kitty, acknowledge that *The War of the Worlds* (Wells,1898a; 2017b) mainly includes men characters, but also that the women who are portrayed are well-written:

>   Martha: Well, erm it's a male dominated book. However, I think the females that are portrayed in the novel are strong…

>   Kitty:Yeah!

Martha: And think sort of rationally, as opposed to these males who erm...even authority figures like the Artilleryman erm... they react with great emotion and sort of lose their minds. And the women are sort of like an insight as to how you should act in that situation compared to the men… (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

As I have discussed in the previous findings and analysis chapter, the use of the term "strong" by participants was implicit in their admiration of the characters they were describing. In the example above, Martha perceives 'strength' as a positive trait, but then in relation to RQ 2 reflects that the woman character she admired (most likely, Miss Elphinstone, as discussed in the previous chapter) was a role model of sorts: "an insight as to how you should act".

Hannah (below) notes that she believes the women characters foreshadow key developments in the novel's plot, which contrasts the "victim" interpretation that Lucy shared :

Hannah: The wife at the beginning of the novel …tells the Narrator like to be wary and to look out for what's about to happen, like "this isn't good". And he just sort of brushes her down. But it's interesting as she sort of foreshadows what's about to happen… (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

I interpret the differential portrayal of women and men characters to have impacted how my participants described paid and unpaid work, how they linked them to 'real world' examples and how they spoke about romantic relationships. I will provide more detail about these three main themes later in my analysis.

7.3 : Why do you think there are no women narrators in the novel?

There were four main categories concerning participants' views of the absence of women narrators. These were the perceived absence of women authors, social conditions for Victorian women, the domestic conditions for Victorian women and practical plot-driven or theme-based reasons. I will now outline and present some examples from my data below.

7.3.1: 'Absence' of Women Authors

For some of my participants, their perceptions about the 'lack' of women authors influenced their answer. Essentially, if the book was not written by a woman then there would not be a woman narrating the novel. This is evident in Penelope's response: "Ermmm because maybe the book...the whole thing wasn't by a female author?". For Anne and Maria, they felt that because the story was so reliant on Scrooge that there did not need to be any women narrators:

> Anne: I think it's because Scrooge is just a massive part of the story, so like if anyone else was doing it I think it would make the story more about women. Sort of.
>
> Maria: …Maybe it's just more because of the women in the novel not really needing to be focused on much. So it's more like the women characters are there but not like too involved. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

Anne and Maria's reflections indicate that they view perspectives other than the main character or narrator as distracting to the central story. Maria also indicates that the women characters are "there but not like too involved", implying that she feels they do not have the same level of importance as the men characters. Anne and Maria did not hint at any negative feelings when answering this question, and seemed resigned to it being reflective of when the novel was written. This was a similar line of thought for Elizabeth and Jane: Elizabeth: "Because it was a very masculine time…", Jane: "Yeah books then had barely any women as the main characters…" and Elizabeth: "H.G Wells was also a male writer, so he's more likely to write for a male audience". Elizabeth's perception of Victorian England as a "very masculine time" interestingly tied into some participants' ideas linking the lack of women narrators in the novels they studied to what they perceived to be the historical and social conditions of the Victorian period in England. Whilst my participants were not always factually correct in their views about social conditions

for the Victorian era, their beliefs shaped how they viewed the novels they studied.

Essentially, their understandings of 19th century gender roles caused them to

perceive women as purely domestic, politically and socially unimportant and not

engaged with feminist ideas. I will now present data which shows this in more

detail.

7.3.2: Social Conditions for Victorian Women

With the exception of books about model behaviour, some of my participants did

not think that women were represented in literature as "everything was about men"

(Eliza), which participants believed explained the lack of female narrators:

> Isabella: Yeah wasn't there like Victorian books about how women should behave and stuff…
>
> Clara: Yeah it's more just the men…
>
> Eliza: Well this is the thing, yeah. Everything was about men so that's probably why the books were too.
>
> Penelope: Women wouldn't have been taken as seriously as well. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

This lack of awareness of literature from the Victorian era, (which showcases the

lack of time and resources to teach context alongside texts at GCSE) as well as the

perception that books for women were purely model behaviour-based is something

which another group mentioned:

> Esther: I think it could also be the time that it was written. Because it was like the 18th...no wait 19th century? 19th…Yeah! So hmm, because of the time.
>
> Lydia: Erm well people thought that like women couldn't do like science and stuff…
>
> Catherine: Yeah…
>
> Jane: Yeah because that was more of a male thing…

Mary: And it was definitely like a more scientific time where men did the science and…

Catherine: Yeah.

Mary:...and there were less women who sort of did that… (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

As I have mentioned previously, some of the observations that my participants made were sometimes inaccurate. There were in fact many novels predating the Victorian period which were written by men from the point of view of a woman. Some examples include *Pamela* (Richardson,1740a;2011b) *Clarissa* (Richardson, 1748a;1991b) and Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722a; 2004b). In addition to this, there were many Victorian women authors who were extremely successful to the point where critics welcomed the emergence of "female literature" (Peterson, 2015, p. 1). Whilst the publishing industry undoubtedly favoured men, and allowed men to set the 'standards' for literature during the Victorian era (Tuchman, 1989) women were actively writing and publishing. Additionally, when considering "The Woman Question" (Darwood et al., 2020) spanning the 19th to the 20th century, Victorian society underwent vast changes concerning "'votes for women'...gender equality more widely, including all kinds of economic, professional, domestic and sexual issues affecting girls and women" (Darwood et al., 2020, p.xx). In the analysis section that follows, I will discuss this misconception, in addition to others which I note in the descriptive presentation of my findings, and highlight the significance that teaching additional historical and social context can have.

Julia also expressed a view on what she perceived social and political conditions for Victorian women to be:

Julia: I think it has a lot to do with the time that it was written. So in the 19th century there wasn't much about feminism or anything, so erm, it was just the norm that was expected at the time. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Julia's perceived historical understanding of feminism highlights a lack of provision of historical and political context alongside the novel she studied. The Victorian and pre-Victorian period encompassed many feminist thinkers, including Mary Wollstonecraft (Caine,1997). As I have mentioned previously, I will go into more detail about these instances of misconception by some of my participants later in my analysis.

7.3.3: Domestic Conditions for Victorian Women

Relating to perceived social conditions for Victorian women, my participants' understandings of domestic conditions for Victorian women also influenced their readings of their 19th century novel, including their explanations for a lack of female narrators in the texts they studied. For example, Elinor and Emma reflect that there is not only a lack of women in the novels they read, but that they feel the women characters they do encounter are "stereotypical" (Elinor) in nature:

> Elinor: Yeah! And I think the characters we have are quite stereotypical characters as well. Like, all the female characters have these stereotypes for how women should be in the novel, and even though none are narrators it's difficult to escape that. Like none of them do anything huge, compared to Scrooge and the central themes... Erm, so I think sort of women and feminine characters would have been at the bottom in terms of what roles they have. Like not as important as masculine characters.

> Emma: I think at that time, it was very much women doing the cooking and the cleaning, and things like that. And like, even when Dickens was writing the story, it was still very like, shown in the fiction and things. But like, in the time that he was writing it, that's what everyone believed. And maybe things helped like the Suffragette movement, like you wouldn't even think about that really. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

The above highlights another instance in my data where participants did not necessarily hold accurate opinions concerning historical feminism and gender in English literature. For example, there were many non-stereotypical women characters in English literature in the Victorian period, as well as before it. One

example of this can be found in *The War of the Worlds'* (Wells,1898a;2017b) Miss Elphinstone. Focus group participants who read *The War of the Worlds* (Wells, 1898a; 2017b) praised Miss Elphinstone for performing non-typical femininity; for example, Hannah commented on how her having a gun would be shocking to a Victorian audience compared to an "iron in her hand". In addition to showing how it could be beneficial to include more context and critical theory alongside the teaching of texts for subject English, these comments indicate how my participants' readings and understandings of the texts they encountered were not always complemented by deep historical knowledge. This instance in my data, along with others which I have highlighted previously in the chapter, indicates that my participants had to resort to stereotypes that they had encountered concerning the Victorian era in order to inform their understanding of what they were reading. My participants needing to fill in these knowledge gaps indicates that there is a case for an improvement in exactly what is taught alongside texts in subject English.

7.3.4: Plot and Themes

For Margaret and Maria, the lack of women narrators in the text they studied was due to a mixture of the 'practical' reasons. Instead of the context in the real world surrounding the novel, Margaret and Maria considered the thematic and plot-driven reasons as to why they thought that there were no women narrators in the texts they studied at school:

> Margaret: I think it might like have to do with the like...with most novels with having the main protagonist being a man, because like if we're talking about like war and stuff like that, most of them are people from the army. And most like, most novels that like feature a women being the main character as if she was like a nurse or like helping to save the soldiers and stuff like that. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Maria: Um, I think, er maybe it's just more because of the women in the novel not really needing to be focused on much. So it's more like the women characters are there but not like too involved. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

Margaret's response ties to her perceptions of gendered careers, whereas Maria's indicates that if women are not central to the plot then they do not require the same level of focus and representation as men characters. These responses linked to my participants' 'practical' readings of their assigned texts, in that they viewed the elements of plot or different themes as justifications for a lack of women characters. This could relate to the nature of analysis they have conducted as part of their GCSE in English Literature, as often key themes, lexical choices and plot are analysed, but there is no requirement for the inclusion of context of other novels of the period, or a great depth or political and social historical context.

7.4 : The novel has been interpreted as "...otherwise an unbelievably male story – Scrooge, male ghosts, men, men, men, men, men." what do you think about this statement?

This was the fifth question in the focus groups that took place in Schools 2 and 3. It was not used for School 1, as participants were studying *The War of the Worlds* (Wells,1898a; 2017b) and this would not have been relevant. The quote was taken from a *Guardian* article which highlighted writer Piers Torday's views on the casting of a gender-swapped play adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* (Walker, 2019). I didn't provide the context of the quote, but included it as gender was a key theme in my research and I was interested to see if my participants had the same feelings as Torday based on their interactions with the novel. Based on their responses, my participants had not considered the genders of characters as a defining factor in their opinions of the novel. The quote in Q5 did not spark a particularly in-depth debate in any of the schools studying *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens,1843a;2018b).

However, responses fell into two main categories of partial agreement and disagreement that the novel is male-centred.

7.4.1: Partially Agreeing

The quote caused some respondents to highlight the instances in the novel where women did play a role (even if it was small), but these participants still partially agreed with it:

> Clara: Well I agree on a certain level. Er...because it revolved around men. However, the women do play a small role in it.

> Penelope: I sort of agree with this, but if it wasn't left to the women during some of the novel I don't think the plot would have been the same. For example with Belle and Scrooge and how much he loved money that was sort of about a woman.

> Isabella: I agree to an extent, like the women don't really speak much in the novel so it does feel that it's about men more just from that point of view. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

These reflections link to some of my participants' discussions concerning the lack of women narrators in the novels, as well as practical elements of a text (such as the plot or themes) justifying why minor roles suit women characters. In the focus group for School 3 (*A Christmas Carol*) my participants agreed with the quote, but did not go into a lot of detail as to why or how: Maria: "I think it's sort of true. I think most of the characters, even the ghosts, are men. Like there's not a lot of female characters.", Anne: "I'd say it's true as well". Examples where my participants agreed with the lack of women characters therefore, were common in the data and highlighted that they were aware of the gender imbalance.

7.4.2: Disagreeing

There were also instances where my participants disagreed with the quote

concerning gender representation in *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens,1843a;

2018b). Maria's classification of the ghosts in *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens,1843a;

2018b) as being men characters interestingly contrasted Elinor's readings of the

ghosts in the novel:

> Elinor: Yeah, I think I kind of disagree with that. Like I think that the first ghost, the ghost of Christmas Past wasn't given a gender. I think whoever said that has forgotten the Ghost of Christmas Past, I mean they were kind of like everyone else but they were changing. And they weren't quite masculine or feminine, like feminine voice and masculine face. I think, erm, so I think that we don't really know the gender of that ghost, so it's quite like… (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Elinor's commentary about gender non-conforming aspects ('non-binary ghosts')

challenges the quote and presents the only example in all my data of gender that is

not in the male/female binary. The significance of this is that it shows that despite

my participants' errors in some areas concerning feminism and gendered readings,

they are aware of some progressive perspectives on gender and gender identity (e.g

gender being a spectrum, not a binary). In summary therefore, this question was

either mostly agreed with, or disagreed with and presented an opportunity for some

of my participants to share their understandings about the construct of gender.

7.5 : The novel has been interpreted as (among other things) "a commentary on… Victorian fear, superstitions and prejudices" What do you think about this statement?

This was the fifth question in the focus groups that took place in School 1. It was

not used for Schools 2 and 3, as participants were studying *A Christmas Carol*

(Dickens,1843a;2018b) and this would not have been relevant. The quote was taken

from an accompanying blog to the Wordsworth Editions edition of the text (Stuart

Davies, 2019). I included it in order to spark a discussion about the ways in which

my participants felt that key themes from the novel were evident (or not).

All of my participants agreed with the quote, with Susan and Martha providing

specific detail about what the 'fears' aspect of the quote might have referred to:

> Susan: I think I kind of agree with it! Because at the time it was written, they were learning new things about like science and space, and so they didn't really know anything about what could really be out there. So that's basically, true…

> Martha: Also when the book was written, it was written towards the end of the 19th century, so that meant that people had all these fears about like what was going to happen in the 20th century… (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Here, Susan and Martha show a heightened awareness of historical and social

context. Instead of filling any knowledge gaps with information based on stereotypes

they might be aware of, these participants link the themes of the novel to historical

and social change. This is most likely the case as a result of the extra attention to

context that their teacher had included alongside the teaching of the novel, which I

will discuss in more detail in Chapter 8 of this thesis.

This extra context also benefited Hannah, who had especially picked up on the

colonial undertones of the novel:

> Hannah: It sort of played on the superstitions and like what might have been...It was also interesting because erm, Wells wanted to question the late Victorian beliefs at the time on their superior...their feelings of being superior erm, like The British Empire had invaded Tasmania.

> Hannah: Yeah, and like sort of personifying it and flipping it, so making these readers of the time, to look back...to sort of hold a mirror up to themselves and maybe look back at what they're doing. Personifying it with Martians and people… (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Above, Hannah is able to apply her knowledge of the British colonisation of

Tasmania to the themes in the novel and reflect on Victorian readers' perceptions of

the novel. Her ability to read in this way is strengthened by the extra knowledge that

she has encountered alongside the text in her English lessons. Essentially, a good foundation of social and historical knowledge enabled her to connect with one of the key themes.

When I probed my participants about the 'Victorian prejudices' aspect of the quote in relation to the roles of women, they returned to a discussion about Miss Elphinstone's possession of a gun (building on its significance for them as discussed earlier in the focus group session):

> KS: Because obviously the role of the time was for women to be "The Angel in the House"...do you think the novel accepts this or challenges it?
>
> Susan: Well I think it does challenge it. Was there like a woman who had a gun or something?
>
> Margaret: Yeah didn't she get it or give it to the brother or something?
>
> Martha: Yeah and it was like a poignant thing, showing that they aren't just like a stay at home and let the man fix all the problems.
>
> Susan & Hannah & Margaret: [All agree/make noises of agreeing] (School 1 , *The War of the Worlds*)

From the above, it can be noted that my participants had really engaged with the key themes from the novel and were able to outline the specific examples that linked to the quote I asked them to respond to. The examples my participants chose showed a good level of awareness of historical and social issues (e.g. Imperialism) as well as picking up on challenges to Victorian attitudes toward gender in a more accurate manner than the schools that studied *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens,1843a;2018b). I interpret this to show that learning additional context and historical significance alongside a text can benefit pupils' understandings of what they are reading, and their ability to reflect on key themes and events within a novel.

7.6 : What can you tell me about the attitudes towards gender that existed when the novel was written?

This question allowed for my participants to share their knowledge about the social and political (in terms of gender relations) conditions that existed for women during the time period of when the novel they were studying was written. The below data highlights the levels of awareness that my participants had about the domestic and economic expectations of women in the 19th century. They discussed 19th century gendered power dynamics, as well as made links to colonisation and notable historical figures. I will also show some of the ways in which my participants make comparisons between women's lives in the past, and how they perceive the current state of gender relations.

7.6.1:19th Century Power Dynamics

One thread of discussion concerned the power dynamics between men and women in 19th century England:

> Clara: Erm well like they thought that men were better than women, especially like with who had power in society and who could work good jobs and stuff.
>
> Isabella: Like women weren't valued by society. And they weren't like a big part of society.
>
> Penelope: And wasn't it also like women couldn't do as much as men, and men had like...more power. And they, like people listened to them more. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, my participants' readings of power linked to whether they viewed a character positively or negatively. In the above interpretation, Clara, Isabella and Penelope's understandings of social relations between men and women influence how 'powerful' they perceive characters in the

novel and real people outside of the novel to be.

Additionally, Clara's mention of jobs was something that Louisa also brought up during discussion:

> Louisa: I think it was the case that men were more important than women. Like they were the ones working and stuff and the women were the ones expected to be at home.
>
> Anne: It was also that women were seen as property. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

I will explore this in more detail when conducting analysis in the chapter, but the above indicates an association of paid work with importance. Anne also adds that Victorian women were viewed as "property", which followed Louisa's initial comment that tied paid work to levels of importance. This comment is another example of how paid work was viewed as liberating by my participants, and also an instance where they did not consider different groups of women in their answers (for example, working class women (Frost,2018)). I will provide a deeper analysis concerning class dynamics and intersectionality later in this chapter.

7.6.2: Links to the present

Beyond reflecting on their understandings of gendered relations in the 19th century, some of my participants also felt that some examples were applicable to the present day. When I asked a group studying *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens,1843a; 2018b) if they thought that attitudes about gender and gender roles were present today, the entire group replied: "Yes!! Yes!".

The specific connections that these participants made to the experiences that they perceived contemporary women to have when I asked them to compare the conditions they had described for Victorian women were as follows:

Clara: Erm perhaps the exclusion of women in certain things. Not always jobs...like women in sport?

Penelope: Yeah, and like how much money women get compared to men. It still seems bad and unfair.

Eliza: Yeah like and men at work have it a bit better, like if you're a man you get like advantages and stuff. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Here, my participants use the example of paid work to draw their comparisons between conditions for Victorian and contemporary women. In doing this, I argue later in this thesis that they view paid work as liberating of the oppressive social conditions they described previously. Whilst my participants viewed paid work as liberating, they had negative views concerning domestic work:

Lydia: Yeah it's [Misogyny] still there, but not as much as it was.

Georgiana: It's less...and we still have more opportunity. And like, there are people out there, like men who look after the family. Like it is different now. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Elinor: I think they are in some people, definitely there are some people who still like...would expect their wives or their partner to make the food for them, and like, you know, make sure that food is on the table when they get home and things. And even when people make jokes about it, it sort of like...it still shows that there's still some part of them that believes that if they can make a joke about it. And act like that's acceptable. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

The above indicates that whilst my participants view paid work as liberating for women, they are aware that there are still inequalities such as the unequal division of domestic labour which impacts contemporary women. In addition to these connections, Anne's group studying *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens,1843a;2018b) reflected on her statement that women were classed as 'property' in the past:

KS: And what if we think about those comments you made about women being seen as "property"? Do we think that's changed?

Louisa: I think that it's more equal between men and women when you think of that. Like nobody is the property of each other.

Maria: I think both to be fair. There's some things that are the same…

KS: Do the rest of you agree with that?

Anne & Louisa: Yeah. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

This is another 'liberation benchmark' for my participants: in the contexts of their discussions, the concept of 'not being property' and women being able to work and be paid were the main markers for gender equality that surfaced in the discussions. I argue that this highlights their levels of awareness about feminism, and therefore illuminates what they considered as feminist progress when comparing historical and contemporary contexts.

7.6.3: Domestic and Economic Expectations

My participants' understandings of domestic and economic expectations of women in the 19th century was also raised in response to this question (*What can you tell me about the attitudes towards gender that existed when the novel was written?*). For example, Maria noted that she felt "women would just stay at home" and Anne believed that "men were more likely to work.". This is an example of when my participants would consider middle class or privileged women in the answers, which is also reflected in the extract below:

Hannah: You just think like, women are weak.

Esther: Wimps!

Hannah: Yeah! Like "she should have an iron in her hand, not a gun!".

Catherine: Women were thought of like just a family person, did all the caring stuff and just sort of looked after the home. Supposed to be quiet…

Elizabeth: And women were not required to work!

Lydia: They just weren't respected.

Mary: And that was just normalised!

Jane: Yeah!

Mary: It was always like "women should look after the men" but then the men should provide everything for the women. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

The above reflects a selection of stereotypical views, rather than ones grounded in historical accuracy. The women that Catherine and Elizabeth refer to, for example, cannot include working-class women by definition, who would have to work to bring in a wage as well as be responsible for domestic tasks (Frost, 2018). The nature of these domestic tasks also differs from Hannah's very 20th century vision of the stay-at-home woman, and those women who did not have jobs outside the home would employ working-class women to do their household tasks (Gerard, 2016). Victorian middle class women also sought employment, although this was less physically demanding and did not require the same levels of domesticity as the employment working class women might have had (Young, 2019). Of course, this gap in knowledge does not make my participants' points less valid, or imply they should be condemned for their misinterpretations and misunderstandings. What it does show is that there is a fairly consistent lack of historical and literary knowledge concerning gender and gendered relations in my sample.

A focus on work and domesticity was also compared to conditions for contemporary women:

Anne: I think it's more like common for obviously both men and women to work now. Instead of like women just stay at home.

Maria: … It's more common for women to go to work now. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

Betty: Erm I feel like in some households, erm as we were saying, there are just little things that are quite,erm...like for example, er, it tends to be like, women tend to do like the majority of work that's like cleaning or cooking in some households, which means again, people now are doing that just as much as they were then. Like women are still stereotypically doing that whole cleaning or cooking thing, and that's not necessarily progress in that area. It just tends to happen sadly. (School 2 , *A Christmas Carol*)

I interpret the above to show Anne and Maria building on the idea that paid work is a marker of gender liberation, but then also that Betty shows consideration for the domestic tasks which do not disappear simply because a woman is able to have a job (Hochschild, 1990). This discussion appears to indicate that some of my participants minimised the reality that contemporary women balance paid work with domestic tasks. Such a stance continues to build the picture that alongside the lack of historical and literary knowledge concerning gender and gendered relations, my participants had relatively little contemporary knowledge about gender and feminism.

When discussing inequalities concerning paid careers, my participants began to consider how different national contexts might factor into levels of gender equality:

Mary: I think obviously with students like it's different, we are very lucky in our country too. We are given most of the same opportunities like men are.

Elizabeth: We are represented.

Lydia: Yeah but, I feel like, depending on what you're going into it can be a male-dominated area…

Elizabeth: It depends what area…

Lydia: Yeah, it was like if it was a male job.

Mary: Yeah more business men are actually men than women, well people in businesses I mean.

Lydia: Yeah, like if you went into a male-dominated business, I imagine you would feel quite restricted and pressured… (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

In addition to workplace inequalities, my participants showed awareness of different levels of gender equality. However, Catherine generalised that "In all countries, I think females are like mostly known to like look after your family.". I interpret Emma to have also reflected on this, with her usage of "common" implying it was the norm:

Emma: Yeah I think it's quite common in the family, like erm for women to have like a part time job and the man to have a full time job. I think like a lot of men are intimidated if like their wife makes more money than them. Or, if they have more power than them. I don't know. Or both, or if they can just provide for themselves, like if they could be like free of them or something. So that hasn't really been dealt with. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

I will provide more detail later in the chapter when conducting a deeper analysis of my data, but the above provides an insight into my participants' understandings of feminism. Later in the chapter, I link their insights and ideas concerning feminism to popular feminism and show which feminist issues my participants show an awareness of in my data.

7.6.4: Links to Colonisation

For Kitty, women were 'frozen' historically and socially, with her below statement highlighting that she felt nothing was happening for women and that events that were happening (for example colonisation relating to the expansion of The British Empire) were not related to women:

Kitty: Yeah very male dominated...and erm just...there wasn't really any like any pinnacle female things going on at the time. When Wells was writing it. Erm...cause obviously there was like The British Empire, but being a women...like colonising these places but again that wasn't women that was all males doing that. So there just wasn't...any female driven things really… (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Margaret also touched upon the removal of women from historical acts of violence briefly, when she noted that a Victorian audience might find a woman having a gun shocking, implying that women were not associated with violence or the potential to commit violence: "Like if I had read like a woman had a gun, that would be kind of like shocking, if I was back in Victorian times". Whilst these were isolated examples in my data that referred to Britain's colonial history and the perceived relationship of women not being associated with forms of violence, I will

discuss them later in more detail in the chapter, as I believe them to be worthy of

analysis, despite the fact that they are not representative of the attitudes of all of my

participants.

7.6.5: Links to Notable Figures

In some cases, my participants made connections between conditions for women

and notable figures to explain their ideas:

> Jane: But there were like, people who went against it. Like you have The Queen (Victoria) and Ada Lovelace. There were a few back then breaking like the rules, but the majority kind of went with it..

> Jane: I feel like there are some celebrities out there who do the same sort of thing as Miss Elphinstone.

> Lydia & Georgiana & Catherine: Yeah!

> Elizabeth: Yeah I suppose that's true. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

The above shows that my participants used their historical awareness to partially

make a comparison between the character of Miss Elphinstone and notable

historical figures, in addition to drawing on more modern influences such as Jane's

mention of "celebrities". Margaret, Martha, Hannah and Kitty also drew upon the

modern comparison of Kamala Harris in their discussion:

> Margaret: Well it's awkward isn't it? Like I bet in some countries they do, but I think that we're ok in the UK...women are doing pretty good.

> Martha: Well...I don't know if you look at like what we were saying earlier about women and elections [this conversation took place outside of the focus group] Hmm...about like the lack of women politicians…

> Hannah: Oh yeah! Like Kamala Harris. Yeah she's doing really well, and like Mike Pence was being disrespectful of her and she wouldn't have any of that. She shouldn't have to deal with it though.

> Martha: I think, like especially, like cause it's quite poignant at this time with all the elections going on [US 2020 Election] and in the UK the Government...issues haha...I do think there's a lot of males just getting angry

at each other and just thinking shouting will give them a bigger voice, and will make their point heard and that's what they should do. But the females are actually in, because I saw this picture and it was like taking this female out of like...have you seen it? When they take females out of jobs to show how heavily male-dominated they are?

Kitty: Hmm yeah I think so…

Martha: Well, erm...I just think that erm, when the...I think the females think a lot more strategically, and don't feel the need to shout to get their point across. And erm, it's sad that sometimes it can't be put across because they don't want to fight...I don't know they just think more rationally, and not as...angrily…

All: Yeah!

Martha:...and not as hungry for power. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Margaret's initial steer of the discussion towards US politics was due to my participants' earlier discussion which took place outside of the focus group (concerning the US elections). In the above, I interpret the connection between current issues and notable figures enabled some of my participants to draw on pop culture and famous figures. In doing this, my participants made connections between characters and themes in the novel to their current lives. The above data also connects to previous points I have made about associations of women with violence, although here instead of explicit links to innocence from violence, women are contrasted with the more 'aggressive' behaviours exhibited by men. Whilst the above does not say women are incapable of being angry, Martha outlines her view that women "don't want to fight" and builds a point that centres on that assumption. Martha associates women with rationality and strategic thinking, and aggression and anger with men, labelling the treatment of women (or specifically Kamala Harris) as "disrespectful". This labelling reinforces traits associated with the concept of toxic masculinity (Kupers, 2005) in the men that are referred to, which has ties to the previously discussed concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell,1995).

Now I have presented data concerning my participants' social and historical

understandings of gender politics in the Victorian era, I move to outline how this

linked to their interpretations of the characters, themes and events in the novels they

studied.

7.7 : Can you tell me about your impressions of the lives of men and women in *A Christmas Carol/ The War of the Worlds.* How are they different? How are they similar?

My participants' answers to this question reflected their understanding of the

domestic and economic expectations of women in the 19th century. This question

prompted some of my participants to discuss differences in social class alongside

differences in gender relations. Another key aspect that many participants referred

to was perceptions of 'strong' women, and how they observed this to manifest

differently in men and women characters.

7.7.1: The Portrayal of Characters linking to Economic, Social and Domestic Roles

Anne, Louisa, Betty, Julia and Emma discuss the portrayal of women and men in

terms of their economic, domestic and social roles in the below extracts:

> Anne: Erm, I think that it's shown how that the men were the people that always went to work and women do all the cooking and look after the kids and stuff.
>
> Louisa: I think as well as differences between men and women it also shows the difference between like the rich and poor. Like, they have different priorities and sorts of jobs and I think that real life would have been similar to what we see in the literature. But I still think the bigger differences are between men and women in general. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)
>
> Betty: Oh, erm...I think that like, quite a few of the men have like jobs and stuff, like the women don't and look after the families and yeah. Like what people were saying earlier, staying at home and stuff. Yeah.

Julia: Women are there to do stuff for men. They're there to like, you know, be a wife or carer to a man.

Julia: To provide that environment for the men.

Emma: Yeah women are also supposed to be maternal as well. Yeah it's very like kind of featured in the novel, yeah. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

As I have previously shown from the data, at times my participants rely on stereotypes to fill in knowledge gaps surrounding historical and social conditions. Above, these understandings influence the ways in which my participants link characters to their 'real life' context, and the comparisons they make between different characters. This in turn then impacts how they feel about characters, which I have discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

7.7.2: Marriage and Relationships

Marriage and relationships were also discussed during one focus group in response to this question:

Julia: I think also in the novel it's not a priority, like men didn't need it. (to get married)

Emma: Yeah the fact that we don't even know the wife's name, wait the fiancée's name...wait is she?

Betty: Yeah fiancée.

Emma: Like yeah they obviously didn't say her name . And like, yeah she didn't seem to be that important overall.

Betty: Well for some of them it's the fact that they were still to get married, but obviously Mrs Cratchit was married with children. Erm maybe they'd be more respected though, because they could get a job, erm, to provide the family with income instead of just providing for the family and looking after your husband. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

I have previously analysed this data in relation to RQ1: *How do girls read gender in the assigned texts for GCSE English Literature?* However, when linking my participants' 'readings' of characters to how they view themselves, here their

perceptions of gendered labour and unequal power dynamics in relationships feeds into their expectations of relationships in the real world. I will discuss this further later in the chapter when conducting analysis.

7.7.3: "Strength"

Another adjective that came up regularly in conversation with participants was 'strong'. I have previously discussed this in relation to RQ 1: *How do girls read gender in the assigned texts for GCSE English Literature?.* In relation to RQ 1, my participants' perceptions of strength linked to their respect and admiration for the women characters in the novels. In relation to RQ 2, this respect of "strength" ties to what they value in the real world. Therefore, the perceived 'strength' of women and men characters was a key aspect of their personality in the eyes of some participants:

> Martha: I think at the beginning of the novel, all the male characters are portrayed as the strong ones, they're like "we're gonna get through this! We can sort it out, we can beat the Martians!". But, as it progresses you see them crumble and sort of deteriorate, whereas the women at that point, when males are just not doing well, they sort of, not save the day, but…
>
> Hannah: Well the Narrator's wife is like taken away from her life and like all this stuff happens to her, but I guess it happens in the same way to all the women… (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Above it is clear from Martha and Hannah's answers that strength and 'strong' characters are notable in their interpretations of gender and gendered differences in the text. I will provide more detail on this later in the analysis section of the chapter, but I wanted to highlight the reason for the inclusion of Hannah's quote alongside Martha's. In Hannah's quote, there is not a clear cut mention of 'strong' or 'strength', but what can be noted is the use of the phrase "this stuff happens to her" and her repetition of this with reference to other women characters. Where Martha explicitly

mentions "strong", Hannah's quote shows evidence of the opposite being observed by her, i.e. the lack of strength present where "things happen" to a character rather than them being in control of what they do and what events they are involved in. Hannah's interpretation of the value of strength does not enforce a victim blaming narrative, but instead highlights why some participants felt that the terms 'strength' and 'strong' were synonymous with a more significant role in the plots of the novels they encountered. However, it must be noted that my participants did use the terms 'strength' and 'strong' quite vaguely, and I interpret them to have positive implications when referring to emotional strength over physical (as I detailed in the previous analysis chapter).

7.7.4: Lack of Representation

In addition to the specific ways in which my participants noted the lives of men and women characters to differ, Jane, Georgiana, Elizabeth, Lydia and Catherine mentioned how they felt that the lack of representation was notable:

Jane: Well it's sort of unfair…

Georgiana: Men have more opportunities in it. I feel like, women aren't represented as well…

Elizabeth: Yeah! Like there's way more male representation.

Lydia: Yeah.

KS: And how does that make you feel that there is more male representation?

Catherine: Well you know...it's...not good! (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

This shows, along with other data concerning this question, that my participants' perceptions of the representation of women characters in the 19th century novels can be categorised in three main ways. These are observations

relating to domestic and economic roles, 'strength', or an outright lack of representation.

7.8: What do you think about the way that *The War of the Worlds/ A Christmas Carol* portrays gender?

This was the seventh question in focus groups that took place in School 1 and the ninth for Schools 2 and 3. As a probe relating to this question, I also asked participants to connect what they said in response to this question with examples in the modern world.

7.8.1: Contrast of Portrayal

Georgiana, Jane and Mary all noted that the portrayal of gender in their studied text made them notice the contrast between representation in the 19th century and now:

> Georgiana: Well yeah I can understand that for the time…
>
> Jane:...and also it shows the difference…
>
> Mary: Like if you think about right now, like how much more female representation there is in novels. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

In this example, my participants' readings of the text have allowed them to form explicit links to their understanding of representation in contemporary texts. In this way, I interpret their reading of gender to have sparked a discussion about perceptions of progress, despite their historical awareness of Victorian literature not being completely accurate.

In addition to progress, stereotypical portrayals of gender were also discussed by Margaret, Hannah, Emma, Harriet, Elinor and Betty:

Margaret :...like the bit about the wife and she's like hushed away like her mind shows she wants to talk, like she's been there. And like, then again hushed away.

Hannah: Yeah to drive the novel forward there's a way, and to keep the readers entertained, like a love story so people are gripped. Hoping that the relationship comes out the other side. So traditionally, they've got the male and female couple, and that's quite outdated but traditional, but with the characters erm, like Miss Elphinstone, it sort of breaks that stereotype. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Emma: Could you say it does in a way. Like does it kind of do it without intending, not like that, but like it's still there in that the male characters have masculine expectations and the female characters do kind of reflect the things we were saying, like being homemakers?

Harriet & Elinor: Yeah!

Betty: Yeah it's kind of reflective of the societal expectations in a way… (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Whilst both Margaret and Hannah show awareness of the more stereotypical portrayals of women in the text they study, Hannah also highlights that the inclusion of Miss Elphinstone provides a refreshing contrast. Miss Elphinstone was a popular character for discussion in the groups that studied *The War of the Worlds* (Wells,1898a; 2017b), and her characterisation proved to have links to the contemporary times via the comparison of social media by Georgiana: "I feel like the book, was like our social media. Like showing Miss Elphinstone standing up is like our social media.". I interpret the comparison between Miss Elphinstone and social media to highlight the impact that celebrities and celebrity culture can have on young people, i.e Miss Elphinstone's actions were read by Georgiana as being the sort of 'stand' a celebrity or influencer would make on social media today. I will provide a deeper analysis of this later in the chapter.

7.8.2: Lack of Gendered Representation

The lack of gendered representation in the novel was also raised during a focus

group where participants had studied *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens,1843a;2018b):

> Julia: Well obviously there aren't really that many women in it, so it's not really got that as the main theme, but except the Ghost of Christmas Past who might be a woman, that's sort of all the different representations of women that you get. Well it's not actually representations, it's fictional like a ghost. I mean like, as in none of the other female characters are ghosts but they're all what would be expected. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Julia's commentary about the lack of women and her perceptions of the gendered

representations of the ghosts in the novel linked to another extract involving Betty

and Emma, where they discussed the lack of non-binary and trans representation:

> Betty: I don't know if it's really an important point, but there was at the time like, you know transgender wasn't even a real word.
>
> Emma: Yeah!
>
> Betty: Like, there isn't really any sort of representation of that type of feeling, but like the non-binary Ghost of Christmas Past...well that was a ghost so *laughs* not sure if it counts as representation.
>
> Emma: Yeah and there could be like more feminine males or masculine females to show something different.
>
> Betty: Yeah! I guess the closest thing to doing it was through a ghost. Could have done a bit more, not gonna lie. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

The above indicates firstly, that some of my participants were conceptualising

gender as a spectrum (rather than a male/female binary). Secondly, it shows that for

Betty, despite the instances where my participants reflect on masculine traits they

found in women characters and feminine traits they found in men characters, that

she felt the "closest thing to doing it (different representations of gender) was

through a ghost". I interpret this to connect to other instances where more context

alongside a text would be beneficial for pupils, as perhaps Betty's reading of gender

caused her to make assumptions about all Victorian literature, or attitudes towards

gender: "transgender wasn't even a real word".

7.9 : Analysis Overview

Now I have presented my findings in a descriptive manner, I move to a deeper analysis. The most prominent points which I have outlined in my findings include: how portrayals of women characters are perceived as negative, educational or positive by my participants; how my participants' understandings of historical and social context informed their readings of the novels; the ways in which my participants linked characters and events in the novels to current 'real life' examples; my participants' attitudes towards marriage and relationships; and finally, my participants' attitudes towards domestic and paid work. These all combine to answer RQ2: *Does the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English Literature curriculum have an impact on how pupils view themselves?*, in the following thematic sections.

Firstly, I provide an analysis of findings which relate to Celebrities and Pop Culture, in which my participants made links between the novels and their exposure to, and engagement with, some aspects of celebrity culture and pop culture. Through this analysis, I argue that the portrayal of women in the 19th century texts allows these young women to see themselves through the connections they make to certain aspects of their lives. I analyse these findings in relation to the concept of the Male Gaze (Mulvey, 1975), as well as Mendick et al.'s (2018) study of the role of celebrity in the formation of aspirations and identities.

Secondly, I provide an analysis of findings which relate to Housework and Work beyond the House. I highlight how the portrayal of women in the texts my participants study encourages my participants to think about current expectations regarding housework, as well as their perceptions concerning paid work. I link this focus to the "#Girlboss" mentality outlined in Chapter 2, which was also used as an analytical framework in Chapter 6. Additionally, this has ties with Mendick et al.'s (2018) research concerning 'austere meritocracy' as I interpret some of my participants to view forms of labour as liberating for women.

Thirdly, I present an analysis of findings which relate to Motherhood and Relationships, in which my participants' reflections on relationships and motherhood as a result of the discussions around the women characters are discussed in detail. Finally, I summarise and conclude the chapter, before moving on to discuss findings from my staff participants.

7.9.1: Celebrities, Pop Culture and Pop Feminism

Findings that relate to *Celebrities and Pop Culture* show how the connections my participants made with the characters in the 19th century novels they study allowed them to establish their thoughts and feelings by linking said characters to examples of celebrity and pop culture that they are familiar with in their lives outside of reading.

Participants expressing connections with celebrities and pop culture is a common theme in research conducted with girls (Duits & van Romondt, 2009; Durham, 2003). Celebrity culture and its influence on young people is sometimes interpreted as having the ability to be 'corrupting' (Allen & Mendick, 2013). It is important to consider, however, the details that emerge when young people form associations between elements of their own lives and those of celebrities and pop culture. For example, in the research of Harvey et al. (2015), young people use celebrities and pop culture to express their ideas about social and economic inequalities that exist in wider society. The instances from my own data amplify this more positive view concerning pop/celebrity culture and its impacts on young people. My findings indicate that the connections that my participants made with the characters in the 19th century novels they studied are reinforced when they are linked with celebrities, notable figures and contemporary pop culture to enrich their experiences of reading.

7.9.2: Celebrities and Notable Figures

There were multiple instances where my participants brought up celebrities and other notable figures in the focus group discussions. For example, Jane compared Miss Elphinstone to "some celebrities" and mentioned "The Queen [Victoria] and Ada Lovelace" when considering real examples of Victorian women to compare the characters in her novel to. Hannah referred to Kamala Harris when reflecting on how women are treated poorly in some career paths as a result of gender inequalities in the workplace. Harvey et al. (2015) note that young people speak about celebrities and pop culture in order to express their ideas about specific aspects in wider society, and explore social and economic inequalities. In the above examples, my participants' conversation about celebrities facilitates their exploration of the women characters in *The War of the Worlds* (Wells,1898a; 2017b)**,** as well as what they believe the main differences are for women who existed in the 19th century compared to the present day. Jane's comparisons of the character of Miss Elphinstone to famous figures from the 19th century ("The Queen [Victoria] and Ada Lovelace") and present day celebrities demonstrate her respect for Miss Elphinstone's character. The specific examples of celebrity that Jane choses to name are highly notable women, which implies that her reading of Miss Elphinstone mirrors the impressive lives that these real women led. In addition to this, she also suggests that there are current examples of celebrities who "do the same sort of thing as Miss Elphinstone", implying that she still feels that this character embodies traits that are seen in current celebrities. Whilst Jane does not name these qualities outright at this stage in the focus groups, the descriptor of "powerful" was frequently used by Jane and her peers to describe Miss Elphinstone earlier in the focus group. Therefore if "powerful" women are still perceived by Jane to be valued in current society, this trait could have been observed in celebrities to arrive at this conclusion.

I argue that "powerful" in this context can be classed as a neoliberal trait. Definitions of neoliberalism can be varied, but I have previously defined how I use it

in my literature review: (a late stage of capitalism that emerged as a result of the structural and economic changes during the 1970s (Duménil & Lévy, 2013) with its individualised feminism equating empowerment with financial (Mastrangelo, 2021)). When considering how "powerful" as a trait may be neoliberal, I refer to neoliberalism's grounding in social dominance, and in the reinforcement of economic and gendered inequalities (Azevedo et al., 2019). Of course, associations of neoliberal ideology vary with national contexts. From a Western perspective, those who subscribe to neoliberal beliefs tend to be self-interested and work towards forms of dominance (Bettache & Chiu, 2019). Such an interpretation is partially evident in my participants' readings of characters as powerful because of the ways they value power and strength as traits.

Building on from power as a neoliberal trait in Jane's assessment of Miss Elphinstone, I now identify instances in my data that led me to argue that my participants value this trait in real world celebrities and notable figures. Firstly, the types of celebrity that Martha and Hannah mention in the discussion are significant. Martha references an earlier conversation that took place outside of the focus groups that I was informed took place between herself and her peers in form time the morning that they participated in my research. This earlier conversation concerned the 2020 US Presidential Elections, and Martha and Hannah linked their exposure to this to the ways in which they perceive gender inequality to manifest in society today compared to in the 19th century. Martha sees gender inequality in the "lack of women politicians" and the "heavily male-dominated" nature of certain career paths. I interpret this focus on high-ranking careers to have similarities with the values of Girlboss feminism, in which these qualities are presented as desirable. For example, Martha doesn't necessarily express an issue with the ways in which electoral politics work (in both the US and "in the UK the Government") or consider other barriers that women may face to getting a prominent political role other than the presence of "a lot of males just getting angry at each other". This

example reflects the ways that my participants have a certain vocabulary for discussing their ideas and understandings of feminism, of neoliberal values taking front and centre in priorities for women's rights. Essentially, I interpret this extract to imply that Martha believes that conditions for women are better now than in the 19th century, but her main priorities in regards to what she wishes was better revolve around work or representation of women in leadership

roles.

  In contrast to this, a key issue that Hannah perceived women facing today compared to the 19th century was the treatment of women compared to men: "Mike Pence was being disrespectful of her [Kamala Harris] and she wouldn't have any of that. She shouldn't have to deal with it though." This perception of poor treatment of women by men is shared by Martha: "just thinking shouting will give them a bigger voice, and will make their point heard". This suggests that, while Hannah considers Kamala Harris to be "doing really well", she is able to recognise underlying inequalities that her chosen celebrity (Kamala Harris) faces. This interpretation somewhat differs from showcasing a "popular acceptance of inequality" (Billig, 1992, p.14), and instead I perceive Hannah and Martha being dissatisfied with the inequalities that they describe. Whilst Hannah and Martha don't make any justifications of their judgements, their comparisons are different to those in Billig's research as they are not between their own lives and celebrities, but instead are between the characters in the 19th century novels they read and celebrities.

  However, what I do interpret as similar in this research context are links to how participants in Harvey, Allen and Mendick's (2015) research use celebrities to communicate how they imagine their own futures to be. Hannah and Martha do not connect celebrities to their own personal lives, but they do use the discussion of celebrities to highlight their distaste at inequalities that exist for women in the present day. Referring this idea back to RQ2: *Does the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English Literature curriculum have an impact on how pupils view*

themselves?, the characters that the girls discuss in the above extracts enable them to reflect on the gender relations that they observe in the present day. Whilst this isn't strictly how they view themselves, it is related to how they view the conditions that they live in. Such reflection also allowed them in these instances to highlight what was important for them with regards to the changes they want to see in terms of gender equality. Therefore, whilst this does not directly answer the RQ, the implications of this analysis are that the medium of pop culture and celebrity enables young people (in this case, young women) to discuss gendered social conditions.

7.9.3: Links to Popular Feminism

The following will include an analysis of my participant, Sally, as a case study with reference to links to popular feminism alongside relevant questionnaire data. Sally's responses provided the clearest example of popular feminism within my focus group data, which I will include in this subsection. I define popular feminism as the elements of feminist politics and values which are found in everyday life (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Similar to neoliberal feminism, popular feminism depends on the validation of the mass media and celebrity culture in order to survive and spread (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). The previously mentioned Girlboss feminism shares values with both popular and neoliberal feminism, as these forms of feminism do not critique or challenge capitalism, but rather contribute to its normalisation and view it as a form of liberation for white women in particular (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020).

One aspect of popular feminism is the common use of a feminist vocabulary (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). This can encompass generic phrases concerning 'rights for women', 'strong women' and 'girl power': all phrases commonly used by my participants, which also align with the 'Girlboss' values I have described previously in this thesis. Data from my questionnaire responses shows examples of the feminist vocabulary that some of my participants utilised:

Q: What do you understand by the term "feminism"?

Female equality

Having the belief that females hold just the same amount of potential as men and supporting these beliefs

Women which protest for equality

Rights for women

About and to do with woman and feminine.

A strong view from someone who supports women and their rights just as much as mens.

The idea that everyone is equal regardless of their gender.

Feminism is a word to describe people who want equality for everyone

I interpret the above to be examples of popular feminism, which exists as a spectrum of media-friendly expressions which rely on celebrity and media usage to gain popularity and wide usage (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). McRobbie (2009) argues that as popular feminism, and forms of it such as Girlboss feminism, gain more visibility that there is less emphasis on a critique of patriarchy or systems such as racism (see also Gill, 2011 and Rottenberg, 2014). Sally draws on discourses of popular feminism in the discussion below. Her quote here was a response to the differences between life for women in the 19th century compared to now centres on the portrayal of women's experiences in different forms of media

Sally: And I think also there's still like a lot...well in the media especially. Everything is sort of written for a male audience almost. Well not everything, but lots of things. Films will show the male gaze. And lots of other things, like newspapers or magazines are written for more like kind of a male audience. So our views and perceptions of women are quite altered by that. Because obviously, men don't know what it's like to experience being a woman. So the way that they write it, isn't actually true, or like, reflective of what it's actually like to be a woman. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

I now examine three main points from Sally's quote. Firstly, and perhaps most notably, is Sally's direct use of the term "male gaze". Sally draws on the concept of the 'male gaze' in visual media, a term conceived of by Mulvey (1975). Mulvey's definition of the Male Gaze is centred around the representation of women in film,

arguing that the unequal power dynamics that exist between men and women as a result of the patriarchy transfer to cinematic representations where women are perceived as sexual objects and not human beings, and that the camera adopts the viewpoint of a heterosexual male onlooker. Mulvey's interpretation suggests that the aesthetic pleasure of the average heterosexual cisgender man is heavily valued in film and television. Sally's direct usage of the term clearly shows the popularisation of this academic concept. Sally has picked up on this term, and extends her experiences of "male gaze" to "other things, like newspapers or magazines". Sally therefore, was able to utilise a key piece of feminist theory in her focus group discussion. In doing this, she demonstrated that she has a foundation of knowledge when it comes to feminist theory, or at least a pop version of it. This shows that, alongside the discussion of how conditions for women have changed since the 19th century (or in some cases have stayed similar or the same), my participants are being exposed to and interacting with fairly advanced ideas and theories to explain their views. Generally, popular feminism enables the broader public to engage in usage of appropriate terminology (alongside for example, organising marches, or hashtag activism) (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020).

   In addition to the popularisation of the academic concept of the "male gaze", Sally also mentions that the male gaze has an impact on how she, and by assumption others—perhaps her peers judging from the language she uses—feel about themselves: "So our views and perceptions of women are quite altered by that.". When linking this to Mulvey's definition of the Male Gaze, Sally's feelings of having her "perceptions of women… quite altered" make sense given their root cause. If Sally, or any woman, was to have regular exposure to media that relies on the sight-line of the camera to capture the spectator's perspective and the perceived spectator was a cisgender heterosexual man, they would encounter a disproportionate amount of representation of women's bodies as for sexual gratification. This results in a consistent establishment for the viewer of women as

dominated individuals, and men as the dominators (Mulvey, 1975). Mulvey (1975) also argues that this pairing choice of women as passive objects and men as active viewers is a manifestation of patriarchy whereby gender roles are reinforced culturally in different forms of media to strengthen the existing social and political inequalities between men and women.

Sally's specific indication of having her "perceptions of women… quite altered" could be interpreted as her having an "altered" view that is negative. I interpret this to be the case, as Sally (and her peers) are not the target audience of the Male Gaze. Therefore, the media Sally (and her peers) encounter does not prioritise women and girls as consumers, and portrays women in an objectified manner. Similarly, Calogero's (2005) research indicates that exposure to and experience of the male gaze is associated with detrimental effects on women's self-esteem. Over a prolonged period this can not only cause women to anticipate being subject to the male gaze, but also an increase in the likelihood to have feelings of anxiety and dissatisfaction about their body image (Calogero, 2005). Additionally, Oliver (2017) notes that a consistent experience of the male gaze in media can result in girls and young women limiting their imagined possibilities to spectators, particularly restricting their ability to see themselves as women "with agency" (p. 451). This isn't an occurrence as a result of a traditional interpretation of the texts my participants study, but instead has surfaced as a result of their foundations of knowledge concerning feminist theory alongside their lived experiences as young women.

Essentially, the medium of discussing their studied texts has allowed these deeper discussions to surface in the context of my data. The examples from my participants show that they already have been exposed to feminist critical perspectives (and at times use appropriate terminology: "male gaze") which are far beyond the 'casual' levels of feminist views that previous generations would have had before them.

Whilst Sally specifically names "male gaze" in her focus group response, her

answer could be interpreted with Goffman's analytical framework around gender display (1956a; 2008b). Goffman's research concerning the portrayal of gender in advertisements argued that men and women are depicted as a binary engaging in 'hyper-ritualizations' of social scenes. Brands and companies relying on these images of gender normalise such things as 'female subordination' and 'infantilization'. Sally, as well as some of my other participants, expressed that at times their views are already endowed with a feminist critical perspective that is beyond the kind of understanding that even their mothers would have had. These casually critical feminist views show there is a foundation of knowledge about feminism, but also that the types of feminism my participants have encountered are often media-related or associated with viewing work and earning as a marker of empowerment and success.

7.9.4: Housework and Work beyond the House

This theme relates to my participants' ideas about the current expectations that women face with regards to housework and paid work. Instances in my data where my participants discussed housework were more common and evenly distributed than in other themes I identified. The portrayal of women in the 19th century texts my participants study allows them to make links to what they understand about domestic labour and reimbursed labour in the present day. The consistent reference to labour of both kinds is also linked to perceived importance by my participants.

Elinor, Harriet and Emma provided examples of this which I have presented earlier in the chapter. Firstly, Elinor directly associated the kinds of labour that characters perform with their importance with "Like none of them do anything huge, compared to Scrooge … women and feminine characters would have been at the bottom in terms of what roles they have. Like not as important as masculine characters". Elinor mentioned that she found the roles of the women characters to be "quite stereotypical", and Emma expanded on what these stereotypes involved, linking

them to domestic labour: "very much women doing the cooking and the cleaning, and things like that". I interpret Elinor and Emma's ideas about housework and the links they make with gender to reflect a key aspect of Girlboss, in that economic labour is seen as more important than domestic labour, as economic labour has a direct link with income. Essentially, if forms of labour are associated with differing levels of perceived importance, then unpaid domestic tasks leave a character to rank fairly lowly in their interpretations. As I have previously discussed in Chapter 6, I posit that consistent exposure to the ideas that relate to Girlboss feminism cause my participants to have values and ideas concerning feminism and gender that mirror a paid-work-focused priority.

These 'Lean-In' (Sandberg, 2013) values can also be observed in the previously shared exchange between Julia and Betty. Here Betty and Julia reflected on gender relations again in terms of domestic and paid labour: "the men have like jobs and stuff, like the women don't and look after the families" (Betty) and "Women are there to do stuff for men. They're there to like, you know, be a wife or carer to a man." (Julia). I interpret that the focus on paid work (in the same manner as Emma and Elinor) reflects participants' acceptance of Girlboss values which position women as entrepreneurial subjects. Whilst on the surface what they say is empowering (as they denounce a system where women are relegated to housework), the idea that paid work brings freedom and empowerment has strong ties to my analysis in Chapter 6, which shows this is not actually a progressive form of feminism as it relies on cooperating with capitalism and minimises wider social inequalities.

As I have mentioned previously in this chapter, there are occasions where my participants interpret the women in the novels with incorrect historical understandings. For example, the majority of women would have been working-class and would have held jobs outside of the home (Gerard, 2016), but this paid labour did not liberate them in the way that Betty and Julia imagined. In fact, it could be suggested that the addition of paid work for women adds to the burden of

domestic work for women, and would have done so historically (unless women were from a higher social class) (Frost, 2018). The neoliberal element of my participants' conceptions of gender equality lies in their assumption that engaging with capitalism and paid work would liberate women from the expectations of domesticity.

Julia also held a critical view of domestic labour when compared to paid work in one of her answers, which reflects the ideology of Girlboss feminism. Julia's statement that "in the novel too that there is a woman with a job, rather than just staying in the house" is noteworthy. Her use of "rather than just" implies that Julia also has a negative perception of housework and domestic labour, and this supports my interpretations of the previous excerpts in this subchapter (that paid work is a liberating form of work, and superior to domestic labour). The use of "just" to portray perceptions of the values of labour is also something present in an answer from Anne, "women just stay at home," and Martha, "showing that they (women) aren't just like a stay at home". This supports my earlier interpretations concerning the ways in which my participants view different forms of labour, and that they feel that domestic tasks are less desirable to them than a paid career. This does not mean that I believe my participants should be against the economic independence of women, however the association of a career and of paid work as being the marker of feminist progress ties in with Girlboss feminism. This is not about simply valuing paid work, but rather the level of importance which is placed on the role of paid work. When considering this importance paired with my participants critically questioning a somewhat one-dimensional depiction of women in the novels they study, I argue that they use paid work as a marker of progressive social conditions for women but at the same time, fail to highlight that for working-class women work is not a source of feminist liberation. Additionally, the type of woman/women that my participants focus on in their analysis appears to be middle-class white women. This is significant, as this is the main audience for Girlboss feminism. Therefore, the theoretical women of the past and the women of today have their social conditions

compared and discussed under the lens of a specific form of feminist understanding by my participants: Girlboss feminism.

Building on this further, Emma, Harriet, Elinor and Betty's previously presented discussion concerning gendered expectations isa good example of how a selection of my participants connect portrayals of gender in their studied 19th century novel to being "reflective of the societal expectations" (Betty). What is interesting about this extract in particular is that once again, the "societal expectations" (Betty) that they discussed concern domestic labour. Emma outlines that "male characters have masculine expectations and the female characters do kind of reflect the things we were saying, like being homemakers" within the novel. My participants are still aware of, and exposed to, the divide between "masculine expectations" (Emma) and feminine expectations ("being homemakers" Emma). Anne also had evidence of this divide in her earlier presented exchange with Louisa. Anne's use of "always" in reference to the gendered division of labour in the novel suggests that gendered expectations concerning work and housework still exist for her, and that there are still attitudes held in society today that participants encountered in their 19th century novel. Research indicates that whilst the nature of housework and domestic tasks has changed over time, due to factors such as technological advancement or changes in priorities, the burden to perform the majority of the unpaid work in the home falls predominantly on women (Federici, 2012; Oakley, 2019).

Hannah's contribution discussing the shock to a Victorian audience seeing Miss Elphinstone holding a gun and not an iron highlights her perceptions of these attitudes in the 19th century. Hannah's association with women and housework within the context of her studied 19th century novel connects the character who she and her peers are referring to (Miss Elphinstone) with what they understand to have been the reality for Victorian women. Miss Elphinstone was not depicted as a woman who had domestic duties to perform in the novel, and instead Hannah is connecting her knowledge of societal expectations concerning housework to how she feels the

character of Miss Elphinstone would have been perceived by a 19th century audience. I interpret this to be a reflection of my participants' perceptions of a change in societal attitude, as Margaret, Hannah and Esther's statements are all conditional on the audience being Victorian. This shows a sophisticated reader-response approach to the text. Essentially, to my participants as modern readers, women possessing and using guns is not shocking and the assumption that women cannot be more than 'Angels in the House' (Moore, 2015) is no longer a factor that readers would consider when they read the novel.

  Building on this interpretation of a change in societal perceptions about the nature of women's labour, Maria indicated that she felt it was "more common for women to go to work now". Her perspective on paid labour does not necessarily mean that these expectations to do the housework have disappeared, but instead remain (as evidenced by earlier shared data) in addition to women going to work. This links to ideas from Hochschild's (1989) research about the double burden or second shift. With these terms, Hochschild summarised the higher workload that women face as a result of working a paid job and having the majority of responsibility for a significant portion of unpaid work around the home (1989). Maria's contribution about women having paid roles links to the previous references to work as being a marker of social progress.

  Lydia and Georgiana noted expanded opportunities for women currently when comparing society in the 19th century to their perceptions of modern life. This idea that Georgiana mentions of "more opportunity" was not expanded upon, however given the context of the conversation and the work-heavy focus that her peers in that focus group had regarding women's rights, I interpret this to mean more opportunity in terms of work.

My participants also highlighted some of the barriers that exist for contemporary

women at work, such as advantages that men have in some workplaces and the gender pay gap. Martha noted that: "females think a lot more strategically, and don't feel the need to shout to get their point across. And erm, it's sad that sometimes it can't be put across because they don't want to fight" and Lydia observed that: "Yeah, like if you went into a male-dominated business, I imagine you would feel quite restricted and pressured". These comments have two key areas that are significant. Firstly, the points that my participants make about what barriers exist are noteworthy. Martha suggests in her response that men in politics tend to "shout to get their point across" and that women are disadvantaged in this particular field because they "think a lot more strategically" and "don't want to fight". Here Martha's views link to research by Clatterbaugh (1990a; 2019b) concerning gender stereotypes in politics. He writes that the typical masculine gender role is composed of:

A set of behaviors, attitudes, and conditions that are generally found in men of an identifiable group. For example, if men in this group tend to behave aggressively, aggressiveness is a part of their masculine gender role; if they tend to value rational discussion or to do certain kinds of work, then that, too, is a part. (p. 3).

What links this explanation to Martha's point is not that men can 'only' be aggressive, as Clatterbaugh even highlights that different traits are associated with different masculine social groups, but that dominant traits which are associated with privilege tend to be reflected more in politics. Clatterbaugh refers to "Distinct masculinities" (1990a; 2019b, p. 3) which are social roles that are part of, and exist in, groups of men in specific contexts. As part of the conditions which construct and determine masculinities, Clatterbaugh also takes account of how privilege or a lack of privilege can impact how masculinity is treated and valued in a society. He clarifies that "if some men are generally treated as more suited for political office, then that privilege is included in their masculinity" (1990a; 2019b, p. 3). Cheryan and Markus (2020) support this, and whilst their research is in a US political context, they highlight that political leadership roles are defined by masculine characteristics (such as those that Clatterbaugh outlines). This suggests that certain traits are prioritised and valued and ultimately, viewed as the standard. Such an analysis ties in with Martha's perception of the traits that she

associates with men who work in politics, but in addition to this Martha reflects that she feels that women are directly disadvantaged as a result. These examples highlight one of the ways in which the novels my participants read for GCSE English have impacted their views of themselves, is through triggering a reflection about future careers and conditions that contemporary women face in the workplace.

Mary, Elizabeth and Lydia provided another example of this from the data I have presented earlier in the chapter. Mary's specific focus on being "very lucky" to have "the same opportunities like men" shows her measuring social progress through the lens of 'opportunities', which I interpret to mean career-based opportunities. This measure of progress sparked the rest of the group to reflect on where inequalities still exist, because while women are able to pursue certain careers, there are still barriers that exist in doing so. Research by Lombard et al. (2021) examined the nature of this disadvantage in participation by women in a US political context. They argued that political leadership and high-ranking political party positions in the US are "rooted in biases that prioritize and center stereotypical notions of masculinity and Whiteness, fostering an environment that disadvantages women and especially women of color above and beyond traditional gender discrimination." (Lombard et al., 2021, p. 107). In addition to this, they note that there is little hope for women's interest in politics or desire to want to be involved in politics beyond short-term roles until the "masculine defaults" ((Lombard et al., 2021, p. 107) which are embedded in society and are scrutinised, challenged and dismantled. In the context of this study, I argue that despite my participants viewing the access to and opportunities granted by certain careers as markers for social progress, that they are still able to observe where inequalities exist as a result of discussing historical conditions for women (such as those they encounter in their GCSE texts).

Linking the above to Martha's previously mentioned feelings that women are disadvantaged in politics due to their nature to "think more rationally, and not

as...angrily", and Lydia's where she notes that she imagines that women in the business sector would "feel quite restricted and pressured", it is clear that the types of work that my participants mention is noteworthy. Martha and Lydia have perceptions about very 'lean-in' careers (i.e business centred or high-earner related), and the sorts of career paths which branches of this feminist school of thought (for example Girlboss feminism) would view as aspirational. Rottenberg (2018) ties this view of certain careers to the popularised narratives about neoliberal feminism, and uses Ivanka Trump's *Women Who Work: Rewriting the Rules for Success* (2017) as an example. Rottenberg argues that the book represents a wider movement of women who want to succeed and 'have it all' behind its dismissible exterior composed of inspirational quotes and jargon (2019). The message of female empowerment offers a vision of feminism that is "not very feminist at all" (Rottenberg, 2019, p.1073) but still resonated with a wide audience and sold extremely well. Rottenberg (2019) associates the book's contents and success with the most recent variant of the neoliberal feminist, in that the values and ideas in Trump's book (and others such as Amoruso's #Girlboss (2014)) reflects women being perceived as human capital who should ideally be investing in themselves and building towards a professional presence in all aspects of life (even hobbies and friendships). The kinds of careers that are idolised by Trump (2017) mirror those mentioned by my participants as being "restricted and pressured" (Lydia) environments for women.

Beyond the paradigms of a specific career path, language associated with the business world is also a key component of this particular brand of feminism, and this was apparent in how my participants understood gender in the novels. For example, Trump (2017) encourages her readers to view themselves as 'stock' and to put their energy and focus into increasing their 'market value'. As Rottenberg (2018) notes, this goes beyond the expectations of the workplace to include modified behaviour (such as use of language) and aspirations (such as the sorts of careers one might wish to pursue). There is evidence of both of these elements in my participants'

responses. For example, considering use of language, my participants have a certain vocabulary they use exclusively when expressing their understandings of feminism. Throughout my focus group transcripts, the words "strong", "power", "female" (which occur 14 times, 8 times and 31 times respectively) implying that some of my participants' understandings of feminism and the sort of feminism to which they refer has strong ties to neoliberal feminism. This supports the idea that 'aspirational women' (Allen, 2014; McRobbie, 2009 & Rottenberg, 2019) are most open to wanting to be 'empowered' by this form of feminism, and that the desire to be successful mirrors being a 'good' feminist.

  As I have discussed in the previous findings chapter (Chapter 6), there is a high level of popularity with this form of Girlboss feminism (or its other names which I have previously outlined, including popular feminism, Lean-In feminism and neoliberal feminism). I am not claiming that my participants are familiar with the popular texts which have surfaced within and alongside this movement (such as Ivanka Trump's *Women Who Work: Rewriting the Rules for Success,* 2017, Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead,* 2013 and Sophia Amoruso's *#Girlboss,* 2014). However, their potential exposure to the values within those texts through a medium such as social media allows for elements of my data to, in the same way as Trump's *Women Who Work* (2017), have moments that capture and reproduce "key contemporary and neoliberal expectation" (Rottenberg, 2019). Considering the examples that my participants have provided, the connections that I make from their responses reflect what Rottenberg (2019) refers to as "the wider cultural landscape in which neoliberal feminism has increasingly become part of mainstream common sense."(p.1074). In this way, my participants' readings of gender in the novels they study link to their attitudes concerning work (domestic and paid) in the real world. Now that I have presented an analysis for data relating to housework and work beyond the house, I move to discuss motherhood and relationships in the next and final analytical section of this chapter.

7.9.5 : Motherhood and Relationships

In this section, I will discuss how my participants discussed their reflections concerning relationships and motherhood. Studying the relationships and motherhood of female characters in these GCSE novels helped enable my participants to think about their own perceptions and expectations of motherhood in today's society. In addition to this, their attitudes about marriage and historical and social expectations concerning marriage also highlighted their outlooks for contemporary women. Essentially, in the discussions concerning motherhood and romantic relationships or marriage, my participants were not rejecting the stereotypical associations of women in these areas in the same way that they showed resistance to other gendered expectations in the data.

7.9.6 : Attitudes Concerning Motherhood

Below, Harriet and Emma reflect on the ways that having children was viewed as an essential part of a woman's life in the context of the novels they were reading:

> Harriet: Yeah women are expected to provide a family.
>
> Emma: Yeah, and I think one of the reasons why, I can't remember who, but one of the reasons she feels bad is because she can't like provide any children. I can't remember why. I can't remember what it's called. Erm, like so she feels like bad about that. And I think that shows that even the women thought that they were worthless at that point for not being able to do that. Or, like that they needed to be able to have a family and get married. But like, with Scrooge, it was just like, he didn't even have to consider like a "down payment" to his future wife's father or anything like that. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

The above shows that some of my participants understood the ability to have children was tied to a woman's value in the 19th century, and that their idea of aspirations for women in the 19th century involved marrying and having children in order to leave home. Previously presented data from Betty also ties in with this, for example "Well for some of them it's the fact that they were still to get married, but obviously Mrs Cratchit was married with children. Erm maybe they'd be more respected". Sally also contributed that: "women are just more like, family-orientated

and things. And like, at the time maybe they wanted to get out of their current house to go start a family". The main areas that these participants felt fit to focus on in terms of gender issues concerned the pressure for women to have children.

   Whilst my participants' ideas and understandings are not necessarily inaccurate, their focus on these expectations of women echoes research by Read (2011), Hutchings et al. (2008) and Thorne (1993), in that my participants are prioritising a discussion which includes elements of social learning. For example, Read's (2010) research highlights how girls use celebrity role models to describe how they would like their future to turn out, but she notes that this partially stems from social learning and sex roles theories, which highlights how role model behaviour can impact how girls shape their identities. Similarly in Hutchings et al. (2008), the role modelling of teachers (from children's perspectives) is linked to social learning and sex roles, in which the identification of certain traits leads to imitation at different levels. Thorne (1993) also provides an examination of how children are involved in their reproduction of gendered behaviour in schools, rather than just 'being' different. Thorne's analysis is split into two key areas to consider: how children actively challenge gender roles ("how kids mark, cross, undermine, and challenge boundaries between girls and boys" (1993, p. 135)) and how children engage in social construction of existing gender roles (through practices such as "forming lines, choosing seats, teasing, gossiping, seeking access to or avoiding particular activities" (1993, p. 157)). When considering Thorne's (1993) arguments alongside my own findings, the gendered practices my participants focus on include having children and how children have historically been tied to womanhood. This is an idea that they may have been exposed to through sources other than the novels they read, for example television, social media and perhaps the most prominent influence of other adults (Hutchings et al., 2008; Read, 2010; Thorne,1993). If learning is considered as a social process that can occur through observation of environment and behaviour (Bandura, 1977), then my interpretation of why some of my participants chose to focus their answers concerning conditions for women and the

changes to these conditions centred on having children indicates they are not necessarily rejecting the stereotypical association of women and children in the same way that they show resistance to other gendered expectations in the data.

Building on this point, some of my participants also had perceptions of what motherhood is and what it involves. Emma and Harriet used the term "loving" to describe Mr Cratchit, but then Emma reflected that "in comparison he [Mr Cratchit] was a bit more loving. As opposed to that extreme maternal trait.". Additionally, Catherine believed that: "…in all countries, I think females are like mostly known to like look after your family". In the same way that some of my participants discussed the significance of motherhood for women in the 19ᵗʰ century, they also had ideas about what motherhood would actually involve. Emma and Catherine's answers indicate that they view women as primary caregivers and that there is a delicate balance to strike within this role to not be "extreme" (Emma). My participants' associations of women as nurturing and caregivers show that their perception of motherhood is grounded in common gender stereotypes. These stereotypes about the link between women and the burden of care also ring true, as globally women spend up to ten times more of their time on unpaid care work than men (Ferrant et. al, 2014).

Patil (2018) notes that because of entrenched stereotypes, women are viewed as homemakers and care providers whilst men are expected to fulfil the breadwinner role. As a result of these widely held assumptions, the burden that women face in terms of the care they are expected to provide also contributes to other gendered inequalities (Patil, 2018). When considering why these examples occurred in my data, it would be useful to consider a study by Skelton et al. (2009). Their research explored the views of a sample of 12-13 year-old girls in the UK about their attitudes towards being viewed as clever. Whilst my participants did not disclose their opinions about being labelled intelligent, Skelton et al.'s (2009) acceptable framework of femininity is useful to consider.

This refers to, but is not limited to, girls expressing interest in fashion, beauty, celebrity and pop culture, emotional connections with friends and engaging in an interest in heterosexual relationships (see also: Renold and Allen, 2006; Ringrose, 2007). Skelton et al. (2009) found that their participants were still negotiating their attitudes towards labels concerning their intelligence, and the examples I have shown from some of my participants shows that their attitudes about the gendered framework of femininity and the traits connected with motherhood are not facing the same levels of scrutiny and negotiation. In my data, my participants often scrutinise domestic responsibilities and housework for example, but motherhood still remains part of their gendered 'frameworks' for women, both inside and outside of the novels they read.

7.9.7: Attitudes Concerning Marriage and Romantic Relationships

In addition to their perceptions concerning motherhood, some of my participants also had views about romantic relationships and marriage which were captured in their answers. Examples of this from my data have been presented earlier in this chapter, but I will now highlight the three main areas that build these wider themes. Firstly, participants expressed an ambivalence towards the institution of marriage. They did not actively dislike it, disagree with it or criticise it, but, notably, they did not wish the characters in the novels to marry or to rely on marriage for liberation. For example, Julia didn't view marriage as a priority for men: "it's not a priority, like men didn't need [to get married]" in the context of the discussion about living conditions for men and women, and viewed that as an advantage. In the same discussion, Emma and Betty struggle to recall Scrooge's fiancée's name ("we don't even know the wife's name, wait the fiancée's name") and decide that she "didn't seem to be that important overall". From these examples, there is a link to the downplaying of the perceived importance of marriage by my participants, as well as the labelling of a character (Belle) who was at one point engaged as "not important" to the point where her name is forgotten. This shows that whilst some of my participants are aware that historically women would have relied on marriage, they did not want the

characters that they admired to be married. Instead, women were admired for their independence, their 'power' and their influence over other characters and events in the novels.

Interestingly, Hannah was able to analyse what she felt the function of marital and love storylines in texts are: "… to drive the novel forward … and to keep the readers entertained, like a love story so people are gripped. Hoping that the relationship comes out the other side." but she also expresses that she feels that this is "quite outdated but traditional". The flip side of this, is that characters who have storylines and arcs which resist this "traditional" format, such as *The War of the Worlds'* (Wells,1898a; 2017b) Miss Elphinstone, are admired for breaking "that stereotype". I interpret this to be an example of some of my participants voicing a partial rejection of gender-typed norms relating to marriage, and whilst the examples where this occurs refer to characters in novels, the attitudes that some of my participants have appear to be reflective about their own views on marriage and relationships.

  The second theme of interest is that whilst the language around relationships is grounded in prescribed heterosexuality and gender binary of "husband" and "wife." Hannah discusses how these couples "…traditionally, they've got the male and female couple" and acknowledges that this is "quite outdated but traditional". This isn't to say that Hannah is rejecting heterosexuality within romantic storylines, or indeed in her own life, but what is interesting is the acknowledgement that the "traditional" couple in her view is "quite outdated". Whilst there is a difference in saying something is "quite outdated" and being an ally with, for example the LGBTQ+ community, I interpret Hannah's statement as having a progressive core. Whilst Emma's statement refers to marriage and relationships rather than gender, in research with young people aged 12-14 in England about gender, Bragg et al. (2018) found that young people have an expanded awareness concerning gender identity and expression as well as principled commitments to gender equality and tolerance for gender diversity and championing the rights of gender and sexual

minorities. If this data can be considered as representative of young people, then negotiating opinions and ideas about representations of marriage and relationships could also be classed as part of this awareness and tolerance.

With the above considered, an example in my data of Emma reflecting on some men having insecurities about how much their partners earn compared to them relates to RQ 2: "I think like a lot of men are intimidated if like their wife makes more money than them. Or, if they have more power than them". Here, what Emma said was not something that occurred in the novel she was reading, but was a reflection of an issue that she felt existed in both the 19ᵗʰ century and today. In terms of how this links to herself specifically, I interpret this to imply that she does not share these views, and as a result would not want this dynamic in her own relationships.

7.10: Conclusion

This chapter has provided relevant data and analysis relating to research question RQ 2: *Does the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English Literature curriculum have an impact on how pupils view themselves?.* After presenting relevant data, I discussed the three main themes: *Celebrities and Pop Culture, Housework and Work beyond the House* and *Motherhood and Relationships.* Each section has shown the different ways in which my participants make connections to the modern world as a result of the discussions around the 19ᵗʰ century texts they read. These connections are not necessarily things that my participants have experienced at this stage in their lives (examples being marriage and relationships, or motherhood or lived experience of being a celebrity), but my participants use the discussions to highlight their views about the conditions that exist for women in the present day.

My key findings relating to *Celebrities and Pop Culture* are that the connections

that my participants make with the characters in the 19th century novels they are studying allow them to reinforce their thoughts and feelings by linking them to examples of celebrity and pop culture that they are familiar with in their lives outside of reading. Whilst the connections my participants make do not strictly reflect how they view themselves, they highlight the conditions that they live in and what was important for them with regards to the changes they want to see in terms of gender equality. My participants also showed a level of awareness of feminist concepts, such as the Male Gaze (Mulvey,1975), in their discussions. This shows that despite not necessarily encountering these ideas in a formal educational setting, my participants' exposure to these ideas informs their reading of these texts, alongside opinions they have about contemporary gender politics.

My findings presented in *Housework and Work beyond the House* reflect how my participants appeared to draw on Girlboss feminism as the benchmarks of progress. The data shows that they value certain careers above others associated with Girlboss feminism, and that my participants view paid work as liberating from housework for women as opposed to an extra burden. I suggest that in answer to RQ2: *Does the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English Literature curriculum have an impact on how pupils view themselves?,* the instances outlined from my data for this theme reflect the ideas that my participants have about domestic and paid labour. They showcase these views as a result of connecting working conditions and the gendered distribution of housework from the 19th century novels that they study to their perceptions of working conditions and the gendered distribution of housework today. In this aspect of the data, my participants are making connections that I perceive to be about how they view their expectations and aspirations, which are extensions of themselves. The connections that I made with forms of neoliberal feminism follow the format that Rottenberg (2018) outlines in

terms of participation and audience for these values, in that it has established itself as a "normative frame and ultimate ideal" (p. 1074) especially for middle-class or aspirational women and young women. I have argued above that this is evidenced by the perceptions that my participants have about the sorts of work that there are still significant barriers in, and the kinds of work they specifically chose to talk about.

Finally, in *Motherhood and Relationships* my participants are more traditional in their views concerning expectations of motherhood for the women in the novels they read as well as contemporary women compared to their views about marriage and romantic relationships. The examples I presented show that my participants understand the expectations historically on women to marry to survive, but also that they respect women characters in the novels they read for rejecting that stereotype. Essentially, the characters and novels that the girls discuss enable them to reflect on the gender relations that they observe in the present day. Whilst this is not strictly how they view themselves, it relates to how they view the conditions that they live in and this also allowed them in these instances to highlight what was important for them in terms of the changes they want to see in terms of gender equality, or the values that they associate with motherhood and relationships. I will now proceed to Chapter 8 of this thesis and use staff data to answer *RQ3: What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in class?*

Chapter 8: Findings and Analysis (Staff) *RQ3: What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in class?*

8.1: Overview

The following chapter will present findings which are relevant in answering research question 3*: What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in class?.* Subsequently to presenting my findings descriptively, I will provide an analysis of this staff data. This will be organised under three themes within the chapter, namely: *Resources, Authority,* and *Idealism.*

Resources involves an analysis of data which highlights the impact that factors such as time, money, and staff experience have on GCSE text selection. My staff participants outline how barriers relating to different resources influence the text that they teach in their schools. Additionally, it encompasses my staff participants' perceptions of the impact that different 'resources' have on their choices to teach certain texts.

Following this, in *Authority* I present an analysis of data which relates to limitations which are somewhat external to my staff participants. These are aspects which are essentially out of their control, for example predetermined school choices, pressures from senior staff or even the view of the relevant exam board. Essentially, different forms of external authority.

Subsequently, I outline instances in my data where my staff participants are either influenced by their *Idealism,* or have views as to how text choices should be used in their teaching. I then finally conclude the chapter with a summary of my findings and present my answer to RQ 3*: What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in class?* before progressing onto the final analysis chapter of this thesis.

8.2 : Findings

The following findings allowed me to answer RQ 3*: What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in class?* Data was sourced from the staff interview phase of my research. As I have outlined previously in this thesis, I interviewed three staff teachers as part of my main study, all who had varied levels of experience of teaching at different secondary schools. I have assigned them the names Austen, Stoker, and Poe. I will now move to present my findings descriptively under three themed subheadings: *Resources, Authority* and *Idealism.*

8.2.1 : Resources

Data concerning different types of resources having an impact on text choice was common across all of my staff participants' transcripts. I have applied the term 'resources' to data which highlights the texts available at schools for teachers to use, staff experience and comfort of teaching, and time.

Despite the variances in exam boards and differences in the types of school that I conducted data collection in (AQA and OCR; Private Boarding, State and Faith State) all of my staff participants were influenced by different sorts of resources with regards to what they taught for GCSE English Literature.

8.2.2 : Copies of Text and Lesson Plans as a Resource

Teachers mentioned that they had to use the same text several years in a row due to a lack of resources:

> KS: And do you at your school repeat the teaching of the same novel for the next cohort of students?
>
> Austen: Yeah.

KS: And would you say that's happened a lot? Thinking about how long you've been working there or?

Austen: Erm, I think it's...yeah I mean I've only been there since September (2020). Erm, but in the three schools that I've been at now, they go based on "ok what do we have the most resources for?" (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Stoker's response to the same question was: "Yeah I have done! Because of you know, because of resources and stuff.". This highlights that schools having limited resources directly influences teachers' choices of novels to teach, despite the selection being wider according to different exam boards. Poe does not mention how his school's resources influence his text choice, but he emphasises the role that time pressure and pre-existing lesson plans play:

Poe: Curriculum choice is always a compromise between maybe new stuff you'd like to do and stuff that is already there and you have the texts for it and you've made the resources and the teachers are already familiar with it, because it's a huge thing...again we're making changes to KS3 right now as a lot of schools are, but every time you decide to change something, you're asking staff to learn new texts. Now, I think that's something that's often underestimated like "oh you're an English teacher" but that doesn't mean you know every single text inside out back-to-front at all. So, it's good to have that consistency and the repetition of texts is a good tool for the teacher. Because you always teach it better the next time around. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

The above shows that Poe believes there is not an unwillingness to teach different texts, but that due to the pressure this places on educators it is difficult to vary novel choices each year. This is because creating new resources and allocating time outside of lessons to research new texts and how to teach them is very time consuming for teachers. Stoker also alludes to this in his answer:

Stoker: With the current Year 10's...they will do *War of the Worlds*… I've not given them the choice, because it does seem to work well...yeah just in terms of workload...Sort of building on the success that I've had with this cohort really. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

For both Poe and Stoker, workload is a major factor in the impossibility to find time to prepare teaching on a different text. This high workload does not leave time

for teachers to focus on creating new resources, or searching for pre-made ones for a different text choice. This is evident with "…curriculum choice is always a compromise between maybe new stuff you'd like to do and stuff that is already there… and you've made the resources and the teachers are already familiar with it, because it's a huge thing..." (Poe) and "yeah just in terms of workload" (Stoker). Both Stoker and Poe refer to "workload" (Stoker) or the dilemma of "compromise" (Poe) in what an educator might wish to teach measured against what their time allows. This echoes the findings of Elliott and Olive (2019), who researched why English teachers tend to repeat the selection of Shakespeare plays for the drama requirement of the GCSE in English Literature. They found that the workload of teachers not only presented obstacles for individuals if they wanted to change which texts were taught; but also entire departments were impacted and opted to not change texts unless forced (Elliott & Olive, 2019).

   In addition to the pressures of workload to prevent the creation of new resources, an issue for my staff participants was where they could find potential resources that already existed. Austen observed that there was "very little time to do independent research" and she felt the need to desperately try to "find things from sort of other successful teachers". Austen also noted how Twitter was a good place to "have these conversations with other educators from other backgrounds". Poe's answer below did not reference Twitter, but did highlight the role that secondary teacher resources can play with regards to text selection:

> Poe: I can almost picture the page on the syllabus that sort of says...ur..."we...we recommend an explanation of postcolonial theory alongside this"... they've got a tricky balance in terms of guidance and help...because for us as teachers, to get access to the good quality essays that explore those things is a: potentially prohibited because they're behind university access and paywalls. And b: even if you can access them, you're gonna spend a big chunk of time

reading a lot of stuff to potentially use. And how do you balance that with being the life of a teacher? Well, most teachers won't. They'll Google it and that ends up being potentially reductionist. So then we need the exam board to potentially create the resources. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

Whilst Austen indicated that she sees Twitter as a good platform for searching for different resources, Poe referred to Google as "potentially reductionist". Perhaps the key difference in Austen and Poe's sources for secondary resources in the communal or lack of communal element. For example, Austen noted that Twitter allowed for the opening of dialogues with other educators to discuss ideas. Poe highlighted the issues that he perceives exist as a result of relying on Google searches, and ultimately reflected that a potential way to solve them would be for "the exam board to potentially create the resources". For Poe, the lack of community that Google provides could be solved by meaningful advice from an exam board. I interpret that both Austen and Poe want guidance from outside sources in order to be confident enough to switch up their text choices. Therefore, a lack of lesson resources and guidance influence their text choices that they teach for GCSE English. Now that I have outlined findings which indicate physical resources (copies of texts) and teaching resources impact teacher's text choices, I will move to present data that highlights how staff experience and background impacts text choices.

8.2.3 : Staff Experience and Background as a Resource

Staff experience relates to the amount of time that teachers have had in the profession, their experiences before teaching (for example, relevant Masters' degrees), and their personal backgrounds and characteristics (for example, their gender).

Austen noted that what staff "*feel the most comfortable in teaching*" is a factor in text choice, highlighting staff experience as a key 'resource' type. Below, Austen

shows that there is a link between teaching resources, staff experience and comfort of teaching:

> Austen: But, when there's more resources or people feel more comfortable in choosing different novels to teach it's easier than sort of teaching the same thing again and again and having them parrot it back. Like there are really important messages in, you know, these popular ones that people choose to do. Like that's without a doubt, but I don't think that the students get a sort of a wide...a wide approach to literature. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

In the above, Austen's referral to "more resources" is directly linked to her believing that staff "feel more comfortable" when they have these resources. I interpret 'resources' in this extract to refer to staff experience being complemented by external resources (such as online activities or lesson plans), and comfort resulting from the right combination of experience and external resources.

Austen also highlights how the teaching of any critical theory is dependent on the 'resource' of independent effort that staff put in. I will provide more examples of this interpretation of 'resource' in the following subchapter, where I classify time as a resource. In this instance, 'independent effort' also ties to teacher background. For example, Austen also notes that she has a Masters' (MA), which not all teachers have, and I class this as a resource which has influence over text choice and the ways in which a novel is taught:

> KS: Yeah, of course. Thank you. Erm, do you teach any critical theory alongside the text? For example, post-colonial, feminist, Marxist?
>
> Austen: I try to bring that in. Erm, and that's something that I've been focussing on a lot more this year after doing my MA. Erm, and erm it's something that's not normally there. It's not normally...it wouldn't be in the schemes. So it's very much like your own independent reading. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Austen then builds on this idea of teachers holding specialist degrees as a 'resource' which influences text choice and what extra theory or critical reading they feel that they can offer when teaching their GCSE pupils:

> Austen: Erm, but I think that they would struggle because a lot of teachers don't have background specialisms in...you know...you just need a degree to teach. So, like the training...a lot of the like trainees at the moment...and it is down to context and society at the moment…Erm, there's like people from a philosophy background, from like a law background, trying to teach English. Which they have their own specialisms and their own theory, but if you turned around and wanted to discuss like...Judith Butler's language, the representation of gender, performativity of gender they'd be like "what?". Erm, and this comes up a little bit in Key Stage 5. Typically for language. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Interestingly, Austen does not rank or prioritise subject backgrounds in her answer, but she does observe how different specialisms can mean a different teaching experience for both staff and students. Poe does not mention any qualifications, but he does mention how being "more well-read than the average person" could impact text choice, and how equipped someone might feel to teach a novel. Poe also refers to the idea of personal background and teaching experience as being key influences in teaching and text choice, and highlights how different educational backgrounds can impact what extra knowledge and context teachers include in their lessons:

> Poe: A big part that is underestimated is...essentially how it'll all boil down to teacher knowledge. Like...when they're making those changes if you're bringing in a core bunch of new texts, you've got staff who have likely not read them. So, they've got to read that text and read the book through at least once before you feel ready to teach it...let alone all the stuff you might need to do around it! … do we need to do some department training around what we mean by post colonialism? Because, that's a phrase that every English teacher will go "yeah, I essentially get the essence, but do I get it well enough to teach it?". (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

Linking to this, Austen details how a specialism can impact the level of experience a teacher has (in addition to years in the teaching profession), emphasising how having different backgrounds can allow a member of staff to feel more confident in what they can offer students in addition to the base teaching of a novel:

Austen: Erm, so there's that horrible...that horrible doubt as a new teacher thinking "oh what can I do?" "What can I share?" You know, even when you know your specialisms can be in something really relevant, you can help students. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

This is also briefly explored by Poe, as he felt that he didn't have as much background knowledge about 19ᵗʰ century novels that would be beneficial for teaching: "I'm going to show my potential lack of reading from that era, that's what I'm worried about." Both Austen and Poe use vocabulary relating to negative feelings about a potential lack of knowledge: "horrible doubt" and "worried about". From these responses, I interpret that when staff feel under-prepared in relation to their own personal resources of experience and background, which can cause feelings of anxiety, as well as have an impact on the influence of text choice.

Austen and Poe both discuss how other aspects of staff experience can influence their text choices. For example, Austen notes how a personal background can impact practice:

Austen: And that's why educators don't want to teach, or some educators, don't want to teach from diversity backgrounds. Because they don't feel like they can represent it well. But, we have, we have lived...and we've been brought up being able to speak through the voices of white men. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Poe then reflects on how his personal background impacts his text choices for English:

Poe: And I have to say when I am making these sorts of choices I do feel relatively ill-equipped. As a white man, you know, what sort of experience do I have to draw on to make those choices? And then what I worry about is making relatively tokenistic choices- you know with "oh that ticks that box" and becoming all about the box ticking. Now again, I can't read all of the books out there and get that full sense…where does the guidance come from about the selection of texts? …where is the training for lack of a better word? (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

Both Austen and Poe are reflecting on opposite sides of the same issue. Austen perceives the barriers in text choice as being related to " …some educators, don't

want to teach from diversity backgrounds. Because they don't feel like they can represent it well." but for Poe he feels "relatively ill-equipped. As a white man…" when considering wider text choices, critical theory and perspectives in regards to his teaching. The common element of these accounts is that feeling under-prepared as a result of personal background can impact text choice, as well as whether my participants would consider teaching critical theory alongside a text. Poe's viewpoint (as a white man) shows that whilst he feels unable to go beyond the base text with his students, he would be willing to do so provided there is "guidance" and "training". This stems from Poe feeling: "relatively ill-prepared to make some of those choices about some of those authorial intents and character representations". Therefore, when considering 'resources' as a factor in text choice, personal background is a key characteristic that educators bring with them to the role, as well as the desire for training to help them to overcome any feelings of ill-preparedness or anxiety in text selection and teaching alternative perspectives alongside novels.

  Obviously, personal background is not a form of 'resource' which can be altered, but it does impact what my staff participants felt comfortable teaching, and what sorts of engagement they expected from their students as a result. Austen feels that her gender has an impact on the levels of engagement that students will have with her teaching: "So you're more likely to have more engagement with girls, or at least I am as a female teacher. I feel like I'm more likely to have engagement with girls." Interestingly, Stoker also shares this perception concerning gender having an impact on text choice, but as a man instead of a woman:

> Stoker: I was very open with it, and I sort of said to them "listen some people are saying you've picked a very masculine text". And actually you know...they...they voted for that one! Erm...it wasn't my choice! You know as the new male head of department… (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Stoker's response includes direct examples of some of the comments that he received in reference to the text choice for his GCSE class relating to his gender, whereas Austen's response stems from her experiences of connecting with her girl pupils. Stoker's gender did not impact the engagement he had with his pupils (as evidenced by how much his pupils enjoyed his lessons, which they disclosed to me after our focus group sessions). Instead, his gender impacted perceptions surrounding the text choice of *The War of the Worlds* (Wells,1898a;2017b). I interpret this issue to tie to gender norms and expectations, as *The War of the Worlds* (Wells,1898a;2017b) contains themes that could be interpreted as stereotypically masculine in a text: for example, alien invasion, violence and disaster. In Stoker's instance, these perceptions tied to his gender (a man assigning a 'masculine' text for his pupils) did not stop him teaching the novel. For Austen however, her perceptions about levels of engagement from pupils as a result of her gender have an impact on what she chooses to teach. Therefore, personal background and educational background impact and influence the text choices that teachers make when teaching subject English. I will now present my findings which highlight the role that the resource of time has in influencing teacher text choice.

8.2.4 : Time as a Resource

Within the following findings, I consider time to be a resource that impacts and influences teachers' text choices for GCSE English. All of my staff participants observed that time was a key consideration for their decision making processes with which novels they choose to teach. This manifested in two ways: the lack of time for staff to prepare, and the lack of time for staff to teach a text. This partially links to my previously presented findings which concern teaching and lesson resources as influential, as heavy workloads and busy schedules for teachers are indicative of

limited time to create, search for and plan more resources.

When I asked my participants what limitations they face when teaching, Austen responded with "Time, massively! Erm, there's not time, or there's very little time…". I interpret this to refer to the lack of time to prepare to teach different texts. Stoker also shared that time in general was a limitation: "I'm sure other teachers you have spoken to have similar concerns...you know it's a similar pattern anywhere in any school I would say. It comes down to time". Here, Stoker implies that time to prepare is a universal issue that impacts "any school", and within my sample of staff his view was confirmed. The issue of text length was also found to be a deciding factor in what teachers of English decided to select when considering the requirement of a Shakespeare play (Elliott and Olive, 2019). Elliott and Olive's (2019) research also had a much larger sample of staff than my own, therefore this gives more support to Stoker's claim of the importance of the role of time and text length as a deciding factor for English teachers.

The lack of time to prepare also impacted the amount of critical theory that my staff participants could consider including alongside their chosen texts. The below extract from Poe outlines this how time is an obstacle:

> KS: …do you teach any critical theory alongside the text? For example, post-colonial, feminist, Marxist?
> Poe: Erm, no not at GCSE.
> KS: Ok, why not?...
> Poe: Well sadly it's nothing more than passing reference. And not enough to...not to drawn and keep the attention on the fact that this is a big body of critical theory…It's almost just a..."this is the sort of subheading we're gonna use in out lessons". It's the...it doesn't connect it to that wider body of critical theory...that's problematic in terms of length, it's problematic in terms of style and in terms of reading challenge. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

The above extract shows that time as a resource factors into Poe's feelings about how well teaching critical theory alongside texts would fit in with exam expectations and structure. His thoughts in the above echo previous sentiments expressed by my

staff participants about their hesitance to teach different texts. This reluctance to do so is because time would impact how well they could execute a different text in contrast to what they are used to teaching. In Poe's view, what is currently taught alongside texts in terms of critical theory at GCSE level is "nothing more than passing reference", and whilst he doesn't necessarily see this as the best way to engage in critical theory alongside literature, ultimately he reflects that because of time he doesn't see how it would be possible: "that's problematic in terms of length, it's problematic in terms of style and in terms of reading challenge". Poe also touches on his perceptions of the level of reading challenge students would face in order to engage with the style of language and length that some base critical theory texts would offer. However, these obstacles could be overcome with more time, as these arguments also exist when considering the difficulties of teaching many of the prescribed "traditional English cannon classics (e.g. a Shakespeare play, a 19th-century novel)" (Verhoeven, 2021, p. 4) and originate in the contents of their language being "far removed from any contemporary socio- and ethnolects or regional dialects used by GCSE students themselves" (Verhoeven, 2021, p .4). This perceived barrier does not stop the teaching of such texts, but it means that limited time to teach them effectively does not help with the teaching process. Stoker suggests that a way to overcome the difficulty of time in both teaching the 19th century novel and including more exposure to critical theory for students alongside it would be for exam boards to provide guidance and resource:

> Stoker: I think it (teaching critical theory) would be a good thing...beneficial...but wonder if it would be supported. If it's just to learn it for exams...I mean as well as quite lengthy texts, all closed book. There's enough pressure on them anyway really! So pragmatically, there probably isn't time to sort of really...add that to the list of things that need to be taught. But, sort of morally and kind of, you know...as a pathway to further enjoyment, and certainly it would help. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Poe highlights that without the level of support that Stoker suggests would enable the teaching of critical theory, that there would be a lot of pressure on both teachers and students:

> Poe: And er, the number one thing you come up against is "oh well we haven't got enough time". And it's true! Well, true to an extent, but I think it can be too easy if that becomes the reason you don't do things. Because actually, if something if thought through well enough, then you can implement something thoughtfully enough in order to create that time. Now what happens, potentially again if you're thinking about a GCSE syllabus change. You can almost guarantee that they won't build in enough time for schools to respond to that. I've seen some of that during the pandemic, in terms of the pressures and advice that schools got. You know, the information about when we need to do things and it was like 48 hours later they've got to be doing it. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

I interpret the above to show that Poe and Stoker view teaching critical theory as a positive development, but both of them would want to know they were supported by their exam boards in doing so. Both of them mention "pressure" on staff (Stoker) or the need for "consultations of staff" (Poe) before changes are made. From Poe and Stoker's extracts, it is clear they both see the potential benefits for students in including critical theory alongside the novels which are taught, but view the realities of achieving that in a negative manner: "…to answer the question probably not on a practical level but yes in terms of the benefits." (Stoker) and "I can't imagine a scenario where they plan it properly…" (Poe). This does not have a direct link to what might influence staff choice when choosing a text to teach, but the above highlights the impact that time and teaching resources have on the ways that texts are taught. Therefore, Stoker and Poe's recommendations seem logical, as more support from exam boards would allow teachers to choose which texts they teach more freely, and improve the content they teach alongside texts.

In addition to the lack of time to prepare, time to teach the text was also a recurring issue for my staff participants. Time influenced their text choices through the common concerns about the lengths of potential novels. This was due to the amount

of lesson time allocated for subject English (to accommodate finishing a novel with pupils) and due to the amount of time to teach before the final examination. Poe's extracts highlight both of these elements concerning time to teach as a limitation:

> Poe: …the key consideration, although I wish it wasn't, is length. And I think that's part of the reason why schools are commonly doing *A Christmas Carol*...just because it's shorter!
> Poe: So...so you take out a big chunk of reading time so you can get through the text in more detail and with more consideration of the exam. It's a huge...a huge factor! A huge concern… I've done some rough maths, and gone "so if we need to get through a text a term, and we only have this amount of time in a week" I know that we can't have a text longer than 350 pages, and even that's pushing it! So, length ends up being a sort of factor with logistical consideration rather than the content consideration. And I think it's that...that practical and logistical consideration that comes first, or has certainly come first in my own experience. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

Poe outlines the mental mathematics of weighing up a text's length in relation to the amount of time there is to teach it adequately to pupils prior to their final examinations. This is something which I go into more detail about later in this chapter when conducting my analysis, where I reference how the exam format has an impact on text choice. Essentially, the longer a novel is, the less likely it is that it will be chosen. This echoes Elliott and Olive's (2019) study, where shorter Shakespeare plays were more desirable when considering what to teach, as well as one of their participants implying that a shorter play would better allow for multiple visitations to improve exam performance for students. This is also something that ties in to Poe's comments about the time required to study the different 19th century novel options, and is therefore likely to widely influence text choice. With this considered, I now present data which relates to the role that different forms of authority have on GCSE text choice based on the perceptions of my staff participants.

8.3 : Authority

I classify the theme of 'Authority' to include two main sources based on my staff participants' responses: exam board/government authority and school authority. The structures involved in exam boards and schools in the following excerpts have significant power, which in turn have an impact on text choice.

8.3.1 : Authority From Exam Boards/Government

For Austen, a huge consideration when selecting a text to teach was exam performance: "it's about trying to get the students the best grades. Erm, which is fair! Because it's important for the students to get the best grades." Austen does have a choice from a selection of 19th century novels to use in her teaching (within the limitations of the exam board her school uses), however she clearly prioritises her students' grades in the decision making process: "Erm, who are they gonna get marks for?. Erm, and that's all exactly what they're doing, like they're just trying to get marks.". Austen also outlines how she wants aesthetic enjoyment for her students, but that exam considerations come first:

> Austen: In a...yeah I think it's...we do want them to enjoy the texts obviously, but I don't think that that comes first. And that's really sad! Because, it is the texts that we enjoy the most that we tend to get the better marks in, erm, and understand more. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Often teachers (and those who evaluate teachers) view students' exam performance as markers of success (Stronge et al., 2011; Stronge, 2018). Therefore, whilst there is a selection of texts to choose from for teachers, certain ones have the advantage of being more likely to have the opportunity of optimum exam outcomes. Poe highlighted in previously presented data how the role of the exam influenced his text choices. Poe's outlook on a text being taught multiple times

across cohorts causing better exam results is also a finding that Elliott and Olive

(2019) identified when examining the factors behind teachers' choices of which

Shakespeare plays they choose. In their research, a respondent mentioned that

they felt "a play needed to withstand being revisited "at least three times" in order to

prepare for an examination." (Elliott and Olive, 2019, p.111) which resonates with

Poe's view that repeated texts allow for better exam performance.   The role of

exam format affected Poe's text choices, as he felt he needed enough themes within

a novel for students to draw upon in their assessments:

> Poe: You take out a big chunk of reading time so you can get through the text in more detail and with more consideration of the exam. It's a huge...a huge factor! A huge concern…that practical and logistical consideration that comes first, or has certainly come first in my own experience. So that's something. And then I think we look at the themes, and we think if they are ones that we have sort of addressed in KS3 and might we potentially be able to draw out a thread across that…So we sort of go are there common...so the idea of patriarchy for example, which just crops up time and time again. So we're just trying to make that a bit of a thread that comes through in a lot of the texts that they are doing in years 7,8 and 9, so that when we start looking at it in *A Christmas Carol* it's not a brand new concept. So I think that you look at the big thematic picture and conceptual ideas and figure out their place in the curriculum. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

  Here, Poe links his decision to teach *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens,1843a; 2018b)

with expectations of what could be covered for the exam. In addition to this, he

highlights the role that the timescale he has to teach the text and explore themes

and key concepts in detail has on his choice. This finding also resonates with Elliott

and Olive's (2019) study, as their participants reported that it was important for their

chosen Shakespeare plays to have clear plots, and strong characters and themes

that would be optimal for analysis in the final exam.

  The role of the exam also influenced how my staff participants felt about teaching

theory alongside 19th century novels. Its format, which requires students to structure

arguments and have different angles, played a role in Austen's below response:

KS: But do you think that it helps understand the text for the students? [Teaching theory]

Austen: Yes. Absolutely. Erm, they need to see things. Like, I will consistently go back to like the *Norton Anthology of Critical Thought* and just be like "right, what could this be used for? How could I bring this in?". Erm, so even things like considering Queer Theory when you're looking at some of the poets…power and conflict- Wilfred Owen. Talking about Queer Theory. And even Shakespeare talking about feminism and Queer Theory if we're thinking about Shakespeare…even just bringing up like The Death of the Author, in terms of criticism. Saying, well "does the author die when we put a text on a table?" Or is it part of this? You know, we can't look at *An Inspector Calls* without considering Priestley being a radio host and how his voice was projected to people around him...the kids kind of struggle to put themselves into the writer's perspective. Because they've never lived anything other than what they've lived. Which is understandable. So the criticism part allows them to think about what the word evaluate means, and what makes up a critical and conceptualised essay which is a top Grade 9 boundary should be. Otherwise, like I say you just get that kind of 'parroted back' constant like..."the writer has used a metaphor to make it like ..." and they just struggle and you can't get that conceptualised or thoughtful answer. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

For Austen, the structure and expectations of the exam influence how she thinks an increase in teaching theory alongside texts will benefit her students' performance. Austen's response shows that the impact of the exam not only affects which texts are chosen for reasons such as length and themes, but also the considerations about what could accompany the texts in order to help students to reach their full potential. Austen's dilemma of wanting to expand how she teaches the 19th century novel in her classroom resonates with the following from Almond (2021) reflecting on her practice teaching poetry as part of the English literature GCSE specification: "I was therefore faced with the dilemma of trying to ensure that the students had a good understanding of the fifteen poems in the GCSE anthology whilst also showing them how diverse and engaging poetry could be."(p. 244). Austen notes that the levels of depth that she goes to concerning theory "depends on the group as well" stating that too much extra content can be "really overwhelming" for students. She shared that she includes critical theory "a lot with Key Stage 5. Less so with Key Stage 4" but that she feels it "would be really

beneficial" and allow her GCSE students to "structure arguments as well, like to structure essays. Because they would be able to weave that into the argument, the introduction, the middle body and then the conclusion.".

Stoker also mentions the role the exam plays on his teaching practice, and highlights specifically how a text can have different elements that are used when teaching to prepare for it:

> Stoker: I'm glad that they picked it [*The War of the Worlds*] because obviously, I mean well *Pride and Prejudice* was sort of second...came second place choice. And obviously it's a lot longer for a start, and it's a closed book exam! Erm, which as a...as a factor. Um, there are far more characters in *Pride and Prejudice* to...to revise, to create character profiles for and you know sort of learn. And so actually, *War of the Worlds* is very contained and very...it's quite efficient in that sense that it's...it's just all plot driven really. Erm...so...I think anyway having a choice but it's a closed book exam text, erm that was very much in the back of my mind and I think...well I was tempted to guide them in that direction but they didn't need it you know they chose it! Although, perhaps the page count did influence it. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Above, Stoker mentions "character profiles" as something which plays a role in text choice consideration. He also expresses relief at the text choice he had to teach based on its length and its suitability to work well in a closed book exam. Almond (2021) notes that: "With a degree of irony, although part of a teacher's job is to prepare students for life beyond the classroom, exam pressures can create a disconnect between life inside the classroom and life outside the classroom." (p. 245). Almond's perspective summarises what Austen and Stoker describe, as both of my participants felt that the 'authority' of the exam influenced what text choices they made, as well as how they taught those texts. This was also the case for Poe, who reflected on how teaching theory at GCSE would work in principle:

> Poe: But do those broad...broad concepts help? Yes, I think they do. Because, they do start to make the text have some relevance to the real world…Now whether they see that...you know you saw in some of their answers that they don't...they don't draw those connections, and those connections don't end up being very firm and established. And you're talking there to decent pupils

who, want to engage more but don't necessarily get to. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

Poe shared that he felt there would be benefits for students in including theory alongside the teaching of texts in relation to their performance in exams, but also engagement with and enjoyment of texts. Poe also mentioned that he felt his choices concerning teaching GCSE English had elements of "compromise" as a result of the pressures of the final exam:

> Poe: that's the nature of teaching. Particularly when we're talking about GCSE, because everyone's aware that there's an exam at the end of it. And that is...that's your end goal. So you have to balance that "oh I'd love them to understand the fullness of this text" to "ultimately, I know they have to write about it for 40 minutes". And...what's going to make them successful at that? And it's a compromise. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

I interpret Poe's answers to clearly show that he is not against teaching theory or particularly biased in the text choices he makes for personal reasons. Instead, due to the influence of the 'authority' of the exam, he feels that he needs to "compromise" on the choices that he makes.

In contrast to Poe, Stoker focuses on the positives that critical theory could add for students and relates them to the exam requirements. He notes that he feels critical theory "really helps, for the success criteria...for the mark scheme" and thinks that "it's important to have that alongside the book and to look out and see the bigger picture. And teaching critical theory allows you to do that, so yeah it's definitely really helpful.". Additionally, Stoker highlights how critical theory is a "cognitive hook" for students when studied alongside GCSE texts:

> KS: Yeah. Brilliant, and what do you think is the point of teaching that critical theory alongside the texts?

> Stoker: Well I think it's really interesting, it just opens up all sorts of discussions. I think it's really good, particularly for a closed book exam such as...such as this one. It's...they're all hooks. Sort of the ways into building that memory for them, you know suddenly those female characters become

more...more than just stock characters. It becomes something that's actually worth considering, and it's...it's almost like a sort of cognitive hook I would say. It allows them to then...remember them in a different way…it's probably a sort of 'learning hook' as much as anything else. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Stoker's thoughts show that he feels critical theory can help students engage with and enjoy texts, as well as help them perform better in exams: "learning hook". However, Stoker's connections with exam performance do not imply that he agrees with the current structure of the GCSE English Literature exams:

Stoker: And with the exam...it's...well I wouldn't want to sit it! It's...a lot to get through. Um...it feels needlessly large I would say. Erm...and the fact that it's closed book is sort of adding I would say needless pressure. It...I'm not sure what's being tested there with it being closed book, other than memory. It seems a shame to sort of...risk it in that sense. Yeah the fact that it's closed book I think is a bit of a shame. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Therefore in Stoker's case, whilst he does not agree with the current exam structure, the pressures of its 'authority' cause him to make connections as to how his students' performances in the exam influences his text choices and teaching practice.

Poe also outlines his perceptions of the exam format in relation to his teaching practice and text choice:

Poe: And I think one will happen in the not too distant future, for some of the reasons we're discussing but also something else about the pandemic, is that it's highlighted the limitations of the current assessment model of GCSE English…It's the constant er... dynamic of the exam vs. the fullness of the text. So, um...would it help? In principle, yes! But sadly in reality, I can see a lot of obstacles in terms of it actually being a useful. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

Poe is not as overly critical of the current model of assessment for English literature as Stoker, but he does reflect on how the pandemic highlighted some of its weaknesses. The duality of the "dynamic of the exam vs. the fullness of the text" appears to be something that all of my staff participants encounter in their teaching (as well as something reflected in wider research). Changes to the exam will not

necessarily alleviate the influence that it has over text choices and teaching

practices for staff, but based on my data I argue that it has the potential to increase

text choice and teaching practice autonomy for teachers.

8.3.2 : Authority Within Schools

In addition to the influence of the external authority of exams on my participants'

text choices, power structures within schools also played a role. Poe shares how

having the role of Head of English at his previous school granted him the power of

choice:

> Poe: They were just sort of "Well you get this list then you choose from this list". Um, so I saw it in quite pragmatic terms. So, in my previous school I was Head of English, and it was more just a pragmatic choice of well we have a shortlist and we need to choose something off the shortlist. This was rather than reflecting on the fact that the shortlist could have been any number of other books…I don't think I had opened up my mind to what that shortlist inherently does to the curriculum, both in an individual school and across a whole nation as well. And how...controlling that is to be honest with you, and therefore limiting as well. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

The above highlights that for Poe, the power dynamics that he has had in the

past have given him a certain amount of freedom from the authority structures within

schools that might have dictated the text choice he would need to teach. Meanwhile,

Austen's account shows the opposite to have been the case for her control over

what she teaches:

> Austen: …the selection erm is actually, it's usually overridden by the school. So every school that I have worked at, it's usually chosen by people who already work there. You know, I couldn't... I would feel very uncomfortable walking into a school and saying "I'm going to teach *Pride and Prejudice*". Erm, because they would be...it would be much more likely that they're already teaching *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* or something else for example. So, it's usually based on what the school has got in terms of its...erm their schemes…So they end up sort of prescribing what you need to teach already. Erm, and you're unable to sort of change that.…what I'm allowed to teach...is erm purely what the school expects to teach. Erm, it's never been a conversation that I've been a part of for Key Stage 4. It's always been "these are the novels that we teach, these are

the plays that we teach" erm..."here's our scheme of work". So...yeah purely what the school has dictated. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Austen's insights are a stark contrast to the relatively laid-back perspective that Poe radiates in his extract. For Austen, the 'authority' within schools has been a huge factor in what she teaches and has taught in the past. I interpret Austen's views to highlight not only the role that power structures within schools play in text choice, but also that she feels that these power structures prevent her from making the changes she wishes she could. For example, "prescribing what you need to teach", "strict agenda", "unable to make changes" and "struggle" all resonate with Almond's (2021) experiences of teaching poetry for the GCSE English literature exam, with the tendency to adopt "a safe, but narrow, exam-focused approach" (p. 245).

In addition to limitations that she faces with text choice, Austen also felt that she lacked autonomy with different aspects of what would be taught alongside a novel. For example, she outlined that there were barriers which related to teaching feminism, and what is considered "age appropriate":

> Austen: So yeah. So, I'm trying to. Erm, for example feminist theory. But, I would say that feminism is considered a very dirty word in schools still…there's a lot of pressure on what is age appropriate, especially in religious schools. And I think that does tie in to it…(School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

Austen outlines that there are explicit issues in her school with feminism and feminist theory, but also indicates that she feels the issue is more widespread. McCallum (2021) theorises that this "control and containment" (p. 31) relates to the high-stakes exam involved in subject English, and that classrooms lack "expression and discovery" (p. 31) as a consequence. Austen's experiences are also tied to the context of teaching in a religious school, which is not the case for Poe and Stoker. Kim and Ringrose (2018) describe educational institutions as "complicated

spaces"(p.47) for feminism and attitudes towards feminism. They also do however observe that encountering feminism has become more "ingrained" in the constructions of youth for young women (Kim and Ringrose, 2018), therefore perhaps a silver lining of Austen's experiences of restriction from her institution do not necessarily mean that her students will be deprived of encountering feminist ideas outside of the classroom.

In contrast to this, Stoker's experiences of teaching differed greatly to Austen's, as his school wanted him to teach feminist theory alongside the 19th century novel:

> KS: Yeah. Of course. Do you teach any critical theory alongside the text? For example, post-colonial, feminist, Marxist?

> Stoker: Yeah! Yeah a little bit. Erm...particularly, well I mean...I think because...partly because of the sort of the conversation I had with the Head here, about sort of masculine or feminine angle, or the feminist angle in War of the Worlds and there was this sort of need to defend it perhaps… (School 1 , *The War of the Worlds*)

The above highlights a different experience, as Stoker felt that the pressures within his school's hierarchy were present in different ways. In Stoker's context, he left the text choice to his students as it was his first year at the school, but there was resistance from other staff about the choice that his students made. Instead of pressure to change the novel, he felt that "there was this sort of need to defend it" as it had been labelled too "masculine" by his superiors. So, whilst Stoker did have a different experience to Austen with regards to text choice and how he could teach it, ultimately the role of authority structures within both of their schools played a key role in either text choice or teaching accompaniments. Now that I have presented my findings relating to the ways in which authority impacts my staff participants' text choices, I highlight how the role of 'idealism' influenced their practice.

8.4 : Idealism

Not all influence over text choice was negative for my staff participants. The theme of 'idealism' includes data which refers to instances of co-construction with students, as well as my staff participants' aspirations and ideals about teaching (in both their current and future practice).

8.4.1 : Changes from Exam Boards

Stoker outlined what he would want future changes to look like with regards to expectations from exam boards concerning subject English:

> KS: Brilliant, thank you so much! Erm, do you think that exam boards should recommend teaching theory alongside texts?
>
> Stoker: Well I mean probably! I think it would make sense, I mean at A Level anyway I always have done because it seems a natural progression...it seems sometimes it's hard not to really, you know...I mean whether they should or not, I mean it's...I mean the pragmatic answer probably not because given the scale of how much change there would be and how much extra work it could be for teachers...that's why I say that. I think it would be a good thing...beneficial...but wonder if it would be supported…I think it's really, really important. So...to answer the question probably not on a practical level but yes in terms of the benefits. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Here Stoker expresses that his ideal curriculum would have elements of social theory alongside the teaching of texts. He notes that on a "practical level" with the current expectations and conditions for teachers that he feels it might not work. However, I interpret the majority of this response to be focusing on the positives of an idealistic form of teaching: "I think it would be a good thing...beneficial", "morally and kind of, you know...as a pathway to further enjoyment" and "I think it's really, really important". Stoker's answer shows evidence of the line between what he feels would be beneficial to students, and what the realities are that stop that from happening. Whilst this extract doesn't explicitly outline a direct influence on text

choice, it does show some of the ideas that have the potential to have an impact

during a decision making process.

Austen and Poe also articulate their thoughts about the prospect of teaching theory

alongside texts, and outline some of the more 'idealistic' factors that I interpret as

having a level of influence over their novel choices:

> Austen: I do really enjoy teaching *An Inspector Calls*. I think that we need more focus on the sexual assault that happens in *An Inspector Calls*. Erm because...we never...it's glossed over so quickly..it takes...you as the teacher have to bring that to the attention of the girls and the boys in the room. You have to say, "what does that mean?" and break it down, because it's not explicit enough. But I would like to teach one (a novel) that has more serious and pressing issues in it that are almost more explicit. And usually that would come from the presentation of a woman I would say. Erm, so I'd love either, you know People of Colour or the sort of minority backgrounds, would be really interesting to teach…(School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

> KS: So if we're talking about an ideal world where there isn't an exam, do you think that critical theory can help enhance aesthetic enjoyment of the texts?

> Poe: Oh I would have thought so, yes! Because it opens up that text to be more than just this random story of a bloke called Scrooge who actually didn't really exist. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

Above, Austen and Poe share their views concerning the possibility of teaching

critical theory as part of lesson content for GCSE English. Later in my analysis, I will

outline how the 'cultural analysis' view from Cox's Five Models of English (1991) fits

with Austen and Poe's idealistic outlook of English teaching. These idealistic desires

would require input from exam boards in their implementation. For example, when I

asked Austen specifically if she felt her exam board should advise including critical

theory alongside texts, her reply was immediate: "Yes, definitely!". Additionally, I

interpret Poe's previous reservations about the addition of theory to the curriculum

as relating to the barriers that impact text choice. In the above extract, when I asked

him if some of those barriers did not exist (specifically, the pressure of the exam and

the expectations on his students' performance) he was much more affirmative about

the possibility of teaching theory in more ideal conditions: "opens up that text". Poe's

perception about 'opening up' a text for students also links to some points in my staff

data concerning students' enjoyment of texts in English:

>   KS: And erm...in addition to that, do you think as well alongside that it could help promote aesthetic enjoyment of the text?...

>   Stoker: Yeah I think so! I think it reminds them (students) that it's not just this dusty museum piece that sort of exists to be studied, it's a product of its time I think. And it...erm...and it sort of as we've discussed that it sort of lives and breathes in different ways when they're reading it. That it's not just there for their exams, but that it is a novel. You know, that it is of its time but it also takes a lot from the reader and gives back to the reader too potentially. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

>   Austen: But it's about thinking, well how can we equip them to manage with the world around them in the best way? And that's what we do as educators. And it's a shame that, erm...schools that are based on religion are still very, still very sort of backwards in terms of sort of equality for women and birth control for women. And they are hindering the education of their girls because they are still stuck in sort of backwards times. (School 2, *A Christmas Carol*)

The above data highlights that Austen and Stoker believe that students should be

able to enjoy their experiences of learning English. These extracts also link to

another of Cox's Five Models of English- the 'adult needs' view (Cox, 1991). Linking

to my interpretation of the findings from Austen and Stoker, Poe also mentioned that

he felt that students should be able to "engage in, that they see something relevant

to themselves". Additionally, Austen's view that English should equip students "to

manage with the world around them in the best way" is also reminiscent of 'adult

needs' view (Cox, 1991). These instances highlight that the ideals that my staff

participants had about the nature of change to English education fits with Cox's Five

Models of English, and encompasses some of the elements of English teaching

which have been left neglected by changes to syllabus requirements over the years.

When considering how to action some of these ideals, Poe again highlights the

role of the exam boards and the impact that "guidance" could have: "what I mean

about where is the sort of guidance, you know there are these questions you sort of

ask yourself while making these decisions.". A recurring theme in my staff data is that many of the barriers that staff face are perceived by my participants as being able to be helped via better guidance from exam boards. I argue that my staff participants' responses show that this increase in guidance and consultation with English teachers would improve English teaching, as well as allow teachers to include the 'ideal' content in their practice.

8.4.2 : Students' Engagement with English

In addition to the 'ideal' changes from exam boards, my staff participants also shared the ways in which their students' experiences of English influences their text choices and teaching practice. Poe highlights how student engagement with a text as a result of it feeling "more relevant" influences text choice:

> Poe: And, also the role of the kids as well. So again, that's ultimately probably why you'd go for *A Christmas Carol* over *Jekyll and Hyde*. Some of those gender...erm dynamics. And debates feel more relevant to them than some of the more abstract religious and scientific debates going on in *Jekyll and Hyde*. (School 3, *A Christmas Carol*)

Poe's extract clearly shows the role of student enjoyment and engagement in the factors of his text choice process which I consider to be 'idealist'. This emphasis on student autonomy in the learning process manifested even stronger in Stoker's case:

> Stoker: I know that both *War of the Worlds* and *Hard Times* was on there, and I think I gave them the choice of all 6...erm...and oh! *Pride and Prejudice* was another one! That one actually came second in the girls' choices. So, it was like I said one that I'd not taught...but the others I had done before. And I gave them a freedom of choice, because I thought "oh well I'm new to the school! Let's start from scratch and we'll work it from there.". And they, well not unanimously, but largely they voted for *War of the Worlds*.

> KS: It sounds like from what you've mentioned that you let the girls have an element of choice too maybe?

Stoker: I did...but normally I mean I wouldn't do that. I think it's because I was new and... You've got a sense of that when you spoke them, and they're really lovely! Erm, and I sort of thought "well, let's...let's look at the choices available to us and have a vote on it". You know, pick whatever text you want us to work with and let's just have a fun and friendly start with it. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

Whilst Poe mentioned "the role of the kids" in his extract, Stoker was the only

staff participant who directly involved his pupils in the decision making process. For

Stoker, the students were the main influence over the text choice for that school

year, as he allowed them to take a vote on what they would study. I interpret the

'idealism' in Stoker's answers to be his justifications of involving his students in the

decision making process. Additionally, he was willing to defend their choice when it

came up against some resistance from senior staff at his school, showing that he

valued his students' perspectives and opinions in his teaching practice. From the

above extracts by Stoker and Poe, it is clear that the role of students are part of the

'ideal' aspects of English teaching, and perhaps an emphasis on student autonomy

would be a positive influence on text choice in the

future.

Although Stoker was the only staff participant to allow students to play such a

central role in selecting the text they would study, he outlined some of the limitations

of this:

Stoker: I will most likely with this one, and because it's working so well! …with the current Year 10's...they will do *War of the Worlds* and they seem happy with that. I've not given them the choice, because it does seem to work well. so...well they...they had got to vote and they were asking sort of will the next classes get that. And I explained that they wouldn't and they'd sort of get what they're given really...when they heard what the choice was and again they'd sort of set based potentially on the size of the text, they were happy with that one! ...yeah just in terms of workload... Sort of building on the success that I've had with this cohort really. (School 1, *The War of the Worlds*)

The above shows Stoker outlining how some of the barriers I have identified

previously in this chapter impact his decision to allow his students to keep choosing

which text they study. Interestingly, he does not outline any negatives concerning

allowing students to choose a text in terms of the idea behind it. Instead, the role of

the length of the text, the role of teacher workload and the role of teaching resources

all impact his decision making and force him to scrap his 'idealism' in the choice

process. Therefore, whilst Stoker did experience his ideal practice of allowing

students to determine text choice, the barriers that existed beyond that decision

ensured his future practice would be impacted.

8.5: Analysis Overview

Now I have presented my findings in a descriptive manner, I move to a deeper

analysis. The most prominent points which I have outlined in my findings include:

how 'resources' such as copies of a text, time to plan and time to teach, and teacher

background impact on text choice. I have also presented findings which show how

authority, both internal (in a school) and external (exam boards) impact my staff

participants' choices. Finally, I showed how idealist values have some influence on

the text selection process, but that ultimately these positive values were outweighed

by negative limiting factors. I will provide an analysis of the data I have presented

previously in this chapter under three main-themed headings: *Resources, Authority*

and *Idealism*. I will then conclude the chapter and clearly answer RQ3: *What are the*

factors that influence which texts teachers use in class?.

8.6: Resources Analysis

As I have shown in my findings, one resource which Austen referred to was her

MA. Austen's MA influenced her teaching outlook and general practice, as well as

the foundation of knowledge which she brought to her classroom. There is a large

amount of research that exists concerning the importance of teacher knowledge on

the influence of practice (for example, Ball et al., 2008 and Woolfolk et al., 2006). This is split into two key groups of knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and content knowledge (CK) (Kleickmann et al., 2013). CK represents teachers' understanding of the subject matter taught (Kleickmann et al., 2013). This understanding is vital, as according to Shulman (1986) a teacher needs to "not only understand that something is so, the teacher must further understand why it is so" (p. 9). Therefore, Austen's emphasis on the role of understanding a subject on a deeper level before teaching it has implications that staff background knowledge can impact their text choice, as well as other areas of their teaching.

Austen also noted that if she wanted to teach critical theory alongside a text, or teach something not represented in the exam board schemes that she would feel relevant and useful for her students that "it's very much like your own independent reading". I argue that this presents two key dilemmas: firstly, that if teachers want to go above and beyond set schemes in a beneficial manner for their students that there is a burden of extra work and reading to be on them; and secondly, where and how they are supposed to access any potential reading to help build extra resources. If it is easier for teachers to repeat texts they feel comfortable with and do not need to invest extra time, learning and personal research into, then it is logical that this factors into their decision making process concerning which text they teach year to year. This is not because teachers would not want to pursue more knowledge to share with their students, but for the sake of ease in a context such as the UK, where the education sector has one of the highest levels of stress sickness absence across all occupations (Ravalier and Walsh, 2018) it would explain why for many the harder and self-managed option is not as popular. In addition to this, the impact of Covid-19 on teachers in the UK brought extra stress (Kim and Asbury, 2020). Instead of potentially feeling able to do "independent reading" that Austen

describes, teachers were more likely to be relying on the knowledge and relationships that they already had to support their students the most effectively during a very uncertain time (Kim and Asbury, 2020). With this considered, the 'resource' of personal background was not something that could have much room for improvement during this time, nor the development of additional teaching resources.

   A response from Poe described "teacher knowledge" as "a big part that is underestimated" in reference to expectations about what he perceived teachers must balance alongside their experiences of selecting which texts to teach. He also referenced "all the stuff you might need to do around it!", with "it" being the teaching of a different text to what a teacher might be used to from having taught it previously. Elliott (2016) identified similar reasons for textual inertia in teachers concerning their choices of which Shakespeare plays to teach in English lessons. Expertise, combined with the additional factor of many teachers teaching the same plays that they studied when they were in school are factors in choices for Shakespeare plays (Elliott, 2016). Therefore, this links to my own data in relation to the teaching of 19th century novels, as teacher knowledge of a 19th century novel would be an influential factor in their text choosing process. In addition to teacher knowledge, teaching resources were also a 'resource' which I identified as factoring into my staff participants' text decisions. Poe outlined his reasons for potentially being against using critical theory at GCSE level with his students: "a: it's hard. Er...b: it's hard to get the right...you know so you have to read sort of quite complex essays to get at those ideas.". I interpret this to imply that a lack of pre-existing resources and guidance influences Poe's likeliness to want to teach theory alongside texts at GCSE level. This links to Elliott (2017)'s findings, whereby the lack of change in the teaching of Shakespeare plays for English exams relates to

the strong build-up of resources which support certain texts. Elliott and Olive (2019) also note that the tendency for a Shakespeare play to have more resources over others relies on its consideration of being a 'popular' play, which results in many teachers choosing to teach 'popular' plays in order to have the security of a larger amount of teaching resources to pick from to use in their own classrooms. With this considered, it is likely that this is mirrored by my staff participants (as well as more widely) in their 19th century novel choices. Essentially, if my staff participants were aware which 19th century novels are 'popular' and widely resourced, this would impact their decisions to teach certain texts over others, and to repeat teaching of texts that they know there are many resources for them to draw upon in their lessons. In summary therefore, resources of time, teacher knowledge and existing resources were influential in my staff participants' 19th century novel choices.

8.7: Authority Analysis

Authority external to my staff participants through the influence of exam boards and the structure of the final examination impacted their novel choices. All of my staff participants were critical of the format of the exam that their students faced, and I argue that the pressures of this exam impacted their 19th century novel choices. Stoker noted that his decisions were influenced by the "length of the text because it is closed book". The length of text's impact aligns closer with the role that resources play (specifically, the resource of teaching time) but it also links to the pressure to get through a longer text adequately before the final examination. Additionally, the "closed book" format of the exam was viewed as a limiting factor when considering novel choice. In 2015, the government reforms to the teaching of English Literature included a change from open to closed book exams (Marsh, 2017). Marsh's study explored teachers' experiences of teaching poetry for GCSE

English Literature, and her participants felt that the format and demands of the final exam affected their autonomy, distribution of classroom time and students' creative relationship with poetry (2017). Whilst my staff participants were critical of the format in relation to the 19th century novel requirement, I argue that their choices and experiences of teaching are impacted in the same way as Marsh's participants with a poetry focus (2017).

In addition to their criticisms of the exam, my staff participants reflected that more or better guidance from exam boards would have a positive effect on their teaching choices. Poe reflected that he tends to "just make as informed a decision as you can (about what to teach and how) because it's never going to be a perfect decision. And that's, that's ok.". Poe's quote expresses a sense of coping with what is available, instead of reaching full potential both as an educator and or what can be offered to help students reach theirs. The autonomy for teachers is limited in terms of what texts they can decide to teach and what they can teach alongside them, and if the "informed a decision as you can" could have an improvement on what information can help that process.

This change must come from higher up in order to not add pressure on teachers (something which previously presented extracts from my staff participants has highlighted), therefore the role of authority is vital in terms of how it impacts the current decision making process about texts for teachers, and also how it can improve the situation.

Internal authority within school hierarchies was another influence on my staff participants' text choices. Austen clearly outlined how a "strict agenda" in her school did not allow her much flexibility with her teaching: "...department meetings they have almost a strict agenda… There isn't...there isn't really scope to say "shall we sit down and shall we re-change the whole scheme for Year 11?"" This account,

combined with the others I have presented earlier in this chapter, show that internal authority impacts the text choices that my staff participants make for their GCSE English literature classes. This echoes research from Goodwyn (2012), who found that the main changes that his sample of English teachers wanted were more flexibility and more autonomy.

8.8: Idealism Analysis

Additionally, Goodwyn's (2012) study also highlighted that teachers viewed students having a role in choosing their own text to study as positive, and wanted this alongside more personal engagement with the texts used. One of my staff participants, Stoker, allowed his students to co-construct their learning by voting for the text they wanted to study. Stoker outlined why he felt this, as well as teaching context and critical theory alongside that chosen text, was important: "it reminds them [students] that it's not just this dusty museum piece that sort of exists to be studied, it's a product of its time". Stoker's reflections on his teaching practice, as well as in the data presented earlier in this chapter, indicate that he found the process of allowing his students to help pick a text as positive. This mirrors Goodwyn's (2012) findings. Stoker also noted how it was unlikely that he would be able to repeat a student vote on the taught text each year, as a result of the limiting factors I have outlined in *'Resources'.* Therefore, whilst teacher and student partnerships are viewed as positive, ultimately negative factors impact how often this can be a viable option.

Stoker and my other staff participants also mention the role that critical theory alongside a text at GCSE level could have. I argue that their thoughts link with Cox's Five Models of English (Cox, 1991). As I have shown in the data from my staff participants, teaching critical theory alongside the 19th century novel is something

they all see as having the benefits that Cox outlines in relation to the 'cultural analysis' view (Cox,1991). Specific examples of this have been present in previously outlined staff data, however within this subchapter exploring 'ideal' experiences and visions concerning English teaching I highlighted instances where the benefits of the 'cultural analysis' view (Cox,1991) are outlined by my staff participants. Austen felt that the current focus on analysis of themes within some texts are "not explicit enough". Austen also noted that she felt a burden when having to outline and explain certain aspects of a text in order to fill in the gaps for students: "you as the teacher have to bring that to the attention of the girls and the boys in the room. You have to say, "what does that mean?" and break it down…". In Austen's view, the analysis aspect of GCSE English is "glossed over so quickly", and if there was more of a focus on including and valuing the 'cultural analysis' view (Cox,1991) as part of the curricular requirements for English then I suggest that this would improve this issue.

8.9: Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the different factors that I have identified within my staff participants' data that relates to research question (RQ) 3: *What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in class?*. I began the chapter by presenting my findings in a descriptive manner under relevant headings relating to the three main themes I identified: Resources, Authority and Idealism. Following the presentation of my findings, I organised my analysis under 3 main sub-headings: namely *Resources, Authority* and *Idealism*. Through each of these sections, I have outlined the ways in which different factors influence which texts that staff choose to teach for GCSE English Literature.

Some of these influences are arguably beyond the control of many teachers, including my own participants, for example predetermined school choices, pressures from senior staff or even the view of the relevant exam board. Even the factors which are possible for teachers to overcome, such as experience or resources, would require a huge amount of extra work from staff to alleviate. I therefore consider these factors to be barriers, rather than general influences.

There were some positive influences on text choice presented too, such as practices which consider the aspects of English teaching that have strong links to Cox's Five Models of English (HMSO, 1989). In addition to this, the positives of allowing students to co-construct their learning were highlighted in the data, and in the case of one of my staff participants this 'ideal' practice was a reality for an academic year.

In conclusion, school resources, a lack of time to teach and prepare to teach, teacher background and knowledge, school hierarchies, exam boards and 'idealist' staff values all impact the text choices that teachers make for their students. Finally, it is clear that the role of students is an 'ideal' aspect of English teaching, and perhaps an emphasis on student autonomy would be a positive influence on text choice in the future. I will now move on to Chapter 9 of this thesis, my final chapter presenting a conclusion.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1: Overview

This research aimed to capture the perceptions of pupils of English Literature concerning the ways in which they read and understand gender relating to the 19th century novel that they were assigned. An additional aim was to include the experiences and opinions of teachers of English Literature from the same schools as my pupil participants, concerning the texts that they teach and the conditions in which they work. Whilst there is a wealth of research which focuses on teacher perspectives, I wanted to centre pupil participants in my study and analyse their attitudes towards English literature in addition to their teachers. The main reasons driving the instigation of this study included my earlier experience of research during my Masters, and my passion towards 19th century novels and English literature as a whole.

This thesis began with an outline of its structure, as well as an introduction to my research questions. I then provided context for research involving girls, as well as examples of research that includes girl participants with a focus on reading in the first literature review chapter. I also explored key concepts and definitions of power, which I utilised when conducting my analysis. I then provided political and social context for the creation and rise of Girlboss feminism (Ewens, 2019). Following the first literature review chapter, I then proceeded to place the National Curriculum for English in its historical context, and showed how its current form has developed over time. I then discussed the role that forms of culture play in text selection for GCSE English, and the background of the English literary canon. Following this, I outlined and discussed Cox's Five Models of English (Cox, 1991), and highlighted which elements are present in the current model of English teaching associated with

fulfilling the requirements of the National Curriculum. Subsequently to this, I combined the elements which I perceived to be neglected of Cox's Five Models of English (Cox, 1991) to Bowles & Gintis' theory of the Hidden Curriculum (1976a; b, 2011). After my literature review chapters, I outlined the pilot study that was carried out for this project. I discussed how the research questions for this study were developed, as well as how I selected the research methods used. I then outlined the changes I made as a result of the perceived shortcomings and obstacles that occurred during pilot data collection: including changes to the methods made as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. I then outlined my methodology and methodological positions in Chapter 5, before moving to present my findings and analysis in three chapters. Each of these chapters focused on addressing one of my three research questions. I will now present my main conclusions to these research questions clearly as this chapter progresses.

9.2: RQ1*: How do girls read gender in the assigned texts for GCSE English Literature?*

In answering this first research question, there were three main findings which I arrived at upon conducting my analysis. Firstly, there were clear gendered traits that my participants admired, including different iterations of strength, power and independence. I argued that these values mirror values which align with Girl Boss feminism. An awareness of these values, and indeed, awareness of a form of feminism, is not entirely a bad thing. As a Marxist feminist, I am able to reflect on my own journey concerning political and feminist knowledge. Whilst the girls in my study do value fairly neoliberal traits in women characters, and women in the real world, my data shows that younger generations are becoming more aware of feminism and inequalities concerning gender. Ultimately, I believe this is a step in the right direction.

Secondly, when reading gender, women characters needed to strike a balance and be "Radically Both" in order to be characters that my participants admired. Men characters did

not need to achieve this, and as a result of my participants' readings of masculinity, traits such as showing emotion and paternal love were valued highly. The traits that my participants did not admire (the nondesirable traits) were often the opposite of what they admired. When women characters embodied too many undesirable traits, they were sometimes 'nameless' in the data. This did not happen with any men characters. Whilst the double-standard facing women characters is concerning, a positive aspect of this is that my pupil participants had an overall more positive understanding of masculinity. Essentially, their attitudes towards masculinity were more elevated than traditional, or 'toxic' norms and expectations. "Radically Both" highlights the pressures and expectations which women face to embody the correct ratios of certain traits and values. For example, too much drive and ambition can categorise a woman (or women character) as over-confident, but too little and she could be considered in negative ways (an example from this study being the ways in which Mrs Elphinstone was read). To be "Radically Both" is a tough balance to achieve, and as I have highlighted, not something which men or men characters needed to contend with, thus showcasing the imbalance in how different genders are judged for different traits.

Finally, my pupil participants expressed a desire to have the tool of critical theory to allow for a better 'reading' of the texts they studied. This links to literature and research I have outlined which shows the positive impact of learning context alongside texts, as well as Cox's Models (HMSO, 1989). When considering this alongside the perspectives of my staff participants, it would be vital that appropriate funding and workload allocation is provided in order for this to be successful and non-surface level amendment to the ways in which English Literature is taught. There is scope for future research to explore which literary theory and what sort of context would work best for different levels of English teaching (for example, the differences between early Secondary and GCSE). If policy makers and educators want to revive the numbers of students who study English Literature beyond GCSE, I believe that listening to the voices of pupils who have had direct experience of learning can help work towards co-constructing a solution for the future.

9.3 : RQ2: *Does the portrayal of women in the assigned GCSE English*

Literature curriculum have an impact on how they view themselves?

When answering my second research question, I identified three main themes:
Celebrities and Pop Culture, *Housework and Work beyond the House* and
Motherhood and Relationships. My key findings relating to *Celebrities and Pop
Culture* were that the connections that my pupil participants made with the
characters in the 19th century novels they studied allowed them to reinforce their
thoughts and feelings by linking them to examples of celebrity and pop culture that
they are familiar with in their lives outside of reading. The connections my
participants made did not strictly reflect how they viewed themselves, and instead
highlighted the conditions that they live in and what was important for them in terms
of the changes they want to see in terms of gender equality. My participants also
showed a level of awareness of feminist concepts, such as the Male Gaze
(Mulvey,1975), in their discussions. This shows that despite not necessarily
encountering these ideas in a formal educational setting, my participants' exposure
to these ideas informs their reading of these texts, alongside opinions they have
about contemporary gender politics. This links to my previous findings for RQ1, in
which my pupil participants have shown that their understandings of feminism and
issues relating to gender influence the ways in which they read characters in the
19th century texts they are assigned. With this considered, my pupil participants
have shown that they have a level of awareness and understanding of historical,
social and political context which could be built upon through the inclusion of
contexts and theory being taught alongside the novels they read for English
Literature.

My findings presented in *Housework and Work beyond the House* reflected my
previous arguments concerning Girlboss feminism as the benchmark of progress for
my participants. My data showed that my pupil participants valued certain careers
above others associated with Girlboss feminism, and that they viewed paid work as

liberating from housework for women as opposed to an extra burden. I suggested

that the instances outlined from my data reflected the ideas that my participants

have about domestic and paid labour. My pupil participants showcased these views

as a result of connecting working conditions and the gendered distribution of

housework from the 19ᵗʰ century novels that they studied to their perceptions of

working conditions and the gendered distribution of housework today. I argued that

connections to Girlboss feminism were evidenced by the perceptions that my

participants had about the sorts of work that there are still significant barriers in, and

the kinds of work they specifically chose to talk about. I believe that allocating more

time and resources to contextually frame the novels that pupils study will allow them

to have better understandings of historical working conditions and gender roles,

thus resulting in their interpretations of and engagements with texts being on more

accurate foundations.

  Finally, my findings analysed in *Motherhood and Relationships* showed that my

pupil participants were more traditional in their views concerning expectations of

motherhood for the women in the novels they read, as well as contemporary women

compared to their views about marriage and romantic relationships. The examples I

presented showed that my participants understood the expectations historically on

women to marry to survive, but also that they respect women characters in the

novels they read for rejecting that stereotype. Essentially, the characters and novels

that the girls discussed enabled them to reflect on the gender relations that they

observed in the present day. I argued that this related to how they viewed the

conditions that they live in, which allowed them to highlight what was important for

them in terms of the changes they want to see in terms of gender equality, or the

values that they associated with motherhood and relationships. As with *Housework*

and Work beyond the House, I believe that pupils will benefit from more time and

resources being allocated to contextually framing the novels they study. The benefit

may manifest in improved marks, but also in enjoyment and understanding of what

they are reading and analysing in class.

9.4 : RQ3*: What are the factors that influence which texts teachers use in* ***class?***

In the chapter that addressed RQ3, I identified three main themes: *Resources, Authority* and *Idealism.* Some of these influences were beyond the control of my participants, for example predetermined school choices of texts, pressures from senior staff or the views of relevant exam boards. My staff participants had mixed ideas about how such influences could be overcome, for example Poe seemed to have a lot and very little faith in exam boards at the same time. His desire that if any changes were to occur that they were done properly and not at a superficial level was one shared by Stoker and Austen. However, as I have shown in some of the data which addresses RQ3, changes which are out of the hands of teachers limit their autonomy in the classroom. I argue therefore, that if we are to see any changes that teachers who are on the frontline are consulted for their views as part of the process, and that political parties or exam boards do not have the final say and become yet another example of external authority limiting teaching potential.

  I also showed that the factors which would be possible for teachers to overcome, such as experience or resources, would require a huge amount of extra work from staff to alleviate. I therefore argued these factors were barriers, rather than general influences. The expectation should not be for teachers to solve problems that external influences have created. The Conservative Government's funding cuts are making the task of delivering a good standard to education to every pupil extremely difficult, which is only made worse with inflation and soaring energy bills that add up to a £2 billion shortfall by 2024 (Dickens, 2022). As well as the impact this has on teaching resources (for example, physical copies of the novels relevant to this research), headteachers are faced with decisions about what other supplies they can afford, how many staff they can afford, and if any hours need to be reduced for current staff (id). Two in four schools are considering cutting curricular offerings, with the biggest casualty being arts-based subjects (id). English will survive as a compulsory subject, but will also be impacted by the loss of staff support and simultaneous

increase to class sizes that roughly two thirds of schools are considering (id). Therefore, even with the barriers that teachers on the frontline face that they can overcome, the current climate is making their job increasingly difficult.

Additionally, I presented some positive influences on text choice, such as practices which consider the aspects of English teaching that have strong links to Cox's Five Models of English (HMSO, 1989) and allowing students to co-construct their learning. Additionally, I showed that the role of students as an 'ideal' aspect of English teaching, and suggested an emphasis on student autonomy would be a positive influence on text choice in the future. This builds on the potential for teachers to influence the content they teach, and in doing so allows those who are in the classroom (either teaching or learning as teachers or pupils) to have more autonomy and enjoyment of subject English. The negatives and barriers which my data has shown which influence teacher text choice are by no means minor, however, given the empowering and positive narrative of Stoker's pupils my findings leave me optimistic at how the future of subject English could be if we prioritise teachers and pupils at its core alongside the texts they encounter.

9.5: Limitations of this research

There are a number of caveats to this study which should be considered. Firstly, I acknowledge the role of the researcher has an impact on the aims and analysis conducted. My intellectual and emotional involvement with my research will of course affect this study, and Denscombe notes that "the researcher's self (their social background, values, identity and beliefs) will have a significant bearing on the nature of the data collected and the interpretation of that data"(p. 250). This is not necessarily a negative, as qualitative work requires researchers to be reflective before and during the research process, and provide context about the nature of their interests and interpretations for readers (Sutton & Austin, 2015). It is impossible to avoid all elements of bias, therefore by reflecting on my personal

experiences and background I have attempted to honestly portray the context of this research. Braun and Clarke highlight that researchers have active roles in the identification of themes in data, and that themes "reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them" (p. 80). Therefore, subjectivity will always be present in research, and it should be acknowledged.

Another caveat to consider is that data was collected from a single geographical area (North Yorkshire) and from a total of twenty eight pupil participants and three staff participants. Additionally, only nine pupil participants completed the follow-up questionnaire, which limited my sample. It would be desirable for future research to work with a bigger sample, and perhaps aspire to be more geographically diverse.

Finally, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, I was forced to change my methodology to take place online. I would have preferred to collect my data in person for the benefits which I have outlined previously in this thesis. I would also have preferred for a greater range of texts to discuss with my participants, and potentially have one exam board covered to conduct a deeper analysis and present that exam board as a case study.

9.6: Implications of this research

There are three main implications of my research which I will outline below. These are namely, the current format of subject English, the role of exams, assessment and timing, and the teaching of critical theory and historical and social context alongside texts in English.

Firstly, the current format of subject English. Currently, subject English is strongly focused on the study of literature, which aligns with the Cultural Heritage model (HMSO, 1989). The Conservative government's focus on values which

align closest with the Cultural Heritage model (HMSO, 1989) reflect personal

tastes and biases, and lack in accompanying context or critical theory which

would equip learners with other vital skills (which is reflected in my data and

wider research). This prioritisation, combined with the ways in which

assessments are structured, has a negative impact on how pupils can engage

with literature and thus, diminishes the level of positive impact it can have

(Goodwyn, 2012). This reflects Ball's (2013) classification of the English

curriculum being composed of "traditional subjects and canonical knowledge…a

curriculum of…eternal certainties" (p.19). However, this does not mean that the

Canon lacks 'value' or should not be taught. I believe that based on the

perspectives of my participants and wider data concerning English teachers'

attitudes towards subject English, that the current ideological function of English

is to legitimise 'high culture' texts, whilst also not equipping students with critical

thinking skills (as well as others found in Cox's Models (HMSO, 1989)). I argue

that based on my staff data, as well as other research (such as Goodwyn (2012)

and Gardner (2017)) that teachers and researchers see the value that Cox's

Models of English (HMSO, 1989) provide. I have previously outlined how in other

research that teachers perceive the majority of the models to be neglected within

the National Curriculum for English, and the models which are present (for

example, Cultural Heritage) embody the aims that the Conservative government

want ('British Values') rather than provide a deep and rich experience of studying

literature. Each of Cox's models provides a different skill or perspective for

students of English, and therefore this thesis adds to the existing body of

research that believes they should be incorporated into the curriculum.

A second implication of this research is that the value of texts taught in

English should transgress the requirements of exams. My staff participants'

responses build on existing research which showcases a lack of confidence in the ways in which pupils are assessed for English. The rigid nature of forms of assessment which are not necessarily fit for purpose (as outlined by my staff participants in the previous findings chapter) causes: "the constant... dynamic of the exam vs. the fullness of the text" (Poe). The teaching of English Literature has undergone many changes in the UK, with the most recent being in 2015 (Ofqual, 2015). With every review of the National Curriculum, the 'timeless' element of English literature (Goodwyn, 2012) undergoes changes concerning its contents and examination structure and style. As I have outlined in Chapter 3 literature review of this thesis, subject English sparks many debates about the nature of the Canon, as well as what should or should not be included on the syllabus. I have not gone into great detail about these debates, but they are documented by Eagleton, 1975, Cox, 1991, Goodwyn, 1992, and Goodwyn and Fuller, 2011 for example. Goodwyn (2012) notes that the reading of literature should be "essentially experiential, aesthetic and affective, and that it should be an authentic experience for the student with some genuine personal significance" (p. 213). However, due to the limiting factors which I have outlined in the previous chapter of this thesis, the reality that my staff participants face is far removed from Goodwyn's ideal. My staff participants felt that the enjoyment of reading and engaging with the 19th century novels they teach should be more of a priority in practice. Specifically, one of the ways which Stoker felt this was possible was through including more social and historical context alongside novels, as well as critical theory. Whilst Stoker had some reservations about how critical theory might be rolled out as a form of change alongside texts, he concluded that the inclusion of theory could provide "a pathway to further enjoyment" for students.

This links to my third and final implication. The potential inclusion of teaching critical theory, as well as more historical and social context, would add value to the experiences of those who teach and study subject English. However, as Poe noted in my data, he saw "the danger of…teaching for the test". Austen also worried that any inclusion of theory will relate too much to "marks" instead of adding the additional perspectives (and indeed, enjoyment) for pupils. The inclusion of theory and more historical and social context would need to be meaningful in order to have an impact on pupils, and to equip them with the skills they need to meet the Cultural Analysis model (HMSO, 1989). In *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), bell hooks outlined how the gap between theory and practice of feminism in the classroom can have a negative impact on students. She questioned "of what use is feminist theory that literally beats (pupils) down, leaves them stumbling bleary-eyed from classroom settings feeling humiliated" (hooks, p. 65). Therefore, being mindful of my staff participants and hooks, inclusion of critical theory and more social and historical context at GCSE must be meaningful. Perhaps this meaningful addition would remedy the 'Girlboss' mindset, and encourage a more intersectional and radical form of feminist political thought for future pupils.

9.7: Recommendations for further research

The benefits of subject English are huge and diverse in nature, but without allowing the previously outlined different elements to be compulsory in the form of the National Curriculum, there is a strong chance that countless pupils will miss out on the rich skillset that English can provide. The 'gains' from texts could be the skillset for students which align with Cox's Five Models of English (HMSO, 1989). Therefore, future research could focus on the ways in which Cox's Models of

English (HMSO, 1989) can be incorporated into the National Curriculum, and measure any impact that this has on staff and pupils.

   Additionally, the current model of subject English does not leave room for the aesthetic enjoyment of texts. My staff participants, and my pupils to an extent, show that a positive 'gain' from English teaching could be allowing students to form better connections with the texts they study, thus allowing them to achieve aesthetic engagement with the texts they read, and therefore, increase their overall enjoyment of English literature. More research could be conducted to see the impact that aesthetic enjoyment has on assessment results, and also on teaching and learning experiences.

Appendix A: Pilot Focus Group Schedule

Focus Group Questions- Interview schedule

Section one: introduction

Q1: Who is your favourite woman character in *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*?

>Why?

(Discussion might lead to the fact that women in the novel are nameless, witnesses to violence or victims of the plot- 2 maids and a young girl who is crushed)

Q2: Why do you think there are no women narrators in the novel?

>Main characters

Section two: historical vs present day attitudes about gender

Q3: Tell me about your impressions of the lives of men and women in *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*?

>How do you feel about that?

>How are they different/similar?

Q4: "The more oppressed women become, the more horror the characters experience"

>What do you think about this statement?

Section three: gender and social class

Q5: Tell me about the lives of the different women in the novel, in what ways are they different? In what ways are they similar?

>In what ways/how? (eg ethnicity, social class etc.)

(If not very talkative, Think about X character, what can you tell me about their social class?)

Section four: sisterhood/relatability of characters

Q6: What can you tell me about the attitudes towards gender that existed when the novel was written?

>Do you think they are still present in society today?

(The role of women in this period was to be a caregiver, provider of domestic life etc)

Q7: What do you think about the way that *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde* portrays gender?

>Can you link any aspects of this to gender in today's society?

Q8: Can you tell me if there are any themes or events that you have particularly engaged with in the text?

>Why?

Q9: Do you read anything outside of school?

Q10: Anything else you'd like to say

Appendix B: Pilot Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule: Class Teachers

Q1: If you could teach any 19ᵗʰ Century Novel what would it be?

>Why?

Q2: What do you think about the current AQA selection for this category?

Available choices: *Pride & Prejudice, Great Expectations, A Christmas Carol, Frankenstein, The Sign of Four, Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde, Jane Eyre*

Q3: What would you say are the factors that drive you to choose to teach the novel that you teach to your GCSE English lit cohorts?

Q4: Do you repeat teaching of the same novel for the next cohort of students?

>Please elaborate on this

Q5: Do you teach critical theory alongside the texts?

(e.g postcolonial, feminist, Marxist etc.)

>Why/why not? What is the point of teaching critical theory alongside texts?

>Do you think that it helps understand the text?

>Do you think that it helps promote aesthetic enjoyment of the text?

Q6: Do you think that AQA should recommend teaching theory alongside texts?

Q7: Are there any limitations that you face when teaching?

(e.g resources, funding, time etc.)

Q8: Do you notice a difference in how students of different genders engage with the texts?

Q9 : Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix C: Pilot Follow-Up Questionnaire

Follow-Up Questionnaire: Experiences of Subject English

What do you understand by the term "feminism"?

………
………
………
……………………………………………………………

Have you had a chance to discuss feminism or gender studies alongside studying in *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*? (Please circle)

YES

NO

UNSURE

If yes, did it help you understand themes and characters in the text in a better way?

………
………
………
……………………………………………………………

If no, would you have wanted this aspect alongside your study of the text?

YES

NO

UNSURE

Do you think Robert Louis Stevenson is a feminist author? If so, why? If not, why not?

………
………
………
……………………………………………………………

Do you feel the characters in *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde* are relatable*?*

ALWAYS YES

MOSTLY YES

SOMETIMES

MOSTLY NO

ALWAYS NO

Do you feel personally represented by the authors, dramatists and poets that you have encountered that feature on the National Curriculum during your study of English literature?

ALWAYS YES

MOSTLY YES

SOMETIMES

MOSTLY NO

ALWAYS NO

Do you feel personally represented in the novels,plays and poetry that you have encountered that feature on the National Curriculum during your study of English literature?

ALWAYS YES

MOSTLY YES

SOMETIMES

MOSTLY NO

ALWAYS NO

Do you feel the novels, plays and poetry that you have encountered from the National Curriculum provide you with an insight into other cultures and life experiences beyond your own?

ALWAYS YES

MOSTLY YES

SOMETIMES

MOSTLY NO

ALWAYS NO

Is there anything else about your experience of studying English literature that you would like to add?

……
……
……
……………………………………………………………………

Appendix D: Coding Justification Sample

P2P: Because the girl got like trampled on, but then it was forgotten about.
-Power? Negative? Gender?
Quote does refer to gender but mainly focuses on the negative/namelessness. P2P refers to character as "girl": I think the main takeaway in the quote is that namelessness. Also coded to Negative: reference to character's storyline as being negative, combines with namelessness.

P2P: He does with the maid...but that's it...
P6P: And the girl.
P3P:...because he does...because it's not any...like if you looked at An Inspector Calls where there's like strong characters of both genders then you can see how they're treated differently or whatever. But like, Stephenson doesn't represent them at all? So like...
-Namelessness? Gender? Negative?
When considering all three quotes in context, the social class of the character is why the character is treated the way she is. This is also a strong example of namelessness. Discussion of Stevenson- relevant?

P5P: Why is nobody talking about the girl?
P2P: Because the girl got stamped on!
P6P: Yeah exactly! No respect there!
-Power? Negative? Social Class? Gender?
Strong example of namelessness: "the girl". Power/lack of power? "Nobody talking about the girl"-relevance = power? Discussion of character is mainly focussed on the negative plotline associated with her- code of namelessness and power.

Appendix E: Focus Group Interview Schedule (The War of the Worlds)

Focus Group Questions- Interview schedule

Section one: introduction

Q1: Who is your favourite woman character in *The War of The Worlds*?

>Why?

(Discussion might lead to the fact that women in the novel are the minority. During his adventures, the narrator's brother meets Mrs. Elphinstone (who is married to Dr. Elphinstone, who isn't around) and Miss Elphinstone (who is Dr. Elphinstone's sister). They are a good example of how two characters can be used to contrast each other)

Q2: What purpose do you think the women who feature in the novel serve?

>*"They're coming!" a woman shrieked, and incontinently everyone was turning and pushing at those behind, in order to clear their way to Woking again. They must have bolted as blindly as a flock of sheep. Where the road grows narrow and black between the high banks the crowd jammed, and a desperate struggle occurred. All that crowd did not escape; three persons at least, two women and a little boy, were crushed and trampled there, and left to die amid the terror and the darkness."*

(Discussion might lead to women used to emphasise the fear/chaos)

Q3: Why do you think there are no women narrators in the novel?

>Main characters

Section two: historical vs present day attitudes about gender

Q3: Tell me about your impressions of the lives of men and women in *The War of the Worlds*?

>How do you feel about that?

>How are they different/similar?

Q4: The novel has been interpreted as (among other things) "a commentary on... Victorian fear, superstitions and prejudices"

>What do you think about this statement?

>Do you think it applies to representations of women?

Section three: gender and social class

Q5: Tell me about the lives of the different women in the novel, in what ways are they different? In what ways are they similar?

>In what ways/how? (eg ethnicity, social class etc.)

(If not very talkative, Think about X character, what can you tell me about their social class?)

Section four: sisterhood/relatability of characters

Q6: What can you tell me about the attitudes towards gender that existed when the novel was written?

>Do you think they are still present in society today?

(The role of women in this period was to be a caregiver, provider of domestic life etc, "Angel in the House")

Q7: What do you think about the way that *The War of the Worlds* portrays gender?

>Can you link any aspects of this to gender in today's society?

Q8: Can you tell me if there are any themes or events that you have particularly engaged with in the text?

>Why?

Q9: Do you read anything outside of school?

Q10: Anything else you'd like to say?

Appendix F: Focus Group Interview Schedule (A Christmas Carol)

Focus Group Questions- Interview schedule

Section one- introduction/get the participants talkative with an easy start

Q1: Who is your favourite woman character in *A Christmas Carol*?

>Why?

(Belle, Fan/Fran, Mrs Cratchit, Martha Cratchit)

Q2: What purpose do you think the women who feature in the novel serve?

(Do women contribute to Scrooge's redemption? Do the themes of social justice touch on gender too?)

Q3: Why do you think there are no women narrators in the novel?

Section two: historical vs present day attitudes about gender

Q4: Tell me about your impressions of the lives of men and women in *A Christmas Carol.*

>How do you feel about that?

>How are they different/similar?

Q5: The novel has been interpreted as "...*otherwise an unbelievably male story – Scrooge, male ghosts, men, men, men, men, men,*"

>What do you think about this statement?

>Do you think it applies to the representations of women in the novel?

Q6:Do you think that any of the men characters in the novel exhibit typically feminine qualities?

(e.g. the value of the feminine qualities of kindness, compassion, nurturing and care when they are practiced by both women and men)

>What do you think about this?

Section three: gender and social class

Q7: Tell me about the lives of the different women in the novel, in what ways are they different? In what ways are they similar?

>In what ways/how? (eg ethnicity, social class etc.)

(If not very talkative, Think about X character, what can you tell me about their social class?)

(E.g Belle vs the Cratchits)

Section four: sisterhood/relatability of characters

Q8: What can you tell me about the attitudes towards gender that existed when the novel was written?

>Do you think they are still present in society today?

(The role of women in this period was to be a caregiver, provider of domestic life etc, "Angel in the House")

Q9: What do you think about the way that *A Christmas Carol* portrays gender?

>Can you link any aspects of this to gender in today's society?

Q10: Can you tell me if there are any themes or events that you have particularly engaged with in the text?

>Why?

Q11: Do you read anything outside of school?

Q12: Anything else you'd like to say?

Appendix G: Interview Schedule

<u>Interview Schedule: Class Teachers</u>

Q1: If you could teach any 19th Century Novel what would it be?

>Why?

Q2: What do you think about the current AQA selection for this category?

Available choices: *Pride & Prejudice, Great Expectations, A Christmas Carol, Frankenstein, The Sign of Four, Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde, Jane Eyre*

Q3: What would you say are the factors that drive you to choose to teach the novel that you teach to your GCSE English lit cohorts?

Q4: Do you repeat teaching of the same novel for the next cohort of students?

>Please elaborate on this

Q5: Do you teach critical theory alongside the texts?

(e.g postcolonial, feminist, Marxist etc.)

>Why/why not? What is the point of teaching critical theory alongside texts?

>Do you think that it helps understand the text?

>Do you think that it helps promote aesthetic enjoyment of the text?

Q6: Do you think that AQA should recommend teaching theory alongside texts?

Q7: Are there any limitations that you face when teaching?

(e.g resources, funding, time etc.)

Q8: Do you notice a difference in how students of different genders engage with the texts?

Q9 : Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix H: Follow-Up Questionnaire (The War of the Worlds)

Follow-Up Questionnaire: Experiences of Subject English

Form description

What do you understand by the term "feminism"?

Question type

Paragraph

Long-answer text

Required

Have you had a chance to discuss feminism or gender studies alongside studying in The War of the Worlds?

YES

NO

UNSURE

After section 1

Continue to next section

Yes

Description (optional)

If yes, did it help you understand themes and characters in the text in a better way?

Long-answer text

After section 2

Continue to next section

No

Description (optional)

If no, would you have wanted this aspect alongside your study of the text?

YES
NO
UNSURE

After section 3

Continue to next section

Unsure

Description (optional)

Do you think H.G Wells is a feminist author? If so, why? If not, why not?

Long-answer text

Do you feel the characters in The War of the Worlds are relatable?

ALWAYS YES
MOSTLY YES
SOMETIMES
MOSTLY NO
ALWAYS NO

Do you feel personally represented by the authors, dramatists and poets that you have encountered that feature on the National Curriculum during your study of English literature?

ALWAYS YES
MOSTLY YES
SOMETIMES
MOSTLY NO
ALWAYS NO

Do you feel personally represented in the novels,plays and poetry that you have encountered that feature on the National Curriculum during your study of English literature?

ALWAYS YES
MOSTLY YES
SOMETIMES
MOSTLY NO
ALWAYS NO

Do you feel the novels, plays and poetry that you have encountered from the National Curriculum provide you with an insight into other cultures and life experiences beyond your own?

ALWAYS YES
MOSTLY YES
SOMETIMES
MOSTLY NO
ALWAYS NO

Is there anything else about your experience of studying English literature that you would like to add?

Long-answer text

Appendix I: Follow-Up Questionnaire (A Christmas Carol)

Follow-Up Questionnaire: Experiences of Subject English ACC

Question Title

1. What do you understand by the term "feminism"?

[ ]

Question Title

2. Have you had a chance to discuss feminism or gender studies alongside studying in A Christmas Carol?

○ YES

○ NO

○ UNSURE

Question Title

3. If yes, did it help you understand themes and characters in the text in a better way?

[ ]

Question Title

4. If no, would you have wanted this aspect alongside your study of the text?

○ YES

○ NO

○ UNSURE

Question Title

5. Do you think Charles Dickens is a feminist author? If so, why? If not, why not?

[   ]

Question Title

6. Do you feel the characters in A Christmas Carol are relatable?

○ ALWAYS YES

○ MOSTLY YES

○ SOMETIMES

○ MOSTLY NO

○ ALWAYS NO

Question Title

7. Do you feel personally represented by the authors, dramatists and poets that you have encountered that feature on the National Curriculum during your study of English literature?

○ ALWAYS YES

○ MOSTLY YES

○ SOMETIMES

○ MOSTLY NO

○ ALWAYS NO

Question Title

8. Do you feel personally represented in the novels,plays and poetry that you have encountered that feature on the National Curriculum during your study of English literature?

○ ALWAYS YES

○ MOSTLY YES

○ SOMETIMES

○ MOSTLY NO

○ ALWAYS NO

Question Title

9. Do you feel the novels, plays and poetry that you have encountered from the National Curriculum provide you with an insight into other cultures and life experiences beyond your own?

○ ALWAYS YES

○ MOSTLY YES

○ SOMETIMES

○ MOSTLY NO

○ ALWAYS NO

Question Title

10. *Is there anything else about your experience of studying*

English literature that you would like to add?

Appendix J: Information Page & Student Consent

Information Page

Girls Reading Gender in their AQA GCSE English Literature Set Text

Dear Student,

My name is Katherine Smith, and I am a PhD researcher in the Department of Education at the University of York. I am currently carrying out a research project to explore how girls respond and relate to the characters in their GCSE set text. I am writing to ask if you would be willing to take part in the study.

What will this involve?

You will take part in a focus group with 4 or more of your peers. In it, I will ask you, as a group, some questions relating to your understanding of gender, feminism and key themes in the novel you are studying. It will last around 30 minutes. The session will be recorded via Zoom. Following this, I will ask you to fill out a short follow-up questionnaire individually (taking 15 minutes) via Google Forms.

Anonymity

The data that you provide (audio recordings of the focus groups & questionnaire responses) will be stored by code number. Any information that identifies you will be stored separately from the data.

Storing and using your data

Anonymized data will be stored on a password protected computer. The data will be kept for 5 years after which time it will be destroyed. The data may be used for future analysis and shared for research or training purposes, but participants will not be identified individually.

Please read the attached GDPR information.

If you do not want your data to be included in any information shared as a result of this research, please do not sign this consent form

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to 2 weeks after the data is collected, after which time the data will not be traceable back to specific participants.

You are free to request the written and anonymized transcript from ks1097@york.ac.uk.

If you have any questions about the project that you would like to ask before giving consent or after the data collection, please feel free to contact Katherine Smith by email (ks1097@york.ac.uk) or by telephone on 07703831927 or the Chair of Ethics Committee via email education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk

Please keep this information sheet for your own records and return the signed form.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely,

Katherine Smith

Girls Reading Gender in their AQA GCSE English Literature Set Text

Consent Form

Please tick each box if you are happy to take part in this research.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information given to me about the above named research project and I understand that this will involve me taking part as described above.

I understand that if I disclose information which the researcher (Katherine Smith) may feel morally or legally bound to pass on to relevant external bodies, they will do so.

I understand that the purpose of the research is to collect first-hand data from GCSE aged girls about their attitudes towards gender in their GCSE set text.

I understand that data will be stored securely on a password protected computer and only Katherine Smith will have access to any identifiable data. I understand that my identity will be protected by use of a code/pseudonym.

I have read the GDPR information

I understand that my data will not be identifiable and the data may be used:

in publications that are mainly read by university academics

in presentations that are mainly attended by university academics

in publications that are mainly read by the public

in presentations that are mainly attended by the public

freely available online to academics

I understand that anonymous data will be kept for5 years after which it will be destroyed.

I understand that data could be used for future analysis or other purposes [e.g. other research and teaching purposes]

I understand that I can withdraw my data at any point during data collection and up to 2 weeks after data is collected.

Appendix K: Information Page & Parental Consent

Information Page

Girls Reading Gender in their AQA GCSE English Literature Set Text

Dear Parent, Carer or Guardian,

My name is Katherine Smith, and I am a PhD researcher in the Department of Education at the

University of York. I am currently carrying out a research project to explore how girls respond

and relate to the characters in their GCSE set text. I am writing to ask if you would give consent

to your child being involved in the study.

What will this involve?

Your child is being asked to take part in a focus group with 4 or more of their peers. In it, I will

ask them, as a group via Zoom, some questions relating to their understanding of gender,

feminism and key themes in the novel they are studying. It will last around 30 minutes.

Following this, I will ask your child to fill out a short follow-up questionnaire individually

(taking 15 minutes) via a Google Form. I will then be running a Q&A session via Zoom where

your child can ask about university or more questions about the novel if requested by your

child's teacher.

In total, this will take an hour of your child's time to help with my research, all located within your child's school.

Benefits of taking part in my research for your child would include extra revision of one of their set texts in that your child would have the opportunity to discuss their ideas with a PhD student (who holds an undergraduate honours degree, BA English in Education, from the University of York and an MA in Social Justice & Education from the University of York). They would also have the opportunity to talk to me about life at university and degree course options.

Anonymity

The data that your child will provide (audio recordings of the focus groups & questionnaire responses) will be stored by code number. Any information that identifies them will be stored separately from the data.

Storing and using your data

Anonymized data will be on a password protected computer. The data will be kept for 5 years after which time it will be destroyed. The data may be used for future analysis and shared for research or training purposes, but participants will not be identified individually.

Please see the attached sheet for full GDPR information.

If you do not want your child's data to be included in any information shared as a result of this research, please do not sign this consent form

Your child is free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to 2

weeks after the data is collected.

Your child is free to request the written and anonymized transcript from ks1097@york.ac.uk.

If you have any questions about the project that you would like to ask before giving consent or

after the data collection, please feel free to contact Katherine Smith by email

(ks1097@york.ac.uk) or by telephone on 07703831927 or the Chair of Ethics Committee via

email education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk

Please keep this information sheet for your own records and return the signed form to your

child's English teacher by Tuesday 18th May 2021.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely,

Katherine Smith

Girls Reading Gender in their AQA GCSE English Literature Set Text

Consent Form

Please tick each box if you are happy for your child to take part in this research.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information given to me about the above named research project and I understand that this will involve my child taking part as described above.

I understand that the purpose of the research is to collect first-hand data from GCSE aged girls about their attitudes towards gender in their GCSE set text.

I understand that data will be stored securely on a password protected computer and only Katherine Smith will have access to any identifiable data. I understand that my child's identity will be protected by use of a code/pseudonym.

I have read the GDPR information

I understand that my child's data will not be identifiable and the data may be used:

in publications that are mainly read by university academics

in presentations that are mainly attended by university academics

in publications that are mainly read by the public

in presentations that are mainly attended by the public

freely available online to academics

I understand that anonymous data will be kept for5 years after which it will be destroyed.

I understand that data could be used for future analysis or other purposes [e.g. other research and teaching purposes]

I understand that my child can withdraw their data at any point during data collection and up to 2 weeks after data is collected.

Appendix L: Information Page & Staff Consent

Information Page

Girls Reading Gender in their AQA GCSE English Literature Set Text

Dear Participant,,

My name is Katherine Smith, and I am a PhD researcher in the Department of Education at the University of York. I am currently carrying out a research project to explore how girls respond and relate to the characters in their GCSE set text, A Christmas Carol. Part of my research also involves interviewing the teachers of the students that I conduct focus groups with about their experiences of teaching the novels.. I am writing to ask if you would be willing to take part in the study.

What will this involve?

You will take part in a short interview (no more than 20 minutes) that I will record on an audio device.

Anonymity

The data that you provide (audio recording of the interview)) will be stored by code number.

Any information that identifies you will be stored separately from the data.

Storing and using your data

Anonymized data will be stored on a password protected computer. The data will be kept for 5

years after which time it will be destroyed. The data may be used for future analysis and shared

for research or training purposes, but participants will not be identified individually.

Please read the attached GDPR information.

If you do not want your data to be included in any information shared as a result of this research,

please do not sign this consent form

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to 2 weeks

after the data is collected, after which time the data will not be traceable back to specific

participants.

You are free to request the written and anonymized transcript from ks1097@york.ac.uk.

If you have any questions about the project that you would like to ask before giving consent or

after the data collection, please feel free to contact Katherine Smith by email

(ks1097@york.ac.uk) or by telephone on 07703831927 or the Chair of Ethics Committee via

email education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk

Please keep this information sheet for your own records and return the signed form.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely,

Katherine Smith

Girls Reading Gender in their AQA GCSE English Literature Set Text

Consent Form

Please tick each box if you are happy to take part in this research.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information given to me about the above named

research project and I understand that this will involve me taking part as described above.

I understand that the purpose of the research is to collect first-hand data from GCSE aged girls

about their attitudes towards gender in their GCSE set text, as well as their teachers.

I understand that data will be stored securely on a password protected computer and only

Katherine Smith will have access to any identifiable data. I understand that my identity will be

protected by use of a code/pseudonym.

I have read the GDPR information

I understand that my data will not be identifiable and the data may be used:

in publications that are mainly read by university academics

in presentations that are mainly attended by university academics

in publications that are mainly read by the public

in presentations that are mainly attended by the public

freely available online to academics

I understand that anonymous data will be kept for5 years after which it will be destroyed.

I understand that data could be used for future analysis or other purposes [e.g. other research and

teaching purposes]

I understand that I can withdraw my data at any point during data collection and up to 2 weeks

after data is collected.

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Figures

Section one: introduction

Q1: Who is your favourite woman character in Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde?

>Why?

(Discussion might lead to the fact that women in the novel are nameless, witnesses to violence or victims of the plot- 2 maids and a young girl who is crushed)

Q2: Why do you think there are no women narrators in the novel?

>Main characters

Section two: historical vs present day attitudes about gender

Q3: Tell me about your impressions of the lives of men and women in Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde?

>How do you feel about that?

>How are they different/similar?

Q4: "The more oppressed women become, the more horror the characters experience"

>What do you think about this statement?

Section three: gender and social class

Q5: Tell me about the lives of the different women in the novel, in what ways are they different? In what ways are they similar?

>In what ways/how? (eg ethnicity, social class etc.)

(If not very talkative, Think about X character, what can you tell me about their social class?)

Section four: sisterhood/relatability of characters

Q6: What can you tell me about the attitudes towards gender that existed when the novel was written?

>Do you think they are still present in society today?

(The role of women in this period was to be a caregiver, provider of domestic life etc)

Q7: What do you think about the way that Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde portrays gender?

>Can you link any aspects of this to gender in today's society?

Q8: Can you tell me if there are any themes or events that you have particularly engaged with in the text?

>Why?

Q9: Do you read anything outside of school?

Q10: Anything else you'd like to say?

Figure 1: Pilot focus group schedule (students)

Interview Schedule: English Teachers

Q1: If you could teach any 19ᵗʰ Century Novel what would it be?

>Why?

Q2: What do you think about the current AQA selection for this category?

Available choices: *Pride & Prejudice, Great Expectations, A Christmas Carol, Frankenstein, The Sign of Four, Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde, Jane Eyre*

Q3: What would you say are the factors that drive you to choose to teach the novel that you teach to your GCSE English lit cohorts?

Q4: Do you repeat teaching of the same novel for the next cohort of students?

>Please elaborate on this

Q5: Do you teach critical theory alongside the texts?

(e.g postcolonial, feminist, Marxist etc.)

>Why/why not? What is the point of teaching critical theory alongside texts?

>Do you think that it helps understand the text?

>Do you think that it helps promote aesthetic enjoyment of the text?

Q6: Do you think that AQA should recommend teaching theory alongside texts?

Q7: Are there any limitations that you face when teaching?

(e.g resources, funding, time etc.)

Q8: Do you notice a difference in how students of different genders engage with the texts?

Q9 : Is there anything else you would like to say?

Figure 2*:* **Pilot interview schedule (staff)**