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Constructing and Negotiating Meaning: A Dialogic Approach to Analysing Chick Lit

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ABSTRACT

The aims of this thesis are two-fold. This thesis seeks to critically interrogate the complex web of meaning-making practices and processes which circulate around the form of popular fiction by, about and largely for women known as chick lit. In order to address this objective, this thesis develops theoretical and analytical frameworks that are sufficiently nuanced to conceptualise and analyse the construction and negotiation of the meanings of a cultural object as dynamic, emergent, and firmly embedded in social life. Scholarly analyses of chick lit have largely been undertaken from the viewpoint of literary and cultural studies, which has resulted in a predominantly textually determined view of the genre's meanings that isolates the novels from the contexts of their production and consumption. This thesis, however, treats chick lit as a cultural phenomenon, attempting to connect a group of widely read texts with the conditions of their production, examining the way chick lit's meanings are constructed and negotiated by both the 'professional' reader in the academy and the media and the 'non-professional' reader in the 'everyday world', and interrogating the societal norms, beliefs and values that impact upon these appraisals. In order to conceptualise meaning-making in the complex and multifaceted way required by these aims, this thesis adopts dialogism as an interactional and contextual theory for human sense-making, and that, by placing the work of V.N. Vološinov at its centre, is linguistically oriented. However, the dialogic theoretical framework proposed in this thesis is a modified one, in that it addresses the weaknesses that arise from Vološinov's failure to adequately theorise the interrelationships between social, situated, interaction and social structure. This attempt to more adequately integrate the social into dialogism extends to the form of dialogic discourse analysis also developed in this thesis, a framework that seeks to address the limitations of current models by providing a nuanced set of tools and concepts to deal specifically with the analysis of the multiply located, multifaceted meanings that accrue to a cultural object.

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Transcription Conventions

(.)	indicates a pause of one second or less
(2)	indicates a timed pause
CAPITAL LETTERS	indicate material was uttered loudly
° °	indicates that the material enclosed was uttered quietly
=	indicates latching, where there is no discernible gap between speakers' utterances
[	indicates overlap
[[	indicates simultaneous speech
(( ))	material in double brackets indicates additional information
< >	indicates that the material enclosed was uttered rapidly
>@ @>	indicates that the material enclosed was uttered with a laughter quality to the speaker's voice
underline	indicates emphatic stress
:	indicates lengthening of sound
(hh)	indicates aspiration
-	indicates self interruption or false start

Speakers are identified in the transcripts by the first letter of their pseudonym, i.e. R: researcher.

The transcription conventions used in this thesis are largely based on the system developed by Jefferson (in Atkinson and Heritage, 1999).

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Aims and objectives

The aims of this thesis are two-fold. In order to critically interrogate the complex web of meaning-making practices and processes which circulate around the form of popular fiction known as chick lit, this thesis seeks to develop, linguistically oriented, dialogic theoretical and methodological frameworks that are sufficiently nuanced to conceptualise and analyse the construction and negotiation of the meanings of a cultural object as dynamic, emergent, and firmly embedded in social life. Although a burgeoning body of scholarship has sought to analyse chick lit (e.g. Ferris and Young, 2006; Harzewski, 2009), these analyses have largely been undertaken from the viewpoint of literary and cultural studies, which has resulted in a predominantly textually determined view of the genre's meanings. This thesis, however, treats chick lit as a cultural phenomenon (Lang, 2010), and attempts to connect a group of widely read texts with their economic context, the conditions of their production, the way both the 'professional' reader in the academy and in the media and the 'non-professional' reader in the 'everyday world' interpret and evaluate them, and the regimes of cultural value[1] (Frow, 1995; 2007) that inform these interpretations and evaluations. The theoretical and analytical frameworks developed in this thesis are thus designed to interrogate ways in which chick lit's meanings are constructed and negotiated, how its value is invoked and evaluated by both individuals and groups in both public and private domains, and the ways in which societal norms, beliefs and values impact upon these constructions

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[1] I discuss the notion of regimes of value in detail in chapter four, section 4.8 of this thesis, but briefly, Bennett, Emmison and Frow (1999: 260) note that the term designates "those normative organisations of the proper which specify what counts as a good object of desire or pleasure; a proper mode of access or entry to it; and an appropriate range of valuations".

and appraisals.

Following the publication and commercial success of Fielding's (1996) novel *Bridget Jones's Diary*, by the end of the 1990s the category and term chick lit had become established to describe a particular type of novel, written by women, (largely) for women, depicting the life, loves, trials and tribulations of predominantly young, single, urban, female protagonists (Knowles, 2004). By the end of the twentieth century, this genre was also identifiable by its distinctive cover design with bold, pink or pastel-coloured covers with cursive fonts (Gill and Herdieckerhoff, 2006). Chick lit has also become notable for its commercial success; in 2002, for instance, chick lit sales grossed 71 million dollars, and by 2005, the *Wall Street Journal* quoted figures predicting that sales of chick lit in America that year would total around $137 million (Ferriss and Young, 2006; Trachtenberg 2005: 4).[2]

Despite their evident commercial viability, these novels have provoked intense and oppositional responses. For fans of chick lit, the novels reflect the experiences of contemporary young women (Ferriss and Young, 2006: 1), however chick lit's detractors have declared them formulaic, vapid, and, moreover, anti-feminist, firmly (re)locating women within the private sphere of hearth and heart. For example, Lola Young (cited in Reynolds, 1999), chair of the 1999 Orange prize for fiction, attacked chick lit for what she claims is its limited and domestic horizon and Beryl Bainbridge

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[2] Sales figures for individual chick lit authors equally attest to the popularity of chick lit; for example, in 2005 Marian Keyes was placed in the top five of UK *The Bookseller's* Top 100, with her novel *The Other Side of the Story* (2004) having sold 488,508 copies during 2005, and in *The Bookseller's* Top 100 for 2007, Marian Keyes reached third place, with her novel *Anybody Out There?* (2006) having sold 585,026 copies (Stone, 2008). Such is the success of chick lit that two 'how to write chick lit' books are currently in print: Yardley's (2006) *Will Write for Shoes: How To Write A Chick Lit Novel* and Mlynowski and Jacobs's (2006) *See Jane Write: a girl's guide to writing Chick Lit*.

(cited in Reynolds, 1999) declared chick lit "froth" in an interview for BBC Radio 4; debate subsequently raged across the pages of U.K. newspapers, with chick lit author Jenny Colgan railing against what she terms "hairy legged critics" (Colgan cited in Gibbons, 2003).[3]

In the emerging field of chick lit scholarship, however, critics have sought to move beyond such binary oppositions to undertake more nuanced analyses of these novels, exploring their often complex representations of gender (e.g. Gill, 2007; Whelehan, 2005). Yet, in these largely cultural and literary studies, the location of the meanings of chick lit novels is narrowly conceptualised and largely fixed within the pages of the books. Within the scholarly analyses of chick lit to date, little attention has been paid to the production of chick lit and therefore studies have neglected to address the role of production processes in constructing the meanings and identities associated with a cultural product. Moreover, to date no face-to-face empirical studies have been undertaken with readers.[4] Therefore, in the scholarly work on chick lit the activities, interpretations and evaluations largely afforded primacy are those of the 'professional' reader. This thesis aims to address the gaps in existing scholarship by interrogating production processes and practices and their role in the construction of chick lit's meanings, and seeks in particular to address the lack of empirical evidence for how

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[3] Colgan's criticisms are predicated upon her view that the chick lit critic is either feminist or elitist, or both, with this combination of a feminist critic bearing the brunt of her anger. This positioning of the chick lit critic as feminist and/or elitist is particularly significant, since, as I will go on to show, it is a judgement that resonates not only in published studies with chick lit reader comments posted on the internet (Steiner, 2008), but that also emerges in the evaluations of one of the chick lit readers interviewed for this thesis in chapter six.
[4] As I discuss in chapter two, the few studies undertaken within chick lit scholarship that have sought to examine how chick lit readers respond to and interpret these novels are largely web-based analyses of reader reviews posted on commercial web sites (Scanlon, 2005, 2006; Steiner, 2008).

'non-professional' readers construct their evaluations of this popular cultural form. In order to attend to these aims, a crucial objective of the thesis is to construct a theoretical and analytical framework that allows for meaning-making to be conceptualised in a complex way.

In this chapter, I introduce key aspects of the major theoretical building blocks that underpin the approach put forward in this thesis. I begin in section 1.1.1 with the foundational theoretical perspective for this thesis: dialogism. This section provides a brief outline of the way in which, as an epistemological framework for human sense-making, dialogism has been defined and sets out its axiomatic principles concerning language, communication and cognition, placing Vološinov's ([1929]1986) theorisation of language and communication at the centre of the approach to dialogism adopted. It is argued that adopting a dialogic perspective has key consequences and importance for the conceptualisation of the notion of culture adopted in the thesis by refuting the grounds for a 'high' culture/'low', popular, culture binary.

There is a further binary opposition that is challenged in this thesis. The distinction between the activities of the 'professional' and the 'non-professional' reader has been the subject of examination, particularly within the branch of cognitive stylistics/poetics (e.g. Stockwell, 2002, 2009), and within Empirical Studies of Literature (ESL) (e.g. Miall, 2006), as a result of the shift from the focus on texts as objects of study to a concern with the interpretive role of the reader.[5] As Stockwell (2002: 8) puts it, this move entails thinking about the cultural and experiential

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[5] I discuss reception theory and reader-response criticism in chapter two of this thesis, but briefly the concern with the interpretive role of the reader emerged as a result of dissatisfaction with formalist accounts of texts which, in their focus on the author and the content and form of the text, view the reader as passively acted upon.

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constraints around "real readers reading literature in the real world".[6] Whereas this thesis shares the concern of the two fields for the ways in which 'professional' and 'non-professional' readers discuss literature, the focus on readers is not constrained here to the identification and theorisation of the *differences* in reading strategies employed by these two groups, and neither does it share the conceptualisation of the *constitution* of the two groups.

As Whitely (2011a) points out, the distinction between professional and non-professional readers appears marked in empirical studies, and the focus tends to be upon the distinction between academic and student readers. In this focus on academic readers as 'professional' readers and the university student as a 'non-professional reader', the assumption is that non-professional and student readers employ the same reading strategies, thus positioning the student reader as a representative of the non-professional reader. This thesis not only refuses the conflation of the student reader in the academy with the non-professional reader outside of the academy, but also resists clear-cut and simplified distinctions between the activities and reading practices of the professional and the non-professional reader predicated upon 'expertise'. Instead, the view taken in this thesis is that non-professional readers are indeed 'competent', 'pragmatic' readers (Appleyard, 1991) whose engagement with a text is potentially multifaceted, adopting shifting and varied interpretational strategies.[7]

By giving voice to the 'non-professional' reader of popular fiction, and by

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[6] Yet as Benwell (2009) points out, cognitive poetics remains a text-immanent approach, since the theorisation and examination of mental modes of comprehension and processing in relation to language items is employed within this framework in order to identify potential reading effects, and thus as Swann and Allington (2009) also note, the analyst is describing an *ideal* reader's interactions with the text under analysis.
[7] I discuss the notion of the pragmatic reader in detail in chapter two of this thesis.

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putting women, constructions of femininity and the gendering of practices firmly on the theoretical and analytical agenda, this thesis is explicitly positioned as feminist in orientation, for as Hermes (2005: 146) points out, a focus on how women and men actively create their own meanings of a cultural form is firmly associated with a feminist approach to popular culture. However, the relationship between feminist theorising and popular culture has been fraught with difficulties (Hollows, 2000). Section 1.2 thus introduces a further key theoretical building block in the approach developed in this thesis: third wave feminist linguistics. This section begins by discussing in subsection 1.2.1 the problematic assumptions and attitudes that have underpinned feminist engagements with popular culture in what can be termed second wave feminism.[8] This overview is then followed in section 1.2.2 by a critical exploration of how third wave feminism's engagement with popular culture has been conceptualised, delineating third wave feminism in opposition to postfeminism[9], as often the two terms are conflated.

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[8] The term second wave feminism is predicated upon the 'waves' paradigm as a categorisation model which is employed to frame the developments in feminist approaches. As Hollows (2000: 2) argues, the term second wave refers to "the ideas and practices associated with the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s". This wave of feminist theorising is characterised by the construction of women as a monolithic category, which offered little scope for thinking about the differences between women. In particular, in this wave, femininity was often viewed as problematic, with, as Hollows points out, "feminist critiques of femininity … often dependent on creating an opposition between 'bad' feminine identities and 'good' feminist identities" (2000: 14). Furthermore, Hollows points out that "it became common for feminists to claim that a whole range of popular forms and practices – from romance reading to dressing up – locked women into feminine identities which made them blind to, and collude in, their own oppression" (2000: 20).

[9] Postfeminism is a term that has been applied in multiple and various ways. For example the term has been applied to refer to a development in feminist theorising coming after the height of second wave feminism that is highly critical of second wave feminism (e.g. Denfeld,1995) or that locates itself as building upon second wave foundations (Dicker and Piepmeier, 2003). Following Gill (2007) and Taska and Negra (2007), in this thesis, postfeminism is conceptualised as a discursive structure, particularly identifiable across Western media forms. I return to the concept of discourse in chapter three of this thesis but briefly, the term discursive system refers to a

Conceptualising and interrogating postfeminism is important for this thesis for two main reasons: firstly, as I discuss in chapter two, whilst scholars have engaged with the relationship between chick lit and postfeminism, largely scholarly work on chick lit has evoked an uneven conceptualisation of postfeminism, and secondly, as I argue in chapter five of this thesis, the production of chick lit is bound up with postfeminist discourse and the image of women it constructs. Section 1.2.3 then sets out the key issues that characterise third wave feminist linguistics. I do not, however, adopt a third wave feminist approach wholesale and uncritically, and in section 1.2.4 I briefly set out the main issue with third wave feminist linguistics that this thesis addresses; namely, the focus on local practices that makes it difficult to account for the impact of societal values on the individual. This introductory chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of the thesis as a whole in section 1.3. The section below, however, begins to map out the key concepts in the dialogic theoretical and analytical framework developed in this thesis.

1.1 Theoretical and analytical approach: dialogism

Linell (2005: 6, emphasis removed) describes dialogism as a combination "of theoretical and epistemological assumptions about human action, communication and cognition". It is important to bear in mind that, as Linell is careful to point out, although some scholars do indeed align the foundations of dialogism with the work of the Bakhtin Circle of which Vološinov was a member, others would not; dialogism, Linell notes, "is not one coherent school, or theory, not even something that 'dialogists' of

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combination of a conceptual system and a set of practices that structures knowledge (Clark, 2007).

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different persuasions would necessarily agree upon" (2005: 4).[10] However, although

there is no single coherent 'school' of dialogism Linell goes on to note that there does

exist a body of ideas concerning language, communication and cognition that are

loosely related.[11] In his most recent work which attempts to weave together this

grouping of related ideas, Linell (2009: 432, emphasis in original) describes dialogism

as concerned with:

> the importance of the other in the human mind, and about interaction, context-independence and semiotic mediation in sense-making. With a blunt formulation, a 'dialogical 'theory' is therefore about *interactive sense-making in context*, and the emphasis on *other-orientation* provides the implied association to dialogue.

This association of dialogism with dialogue is, however, problematic as it is

predicated on a limited relationship between the two terms; as Linell (2005: 5) points

out:

> 'dialogue' is used to refer to a verbal interaction, often but not necessarily face-to-face, between two (or more) interlocutors. Many [...] linguists, would use the term in this 'extensional' sense. For them, 'dialogue theory' is a theory which deals with such interactions, possibly including also written texts (and other media) in which two or more voices can be clearly discerned.

Like Linell, I differentiate my understanding of dialogism as more comprehensive than

this narrow focus, adopting Linell's (2009: 28-9) succinct definition that "dialogism

deals with processes in human meaning-making in and through language, in thinking,

communication and action, and with the products of such processes". However,

although I follow Linell's general conceptualisation of dialogism, I situate the major

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[10] The term the Bakhtin Circle refers to a group of twentieth century Russian scholars who met to discuss issues of philosophy and aesthetics. I return to a definition of this term in chapter three of this thesis.

[11] According to Linell (2009), this loose combination of theories includes the work of Hegel, Mead, Vygotsky, Wittgenstein, and Goffman. However, the dialogical perspective developed in this thesis does not draw on this combination of scholars for its theoretical underpinning. One of the shortcomings of Linell's paradigm of dialogism, I would suggest, is the lack of extended discussion of these theorists' work and how it fits with and enriches a dialogic perspective.

theoretical underpinnings of dialogism in the work of Vološinov.[12]

Adopting a dialogical perspective has epistemological and ontological

implications for the theoretical framework which underpins this thesis along with key

consequences for the account of 'culture' that is employed and the type of analysis

undertaken. [13] As Linell (2009: 13-4) argues, as an epistemological framework

dialogism makes a number of major assumptions, or encompasses key dialogic

principles. What Linell (2009: 13) terms as the "definitional" principle in dialogism is

other-orientation, or in other words, the assumption that human nature and the social

life of all humans is constituted through interactions with others. The principle of other-

orientation means that dialogism, as Linell puts it "denies the *autonomous* subject who

thinks, speaks and acts in and by himself [sic]"; rather, he argues, from a dialogic

perspective, "[o]ur actions, thoughts and utterances are imbued with interdependencies

with what others have done, are doing, and can be expected to do in the future" (ibid.).

The second and third key dialogic principles relate to what Linell terms *inter-activity*

and *contextuality*, which he summarises as concepts predicated on the assumption that,

"action, communication and cognition are thoroughly relational (or inter-relational) and

interactional in nature, and they must always be understood in their relevant contexts"

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[12] I am concerned to make clear the authorship of what I consider to be the foundational text of dialogism concerned with language clearly since, as I point out in chapter three of this thesis, since the latter part of the twentieth century there has been an attribution of the authorship of works by Vološinov and Medvedev to Bakhtin, but more recent scholarship has shown this to be erroneous. Nevertheless, following Linell, I too take a much more eclectic approach to dialogism that goes beyond Vološinov's theorising with the application of present-day work in linguistics on talk-in-interaction, along with social theory.

[13] Baxter (2010) argues that employing the term perspective when referring to a theory implies that what is being referred to in fact lacks theory status, however when I adopt the term 'dialogic perspective' in this thesis it is to refer to dialogism precisely as a theory: as an ontological and epistemological framework through which human meaning-making is viewed.

(2009: 14). The fourth major dialogic principle is that of *semiotic mediation*, or in other words, the assumption that all communicative and cognitive activities are mediated by language or some other semiotic system.

The rationale for choosing dialogism is concerned not least with its conceptualisation of meaning *potentials*. As Linell (2009: 346-7) points out, from a dialogic perspective human beings engage with artefacts, including written texts, in various and complex ways. Artefacts are inscribed with meaning potentials which are relational phenomena, deployed and understood by human agents who thus assign the artefact meaning in different ways in different contexts. For this thesis, the first major implication for the adoption of a dialogic perspective is that the crucial role of language in society is foregrounded in the key principle of semiotic mediation. As Wold (1992: 1-2) puts it, in a dialogically based approach: "[l]inguistic meaning is conceived as open and dynamic, and constituted in the dialogic process of communication. It is not to be seen as formal and static representations".

The second consequence for this thesis of adopting a dialogic perspective is that a specifically dialogical conceptualisation of culture is adopted. Bostad *et al* (2004: 1) point out that, although now an uncomfortable concept, contemporary academic study is still struggling with essentialism in theories of culture; essentialist theories of culture, they argue, hold that, "some objects have 'essence', that is, they have certain properties without which they could not exist – in our context the necessary and sufficient conditions for calling this or that 'Culture'. Essentialist definitions are thus both 'exclusive' and excluding". Indeed, as I discuss in section 1.2.1 of this chapter, essentialist definitions of what literature counts as 'Culture' that are decided by a binary opposition between 'Art-ful', and 'Art-less' have historically impacted negatively upon

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the ways in which certain forms of fiction have been evaluated, particularly fiction written by women. Such distinctions, moreover, appear to have found a degree of resurgence with the arrival of chick lit. However, in a dialogical conceptualisation of culture, whether in language or in literature there is no 'essence' in meaning.

Vološinov's dialogic theory sees meaning as dynamic, emergent, and firmly embedded in social life; in other words, meaning emerges in situated, specific social interaction and thus meaning is tied to human beings in their material, social and organisational contexts (Bostad *et al*, 2004). Vološinov's dialogic theory regards any communicative act in the following way:

- that communicative acts are always addressed to somebody, whether a real or imaginary person or group, or one's own self;

- that this addressivity means that communicative acts always involve interaction and interdependency with other acts, responding to what has gone before and anticipating future responses;

- and that communicative acts are simultaneously interdependent with aspects of context such as social setting and cultural traditions, or in short sociocultural practices (Vološinov [1929] 1986).

What this means for a dialogical theory of culture is that there is no 'essential' meaning in and of itself; rather, the meaning of a cultural object is deeply influenced by its specific ways of being situated both materially and symbolically by actual human beings who are themselves situated. Culture therefore becomes both process and product.

The very positioning of Vološinov's work at the centre of the theoretical

framework put forward in this thesis suggests that this twentieth century Russian scholar's insights remain relevant for twenty-first century research. Yet, as Brandist (2002: 176) also warns, there are "tensions and inadequacies" in the work of the Bakhtin Circle and he proposes that "[w]hat is of value needs to be consolidated and elaborated, while the weaker areas need to be rethought and reworked". A recurrent line of criticism in Brandist's (2002, 2004a, 2004b) recent work on the contemporary relevance of the Bakhtin Circle is that in both the work of the Circle and in more recent social theory which draws upon dialogic theory, the focus has often been upon the interaction of subjects, but such a focus, Brandist (2002: 174) argues, has a tendency to isolate social interaction from socio-economic structures. According to Brandist, there are a number of core elements of what he terms a Bakhtinian research programme that require considerable work, and these core elements include:

> the relationality of all discourse; the intimate connection between forms of intersubjectivity and the forms of that relationality; the permeation of every utterance by power relations ... the extension of generic forms to all discourse; the ideological significance of artistic forms [and] the struggle of world-views in language (2002: 190-1).

Work on these central aspects, Brandist argues, holds the potential for the development of a productive form of analysis that allows for "the forms of culture to be more closely related to the specific historical conditions within which they arose" (2002: 191). It is in this spirit of productive revision that I modify Vološinov's theorisation of language and communication. The critical modification of Vološinov's work undertaken responds to a number of the core elements Brandist argues need revising, particularly the concepts of relationality, world-view and power relations, and the ideological significance of an artistic form. Central to developing a dialogical approach to a cultural phenomenon that attends to such revisions is a conceptualisation of meaning-making as constituted by people and practices across various sites of cultural production, co-constructed in interaction, yet constrained by values, beliefs and pressures in wider society.

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In conceptualising meaning-making in a multi-faceted way, the thesis thus examines multiple foci, across both the spheres of production and consumption: from the practices of the contemporary publishing industry and media debates about the value of chick lit to the interpretations and evaluations of chick lit constructed by actual readers in one-to-one interviews and within a reading group[14] meeting. As Benwell (209: 301) argues, when people talk or write about books and about reading books, they are constructing and co-constructing a social order of reading and a social order of texts; crucial to the aims of this thesis is therefore to examine how the value of chick lit is invoked in evaluations of the genre made by the 'professional' and 'non-professional' reader, bringing these two perspectives into dialogue in an examination of the social production of literary value and its interplay with gender. This concern with gender addresses the lack of attention to gender in Vološinov's theory, and is underpinned by a further key theoretical building block in the framework developed in this thesis: third wave feminist linguistics.

1.2 Theorising Language and Gender: Third Wave Feminist Linguistics

The feminist theorising drawn on in this thesis is situated within what has been termed third wave feminist linguistics. As Mills (2004: 2) argues, third wave feminist linguistics is a form of analysis that is critical of second wave feminism, emerging from dissatisfaction with the work undertaken, and it is the relationship between second and third wave feminism that is of particular interest to this thesis. The term second wave feminism refers to the ideas and practices developed and undertaken by feminists in the 1960s and 1970s (Hollows, 2000; Mills and Mullany, 2011), and as Hollows (2000: 3)

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[14] Throughout this thesis I use the terms reading group and book group interchangeably.

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points out, it is out of the thinking and activities of second wave feminism that contemporary debates have been produced, particularly in relation to second wave engagements with popular culture and the romance novel. Before delineating the key aspects that characterise the third wave feminist linguistic approach adopted in this thesis, then, I first consider the ways in which work on popular culture in second wave, feminism, particularly the romance novel, might prove dissatisfactory.[15]

1.2.1 Literary value, gender and second wave feminist perspectives on romance and its readers

Hollows (2000: 70) points out that in the contemporary climate, it has become a common-sense understanding that genre writing, such as romance fiction, "is a 'formulaic', 'trivial' and 'escapist' form". Many of these assumptions, she contends, "have their roots in the mass culture criticism which emerged in the nineteenth century" (ibid.). In the early nineteenth century, the term culture was used as a term to describe the specific way of life of various peoples, groups, nations or periods. However, by the latter half of the century following Arnold's (1932) *Culture and Anarchy*, the term culture acquired a more restrictive sense in English, connoting a state of intellectual refinement associated with the arts and philosophy. Implicitly, Arnold distinguishes between 'high' culture as "the best that is known and thought in the world" and the 'low' culture of the masses.[16] By the 1940s, Adorno and Horkeimer ([1944] 1979) had coined the phrase the 'culture industry' to refer to the processes of production of 'mass

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[15] Here I am drawing upon feminist theorising across the disciplines of cultural and literary studies; as Mills and Mullany (2011: 11) argue, "[f]eminist linguistics can benefit a great deal by taking an interdisciplinary approach and utilising work that has been published in other areas, including communication studies, media studies and cultural studies".

[16] This binary opposition was sustained in the 1930s, evidenced in the literary criticism of F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis, who both condemn 'mass', commercial culture consumed by the 'uneducated masses', and, in particular, popular fiction is criticized for offering a form of addiction (Hollows, 2000).

culture', which, run for profit, they view as generating standardised and formulaic products. Unlike 'high' culture which stimulates the reader/viewer to autonomous and critical thought, according to Adorno and Horkeimer, 'mass' culture requires only a passive consumer. Furthermore, as Huyssen (cited in Hollows, 2000: 71) points out, in mass culture criticism, there is a "persistent gendering of mass culture as feminine". In short, in critiques of mass culture, 'feminine' attributes such as emotion are used to signify its inferiority.

Many of the assumptions of mass culture criticism, Hollows argues, pervade second wave feminist approaches to romance and their readers (2000: 70). Greer (1970), for example, describes romance fiction as escapism or "dope for dupes" (Jackson, 1995: 50), functioning as a means to brainwash women into subservience. According to Hollows, there are a number of problems with the critiques of romance fiction that came out of second wave feminism (2000: 73). Firstly, romance is treated as a monolithic, unchanging ideology that fails to account for any narrative changes within or between historical periods. Secondly, it is assumed that readers uncritically accept this unchanging ideology. Thirdly, analyses appear to be underpinned by the problematic notion that the ways in which readers respond to romantic fiction can be ascertained from the text alone. Finally, Hollows argues that "[i]n demonstrating their distance from trivial romantic fantasies, they accepted a 'critical double standard' … based on masculine contempt for the feminine" (2000: 74). With developments in cultural studies, feminists began to take the form and appeal of romance seriously.

In her ethnographically based research on a group of romance readers she calls

the Smithton women, Radway (1987) analyses what and the practice of reading romantic fiction means to them.[17] However, Hollows points out that even in this most sympathetic account of romance readers and reading, Radway draws an 'us and 'them' distinction between the enlightened feminist and the romance reader who needs to see the error of their ways, by disparaging the pleasure the Smithton women gain from their reading. This strained relationship between feminism and popular culture has been an important issue for the development of third wave feminism. In the next section I discuss the centrality of popular culture for feminism's third wave, but I begin by discussing the tensions surrounding what exactly third wave feminism is taken to be who is included in it.

1.2.2 Third wave feminism, popular culture and postfeminism

The term third wave feminism is a highly contentious term within feminist scholarship. Considerable debate has arisen over what the third wave is, and who is included in it. Particularly in a North American context, the term has accrued a specifically generational meaning (Heywood and Drake, 2004; Hollows and Moseley, 2006). Wolf (1991: 276), for example, posits the phrase "Feminist Third Wave", to mean women who were in their twenties during the early 1990s, whilst in their *Third Wave Agenda*, Heywood and Drake (1997: 4) address their anthology to a generation whose "birth dates fall between 1963 and 1974". The problems which have arisen from attempts to describe third wave feminism are also manifest in the uneven way in which the term third wave is applied. In particular, the work of Wolf (1991, 1993), Roiphe (1993) and Denfeld (1995) has been identified as representative of third wave feminism,

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[17] Radway also employed a textual analysis along with an examination of the practices of the publishing industry in her study.

and has attracted considerable media attention (Henry, 2004; Heywood, 2006).

Although to varying degrees, Wolf, Roiphe and Denfeld are all overtly critical of second wave feminism. For these authors, second wave feminism has not only become cloistered in the academy, but is also a feminism which is outdated, monolithic and puritanical: a 'victim feminism' which dwells on the victimization of women and therefore holds little relevance for contemporary women, for whom, it is assumed, equality is secured. However, the identification of this work as representative of the third wave has also been hotly contested. The tensions which surround the concept of third wave feminism are further apparent in what have been identified as key manifestations of third wave feminism which take cultural production and the 'everyday' as key sites for identity construction.[18]

Munford (2007) points out that third wave feminists have attempted to re-focalise the concentration on the detrimental effects of popular culture in the second wave by re-examining popular constructions of femininity; as Baumgardner and Richards (2000: 136) put it, this includes a celebration of "the tabooed symbols of women's feminine enculturation – Barbie dolls, makeup, fashion magazines, high heels" as a confident reclamation of forms of femininity and popular culture identified as oppressive by feminism's second wave.[19] However, as Munford (2007: 268) points

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[18] As Hollows and Moseley (2006:13) point out, some forms of third wave feminism have been formed through popular culture. Baumgardner and Richards, for example, argue that third wave feminist activism is exemplified by the emergence in the 1990s of the punk rock movement Riot Grrrls, and zines, or self-produced print and/or electronic magazines, such as *Bust* and *Bitch* (2000: 79). Riot Grrrls, they argue, "pioneered a feminist voice that was both political and distinctly new. These protoradicals, teenagers and women in their early twenties, reclaimed and defanged epithets that kept young women in line, such as "slut" and "fuck no fat chicks" by scrawling these words on their bodies" (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000: 78)

[19] Munford (2007) terms this construction of femininity that is centrally placed in third wave feminism the 'girlie' girl, which Gibson (2004: 139) describes as "happy and confident in her sexuality, with no need for the tiresome ministrations of older,

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out, the engagement of third wave feminism with popular culture has been dismissed by some feminists as privileging a concern with style over a concern with politics. What is at issue here, I would argue, is the possibility for this definition of third wave feminism to become entangled and conflated with the notion of postfeminism promulgated by the media, and indeed this conflation is often made (Gillis and Munford, 2004).

Tasker and Negra (2007: 2-3) argue that postfeminism has emerged as a "dominating discursive system"[20] which has become pervasive through "structures of forceful articulation and synergistic reiteration across media forms", and as Gill (2007a: 255) argues, is constituted by an identifiable systemacity of particular themes, tropes and constructions of gender. These themes, tropes and constructions include: the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a belief in natural sexual difference; a marked sexualisation of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism.[21]

The resurgence of ideas that sexual difference is entirely biologically rooted is a

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meddling feminists". Interestingly for this thesis, Gibson associates the figure of the girl with chick lit.

[20] I return to the concept of discourse in chapter three of this thesis but briefly, the term discursive system refers to a combination of a conceptual system and a set of practices that structures knowledge (Clark, 2007).

[21] A further key aspect of postfeminist discourse Gill identifies is irony and knowingness. Gill argues that irony has, in contemporary postfeminist media culture, become a way of expressing sexist or homophobic statements in an ironized form which in turn allows for the claim that sexism or homophobia was not what was actually meant. Lad's magazines are a site where irony is particularly used; Benwell (2004; 2007) explains that irony operates in the following ways: "[a] good deal of the irony in men's magazines exists only in the form of a disclaimer, a metastatement to the effect that the views espoused within the magazine should not be taken at face value," (2004: 16).

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crucial component of postfeminist discourse and has, Gill argues, become a feature of all contemporary postfeminist media, fed by the emergence of self-help literature. According to Gill the sudden increase in self-help literature sought to address the problem of the 'battle of the sexes' by asserting that men and women are fundamentally different, and the development of an entire industry was lead by the publication of Gray's (1992) *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, wherein it is stated that the 'ways' of men and women are alien to one another and need to be 'translated' for one another. Cameron (2007:2) notes that popular science books such as Baron-Cohen's (2004) *The Essential Difference* and Moir and Moir's (1999) *Why Men Don't Iron* also promulgate what she terms the 'myth of mars and venus'[22] by positing nature as the reason for the chasm between men and women. In this expression of biological essentialism, it is posited that male and female brains are 'hardwired' differently, resulting in a male brain better adapted to solving mathematical problems and undertaking spatial-visual tasks whereas a female brain is better suited to verbal tasks.[23]

The entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas is also an integral feature of postfeminist discourse. McRobbie (2007: 28) argues that postfeminism should be seen as a double entanglement wherein feminist ideas are "at some level transformed into a form of Gramscian common sense, while also fiercely repudiated, indeed almost hated". Tasker and Negra (2007: 2) also draw attention to the contradictory

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[22] Here, Cameron is referring to John Gray's (1992) self-help book.

[23] This reassertion of natural sexual difference is also a key element of the particular construction of masculinity given voice to in lad's magazines: the new lad. Benwell (2007: 539-40) points out that the new lad "marked a return to traditional masculine values of sexism, exclusive male friendship and homophobia. Its key distinction from traditional masculinity was an unrelenting gloss of knowingness and irony: a reflexivity about its own condition which arguably rendered it more immune from criticism. It was also a construct which drew upon working-class culture for its values and forms, ... was little invested in the world of work, preferring to drink, party, holiday and watch football, made barely any reference at all to fatherhood, addressed women only as sexual objects and was ethnically white".

characteristics of postfeminist discourse wherein aspects of feminism are assumed, assimilated and naturalised, but also where feminism is commodified in the form of the woman as an 'empowered consumer'. The articulation or "suture" between feminist and anti-feminist ideas is, Gill (2007: 2070) argues, also knitted together with neoliberalism, and this is achieved entirely through the language of individualism which underpins the notion of choice and the emphasis on self-surveillance in postfeminist discourse.[24]

The postfeminst subject's constant need for self-surveillance is exemplified by the characterisation of the eponymous heroine in what is arguably chick lit's *ur-text*; as Bridget Jones observes with self-deprecating humour:

> [s]ince leaving work I have nearly slipped a disk, wheezing through a step aerobics class, scratched my naked body with a stiff brush; cleaned the flat; filled the fridge, plucked my eyebrows, skimmed ... the *Ultimate Sex Guide*, put the washing in and waxed my own legs ... Ended up kneeling on a towel trying to pull off a wax strip firmly stuck to the back of my calf ... Wise people will say Daniel should like me just as I am, but I am a child of *Cosmopolitan* culture, have been traumatized by supermodels and too many quizzes ... I can't take the pressure. I am going to ... spend the evening eating donuts in a cardigan with egg on it (Fielding, 1996: 59).

As Tasker and Negra (2007) observe, postfeminist discourse is compelling, and the popularity of *Bridget Jones's Diary* is indisputable as by 2001 the novel had sold more than 8 million copies worldwide (Whelehan, 2002: 66). I agree with Tasker and Negra (2007: 21), however, that media scholars in particular have posed questions about the meaning of postfeminist culture in terms of texts being *either* progressive *or* regressive,

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[24] There is a striking degree of correspondence between the supposedly autonomous postfeminist subject and the subject demanded by neoliberalism, since as Gill (2007: 2070) argues, a "choice biography" lies at the heart of both constructions. Rose (1998: 29) argues that with the resurgence of liberalism in the latter part of the twentieth century in Western Europe and North America a particular kind of psychological subject is required. The central concept in Rose's argument is that what he terms the "psy", or psychology, psychiatry and their related disciplines and practices, has, since the latter half of the nineteenth century, played a key role in the construction and discipline of a "regime of the self" (1998: 2). The all-encompassing trajectory of the psy, Rose argues, is that: instilled in the subject is the need to evaluate one's personal experiences and feelings, to engage in a constant and intense scrutiny of oneself (ibid.).

a strategy which, they point out, struggles to reflect the complexity and ambivalence of postfeminist culture. I would argue that the either-or/progressive-regressive understanding of the meanings of postfeminist culture leads to two problematic routes: an uncritical celebration of popular texts or the dismissal of their consumers, approaches that mirror the criticisms of both second and third wave feminist approaches concerned with cultural production. It is in contemporary feminist *linguistics*, I would argue, that a third wave feminist analytical position has emerged which has neither accrued negative generational associations, nor has it been tangled up with discussions of antifeminism, nor has it been conflated with postfeminism, and it is this definition of third wave feminism that I adopt in this thesis.[25] In the next section, I set out the central aspects of a third wave feminist linguistics.

1.2.3 Third wave feminist linguistics

As I briefly noted in section 1.2, Mills (2004) points out that third wave feminist

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[25] That is not to say that the term third wave and the theorisation of third wave feminism has not been criticised in linguistics, although, to my knowledge, to date only one linguistics scholar, Baxter, has taken issue with Mills's (2004) conceptualisation of the contrast between second and third wave feminism in published form; Baxter's (2003 : 5) criticism of Mills is on the following grounds: "It is arguable whether feminist history can or should be characterised in terms of chronological stages. Indeed, there is evidence that feminist writing in different times and places has been imbued with both essentialist *and* constructionist tendencies". Baxter advocates for conceptualising the third wave "not as a stage of historical progression, but as one of several linked but competing theoretical *strands* within feminist history" (ibid., emphasis in original). I would argue, however, that this is exactly what Mills does; third wave feminism is not posited as a purely linear, chronological development in any of Mills's (2002; 2003; 2004; 2008; 2011) discussions, but rather Mills (2004: 1) states of second and third wave feminist linguistics: "I challenge the notion that these forms of analysis are simply chronological so that Third Wave feminism supersedes and supplants Second Wave feminism; rather I argue that Third Wave feminism is best seen as a development from Second Wave feminism which never the less depends on the basic framework of Second Wave feminism for its theoretical integrity".

linguistics has developed due to dissatisfaction with the work that came out of second wave feminism. The central assumption of second wave feminist linguistics that has become problematic is its presupposition that there are differences between men and women. Drawing on this essentialist notion of gender, linguistic work in the second wave takes this binary opposition as a starting point for research, and women and men are treated as two distinct but homogenous groups. Third wave feminist linguistics moves away from the assumption that women are a homogenous group, instead highlighting the way in which women's language differs according to context and according to class, ethnic and regional affiliation, therefore stressing the diversity of women's speech (Mills, 2004). This has a marked impact upon the way in which gender is theorised, allowing for a more nuanced theoretical toolkit for the type of analysis undertaken in this thesis. From Mills's examination of third wave feminism, in this section I set out the characteristics she posits as shared across third wave feminist linguistics that are most important for this thesis under three subheadings: performativity; meaning; and the individual and society.

1.2.3.1 Gender and Performativity

The concern to avoid binary oppositions and making global statements about women's language has led third wave feminist linguistics to focus on what Mills terms "a more punctual analysis ... one which can analyse the way that one's gendered identity can vary from context to context" (2004: 3), with many such analyses drawing on Butler's (1990; 1993; 1997) notion of performativity. Gender, Butler (1993: x) argues, is a repeated performance: "[t]he materiality of sex is constructed through a ritualised repetition of norms". This performance does not mean that one can perform anything one wishes, since, as Butler (1993: x, emphasis in original) argues, "a wilful and

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instrumental subject, one who decides on its gender is clearly not its gender from the start and fails to realise that its existence is already decided *by* gender". Gender as a performative social construct, or the repeated performance of a range of behaviours associated with a particular sex, is therefore, for Butler, a constant process, as it is with pre-existing gender norms that individuals negotiate. Indeed, Butler points out that what she terms a rigid regulatory framework operates:

> [P]ersons are regulated by gender ... this sort of regulation operates as a condition of cultural intelligibility for any person. To veer from the gender norm is to produce the aberrant example that regulatory powers (medical, psychiatric, legal to name a few) may quickly exploit to shore up the rationale for their own continuing regulatory zeal (Butler, 2004: 52).

Within third wave feminist linguistic analyses which draw on performativity, gender can therefore be defined in the following way:

> [g]ender is not part of one's essence, what one is, but an achievement, what one does. Gender is a set of practices through which people construct and claim identities, not simply a system of categorising people. And gender practices are not only about establishing identities but also about managing social relations (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 305).

This move from binary oppositions to a more sophisticated conceptualisation of gender has led to more nuanced concerns with the ways that individuals reaffirm, negotiate with and contest what they hypothesise as appropriate behaviour. The issue of meaning-making in social interaction is the second characteristic of third wave feminist linguistics important for the concerns of this thesis.

1.2.3.2 Meaning

Second wave feminists, Mills argues, were concerned to analyse what was seen as the inherent meanings of words, and often there was a tendency to assume that certain words or ways of speaking were more powerful than others; for example, interruptions were seen as powerful interactional strategies, whereas hesitations were

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viewed as less powerful (Zimmerman and West, [1975] 1983). However, Mills points out that in the wake of scholarly work which problematised making clear associations between function and formal feature (e.g. Toolan, 1996), third wave feminist linguistics "focuses on the way that words are meant to mean in specific ways and function to achieve certain purposes in certain contexts" (2004: 4). For third wave feminist linguistics, meaning is co-constructed as women and men negotiate, contest and affirm particular practices and interpretations in particular contexts (ibid.). This concept of the individual negotiating, confirming and attesting practices and interpretations in local contexts links to the way in which third wave feminist linguistics conceptualises the relation between the individual and society.

1.2.3.3 The relation between the individual and the social

As Mills points out, the concept of the community of practice has been important for third wave feminist linguistic analyses which attempt to consider the way that on a local level individuals decide upon what language and behaviour is appropriate (2004:7). I discuss the concept of the community of practice in depth in chapter three of this thesis, and so I employ here Mills's succinct definition of the characteristics which define a community of practice: "a group of people who are brought together in a joint engagement on a task and who therefore jointly construct a range of values and appropriate behaviours" (ibid.). In attempting to describe the effect of group values on the individual, third wave analyses therefore focus on interaction at the level of the community of practice. In much work which takes the community of practice as its methodological approach, the construction of identities has been a central analytical focus (for example Bucholtz, 1999; Eckert, 2000; Mendoza-Denton, 2008), and

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Bucholtz (1999: 20) makes clear the importance of identities along with her explanation of the concerns of a third wave feminist linguistic analysis:

> that language users' identities are not essential to their natures but are produced through contingent social interactions; that those identities are inflected by ideologies of gender and other social constructs; that speakers, writers and signers respond to these ideologies through practices that sometimes challenge and sometimes reproduce dominant beliefs; and that as new social resources become available, language users enact and produce new identities, themselves temporary and historical, that assign new meanings to gender.

From this dynamic perspective, an individual's identity is made up of a complex number of aspects, and different aspects of identity will be foregrounded at different times; as Holmes (2006: 18-19) puts it, in response to different contextual influences diverse aspects of identity are brought into play, from one's social (for example gender) identity, institutional identity (such as being a manager) and personal identity (such as wishing to appear friendly). It is this understanding of a third wave feminist approach that I adopt in this thesis, however I do not adopt a third wave feminist linguistic approach uncritically.

1.2.4 Problematising third wave feminist linguistic analysis

As Mills (2004) argues, a third wave feminist linguistic analysis is not without its problems, and this thesis is particularly concerned with what I consider to be principal issue Mills identifies: the impact of the values of wider society. The communities of practice model adopted by much third wave analyses is, Mills argues, beneficial for a local focus but makes it:

> extremely difficult to discuss the impact of the values and pressures of the wider society; talking about society above the level of the community of practice is almost impossible, and it is clear that the wider society as a whole needs to be discussed in terms of the impact it has on the practices within the community of practice (2004: 7).

This concern with the failure of the communities of practice model to adequately theorise and analyse the impact of wider societal values and pressures is central to the development of the theoretical and analytical framework which underpins the thesis, for as I discussed in section 1.1.2 of this chapter, one of the criticisms that is also levelled at dialogism is its potential for isolating social interaction from social structure.[26] In this thesis, the aim is therefore to develop theoretical and analytical frameworks that address the inadequate theorisation of the impact of societal norms and values in both dialogism and third wave feminism. Rather than suggesting that feminism and dialogism simply support one another, however, the approach taken in this thesis suggests that a productive engagement between the two theories can be seen in their intersection, by revealing the complex web of meaning-making between multiple voices and points of view, but recognising that power and shared social knowledge are indivisible. The next section sets out the structure of this thesis as it attempts to develop this new form of feminist, linguistically oriented, dialogism[27], in order to proffer a nuanced examination of how chick lit is made meaningful, an approach that is neither dismissive of chick lit and its readers, nor politically toothless.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis has the following structure. Chapter two critically examines the scholarly analyses of chick lit that have been undertaken to date. As briefly noted in section 1.0 of this chapter, in chapter two I argue that largely, existing studies of chick lit myopically focus on the texts themselves and therefore fail to provide a wider

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[26] I return to and explicate the notion of a community of practice model in chapter three of this thesis, where I critically engage with the model.

[27] This form of feminist dialogism is different from the model of feminist dialogics specifically concerned with literary criticism put forward by Bauer and McKinstry (1991) and Pearce (1994).

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account of the production processes and practices in and through which meaning-making is constituted. I also problematise the way in which 'the reader' has been theorised in the literature, pointing out that the notion of the reader is left completely untheorised in some studies. Critically examining the ways in which the reader has been theorised in reader-response theory and reception studies, I draw upon the theorisation of the pragmatic reader put forward by Appleyard (1991). According to Appleyard, a pragmatic reader draws upon, shifts between and combines a number of reading strategies, and it is this theorisation of the reader that is adopted in this thesis.

Chapter three sets out the theoretical framework developed in the thesis. The general principles of Vološinov's dialogism are laid out and critically examined. It is argued that a number of theoretical shortcomings arise from his inadequate theorising of what constitutes social grouping, how socially shared knowledge is structured, and how the relations between the individual and socio-cultural structures are conceptualised. In order to address this inability of Vološinov's theorising to adequately account for the impact of social structure on social interaction (Brandist, 2002; 2004), elements of additional theoretical perspectives are integrated in to the framework. Incorporated into Vološinov's dialogic theory are a combination of theoretical positions that it is argued effectively integrate dialogism's concern with situated interaction with what Linell (2009: 53) terms "situation transcending, sociocultural practices" or "traditions". Belonging to these situation transcending practices, Linell argues, are sociocultural resources for meaning making that include "language, concepts, knowledge about the world, identities and norms ... that govern expectations and efforts for meaning in concrete situations" (2009: 49). In order to theorise these situation transcending practices and their sociocultural resources for meaning making, a combination of practice theory and discourse theory are integrated into Vološinov's work. Bourdieu's

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(1991) notion of habitus sees structure as partially taken-for-granted, as individuals draw upon and negotiate with a set of practices and attitudes that are infused through implicit and explicit socialisation, but this is held in tension with Foucault's (1972) conceptualisation of discourses and discursive structures, since some ways of thinking, talking, and behaving within particular contexts and domains are more authoritative than others. Indeed, since, as Linell (2009: 14) points out, dialogism "stresses the evaluative dimensions of interpretation and understanding", it is important to acknowledge that not all ideas, opinions, ways of talking and ways of behaving are equally valued.

Chapter four sets out the analytical framework developed in the thesis, which applies these theoretical insights in order to explore the complex ways in which chick lit's meanings are constructed, interpreted and negotiated. Vološinov suggests a dialogic methodology for analysing a cultural product such as a novel that corresponds with the dialogic principles of addressivity and interactionism, since he argues that a novel emerges from a relational continuum of practices, as a novel is created for both verbal and printed reaction as well as active perception. It is argued, however, that Vološinov's methodology does not go far enough, and therefore the circuit of culture paradigm developed in cultural studies (du Gay *et al*, 1997) forms the organising methodology for the thesis. Represented as a circular system (see figure 1 overleaf), the circuit of culture model takes into account the influence of each sphere in producing a full and coherent account of the meanings which arise from a popular cultural form, and demonstrates the integrated relationship between producers and consumers. The concern with both production and consumption is demonstrated in the two types of data analysed in this thesis, production data and reception data, and the analytical tools incorporated into the framework developed in this chapter attend to the specific requirements of both spheres.

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Figure 1
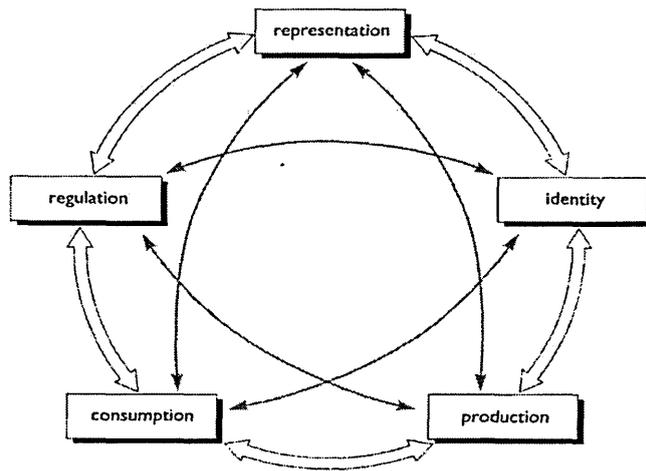
Diagram of the circuit of culture (du Gay et al, 1997:1)

This thesis develops a form of dialogic discourse analysis that analyses both social interaction *and* socio-cultural and socio-economic practices in its focus on the analysis of a cultural form. Taking from dialogic theory the axiomatic principle that all interpretation and understanding is intrinsically evaluative, the tools and concepts gathered together in this model, although diverse, all deal with the ways in which the construction and negotiation of meaning is bound up with evaluation.

A critical political economy perspective provides the analytical trajectory for the production data, examining changes in market structure, patterns of ownership, and channels of distribution in the publishing industry in order to link the making of texts to changes in how what is produced in the cultural industries is valued. This is important since, whether implicitly or explicitly, a frequent criticism levelled at chick lit is its existence as the exemplification of the triumph of the pursuit of profit and the machinations of marketing strategies over substance. Maintaining the dialogic focus upon human sense-making as clustering around meanings and values, the concept of

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stance-taking is drawn upon to examine reception data, by exploring the establishment of speaker positionality through the display of affective, evaluative and epistemic orientation in linguistic production, alongside the appraisal system, which aims to describe how language is used to construct evaluations (Martin and White, 2005). From the dialogic perspective developed in this thesis, however, articulating one's tastes and assessments also involves intersubjectivity; as Martin and White (2005: 62) argue, it is necessary to see evaluating behaviour as sets of "institutionalised feelings" predicated upon community values which include propositions about the value of things such as books. Thus, when examining speakers' and writers' interpretations and evaluations, the analytical framework developed here also draws on the notion of regimes of value, which Bennett, Emmison and Frow (1999: 103-4) define as "an institutionally grounded set of discursive and intertextual determinations that inspire and regulate practices of valuation, connecting people to objects or processes of aesthetic practice by means of normative patterns of value and disvalue". Having established both the theoretical and analytical framework, in chapter five of this thesis I begin the interrogation of the meanings and evaluations that chick lit has accrued, commencing with the examination of production processes and practices.

Chapter five begins with an exploration of the changes that have occurred within the contemporary publishing industry. Indeed, the emergence of chick lit as a category and the consequent proliferation of chick lit novels from the mid to late 1990s onwards places chick lit firmly within a period of flux within publishing, a period within which, as Squires (2007a) argues, a perceived shift has taken place from editorial-led to sales and marketing-led publishing. Through examining the changes in patterns of ownership within the industry and channels of retail distribution, I consider the developments in

the ways in which the social relations between production and consumption have occurred which have impacted upon emergence of and production of chick lit. It is argued that in particular, arising from increased competition, the intensification of marketing activities in the publishing industry has resulted in what Gill (2003: 51) terms "his 'n' hers" publishing, which is encoded in an explicitly sexually differentiated form of address to the reader on chick lit covers.

In chapter six, the analytical focus shifts to reception data and constitutes the first of two chapters that engage with the 'non-professional' reader. This chapter examines one-to-one interviews with chick lit readers. The analysis focuses primarily upon how these readers construct their evaluative stances towards chick lit. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which the assessments of chick lit arrived at by the readers correspond, or fail to correspond, with the themes and issues highlighted by scholars working on chick lit as either important or problematic and which mark these novels out as postfeminist texts, including the genre's relationship to feminism and its thematic concern with romance. Chapter seven analyses the interactions of a book group, The Hapley Road Reading Group, as they discuss a chick lit book, Knight's (2000) *My Life on a Plate*. The analysis here shifts from the two party interaction of an interview to the ways in which the meanings and the value of the novel are co-constructed and negotiated in a group setting. These evaluative stances are examined and the ways in which these locally arrived-at meanings articulate with cultural regimes of value concerned with gender, genre and literary value are explored. However, in this chapter, particular attention is paid to the reader identity co-constructed by the book group members as they express their evaluative stances towards chick lit, an identity that is predicated upon camouflaging taste distinctions along with attending to rapport

management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Chapter eight concludes the thesis by summing up the findings and their implications. In order to substantiate my claim for the necessity of developing a dialogical analysis which can be applied to chick lit, in chapter two which follows I critically examine the scholarly approaches that have been taken to the genre.

Chapter 2

Review of the scholarly approaches to chick lit

2.0 Introduction

As I noted in the introduction to this thesis, chick lit has provoked conflicting responses, from its readers who express affection towards a genre which they claim reflects their experiences, to the disdain of its critics for whom chick lit novels are regressive, anti-feminist, formulaic and ephemeral (Ferris and Young, 2006). In the emerging field of chick lit scholarship, however, critics have sought to move beyond these binary oppositions to undertake a more nuanced and considered approach to the genre (e.g. Gill, 2007; Gill and Herdieckerhoff, 2006; Ferris and Young, 2006; Smith, 2008; Whelehan, 2005). In this chapter, I critically examine these scholarly approaches to chick lit, and the themes and topics that have preoccupied scholars in their analyses of the genre. The chapter has the following structure. Section 2.1 begins the chapter by exploring how scholars have characterised chick lit as connected to but distinct from the women's fiction[28] that has gone before it. In section 2.1.1, I focus upon the ways in which recent scholarship has conceptualised chick lit's thematic and generic relationship to nineteenth century fiction, in the form of the novel of manners, and outlined its relationship to the popular romance and the feminist consciousness raising novels of the twentieth century.

One of the significant ways in which chick lit is differentiated from earlier

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[28] As Montoro (2012) points out, the term *women's fiction* has been employed by critics in two different ways: some critics employ the term to refer to all forms of writing by women, whether these forms are designated as 'high' or 'low', literary or popular, whereas others use the term to refer specifically to literary fiction. I employ the term *women's fiction* in the first sense, to refer to writing by women regardless of generic classification and any value judgement.

women's literary and popular fiction that emerges from chick lit scholarship is the representation of sex in the genre, and section 2.1.2 discusses how this representation has been analysed and commented upon in the literature to date. Continuing with the exploration of what is different about chick lit, section 2.1.3 examines the argument put forward by a number of scholars (Whelehan, 2005; Gill and Gill and Herdieckerhoff, 2006; Gill, 2007) that chick lit's thematic concerns and the construction of its protagonists are underpinned by a troubled relationship with feminism.

It is this uneasy relationship with feminism that Whelehan (2005) argues, results in a pervasive sense of anxiety in chick lit novels, and sections 2.1.4 and 2.1.5 address this contention. In section 2.1.4, I explore how scholars have identified a recurrent trope of anxiety surrounding representations of the body and a preoccupation with consumer culture in chick lit, and in section 2.1.5 I turn to how, in the literature to date, depictions of anxiety surrounding issues of motherhood have been identified with the development of chick lit sub-genres. Throughout this examination of the scholarly literature on chick lit, the central criticism I make is that these largely literary and cultural studies result in content analyses, and as such effectively position the text as the dominant determinant in making chick lit meaningful, disregarding or under-theorising the part the reader plays in the construction of meaning. Indeed, section 2.2 of this chapter considers the ways in which the reader has been under-theorised in the literature on chick lit to date. Section 2.2.1 problematises analyses which are concerned with the text-reader relationship constructed within the novels, and section 2.2.2 critically examines an emerging area of interest within recent scholarship on chick lit focusing on online reader reviews. I set out the model of the reader that informs this thesis in section 2.3, and this chapter concludes with a summary of its findings and the arguments put

forward. I begin, however, by examining the ways in which scholars have traced chick lit's relationship to women's fiction of the past.

2.1 Scholarly approaches to chick lit

Although the consensus of opinion within chick lit scholarship is that Fielding's (1996) novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* inspired the chick lit phenomenon (Chambers, 2004; Craddock, 2004; Dorney, 2004; Ferriss and Young, 2006; Gorton, 2004; Harzewski, 2006; Smyczynska, 2004; Whelehan, 2000, 2002, 2005), Harzewski (2006) and Wells (2006), however, have sought to afford chick lit a lengthier heritage. In the next section, I examine the ways in which these two scholars posit the influences on chick lit from fiction of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and thus how Harzewski and Wells map the genre's position in literary history.

2.1.1 Positioning chick lit in literary history

Harzewski (2006) situates chick lit's heritage within the tradition of the nineteenth century novel of manners, a form which focuses on the set of social conventions of a particular social class, often concentrating on the representation of domestic life, marriage and social behaviour (Abrams, 1999: 192). According to Harzewski, the identification of chick lit's roots can be clearly established by the genre's foundational novel, since Fielding (1996) models *Bridget Jones's Diary* on one of the novels of the quintessential writer of the novel of manners, Jane Austen's (1813) *Pride & Prejudice*. However, what makes chick lit the *new* novel of manners, Harzewski argues, is its synthesis of literary and popular forms. Chick lit, Harzewski contends, adapts and subverts the conventions of both the literary novel of manners and

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popular romance fiction of the twentieth century, such as novels published under the Mills and Boon and Harlequin imprints.

According to Harzewski, this synthesis of forms and modification of narrative conventions can be identified in a number of features found in chick lit. Harzewski points out that the depiction of serial dating in chick lit subverts the primary 'one woman – one man' tenet of popular romance identified by Radway (1989). This subversion of the conventions of popular romance is also apparent in the shift of emphasis from the centrality of the love story in popular romance novels, since in chick lit equal, and on occasion more, attention is afforded to the central female character's quest for self-definition. Chick lit, Harzewski argues, subverts the conventions of both the novel of manners and the popular romance in its displacement of the centrality of the heterosexual male hero, since a number of novels place a gay male best friend in a prominent position in the narrative. An additional reformulation of the conventions of both the novel of manners and the popular romance can be found, Harzewski contends, in chick lit's narrative closure. Unlike the movement towards a resolution of the marriage plot found in the novel of manners, and the 'happy ending' predicated upon romantic fulfilment found in the popular romance, a denouement in the form of an engagement or a marriage is not a prerequisite in chick lit; indeed future marriage is not guaranteed in chick lit.

Wells (2006) also examines the connections between chick lit and earlier women's literary writing. In a similar way to Harzewski, Wells points out elements of chick lit which have their roots in women's writing of the nineteenth century. Wells argues that the chick lit heroine's search for a partner and her growth in self-knowledge have identifiable roots in the novels of earlier women writers. The centrality of the love

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plot is shared across chick lit and all of the novels of Jane Austen, although the nature of the love plot varies since, like Harzewski, Wells notes that hardly any chick lit novels end with a wedding (2006: 50).[29] For Wells, however, the prime distinction between chick lit and the tradition of women's literary writing lies precisely in the designation literary. Chick lit, she asserts, is not literature but fiction, since she contends that chick lit fails to successfully employ what she considers literary language – 'rich' description, metaphor and simile - and fails to provide complex characterisation (2006: 66). Furthermore, Wells argues, chick lit's inferiority to women's literary writing is evident in its failure to present sustained social criticism. In effect, chick lit, Wells opines, does not merit the status of *literature* since:

> all of chick lit's signature elements, from the love plot to shopping, appeal strongly to teenagers' interests, and the genre poses none of literature's demands on attention and intellect. When grown women read chick lit ... they are shrugging off the serious concerns of adult life to escape into fictional worlds in which pleasure and self-indulgence are paramount, and in which they don't have to think too hard (2006: 68).

Because Wells's criticism of chick lit and its readers is predicated upon an 'artful'/'artless' binary and the conceptualisation of a passive consumer, it echoes the problematic assumptions of mass-culture criticism I discussed in chapter one, section 1.2.1 of this thesis. Equally problematic is that Wells's comments resonate with derisory second wave feminist criticisms of popular romance as 'dope for dupes' (Jackson, 1995) based on contempt for the 'feminine' that I also pointed to in chapter one, as Wells trivialises and derides chick lit for its 'feminine' elements. I would argue that re-instating a tired and untenable 'us' and 'them' distinction between the enlightened feminist and the 'ordinary' reader is unhelpful. Furthermore, Wells merely replicates the

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[29] Wells argues that he emotional maturation of the chick lit heroine and the function of humiliation in this process is also rooted in Austen; although rigid standards of feminine morality raise the stakes far higher for the embarrassments and misunderstandings Austen represents her heroines experiencing than for chick lit protagonists, whose humiliation is manipulated for humour rather than moral improvement (2006: 53).

problematic assumption that the ways in which readers respond to fiction can be ascertained from the text alone.

Whereas Harzewski positions chick lit's roots within the tradition of women's literary fiction through the nineteenth century novel of manners, Whelehan (2004, 2005) examines the relationship between chick lit and its popular fiction predecessors of the twentieth century. Specifically, Whelehan (2005) traces the relations between chick lit and two generic forms: the feminist consciousness raising (CR) novels of the 1970s which, linked to the practices of second wave feminism, explored women's psychological and material oppression through narratives that related the lives of women characters in fine detail, and the bestselling sex and shopping novels of the 1980s wherein the plot revolves around the sexual relationships and affluent consumer lifestyle of its protagonists. Underpinning Whelehan's analysis is her assessment of the impact of feminism on popular women's fiction. Whelehan highlights the similarities between chick lit and CR novels, such as Lisa Alther's (1977) *Kinflicks* and Erica Jong's (1974) *Fear of Flying*. Both forms of fiction, Whelehan argues, employ a confessional tone, both use self-deprecating humour, and both chick lit and the CR novel focus upon the quotidian. However, Whelehan contends that this focus on the domestic varies between the two forms of fiction. The CR novel, she argues, portrayed the minutiae of women's domestic lives in order to catalogue the oppressive and unfulfilling association of women with domesticity and motherhood, resulting in a political awareness for the heroine as she overcomes her material constraints. By contrast, chick lit protagonists are myopically focused on negotiating the complexities of emotional bonds (2005: 181). Whilst the heroine of the CR novel is spurred to action upon analysing her oppression, the chick lit heroine, according to Whelehan, often lacks personal direction.

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This representation of characters who fail to achieve their goals and lack self-discipline in chick lit, Whelehan suggests, can also be viewed as a reaction to the 'have it all' 'superwoman' portrayed in the 1980s sex and shopping novel such as Shirley Conran's (1982) *Lace*, in which the central female character is portrayed as glamorous, driven, capable and ambitious, successfully building up her own business empire. Chick lit's construction of self-conscious, inept characters who lack personal direction, Whelehan posits, can be seen as a reaction to the saga of female competence promulgated by the sex and shopping novel. However, chick lit does celebrate its heroines' achievement of 'true love', according to Whelehan, although the treatment of personal relationships in chick lit is very different to that in CR novels. For Whelehan, whereas the CR novel fuses romance with sexual desire, portraying sex as unfulfilling in order to highlight romance as a destroyer of women's sexual pleasure, chick lit heroines appear to experience sexual satisfaction as well as a desire for romantic union with 'the one'. Scholars are, however, divided over the portrayal of sex in chick lit, and in the next section I examine how this representation again characterises chick lit as related to, but distinct from, other forms of women's writing.

2.1.2 Representing sex in chick lit

In contrast to Whelehan, who draws a clear distinction between the portrayal of unsatisfying sex in CR novels and the apparent sexual satisfaction in chick lit, Smyczyska (2004) argues that chick lit heroines often do explicitly, and humorously, express their contempt for men who fail to meet their expectations by, for example, dismissing male characters due to their lack of virility. Craddock (2004) similarly points out that sex is portrayed as unfulfilling in chick lit, but unlike Whelehan, Craddock compares chick lit to the Harlequin popular romance novel rather than CR novels.

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Harlequin romances typically depict an inexperienced heroine who is sexually awakened by an experienced hero and is never critical of his sexual performance. However, sex in Harlequin's chick lit imprint, RDI, is not always portrayed as satisfying for the heroine, suggesting that this generic distinction in the treatment of sex is also apparent to those in the publishing industry. Mabry (2006) similarly highlights the genre's portrayal of its heroines as sexually experienced rather than inexperienced, as she contends that a number of chick lit novels portray the heroine engaging in numerous sexual relationships of varying degrees of pleasure and fulfilment.

In her analysis of Bushnell's *Sex and the City* (1996), another novel along with *Bridget Jones's Diary* considered to be foundational for the chick lit genre (Ferriss & Young, 2006), Kiernan (2006), however, considers the portrayal of the central characters' 'businesslike' treatment of sex as sexual objectification which merely inverts the traditional gendering of sexual roles. Gill and Herdieckerhoff (2006: 494) examine whether the depiction of chick lit protagonists as sexually agentive and experienced radically departs from the ways in which the sexual identities of the heroines of Harlequin/Mills and Boon romance fiction are portrayed. They argue that whilst the sexually experienced chick lit heroine appears to depart radically from the innocent romance heroine, chick lit heroines are frequently "re-virginised", by which they mean that, in their encounter with the hero, heroines often return to an "emotionally virginal state" which, for example, enables them to enjoy sex fully for the first time and therefore to expunge less satisfactory experiences. For Whelehan (2005), Craddock (2004), Mabry (2006), Kiernan (2006), and Gill and Herdieckerhoff (2006), the construction of a sexually experienced subject in chick lit is underpinned by the emergence of a 'postfeminist era' and the proliferation of postfeminist discourses. In the

next section, I examine how chick lit scholarship has positioned the genre's relationship to postfeminism.

2.1.3 Chick lit and postfeminism

Across the literature on chick lit to date, I would argue that generally postfeminism is a notion that is unevenly conceptualised (e.g. Gill & Herieckerhoff, 2006; Gorton, 2004; Guenther, 2006; Mazza, 2006; Whelehan, 2000, 2004, 2005) and conflated with third wave feminism (Benstock, 2006; Guenther, 2006); the term is referred to yet left unexamined and therefore under-theorised (Craddock, 2004; Ferriss and Young, 2006; Harzewski, 2006, Kiernan, 2006; Mabry, 2006), and reference to the concept is omitted whilst at the same time its connotations maintain a shadowy presence (e.g. Hewett, 2006: Van Slooten, 2006; Umminger, 2006; Wells, 2006). Despite these theoretical and analytical inconsistencies and absences, however, in contextualising chick lit, scholars largely, whether implicitly or explicitly, evoke a particular conceptualisation of postfeminism as both historical moment and cultural phenomenon. On this view, as a historical moment, postfeminism occurs after the height of Second Wave Feminism in the 1970s and continues to the present day. As a cultural phenomenon, postfeminism refers to a time in which liberal feminist ideals of individual autonomy and freedom of choice are considered 'common-sense' and that relatedly, feminist campaigns for reproductive rights, equal pay and equal employment opportunities are believed to have been met, rendering feminism passé (Gill, 2007; Mills, 1998). Thus, Harzeski (2006), Mabry (2006) and Wells (2006) all point out that the construction of sexually assertive and experienced protagonists in chick lit occurs in response to the legislative and social changes brought about by feminism. Similarly, Gill and Hierdieckerhoff point out that chick lit protagonists are active heroines, who

are not only sexually assertive but also financially independent, working outside the home, and valuing the freedom to make individual choices (2006: 499).

However, in her analysis of chick lit, Whelehan (2000, 2005) draws upon the conceptualisation of postfeminism as backlash (Faludi, 1991) within which feminism is not only seen as irrelevant but also the cause of women's unhappiness, since freedom of choice is portrayed as a burden. Chick lit, Whelehan (2005) argues, appears to be underpinned by an acceptance of the 'failure' of feminism to renegotiate femininity and to reconcile personal autonomy and the desire for a heterosexual relationship. According to Whelehan, the chick lit heroine:

> is crippled by the burden of choice – most particularly the freedom to remain single - and suffers indefinable lassitude at the prospect of career advancement. She assumes the successes of feminism without feeling the need to acknowledge the source of these freedoms (2005: 176).

Chick lit is, she contends, an anxious genre as feminism "lurks in the background like a guilty conscience" (ibid.). I would argue that the degree of acceptance of feminism's failure in chick lit is a matter of interpretation, and once again, the text is positioned as the primary determiner of chick lit's meanings. Whelehan's analysis leaves unexplored the question of whether chick lit readers view these novels through the lens of feminism's failure. Indeed, the interviews analysed in chapter six of this thesis suggest that for the chick lit readers consulted for this thesis, what feminism means is either unclear or a subject for dispute. Whelehan's description of chick lit as an anxious genre does, however, resonate across the literature on chick lit to date, and in the next section I discuss the ways in which scholars have identified anxiety as a recurrent trope in the genre.

2.1.4 Chick lit and anxiety

The depiction of anxiety in chick lit has been identified and examined by a number of scholars (Gill & Herdieckerhoff, 2006; Umminger, 2006; Van Slooten, 2006; Smith, 2004, 2005). Gill and Herdieckerhoff (2006) point to the anxiety which abounds in chick lit novels in the protagonists' preoccupation with the shape, size and look of the body which is depicted as requiring constant surveillance and work. Umminger (2006) argues that whilst the search for the 'right man' is a central feature of chick lit, yet in a number of chick lit novels, this quest is secondary to the heroine's struggle with herself. Umminger points to chick lit novels which feature 'plus sized' women, and for whom weight loss secures not only the 'right man', but also promotion or a better job.

Van Slooten (2006) highlights the anxiety which underpins the genre's concern with consumer culture, as she examines the portrayal of the fashioning and refashioning of identity in Kinsella's (2001, 2002, 2003) *Shopoholic* trilogy. According to Van Slooten, Kinsella's protagonist Becky assuages her insecurities around personal and professional fulfilment by excessive shopping: through continually purchasing expensive, branded attire, Becky conspicuously demonstrates that she can and does 'have it all'. For Van Slooten, whilst these novels allow readers a 'safe space' to vicariously experience self-fashioning through conspicuous consumption, yet they also reassure the reader that such fantasies are attainable. By contrast, Smith (2004, 2005, 2008) assigns chick lit a more subversive role. Smith examines chick lit's relationship to the "consume and achieve" promise of what she terms women's advice manuals, such as women's magazines and self-help books; but, unlike Van Slooten, Smith argues that chick lit exaggerates its heroines' consumption habits in order to deconstruct the limiting practices endorsed by advice manuals. However, Van Slooten's and Smith's

analyses are problematic in that whether chick lit readers respond to and take up a vicarious reading or a deconstructive, subversive reading is left unexplored. I would argue that the depiction of anxiety surrounding the body and consumer culture resonates with the neo-liberal subject required by postfeminist discourse to engage in constant self-scrutiny, which I discussed in chapter one of this thesis. Anxiety and self-scrutiny, moreover, appear not to have left the genre despite the appearance of sub-generic developments which have resulted in a wider range of concerns and characters.

Whilst chick lit often focuses upon a particular 'kind' of protagonist - young, white single and middle-class - it has expanded its focus to include second-generation Chinese American, Latina, Indian American and African American protagonists. Further sub-divisions shift the focus to women over forty and adolescents, with the middle ground between these two age-ranges focusing on motherhood.[30] Scholars have begun the task of critically exploring these works (Boyd, 2006; Guererro, 2006; Hewitt, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Sellei, 2006) and anxiety would also appear to pervade these newer forms. Hewett (2006) argues that the central conflict in Allison Pearson's (2002) novel *I Don't Know How She Does It* emerges from the protagonist's inner conflict and guilt as she 'juggles' career and motherhood in the attempt to 'have it all'. This fictional representation of anxiety, she argues, mirrors the anxieties surrounding motherhood many (middle class, American) women experience: a set of unattainable criteria for 'good motherhood' traced across a range of cultural forms which, Hewett notes, represent a backlash against many of the changes brought about by feminism.

According to Hewett, Pearson's novel employs similar narrative devices to those

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[30] As Ferriss and Young (2006: 5-6) point out, sub-generic terms have been coined for these developments, respectively, 'ethnic lit', 'hen lit', 'chick lit jnr' and 'mummy lit'.

employed in *Bridget Jones's Diary*: lists, computer messages, and diary entries, but, rather than reflecting the anxieties of single life, Pearson uses such techniques to reveal her protagonist's fragmented, time-starved existence. Furthermore, Hewett contends, the use of self-deprecating humour forges a powerful, "complici[t]", relationship between narrator and reader predicated upon recognition (2006: 128). Many mothers, Hewett asserts, are reading these novels not just for laughter and entertainment, but also for "conversation and community", although, she argues, Pearson's novel does not offer an alternative image of combining work and motherhood (2006: 130). Hewett's exploration of the anxiety surrounding motherhood in chick lit novels raises the issue of the reader, but the conceptualisation of how the reader responds to these novels and what they want from reading them is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, Hewett assumes that readers' responses to the novel can be ascertained from the text. Secondly, Hewett's assertion of the nature of the relationship constructed between text and reader which is predicated upon recognition brings up the troublesome notion of identification. I turn to the notion of the text-reader relationship and set out the reasons why the concept of identification is problematic in the next section, where I examine the ways in which scholarly analyses of chick lit have characterised the chick lit reader.

2.2 Scholarly considerations of the chick lit reader

Although to date no empirical work has been undertaken with chick lit readers in a face-to-face context, and as I have argued throughout this chapter, the majority of the scholarly work on chick lit thus far has been concerned with content analyses of the novels, yet some scholars (Guerrero, 2006; Mabry, 2006; Montoro, 2007; Page, 2007; Scanlon, 2005, 2006; Steiner, 2008; Whelehan, 2005) have taken the reader into account. These scholarly considerations are, however, varied in the extent of their

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treatment of the chick lit reader, and differ in their orientation. In the following section, I consider the ways in which the text-reader relationship has been conceptualised in textually oriented studies, and in section 2.2.2, I examine analyses of readers' interpretations in the medium of computer mediated communication.

2.2.1 Textual constructions of the text-reader relationship

A number of scholars (Guerrero, 2006; Mabry, 2006; Whelehan, 2005) have noted the importance of the first-person narration and the confessional tone employed in the majority of chick lit to create a sense of intimacy and complicity. According to Whelehan (2005: 180 & 210), the confessional tone "draws readers in" so that the relationship between narrator and reader is one of "complicity", and the first person narration "forg[es] the necessary intimacy for the reader to act as confidante". Similarly, Mabry (2006: 195) points out that the first person narration conveys the notion that, although fictional, chick lit novels are "authentic, in-depth accounts of women's experiences". Noting the construction of an informal and intimate relationship between the narrator and reader, Guerrero (2006: 91) argues that the power and appeal of chick lit novels emerges from the "remarkable ability to make the reading experience nearly indistinguishable from a conversation with our best girlfriends".[31] Whilst it is, I suggest, understandable that a first-person narrative will elicit a different response from the

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[31]For Guenther (2006), *Bridget Jones's Diary* employs a new kind of feminist confession that has created a community of readers with a shared sense of frustration and disillusionment with their lives. Bridget Jones's confession, Guenther contends, is of a failed self and such a confession unites a community of readers around a story they recognize as one that they too could have told. This response of recognition, according to Guenther, calls upon the notion in consciousness-raising practices that self-revelation builds community Furthermore, Guenther claims that the novel has created a community of feminist authors formed by the novel's success. Fielding's successors, according to Guenther, continue this brand of new feminist confessional that works to create a shared response rather than judgement.

reader than a third-person narrative, the text-reader relationship posited here is predicated upon the notion of an abstract and generalised reader, and, like Hewett, these scholars implicitly draw on the troublesome notion of reader identification.

Cohen (2001: 245) defines identification as "a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them". The theoretical roots of the concept of identification, Cohen argues, lie in psychological work on child identification (2001: 247). From this perspective, identification is seen as a psychological phenomenon that is part of the child's development process. Identification requires that one imagines being and behaving like someone else, therefore exchanging one's own viewpoint for the viewpoint of another. The ability to identify with others as part of the formation of both group and personal identities has been posited as central to the socialisation of children (Cohen, 2001: 248). Identification, Cohen points out, "is a normal part of development that allows children and adolescents to develop into adults. Children and adolescents identify with both people and characters and try on alternative ideas, images, attitudes, and identities" (2001: 249). It is precisely the notion of this ability to experience vicariously that, Cohen argues, has been attractive for media scholars (2001: 246). However, it is Cohen's contention that the theoretical basis for the study of identification with characters in books, on television and in films that has been posited by media scholars is largely intuitive and fails to make clear the nature of identification (2001: 249). The chick lit text-reader relationship posited by Guerrero, Mabry, Whelehan and Guenther, is, I would suggest, similarly intuitive, and in its suggestion that identification in chick lit functions through feelings about the character based on sympathy and similarity, there is a problematic, albeit implicit, direct mapping between

the knowledge and experiences of the reader and the knowledge and experiences of the character.

Oatley (1999) takes into account the psychological distance the reader may adopt from a novel by distinguishing between a reader's response to fiction based on their feelings about the character and readers who share the perspective of the character, and this distinction is defined as the difference between spectating and identifying. According to Oatley, the reader as spectator is "an unobserved observer in the scenes of the lives of the characters in the story world" (1999: 445). By contrast, the reader identifying with a character or a narrator adopts the character's goals, so that the events of the plot are understood in relation to these goals and therefore the reader experiences the feelings which result from the connections between these goals and the events narrated. In short, the identifying reader experiences the text from a protagonist or narrator's perspective, rather than the spectating reader who, as an observer, develops feelings about and attitudes towards a character. Oatley (1999: 446) points out, however, that these reading positions are not necessarily static, as there is a spectrum that moves from observation to identification along which the reader may move.

As Cohen (2001) points out, Oatley's distinction positions identification as a process rather than as an attitude, as an empathetic response to a range of textual features. In order to provide empirical support for the importance of empathy and the distinction between spectating and identifying, in a long-standing research project Oatley (1994, 1999) asked readers to note when they experienced an emotion whilst reading a novel and, upon finishing reading, to write down their overall response to the story. Resulting from this research, Oatley (1994) first proposed a taxonomy of the emotions that occur during reading fiction, and later (1999) suggested a distinction

between the degree of emotional intensity experienced. I would argue, however, that as a cognitive process any form of identification is difficult to measure, and to treat readers' responses as transparent accounts of their feelings is deeply problematic. Furthermore, whilst Oatley (1999: 446) points out that the division between the reader as spectator and the identifying reader is not static but fluid, the underlying principle echoes the difference between active and passive reading, which brings into play the potential for negative evaluation. Moreover, regardless of the capacity for fluidity on a moving scale, the two reading positions are limited to emotions which cluster around just two experiences, sympathy (observation) or empathy (identification), and as I will go on to discuss in section 2.3, the text-reader relationship is potentially more multi-faceted than this binary classification. I agree in part with the assessment of the appeal of chick lit posited by Guerrero (2006), Mabry (2006), Whelehan (2005) and Guenther (2006) that it is the sense of 'intimate conversation' and confession in the novels that elicits a response of recognition for readers. However, if the assumption is that reader identification is based upon an empathetic response to textual features, then it is necessary to address the question of precisely *how* this sense of intimacy and shared experience is constructed through the language of the text.

Whilst generally within the literature on chick lit scholars have produced content analyses with little or no linguistic analysis, more recently Page (2007) and Montoro (2007) have focused on addressing the language in chick lit novels. Page employs a feminist narratological approach to *Bridget Jones's Diary*, drawing on Hoey's (2001) argument that there are forms of narrative schemata, or predictable patternings, in text organisation which emphasise how a narrative should progress within particular cultures. According to Page, the issue of narrative progression and closure in *Bridget Jones's Diary* is particularly important. Analyses of closure that are based on narrative

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content, Page contends, have little to bring to light about the feminist controversy surrounding the novel as either progressive or regressive, since the ending of *Bridget Jones's Diary* is ambiguous. In a seemingly conservative manner, romantic resolution is implied in the novel's final pages but then the permanence of the romantic union is put into doubt in the final three lines of the text, which would suggest a challenge to the ideology of romantic closure.[32] Yet, Page notes, a lack of narrative closure does not indicate that the text is progressive, or even feminist, in orientation (2007: 98). Examining narrative schemata, Page argues, enables the analyst to come to a more nuanced conclusion about the novel's textual sequencing and narrative closure. Page identifies two particular narrative schemata in the textual organisation of the novel: the goal-achievement pattern and the romance desire-arousal pattern. The goal-achievement pattern, Page argues, can be identified throughout *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and although each goal varies, the goal-achievement pattern takes the same schematic progression of stating a goal, recording the means by which the goal is to be achieved and evaluating the degree of success (2007: 99). What Page identifies as significant, however, is the ways in which this goal-achievement pattern alludes to the self-help genre, with numerous and plentiful references in the novel to self-help texts (2007: 100).

Whilst the outcome of self-help literature suggests individual empowerment, Page contends that the goal-achievement pattern in *Bridget Jones's Diary* includes negative evaluations as Bridget's goals are continuously undercut, rendered incomplete or unsuccessful. The goal-achievement pattern, however, is itself undercut and displaced by the second pattern Page identifies, the desire-arousal pattern which is often

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[32] These last lines of *Bridget Jones's Diary* are the following: "[b]oyfriends 2 (but only one for six days so far) ... [a]n *excellent* year's progress" (Fielding, 1996: 310, emphasis in original).

associated with romance fiction. Within this patterning, despite initially expressing sexual desire, Bridget positions herself as the object of attraction, and so, Page argues, the novel reinforces traditional romance narrative roles, equating masculinity with agency and desire and femininity with passivity (2007:102). The juxtaposition of negative evaluations in the goal-achievement pattern with the emphasis placed on the desire-arousal pattern thus undermines the empowerment of the self-help genre, since although Bridget at first seems agentive, her 'solution' for the fulfilment of her goals is romance (2007: 103). I would argue, however, that Page ultimately locates meaning in the words on the page. It is not clear from her study whether the narrative schemata she identifies and the importance of their challenge to the self-help genre is recognised by or important for chick lit readers. That is not to suggest that close analysis such as that undertaken by Page is not important, as concepts such as narrative schemata give us an important insight into textual cues, but they cannot explain how real readers interpret the text.

Whilst Page's analysis is a narratological one, Montoro (2007) undertakes a stylistic analysis of chick lit that draws on a socio-cognitive analytical framework. Social cognition focuses on people's perception of the social world, and it is "people's perception of other people" that Montoro is concerned with (2007: 70).[33] Montoro draws on the concept of social schemas, which bring together clusters of information about the social world, and Culpeper's (2001) groupings of social categories which, in the formation of social schemas, individuals draw upon when perceiving other people. These broad social categories are grouped into three domains: personal categories include knowledge of people's preferences, habits and goals; social role categories

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[33] Here, it would perhaps have been useful for Montoro to have acknowledged that in fact she is concerned with people's perceptions of *characters*.

include knowledge about social roles such as occupational, familial and relational roles; and group membership categories include knowledge about social groups such as sex, class, age and so on (Montoro, 2007: 71). According to Montoro (2007: 71), the success of chick lit rests on its "attempt at a quasi-faithful representation of certain female values and beliefs drawn from our social world so that their readership can recognise, sympathize and maybe even empathize with those values". Thus, it is the group membership category that is drawn upon for text processing, Montoro claims, reminding readers of real people they know. However, Montoro contends that identifying the group membership category alone is insufficient, as social schema cannot fully account for the ways in which character impression is achieved.

In order to explain the links that can prevail in readers' mechanisms for text processing, Montoro argues that attitude schema, or the evaluative beliefs associated with a particular social schema, are a necessary inclusion. Specifically, Montoro suggests that it is the 'feminism schema', or knowledge of women's rights and equality for women, that is relevant for the fictional representation of women in chick lit. However, the feminism schema is employed as a source of comedy in chick lit and not as a platform for a discussion of women's rights, Montoro argues, as feminist issues are presented in a mocking manner (2007: 74-6). I would argue, however, that Montoro's socio-cognitive approach theorises the reader at an abstract level. Schemas belong to people and not to texts, and Montoro's analysis does not attempt to examine readers' interpretations; rather, it is an *abstracted* reader's interaction with the genre that Montoro is describing.[34] Indeed, whilst Montoro makes the generalised claim that a 'feminism schema' is important for the textual processing of chick lit novels in terms of

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[34] As I go on to discuss in the next section, Montoro's (2012) later work explicitly engages with chick lit readers.

the comedic treatment of female characters, for the chick lit readers interviewed in chapter six of this thesis, the very concept of feminism is either problematically or vaguely perceived. In the next section, I examine analyses that do engage specifically with chick lit readers and their interpretations of the novels.

2.2.2 Chick lit reader reviews

Within the field of chick lit scholarship, there is what appears to be an emerging focus on the analysis of reader interpretations in reviews of chick lit books from online sources, particularly Amazon's website (Scanlon, 2005, 2006: Steiner, 2008). Scanlon's (2005: 6-7) comments about the methodology she employs in her own project offer insights into potentially why, to date, readers' views on chick lit have been selected from computer mediated communication (CMC), rather than face-to-face interaction; Scanlon writes:

> [t]he original intention was to employ oral history methodology, inviting women readers to talk about these books and their roles in the women's reading and lived lives ... An invitation posted in bookstores, cafes and stores, and included in a locally independently-owned bookstore newsletter, however, yielded an insufficient number of participants.

As I note in chapter six, this seeming reticence for chick lit readers to engage with discussions of their views on chick lit was experienced during the research for this thesis, and although the face-to-face interviews undertaken here are with only two chick lit readers[35], securing permission for the recording and transcription of but two interviews was, although successful, difficult to negotiate. Given this difficulty with access to face-to-face engagements with chick lit readers, Scanlon abandoned the quest

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[35] Although there are only two face-to-face interviews with chick lit readers, this thesis also analyses the face-to-face interactions of a further five readers as they discuss a chick lit book, all of whom are members of a reading group.

for an oral history project and adopted a web-based approach.

Scanlon (2005) identified readers who had either awarded Sophie Kinsella's *Shopaholic* novels the highest, four or five star, ranking on either the Amazon (U.S) or the Barnes and Noble (U.S) websites in an online review, or who had expressed their admiration for the *Shopaholic* series on one of five fan websites. Scanlon then invited them to follow a link to a questionnaire. The invitation was clearly successful, as she received some 100 responses with ten days. Scanlon reports that the majority of respondents were single, under thirty years of age and had no children, with over eighty-five percent being under thirty five (2005: 7). One quarter of the respondents lived outside the United States of America, and most read every day, reading between three and eight books a month (ibid.). The reading preferences of the respondents varied, but over a third stated that their preference was for chick lit (2005: 7). The majority of respondents considered humour to be the most appealing aspects of the books (ibid.). Problematising the focus on the romance plot that is prevalent in chick lit scholarship, few of the readers in Scanlon's survey found the protagonist's romantic relationship significant; instead, Scanlon claims that most respondents identified with the protagonist's love of shopping (2005: 8). Whilst Scanlon's survey offers interesting insights into reader's views, the analysis is a little vague as references to 'few', 'many', 'most, or 'the majority' lack precision, and occasional one word or, at most, one sentence quotations from the respondents leaves the full analytical potential of her data unexamined. Furthermore, in initially identifying reader reviews on websites, Scanlon fails to take into account, and address, the particular effects the medium might have on what is written, and treats the reviewer's responses unproblematically as transparent reports and not situated accounts (Benwell, 2005).

In her paper published the following year, Scanlon (2006) addresses some of the issues that I have identified with her earlier analysis. Firstly, Scanlon acknowledges that the reader responses do have other purposes than solely recording a view of the text under question; online reader reviews, Scanlon argues, are used to claim an authorial and authoritative voice and also to claim inclusion in a gendered community of writers and readers (2006: 239). Secondly, Scanlon highlights the limitations that the context of the review facility imposes, as she writes:

> we must remember that amazon.com provides this community space as part of a public marketplace. Writers largely respond to the unspoken rules of the market that allows their presence – often by voicing a pep-rally message about the books ... and encouraging others not simply to read but to purchase the books (ibid.).

Thirdly, this later paper reproduces some sections of the reviews and offers more analysis of them; for example, Scanlon notes that the most striking feature of the reviews is their confessional nature, and reproduces two short reviews after which she states:

> the confessional narrative validates both the positive experiences the readers have with the books and the more problematic excesses that they live out in their own lives ... [i]nterestingly, however, most reviewers engage in the confessional narrative but fall short of revealing the dark side of shopping excesses (2006: 244).

It is, then, clear that Scanlon has provided some evidence to support the more abstract claims about the appeal of the confessional tone of chick lit made by chick lit scholars such as Guerrero (2006), Mabry (2006) and Whelehan (2005).

In contrast to Scanlon, Steiner's (2008) focus is not on chick lit *per se*, but rather her study aims to examine whether the reader's review facility on Amazon's website, which she describes as "private criticism in the public sphere" does, in fact, offer a democratization of the reading and evaluation of literature by displacing the primacy of

the professional literary critic (2008: 1). Steiner makes clear that, as it is located within the public sphere, the medium of the internet does indeed impact upon the form of website reviews. Drawing upon Katz and Rice's (2002) argument that a widening social freedom to express one's feelings more intensely results from the anonymity of the media, Steiner argues that a characteristic of private criticism in the public sphere is heightened emotion, expressed both positively and negatively. Websites such as Amazon, Steiner argues, potentially allow people to express their opinions on books more strongly (2008: 5). Steiner's study analyses 83 reviews of Melissa Bank's (2005) novel *The Wonder Spot* on Amazon's website in Canada from 2005 up to March 2008. In response to the frequent critique of private criticism as being concerned with experience rather than the text, Steiner points out that the reviews in her sample do indeed share a common feature of discussing personal feelings and experiences of a novel. Yet, the reviewers are critical, she points out, despite their positive reviews. Extrapolating from the *Wonder Spot* reviews, Steiner examines reviews of books generally defined as chick lit, finding that the criticisms made by readers are often not about the book. Rather, the reader-reviewers in Steiner's study are critical of the professional critic, whose negative views of chick lit are positioned as elitist, or the critic herself is positioned as ignorant of the genre.

In the most recent scholarly monograph on chick lit, Montoro (2012) analyses both reader comments posted on online book club forums, and the reader responses received through an electronic questionnaire distributed to online book-clubs, academic distribution lists, and university lecturers and students not affiliated with the scholar's institution.[36] Montoro undertakes a two-fold analysis of readers' evaluative and

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[36] Montoro states that the number of returned questionnaires was much lower than she expected, with the total respondents numbering thirteen, but there is no discussion of the

emotional responses to chick lit. To the questionnaire data and to a sample of the posts from online book club forums, Montoro applies a qualitative, stylistic analysis that examines the emotional responses to chick lit that the readers' surveyed attest to experiencing. To the bulk of the online book club reader comments, however, Montoro applies a quantitative, corpus stylistic approach. Montoro argues that her analysis shows that firstly, the readers in her study have a particularly affective involvement with chick lit novels that they expect to culminate in a happy ending, and secondly, the quality of chick lit novels is viewed in terms of entertainment value.

Despite the important analytical shift in trajectory towards analysis of the reader Scanlon's, Steiner's and Montoro's studies make, the reliance on web based sources is problematic. It is, I would argue, worth returning to the points made by Steiner (2008) and Scanlon (2006) discussed above. As Cherny (1999: 152) points out, CMC lacks the visual and paralinguistic cues which are a key element of face-to-face communication, crucially co-presence and visibility, and therefore as Steiner (2008) suggests, in the anonymity of the virtual world, readers posting their reviews online may feel less constrained and subject to censure when expressing their views. Montoro (2012) claims that it is this very freedom to express oneself that makes the reader comments from

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division of these respondents according to questionnaire distribution source. I would suggest that the choice of sources to which the questionnaire was distributed is weighted towards what could be termed the 'professional' reader. Two of the three sources to which Montoro emailed the questionnaire are academic distribution lists and university lecturers, and I would argue that given the very topic that they are being asked to comment upon, it is distinctly possible that those readers who chose to respond have some familiarity with formal literary criticism. Montoro points out that although many of the readers responded confidently and affirmatively to her question which asked whether literary style affects or alters one's emotions when reading a novel, their responses show a lack of the use of specialist linguistic description, thus demonstrating their role as non-specialists. However, I would suggest that this is a questionable argument; as Montoro herself acknowledges, questionnaires and surveys make clear demands on respondents' time, and this may well deter a respondent from entering into a detailed, academic, analysis.

online book clubs unprompted, and therefore makes such data less susceptible to either the potential bias of a researcher's questions or the impact of the researcher's very presence on what is said. I would suggest, however, that Montoro's claim for the spontaneity of her data does not take into account the possibility that online communities also operate within unwritten rules and norms of interaction. Indeed, Scanlon (2006) points out that many of the online chick lit reviews she studied were constrained by the unwritten rules of a marketplace facility, in the implicit requirement to encourage purchases of the novel under review. Whilst I would argue that analysis of CMC and online communities is a fruitful and necessary endeavour, yet a focus on asynchronous CMC alone leaves unexplored and unexamined how readers construct and co-construct not only their interpretations of a book, but also how they construct their identities as readers, whilst managing social interaction in a face-to-face environment.

Throughout this examination of the scholarly literature on chick lit, the main criticism I have levelled at the analyses is that the reader is either under- or problematically theorised. In the final section of this chapter, then, I set out the model of the reader that is drawn upon in this thesis. First, however, I briefly examine the ways in which the reader has been theorised in literary and cultural studies in order to make clear why a modified form of the developmental model of the reader proposed by Appleyard (1991) is adopted here.

2.3 Theorising the reader

A concern with theorising the relationship between texts, their reception and meaning-making spans a number of disciplines including literary studies, cultural

studies and media studies. Reception studies which investigate the interpretive relationship between an audience and a particular medium have examined responses to television (Morley, 1980; Ang, 1989) and film (Mulvey, 1975). According to Mailloux (1989: 5), however, theories concerned specifically with literary reception have fallen into one of two camps, which he terms "textual realism" and "readerly idealism". The 'textual realism' approach privileges the text in the interaction between the reader and the text, and argues that texts are meaningful independently of reader interpretation. From this perspective, Beardsley (1970: 37), for example, argues that "the literary text, in the final analysis, is the determiner of its meaning", as conventions embedded in the text determine interpretation, and readers recognise these textual conventions to come to a valid interpretation. The reader's role is therefore passive, entailing being merely acted upon by the words on the page. By contrast, 'readerly idealism' privileges the reader rather than the text as the primary determiner of meaning and thus conceptualises the reader as active rather than passive. From this perspective, Fish (1976: 171) argues for the analysis of communal interpretive strategies amongst "interpretive communities" wherein a set of interpretive assumptions is in force. In other words, according to Fish, if two readers arrive at the same interpretation of a text, this is because they share the same interpretive strategies determined by the community to which they belong.

Iser (1978), however, highlights the constraints that act upon a reader's interpretation of a text. For Iser, a text is a response-stimulating structure organised by specific narrative strategies and techniques, but these conventions are only meaning potentials which require actualisation by a reader in their dynamic involvement with the text. Culler (1981) also stresses the location of interpretive conventions in the reader rather than the text and emphasises the limits on reading conventions, as he argues that readers make texts meaningful in a specific way. According to Culler, the structure of a

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text is created and developed by the competent reader by employing the appropriate reading conventions, and thus the reader becomes a name for the place where the event of reading occurs. However, as Mills (1994: 12) argues, none of these positions "seem … adequate to describe the complex process of reading". In both 'textual realism' and 'readerly' idealism, the reader is nothing more than a shadowy entity, a hypothesised construct, as either a label for the abstract agent passively acted upon by the text, or an idealised, competent, reader actively controlling the meaning of the text though the application of appropriate interpretive strategies.

Assuming that readers interpret a text in a similar way fails to account for differences in reading. As Mills (1994: 4) points out, even the style and speed of reading can vary, not only between individuals but also within the kind of reading taken up by a particular individual at any one particular time, since a text can either be read in a 'slack' way by skimming and skipping pages or it may be read using the techniques of 'close reading'. Furthermore, there is little sense of the interpretive process as complex negotiation (Mills, 1994: 12), particularly in the seemingly static conceptualisation of consensual, legitimised reading conventions that readers learn and then apply. From a dialogic perspective, individuals are socio-historically and culturally embedded, and thus talk and action are both permeated by sociocultural influences, but they are not entirely at the mercy of social and discursive forces as they are also agents of their own biographies and their own experiences (Linell, 2009: 112). It is therefore a more complex and multifaceted model of reading that this thesis adopts.

Appleyard (1991) puts forward a developmental model of reading comprised of the five roles a reader takes over the course of a lifetime. This schematic model, Appleyard argues, "enables us to hold together all the different kinds of data that are

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potentially relevant to a description of how a reader's sensibility changes across the lifespan", which includes:

> the evolving psychodynamics of our inner lives, the changing social roles available to us as we mature, the values we absorb from our families and communities, the kinds of books we read, the kinds of readers our educational institutions encourage us to be ... and the judgements and moral commitments by which we shape our lives as we mature (1991: 14).

The five reader roles Appleyard proposes are a cluster of responses, attitudes and intentions that readers bring to and make use of during the process of reading and which shift and differ as readers mature. The first role Appleyard assigns to individuals is that of 'reader as player' (1991: 14). According to Appleyard, in the pre-school years a child listens to, rather than reads, stories, and becomes a confident player in a fantasy world, increasingly self-assured in managing and exploring the boundaries of the fictional world.[37] The second role is that of 'reader as hero and heroine', in which school age children imagine themselves as the central character in a story of the conflict between good and evil (1991: 14). In the third role, "the reader as thinker", adolescent readers look to stories to discover what information about life and the world they can gain, observing and evaluating self and others by reflecting upon the implications of a story (ibid.). The fourth role, 'the reader as interpreter', supplants the focus on stories, as college and university students are taught to see stories as texts, as structures composed of various textual strategies that are bound up with their conditions of production (1991: 14).

It is the final role Appleyard describes, 'the pragmatic reader', that this thesis is particularly concerned with. The pragmatic reader is the role of the adult reader, and

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[37] This first role, which encompasses listening to stories and imaginative play, Appleyard argues, illustrates one of the crucial elements in the development of a reader through from earliest childhood to adulthood: " the social construction of experience and its playful expression" (1991: 56).

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there are two important points to be made about this particular role. According to Appleyard, the pragmatic reader may read in several ways which may mimic, but not entirely replicate, the characteristics of each of the previous roles. Adult reading combines all of the ways of reading that an adult has experienced and makes them available for recycling and re-shaping as part of a complex range of responses to what is read (1991: 164). Furthermore, the adult, pragmatic reader makes conscious choices about what motives for and uses they make of reading, and is particularly aware that their reading is voluntary; as Appleyard puts it, adult readers "choose reading over other activities that claim their time ... [t]hey choose the kind of books they want to read ... and the kinds of responses they want to have" (ibid.). Of particular interest for the reader interviews undertaken for this thesis is Appleyard's contention that adult readers "distinguish between escape reading and books that are demanding or challenging", with the former associated with Harlequin romances and bestsellers (1991: 165).

For Appleyard, it is not the feeling of being lost or absorbed in a book that adult readers refer to by frequently stating that they read to escape. Rather, it is what adult readers wish to escape *from* that is the more important point. Reading for escape, Appleyard argues, may be underpinned by the desire to escape from the day-to-day problems of adult life, but may also constitute a desire to escape from the kind of fiction that, with its complex narrative strategies, multiple or ironic perspectives and lack of narrative closure "makes the problems it deals with seem as intractable as those of readers' own lives" (1991: 165). Indeed, Appleyard's insights here find resonances in the interview data in chapter six of this thesis, as one particular chick lit reader expresses her dislike of books with dense descriptive passages and complex plot lines; but it is in Appleyard's treatment of the reader of romance fiction that I find it necessary to jettison his description of the cognitive abilities associated with this final

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developmental stage. Appleyard argues that the satisfaction gained from romance novels appears to be suited to the adolescent reader, and therefore the adult reader of romance may well, he writes, be "stuck" in their reading development; these readers, he contends, "cannot handle narrative forms more complex than romance" (1991: 170). Readers who have a preference for romance fiction, Appleyard proposes:

> simply do not, without the intervention of some kind of developmental stimulus, progress beyond the level of romance ... in their habitual reading, either because they cannot imagine a more adequate view of the world or their education has not led them further or their psychological development does not dispose them to demand more complex kinds of satisfaction from reading (1991: 171).

These strikingly derogatory comments which position the romance reader as passive and undemanding are pervaded by the gendered assumptions of mass-culture criticism I discussed in chapter one section 1.2.1 of this thesis. Indeed Appleyard makes explicit this link with his repeated use of the noun "addiction" to describe serial romance reading (1991: 168-171). Appleyard's claims are untenable and easily challenged, and seem to contradict the sense of resourcefulness he attributes to the pragmatic reader in their ability to consciously manipulate the ways of reading experienced previously. I would suggest, however, that his concept of the pragmatic reader is still useful, as it allows for the theorisation of an adult reader whose engagement with a work of fiction, regardless of its genre, can be multifaceted and shifting, making available, for example, movement between: being more or less immersed in the fictional world of the text to more or less distanced from it; from performing a 'slack' reading to close reading; and from adopting an imaginative perspective to a critical perspective. What needs to be accounted for more explicitly, however, are the cultural regimes of value that inform acts of interpretation.[38]

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[38] I have discussed the concept of regimes of value briefly in chapter 1 of this thesis, in which I draw upon Bennett, Emmison and Frow's (1999: 260) explanation that the term designates "those normative organisations of the proper which specify what counts as a good object of desire or pleasure; a proper mode of access or entry to it; and an

Despite his seeming lack of awareness of his own problematic assumptions, Appleyard points out that there are a number of constraints within his model. Firstly, Appleyard acknowledges that the five roles cannot account for the unique experience of an individual reader of a particular book at a particular time, and nor can they take into account personal histories, experiences and preferences (1991: 15).[39] Furthermore, Appleyard points out, these five roles cannot fully account for the impact of variables such as gender, race and class on how the experience of readers is mediated (ibid.). Indeed, the developmental five stage reader role model, Appleyard claims, *requires* an interaction between the individual, culture and society (1991: 15-16). I would suggest, however, that the five stage model of reading relies too heavily on developmental theories and lacks a foundational theory of the interaction between and interdependence of language, culture and society. Its claims for the pragmatic reader, who is negotiating sociocultural resources and personal experiences and preferences whilst reading, need explicit theorisation, and I suggest that with its focus on the interactions and interrelations between self, other and society, dialogism offers a more adequate foundation for Appleyard's model.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has critically reviewed the scholarly literature on chick lit, identifying the elements of the genre's construction and its themes and concerns that have preoccupied scholars, and examining the approaches across the disciplinary

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appropriate range of valuations". In chapter four, section 4.8 of this thesis I provide a more in-depth discussion of the concept.
[39] Such a schematic model of reader development, Appleyard also contends, cannot and should not claim universality, since it depends on a particular kind of education readers receive in a particular type of society, and the cultural values that are inscribed in that education (1991: 15).

boundaries of stylistics, literary and cultural studies theses scholars have taken to their analyses. Beginning with the ways in which chick lit's position in literary history has been mapped, this chapter has explored the ways in which critics have engaged with what have been seen as the genre's progressive and conservative components: from the representation of sex in the genre, to the anxiety that pervades the novels surrounding the size and shape of the body and the resultant necessity of constant self-surveillance, to concerns about achieving personal and professional fulfilment, and to worries about managing the demands of both career and motherhood.

The central criticism made, however, is that across much of the literature on chick lit to date, the text is positioned as the central determiner of meaning, with the role of the reader being either omitted from the analyses or under-theorised. A number of the scholarly analyses of chick lit have problematically assumed that a chick lit reader's response can be ascertained from the text alone, and the text-reader relationship proposed is predicated upon an abstract and generalised reader whose central engagement with these novels relies upon feelings of sympathy, similarity and identification with the characters therein. Therefore, this chapter has set out the model of the reader that this thesis adopts, wherein the adult, pragmatic reader can draw upon, manipulate and move between a number of responses, attitudes and strategies, including the ability to shift between more or less involvement in the fictional world of the novel, and the adoption of a more or less critical perspective on the text. This model of the reader, moreover, recognises the impact of the interaction between the individual, society and upon the formation of interpretative acts, although how this interaction comes about lacks explicit theorisation. With its stress on the interrelations between self, other and society, dialogism offers such a theory of human sense-making, and the

next chapter engages with the theoretical concept of dialogism in depth, as it sets out the

theoretical framework that underpins this thesis.

Chapter 3

Theoretical framework of the thesis: Dialogism

3.0 Introduction

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework that is developed in this thesis, and that gives substance to its concern with the construction and negotiation of meaning. As I indicated in chapters one and two, in order to address the tendency in chick lit scholarship to locate the genre's meanings within the pages of the books themselves, the aims of this thesis are to examine how the meanings of this particular cultural form are constructed, interpreted and negotiated in the spheres of both production and reception; to examine how the value of chick lit is invoked and evaluated by both individuals and groups in both public and private domains, and to explore the ways in which societal norms, beliefs and values impact upon these constructions and appraisals. In order to conceptualise meaning-making in the complex and multifaceted way required by these aims, this thesis adopts dialogism as an interactional and contextual theory for human sense-making that sees meaning as semiotically mediated, dynamic, emergent, and firmly embedded in social life. In particular, the conceptualisation of language and communication put forward by Vološinov ([1927] 1976; [1929] 1986) is placed at the centre of the approach to dialogism adopted.

The theoretical framework developed here, however, also draws upon a number of insights and concepts from linguistics, feminism and social theory [40]; a diagram of

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[40] What is meant here by the term social theory is "the body of knowledge about the nature of social action and the various contexts in which it takes place" (Ransome, 2010: 1)

the composition of these theoretical elements is presented in figure 2 below.

Figure 2

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                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │     Dialogism       │
                        │    (Volosinov)      │
                        └─────────────────────┘
                           ↙               ↘
            ┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
            │ Socially situated│ ←──→ │  Socio-cultural  │
            │   interaction    │      │    practices     │
            └──────────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
                    ↓              ↙      ↓      ↘
  ┌───────────┐ ┌───────────┐ ┌───────────┐ ┌───────────────┐
  │  Making   │ │ Ordering  │ │Structuring│ │Co-constructing│
  │  Social   │ │  Social   │ │  Social   │ │ shared norms  │
  │ Knowledge │ │ Knowledge │ │ Knowledge │ │  and values   │
  │ Relevant  │ │           │ │           │ │               │
  └───────────┘ └───────────┘ └───────────┘ └───────────────┘
        ↕             ↕             ↕              ↕
  ┌───────────┐ ┌───────────┐ ┌───────────┐ ┌───────────────┐
  │ Relevance │ │ Discourse │ │ Practice  │ │ Communities   │
  │  theory   │ │  Theory   │ │ Theory:   │ │ of Practice   │
  │(Schutz and│ │(Foucault) │ │ Habitus   │ │  (Wenger)     │
  │ Luckman)  │ │           │ │(Bourdieu) │ │               │
  └───────────┘ └───────────┘ └───────────┘ └───────────────┘
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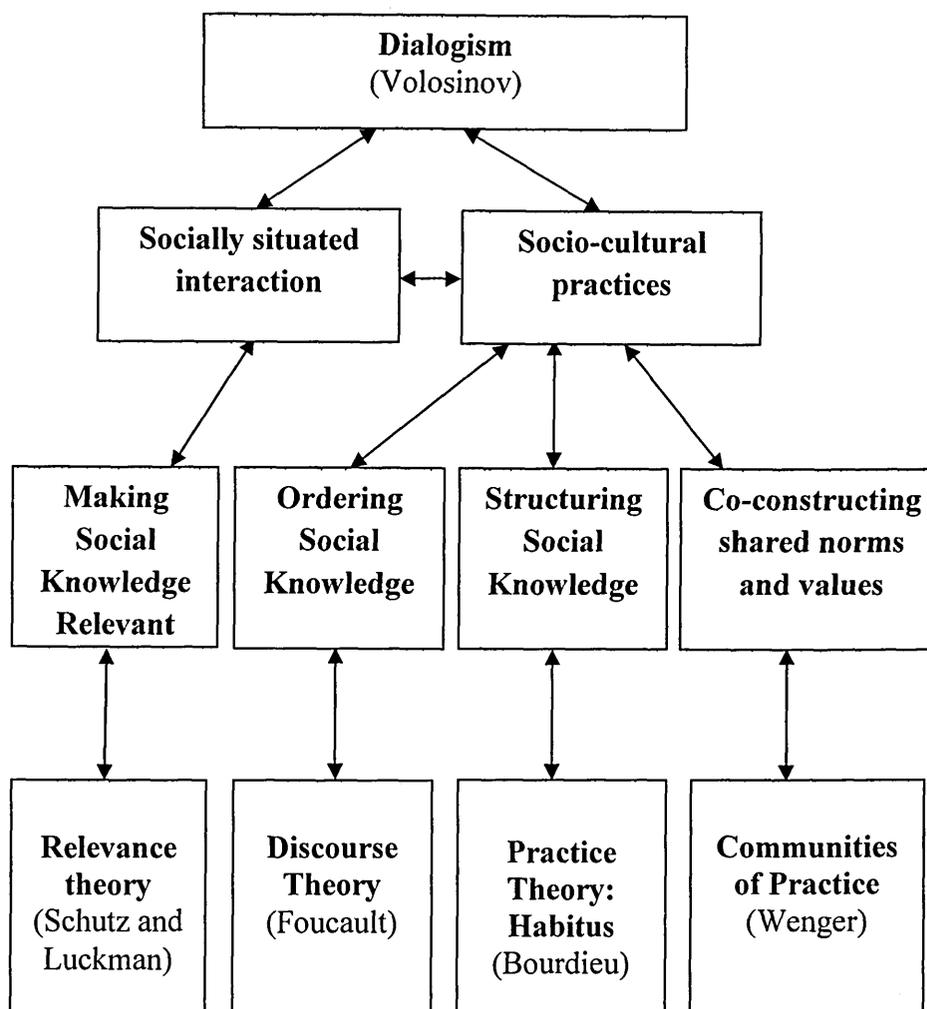
Diagram of the composition of the theoretical elements in the framework

As I argued in chapter one, section 1.1.2 of this thesis, one of the major criticisms of

Vološinov's work that has been consistently articulated is its separation of social

interaction from socio-cultural and socio-economic structures, which arises from a

restricted focus upon situated interaction (Brandist, 2002, 2004a, 2004b). Thus, given

this thesis's aim to take into account how social norms and values impact upon the

construction and negotiation of chick lit's meanings, the inclusion of the insights and

concepts drawn from each additional theoretical element are intended to address the

theoretical shortcomings of Vološinov's dialogism, by integrating a dual focus on

situated interaction and sociocultural practices

This chapter has a two-part structure in order to accommodate this critical
engagement with Vološinov's work. The first part of the chapter, section 3.2, focuses
specifically upon Vološinov's dialogism. Sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 set out the three
foundational theoretical principles of his work that underpin the approach to dialogism
developed here: semiotic mediation, other-orientation and addressivity, identifying a set
of related theoretical shortcomings in his conceptualisation of social grouping and what
constitutes shared, and socially shared, knowledge. The second part of the chapter,
section 3.3, incorporates insights and concepts from additional theoretical perspectives
in order to addresses the theoretical shortcomings in Vološinov's work identified in the
first part of the chapter. Section 3.3.1 draws upon Linell's (2009) more recent
development of a dialogic conceptualisation of other-orientation which extends the
notion of other-orientation more clearly from the individual to the social. Section 3.3.2
turns to a socially oriented form of relevance theory (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973) to
address Vološinov's problematic assumptions about what constitutes shared knowledge
in his account of utterance comprehension. Section 3.3.3 addresses Vološinov's
restricted conceptualisation of social grouping in his focus on class affiliation, and his
failure to adequately theorise the constitution and ordering of socially shared knowledge
that arises through this myopic focus upon class. This section draws initially on the
development in more recent dialogic theory of the notion of double dialogicity, a
concept that sees human sense-making as made up of local, situated interactional
accomplishments which are also part of sociocultural practices. These practices involve
the use of sociocultural resources for meaning-making, which include language,
concepts, knowledge about the world, identities, and norms that regulate both
expectations and meaning-making acts in concrete situations.

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In order to theorise these sociocultural resources for meaning making, section 3.3.4 draws on the concept of discursive structures in discourse theory (Foucault, 1972; 1980) to theorise how social knowledge is sociohistorically ordered, and section 3.3.5 draws upon practice theory (Bourdieu, 1991) to conceptualise how particular aspects of social knowledge concerned with appropriate behaviour and beliefs become stable and durable through implicit and explicit socialisation. Section 3.3.4 retains this concern with double dialogicality, but, in this chapter's final modification of Vološinov's dialogism, the notion of the community of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998) is drawn upon to posit a more complex conceptualisation of the ways in which individuals construct their own communities, within which they co-construct the social norms and values deemed appropriate. This chapter begins, however, by firmly establishing the origins of the dialogic approach that forms the foundation for the theoretical framework developed in this thesis. In response to Linell's (2009) point that dialogism is a loosely related set of ideas rather than a coherent 'school', this chapter starts with section 3.1 within which a clear distinction is made between Vološinov and M.M. Bakhtin, two scholars whose work has often been conflated.

3.1 Making the distinction between Bakhtin andVološinov

According to Brandist (2002: 4), the work of the Bakhtin Circle[41] has generated great interest for Western scholars, however, the Circle's work has also generated

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[41] I have briefly referred to what is meant by the term Bakhtin Circle in chapter one (n7) of this thesis, but to reiterate, the Bakhtin Circle refers to a group of Russian scholars who met regularly to discuss philosophical and aesthetic issues. According to Brandist (2002: 5-6), the group's members included "at various times ... Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975), Mariia Veniaminovna Iudina (1899–1970), Matvei Isaevich Kagan (1889–1937), Ivan Ivanovich Kanaev (1893–1984), Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev (1891–1938), Lev Vasilievich Pumpianskii (1891–1940), Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinskii (1902–1944), Konstantin Konstantinovich Vaginov (1899–1934) and

dispute and division surrounding the authorship of the works published under the names of Vološinov and Medvedev, with the texts bearing their names often ascribed to Bakhtin. Bakhurst (1999: 216) points to the potential initial source for the authorship debate, as he notes that "at the commemoration of Bakhtin's seventy fifth birthday in 1970, the Soviet linguist Vyacheslav Ivanov declared that Bakhtin was the author of the major works published under Vološinov's's name". As Brandist (2002: 8) points out, since the 1970s, a large body of scholarly literature has emerged to debate the authorship issue.[42] Clark and Holquist (1984: 162), for example, make their position on the authorship debate clear as they posit Bakhtin as the sole author: " [t]he many resemblances between the "Vološinov's" texts and other indubitably by Bakhtin prove, minimally, that Vološinov's was a disciple of Bakhtin ... and maximally, that Bakhtin wrote all the works in question". Brandist (2002), however, has established that the practice of attributing the works of Medvedev and Vološinov to Bakhtin is deeply problematic. Firstly, Bakhtin and Vološinov are clearly different individuals; as Brandist (2002: 6) shows, whilst Bakhtin died in 1975, at the age of 80, Vološinov's life trajectory was much different, as he contracted tuberculosis in 1934 and died in a sanitorium two years later (Brandist, 2002: 9). [43] The second way in which the differences

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Valentin Nikolaevich Voloshinov (1895–1936)" (ibid.). The circle began meeting in 1918, but the group meetings stopped in 1929 following the arrest of some of the group members.

[42] Brandist is not, however, complimentary about this body of work, as describes it as "voluminous, ideologically motivated, often bad-tempered and largely futile" (2002: 8).

[43] Further differences in the biographies of the two men are apparent, Vološinov enrolled as a postgraduate at the Institute for the Comparative History of the Literatures and Languages of the West and East (ILIaZV) in 1925, whereas Bakhtin did not graduate from university but instead appears to have 'appropriated' parts of his older brother's biography (Brandist, 2002: 7-8). Scholarly investigations since the fall of the Soviet Union and the ensuing opening up of Russian archives has shed light on Bakhtin's hitherto sketchy biography, and on his 'creative borrowings'. Bakhtin himself had, in fact, provided false accounts of his university career (Hirschkop, 2001:3-4). Moreover, Brandist argues, the works of Voloshinov and Medvedev are distinct from those of Bakhtin in terms of the theories that are drawn upon within them, as unlike Bakhtin, examination of the footnotes in Vološinov's and Medvedev's work shows the influence

between Bakhtin and the work of both Vološinov and Medvedev can be seen, Brandist

explains, is in the scholarly practices employed in Bakhtin's work:

> [a]part from the very different tone and language of the works published in the
> names of Vološinov's and Medvedev, one is immediately struck by the quality
> and quantity of footnote references found there. Together, these factors signal a
> very different authorial practice (Brandist, 2002: 53).

I do, however, follow Brandist (2002: 53) in acknowledging that although Vološinov

and Medvedev are responsible for the texts which bear their names, these works were

produced during mutually-influential meetings of the members of the Circle. Indeed, as

Renfrew (2006: xi) points out, compelling evidence for both the influential nature of the

Circle and the unmistakable authorship of Vološinov and Medvedev is found in a 1961

letter from Bakhtin to Vadim Kozhinov, in which Bakhtin writes:

> [t]he Formal Method and Marxism and the Philosophy of Language are very
> well known to me. Voloshinov and Medvedev are my late friends; during the
> period when these books were written, we worked in the closest creative contact.
> Moreover, at the basis of these books and my own work on Dostoevsky there is
> a common conception of language ... It must be said however, that this common
> conception and our working contact do not detract from the independence and
> originality of each of these books.

A final, important disciplinary distinction, however, must also be drawn here between

Bakhtin and Vološinov, which is central to the linguistic orientation of this thesis, for as

Prior (2009: 278) points out, Bakhtin's theorising "was grounded in literary issues,

rather than the linguistic, semiotic, psychological, and sociological perspectives that

Vološinov... engaged". Having firmly established the authorship of the work I place as

foundational for dialogic theory, in the following sections of this chapter I set out the

dialogic approach developed in this thesis by drawing upon, critically evaluating and

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of the philosopher of languages Anton Marty and Karl Bühler, as well as the influence
of Gestalt theory (2002: 55). Moreover, Brandist argues, given that as a postgraduate
Voloshinov was advised by the linguist and specialist on dialogue Lev Iakubinskii,
Brandist argues, " [i]t is therefore not surprising that the most significant work on the
philosophy of language published in the period 1926–30 was composed by Voloshinov"
(2002:9).

modifying the model of dialogism put forward by Vološinov ([1927] 1976, [1929] 1986). I begin by examining how Vološinov develops his view of language by critiquing what he sees as two main trends in linguistics.

3.2 Vološinov's dialogism: critiquing the monologic model of language

Linell (2009: 35) argues that dialogism must be understood in contrast to something else, and the theory dialogism counters is termed monologism. According to Linell, monologism is an ontology, spanning Western philosophy and including linguistics, that is closely linked to individualism (2009: 44). In monologism, human beings are portrayed as autonomous, rational individuals, but this monologic ontology is split between subjectivism and objectivism. Linell summarises how monologism accounts for this subjective-objective split by conceiving of meaning-making as:

> resulting from one of two sources. As far as language and language use are concerned ... when we ask for what can be or is actually meant by verbal utterances, there are two authorities we can turn to: the individual speakers and the language system ... these are the sovereign 'monological' meaning-determiners (2009: 35).

Indeed, it is the split between subjectivism and objectivism in monologic linguistic models of language that Vološinov draws attention to, and it is the inadequacies of both paradigms that he highlights in what he perceives to be the two major trends in Western linguistics.

In his *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language,* Vološinov ([1929] 1986: 48) challenges what he terms the "abstract objectivism" represented by Ferdinand de Saussure and the "individualistic subjectivism" represented by Humboldt. Vološinov criticises abstract objectivism for its conceptualisation of language as a fixed, arbitrary, system of grammatical, phonetic and lexical forms, and the consequent division of

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language into two categories, whereby *langue* (language system) is privileged over *parole* (speech/utterance). Vološinov argues that 'abstract objectivism', renders insignificant the context of language use and the actual speakers: "it is exactly this [language] system ... that becomes the essence of language; individual creative refraction and variation of linguistic forms are ... only the mercurial and extraneous overtones of the basic, fixed tone of linguistic forms" ([1929] 1986: 57). In displacing individual acts of speaking and specific situations and contexts, 'abstract objectivism', Vološinov contends, cannot account for language change, divorcing language from its historical and social settings. By contrast, Vološinov writes, individualistic subjectivism conceives of language as the "individual creative act of speech", which is located in the individual psyche: "[t]he laws of language creativity – and language is, it assumes, a continuous process, an unceasing activity – are the laws of individual psychology" ([1929] 1986: 50). However, Vološinov's criticises individualistic subjectivism for its "purely aesthetic conception of language" which, he argues, relies upon subjective categories such as linguistic taste ([1929] 1986: 50-1). For Vološinov, both schools of thought are flawed. Abstract objectivism, Vološinov argues, "leads us away from the living, dynamic reality of language and its social functions", and individualistic subjectivism's definition of language as the utterance, which is an individual phenomenon, fails to acknowledge that, Vološinov contends, " [*t]he utterance is a social phenomenon*" ([1929] 1986: 82, emphasis in original). This view of language as a social phenomenon with its roots in social relations rather than a phenomenon of individual cognition is important for this thesis, in that it begins to suggest that meaning is not fixed; since individuals differ in their experience of social relations, meaning differs accordingly. This view of the dynamic, social nature of language is elaborated upon the first of the axiomatic principles that underpin Vološinov's dialogism and the dialogic view of language contained therein: semiotic mediation.

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3.2.1 The foundations of Vološinov's dialogism: semiotic mediation

Vološinov begins the process of bringing together the individual and the social in the concept of the ideological sign; as Gardiner (1992: 85) points out, for language to be conceived of as social practice, "the abstract system of *langue* had to be ... transformed from a purely mechanical signal-system to a 'changeable and adaptable sign'". According to Vološinov, whilst:

> a physical body equals itself, so to speak; it does not signify anything but wholly coincides with its particular, given nature ... [h]owever, any physical body may be perceived as an image; for instance the image of natural inertia and necessity embodied in that particular thing. Any such artistic-symbolic image to which a particular physical object gives rise is already an ideological product. The physical object is converted into a sign. Without ceasing to be a part of material reality, such an object, to some degree, reflects and refracts another reality ([1929] 1986: 9).

He uses the example of bread and wine to demonstrate what Holborrow (2006: 11) explains as his understanding of the "inherent dualism in signs", the location of the sign in the material world and its conceptual, interpretative, potential. According to Vološinov, bread and wine can on the one hand "coincide with its particular given nature", as items of food, but on the other hand can become religious symbols (ibid.). Renfrew (2006: 38) suggests that Vološinov's insistence on the inherent duality of the sign:

> must not be confused with the later canonized separation of signifier and signified, which form a whole 'sign', which in turn relates to a referent that is external to it: this model specifically preserves only the materiality of the referent, with which it is least concerned, and results in the disconjunction of the sign from the 'material reality' it represents or refracts (or, in fact, doesn't).

Vološinov's model, Renfrew points out, does not make such a separation (ibid.). Indeed, Vološinov expresses the inherent duality of the sign thus:

> [e]very ideological sign is not only a reflection, a shadow, of reality but it is also itself a material segment of that very reality. Every phenomenon functioning as an ideological sign has some kind of material embodiment, whether in sound,

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physical mass, color, movements of the body, or the like ... [a] sign is a phenomenon of the external world ([1929] 1986: 11).

In defining, then, an ideological sign as that which "possesses meaning: it represents, depicts or stands for something lying outside itself", Vološinov notes that a sign may thus:

> distort that reality or be true to it, or may perceive it from a special point of view, and so forth. Every sign is subject to the criteria of ideological evaluation (i.e., whether it is true, false, correct, fair, good, etc.). The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. Whenever a sign is present, ideology is present too. *Everything ideological possesses semiotic value* (1986: 10, emphasis in original).

Within the domain of signs, or "the ideological sphere", Vološinov argues, conceptual/interpretative differences exist; since the ideological sphere is "the domain of the artistic image, the religious symbol, the scientific formula, and the judicial ruling, etc.", then, "[e]ach field of ideological creativity has its own kind of orientation toward reality and each refracts reality in its own way" (1986: 10). For Vološinov, "[t]he word is the ideological phenomenon par excellence ... the entire reality of the word is wholly absorbed in its function of being a sign" (1986: 14). Here, Vološinov is beginning to map the complex relationship between ideas and society, language and ideology, but, as Gardiner (1992) points out, Vološinov's use of the word ideology differs from the way in which Marx ([1846] 1976) employs the term.

For Marx ([1846] 1987), ideology refers to cognitive distortion, a false consciousness which results from the obfuscation of the real conditions of the social terrain, in order to legitimise class domination. However, Vološinov's use of the term ideology, according to Gardiner, refers to the semiotic and linguistic processes "whereby meaning or 'value' is conferred on the natural or social worlds" and is therefore more generalised (1992: 13). Although Vološinov does not explicitly put

forward his own definition of the term ideology, Gardiner sees a distinct difference

between Marx's and Vološinov's understanding of the concept. As Gardiner (1998: 65)

points out, in a Marxist conceptualisation, ideology is an epistemological category in

that it is a form of cognitive error, or in short false consciousness. Theorising ideology

as cognitive distortion locates ideology within the individual rather than social process,

and such an epistemological categorisation presupposes a form of non-ideological

knowledge. By contrast, Vološinov's's use of the term suggests ideology as an

ontological category, and an irreducibly social phenomenon.

In his earlier *Freudianism: a Marxist Critique* (1927), Vološinov makes clear

his dissatisfaction with conceptualisations of ideology as located within the individual:

> [t]he abstract biological personality, the biological individuum, which has
> become the alpha and omega of contemporary ideology, does not exist at all.
> There is no person outside society and, therefore, outside objective socio-
> economic conditions ([1927] 1976: 15). [44]

It is in his *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* that Vološinov sets out his

conceptualisation of the constitution of the individual consciousness. According to

Vološinov, the understanding and the conferment of meaning is not a result of an inner

effect - of the individual consciousness, but "a response to a sign with signs" ([1929]

1986: 11). This response to a sign by "moving from sign to sign and then to a new sign,

is perfectly consistent and continuous: from one link of a semiotic nature (hence, also of

a material nature) we proceed uninterruptedly to another link of exactly the same

nature" ([1929] 1986: 11). This chain, Vološinov argues, is unbreakable: "nowhere does

the chain plunge into inner being, nonmaterial in nature and unembodied in signs"

(ibid.). Furthermore, for Vološinov, understanding occurs in social interaction:"[s]igns

can arise only on *interindividual* territory ... [i]t is essential that the ... individuals are

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[44] I return to this quotation later, given the issue of class raised by Vološinov therein.

organized socially, that they comprise a group ... only then can the medium of signs take shape between them" ([1929] 1986: 12).

For Vološinov, there can be no ontological separation between the Marxist concepts of base and superstructure: ideology has to be embedded in semiotic material.[45] Indeed, Vološinov conceives of the consciousness as "tak[ing] shape and being in the material of signs created by an organised group in the process of its social intercourse"; without signs as carriers of meaning, there would be nothing left to consciousness, and consciousness arises not as the spontaneous manifestation of some individual spirit, but through signs which emerge in the process of interaction between individuals who are socially organised ([1929] 1986: 12). Vološinov contends that the word is not only the ideological sign *par excellance* but also the primary medium of consciousness: the word is "the semiotic material of inner life" ([1929] 1986: 14). For Vološinov, then, language plays a crucial role in society as the medium of both inner and outer expression, that is, the making of meaning. However, Vološinov challenges an individual-society binary opposition; in his work, the categories individual and society are not conceptualised as mutually exclusive (Holquist, 1994: 51). There is, then, a distinction between a Marxist conceptualisation of ideology and the way in which Vološinov uses the term.

Vološinov's approach to ideology is also distinctive in his subdivision of ideology into two types. In order to highlight what Rampton (2006: 225) terms "the fluidity of the movement between what might [be] loosely called 'activity' and

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[45] Marx ([1846] 1987) used the metaphor of base and superstructure to characterise the relationship between society's relations of production: upon the economic base is built the superstructure of politics, law, and ideology.

'ideology'", Vološinov makes a distinction between behavioural and established ideology. Whereas established ideologies are "systems of social ethics, science, art and religions", behavioural ideology, Vološinov contends, "is that atmosphere of unsystemized and unfixed inner and outer speech which endows our every instance of behaviour and action and our every "conscious" state with meaning" (1986: 91). A further subdivision is also necessary, but this time within the category of behavioural ideology: "[w]e must distinguish several different strata in behavioural ideology. These strata are defined by the social scale on which experience and expression are measured, or by the social forces with respect to which they must directly orient themselves"([1929]1986: 92). These two strata are of a lower and upper order:

> [t]he lowest, most fluid, and quickly changing stratum of behavioural ideology consists of [...] those vague and undeveloped experiences, thoughts, and idle, accidental words that flash across our minds [...] [n]eedless to say, it would be a practical impossibility to descry in any one such accidental experience or expression its socioeconomic premises ([1929]1986: 92).

The upper strata, Vološinov contends, are "the ones directly linked with ideological systems", they are:

> more vital, more serious and bear a creative character. Compared to an established ideology, they are a great deal more mobile and sensitive: they convey changes in the socioeconomic basis more quickly and more vividly. Here precisely is where those creative energies build up through whose agency partial or radical restructuring of ideological systems comes about. Newly emerging social forces find ideological expression and take shape first in these upper strata of behavioural ideology before they can succeed in dominating the arena of some organized, official ideology. Of course, in the process of this struggle, in the process of their gradual infiltration into ideological organizations (the press, literature, and science), these new currents in behavioural ideology, no matter how revolutionary they may be, undergo the influence of the established ideological systems and, to some extent, incorporate forms, ideological practices, and approaches already in stock ([1929]1986: 92).

Vološinov's dialogism proposes, then, that knowledge is partially socially shared, and is contextualised; as Linell (2009: 241) puts it, knowledge about the world is "socially generated, socially sustained, socially negotiated, transformed, confirmed and censored". Markova (2007: 17) summarises the dialogic perspective thus, it:

entails that words and symbols do not function as parts of normative mechanisms in which information signs have a-priori specified and strictly codified semantic contents. Nevertheless, history and culture make demands on dialogical forms of thinking and communicating and constrain them in specific ways.

That dialogism sees meaning as an emergent phenomenon that occurs at the interface between individuals and their environments is particularly important for this thesis's rejection of the tendency in chick lit scholarship to locate chick lit's meanings as fixed on the pages of the novels themselves. The complexity of the social nature of language is further captured in Vološinov's theorisation of its other-orientation and addressivity, the second and third core principles of dialogism.

3.2.2 The foundations of Vološinov's dialogism: other-orientation and addressivity

For Vološinov, given that signs only arise and are understood in the interaction of socially organised individuals, language, the word, is "*oriented towards an addressee*" ([1929] 1986: 86, emphasis in original). A word, according to Vološinov, is:

> determined equally by *whose* word it is and for *whom* it is meant ... [e]ach and every word expresses the "one" in relation to the "other." I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong. A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another (ibid., emphasis in original).

Vološinov conceives of this equal determination thus: the addressee could be of the same social group as the speaker/addresser or not, of higher or lower social status, or a person with whom the speaker/addresser has close ties (for example, mother, sister, daughter) whilst the addresser/speaker "presuppose[s] a certain typical and stabilized *social purview* toward which the ideological creativity of [their] own social group and time is oriented" ([1929] 1986: 85). The individual in Vološinov's's theorisation is clearly not a Cartesian subject, as the individual belongs to a concrete socio-cultural,

historical milieu that is socially organised; in other words, from a dialogic perspective, the individual is socioculturally embedded. In Vološinov's's theorisation, construction, which, as Linell (2005: 41) notes, refers to the idea that "the human subject 'constructs' or 'interacts with' the environment as part of his or her cognitive activities and in accumulating knowledge of the world", is achieved not solely by individuals *qua* the individual, but by individuals as members of groups and communities. However, it is at this point that Vološinov's work needs some modification, since, I would argue, Vološinov's conceptualisation of 'others' and 'communities' and the concept of shared, and socially shared, knowledge implied by the term *social purview* becomes vague and requires further theorisation. The second part of this chapter thus sets out the theoretical modifications to Vološinov's dialogism necessary to address these theoretical shortcomings.

3.3 Modifying Vološinov's dialogism: others, groups, communities, values and social knowledge

This part of the chapter sets out the modifications to Vološinov's dialogism that it is argued are necessary to attend to his theoretically inadequate conceptualisations of what constitutes social grouping and shared, social, knowledge. However, the first of the modifications to Vološinov's dialogism to be elaborated relates to his conceptualisation of other orientation.

3.3.1 Modifying Vološinov's dialogism: other-orientation

As Linell (2009: 99) points out, the concept of the other is more complex than

just the mutual co-presence of at least two individuals in real time, in a real place. Linell proposes the addition of the notion of third parties as a more complex account of other-orientation. A third party, according to Linell, "might be either a specific third, a particular individual or community of individuals, or it might be an abstract (generalized) third" and thus the distinction becomes one between what he terms "concrete" third parties and "abstract" third parties (2009: 100). Concrete third parties are physically present in the interactional situation, and may well contribute verbally to the communicative activity. For Linell, this type of third party that may be oriented to by speakers, even indirectly, is represented by mediators, interpreters, adjudicators and chair persons. I would suggest that one could productively add here Bell's (1984) categories in his audience design, by which Bell means the speech style a speaker adopts in order to accommodate their addressee. Bell's model of audience design distinguishes four categories of audience type that speakers might orient to in their speech style, and distinguishes these audience categories according to three criteria: whether the addressee is *known* to be part of the interactional situation, *ratified*, or their presence is acknowledged, and addressed, or spoken with directly. Addressees have the most impact upon how an individual talks because these are the individuals one talks directly with, in Bell's terms this audience category is known, ratified and addressed; auditors are known and ratified but not directly addressed; overhearers are known, but not ratified and addressed; and eavesdroppers are non-ratified listeners of whom the speaker is unaware. Linell goes further, however, in that he brings into play the category of absent third parties.

According to Linell, concrete but absent third parties to which a speaker may indirectly orient include what he refers to as a "remote audience" which results in a "split audience design" (2009: 101). The example Linell gives for the concrete but

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absent third party that results in such a split audience design is that of televised talk shows. These types of broadcast, Linell argues, give rise to a situation where attention needs to be paid to what the interlocutors say, or might say, who are physically co-present in the studio, to the overhearing audience also present in the studio, as well as to the absent television audience. Linell also proposes a second category of concrete but absent third parties that generalises to a much wider range of situations: "I say things to you here-and-now, and at the same time directly to all those with whom you might talk in the future, and these thirds will talk with others with yet other thirds in mind, in principle infinitely" (2009: 101). Whilst I do not disagree with Linell's suggestion here, I would suggest that this description of possible speaker orientation implies the potential for a constantly attentive, vigilant and self-monitoring speaker. I would argue that it is important to bear in mind that numerous factors such as feeling distracted from concentrating solely or fully upon the interaction occurring can potentially impact upon speaking and interpreting, and thus keeping in mind such distant, although Linell argues concrete, additional others might not always occur. Linell's notion of abstract third parties is, I would argue, more theoretically convincing and of particular interest to the concern with the impact of societal beliefs and values upon the ways in which the meanings of chick lit are constructed and negotiated.

Abstract third parties include what Linell terms virtual (imagined) participants and generalised voices (2009: 102-3). Virtual participants are individuals or groups who are not present in the interactional situation, but they are talked about whether through quotation or allusion. Linell sub-categorises virtual participants into actual individuals, partly constructed collectivities and constructed collectives. Actual individuals, or groups, are named by interlocutors, whilst partly constructed collectives (e.g. 'the media', 'the politicians', and constructed collectives (e.g. 'the people') are not named

but alluded to in some other way (2009: 102). However, Linell points out that these latter two categories, partly constructed collectives and constructed collectives, may also be considered as generalised voices. The category of generalised voices is the most abstract of the third party categories, and Linell argues that chief among this category are professions and institutions which:

> may show up as perspectives or identities (voices) ... [s]ome generalized thirds may be partly or wholly constructed collectives ... includ[ing] sectors of society, such as science (or "scientists"), the media, the church, the legal system, the banking system, the market, and the state bureaucracy (2009:103).

These voices, Linell argues, are anonymous and/or disguised, and although they are integrated into communicative acts, "parties to communication do not explicitly mention or thematize them" (ibid.). These notions of perspectivity and voice are crucial to dialogism. Prior (2001) points out that the notion of voice as social rather than individual is a familiar one, but unlike Linell he suggests that abstract third parties can indeed be explicitly referred to; Prior writes:

> we do have an everyday notion of collective voices. The notion of collective voice is expressed in common expressions, both directly (e.g., the voice of the people, of a generation, of reason) and indirectly (e.g., "the people called for ..." or "Science tells us ...") (2001: 60).

Regardless of its direct or indirect expression, as Linell points out, in this more abstract sense voice can be conceived of as a "perspective on a topical domain" (2009: 116). In this conceptualisation, however, a single individual may appropriate or express several different voices, as there is, Linell points out, no one-to-one correspondence between voice and person (2009: 117). As Marková (2007: 61) puts it, dialogism recognises "the heterogeneity of the speaker": one perspective may be voiced by many and a single speaker can speak from different perspectives and evoke different voices in any one and the same interaction. A dialogic perspective is thus particularly important for this thesis as yet again meaning-making and meaning-attribution is a dynamic phenomenon that cannot be fixed and determined.

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Ideas, opinions and perspectives on topical domains are Vološinov points out, socially generated through interaction, and, he argues, "any word used in actual speech possesses not only theme and meaning in the referential, or content, sense of these words, but value judgement ... there is no such thing as a word without evaluative accent" ([1929] 1986: 103). For Vološinov, then, each act of speaking involves making some kind of judgement, reflecting some kind of evaluative framework, and signalling one's own perspective in relation to it. This process of accentuation is not only dependent upon the context within which the utterance is enunciated, but ultimately dependent on shared values, beliefs and perspectives; as Vološinov writes:

> [r]eferential meaning is moulded by evaluation; it is evaluation, after all, which determines that a particular referential meaning may enter the purview of speakers - both the immediate purview and the broader social purview of the particular social group ([1929] 1986: 105).

Whilst Vološinov argues that speakers "presuppose a certain typical and stabilized *social purview* toward which the ideological creativity of [their] own social group and time is oriented", since sense-making is linked to evaluation, dialogism can encompass alterity as well as the similarity and commonality assumed in the intersubjectivity of other-orientedness ([1929] 1986: 85). As Linell (2009: 85) points out, alterity implies that the other often holds a perspective different to one's own, providing opportunities for the individual to reflect upon points-of-view unfamiliar to one's own, thereby countering the possibility of solipsism in the notion of the perspectivity of experience. This link between sense-making and evaluation is particularly important for this thesis since one of its major aims is concerned with how chick lit is evaluated. However, whilst, following Gardiner (1999), I have thus far implied that social purview connotes values, beliefs and assumptions, in Vološinov's work the term is left undefined and therefore insufficiently explained, and thus requires clarification and modification.

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Shukman (1983: 155) defines purview as "[t]he field of vision of any one person or social group. The notion includes beliefs and assumptions as well as what is physically visible". Clearly there are two issues within the notion of social purview: the individual and the group. In terms of the individual, a clearer example of Vološinov's thinking is provided in his essay 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry' ([1926] 1983). As Brandist (2004) points out, Vološinov makes a distinction between non-verbal context and linguistic context as sources for the interpretation of language. Vološinov describes a scene thus: "[a] couple are sitting in a room. They are silent. One says 'Well!'. The other says nothing in reply" ([1926] 1983: 10). This exchange, Vološinov argues, is meaningless for those not in the room at the time, including the analyst, since inspecting "the purely verbal part of the utterance" is inadequate ([1926] 1983: 11). In order to analyse the exchange, he argues, the non-verbal context needs to be taken into account:

> [a]t the moment of the exchange *both* individuals *glanced* at the window and *saw* that it was snowing. *Both knew* that it was already May and long since time for spring, and finally, that they were both sick of the protracted winter. *Both were waiting* for the spring and *were annoyed* by the late snowfall. The utterance depends directly on this – on what is *'visible to both'* (the snowflakes beyond the window), what was *'known to both'* (the date was May), and what was *'similarly evaluated'* (boredom with winter, longing for spring); and all this was grasped in the actual meaning of the utterance ... [n]ow once we have been introduced to what was *'implied'*, that is, to the *common spatial and semantic purview* of the speakers, we understood perfectly the integral meaning of the utterance well (ibid; emphasis in original).

Pateman (1989: 209) argues that the central idea in Vološinov's example is that:

> context is to be defined in terms of assumptions which the speaker makes about what the hearer knows or believes, including assumptions about the hearer's assumptions about the speaker's knowledge and beliefs. So defined, the speaker's utterance is shaped by and responds to context - in other words, to the *hearer* who, in this sense, is present ... in the utterance. If all utterances are context bound in this specific kind of way, then all speech (and all written text) is dialogic in the sense that it responds if not to an actual hearer then to *assumptions* about an actual or potential hearer, addressee or audience.

Toolan (1996: 153), however, argues that there are some "questionable assumptions about shared knowledge" in Vološinov's analysis, as it is predicated upon his own, rather than the participants', interpretation of the covert meaning of the word 'well' in the exchange. I would argue, however, that a more theoretically convincing account of utterance comprehension can be developed by incorporating insights from relevance theory. This is not, however, a simple task, since as Linell (2009) points out, relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1995), is monologic rather than dialogic. Therefore the model of relevance theory drawn on here is a modified one.[46]

3.3.2 Modifying Vološinov's dialogism: utterance comprehension, shared knowledge and relevance theory

Sperber and Wilson's (1995) relevance theory posits that successful communication between two people can never be guaranteed because we do not have direct access to one another's thoughts. For Sperber and Wilson, relevance theory jettisons the code model of communication; rather than assuming that the interpretation of an utterance entails both decoding, or recovering what is *said* by a speaker, and inferencing, or recovering what is *meant* by a speaker, Sperber and Wilson argue that all utterance interpretation is inferential. The concept of decoding is, they argue, ineffective because no word carries a single, fixed, referent, a position which accords well with Vološinov's. Instead, Sperber and Wilson develop what they term an ostensive-inferential model of communication:

> [i]nferential communication and ostension are one and the same process, but seen from two different points of view: that of the communicator who is involved in ostension and that of the audience that is involved in inference (1995: 54).

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[46] It is not my intention to proffer a new model of relevance theory. Therefore, coupled with the space restraints of the thesis, the ensuing modifications are not extensively argued.

Ostension is posited as "behaviour that makes manifest the intention to make something manifest" thus comprising two layers of information (1995: 49). Sperber and Wilson give the example of a woman on holiday who, upon exiting her hotel in light summer clothing, is met by a man who grimaces and points to the overcast sky (1995: 51). According to ostensive behaviour, the two layers of evidence in this example are firstly, the evidence that it is about to rain and secondly, the intention to communicate that evidence. In this example, the woman leaving the hotel makes a hypothesis about the man's intended meaning because she assumes that he intends to communicate something.

Utterance comprehension, according to Sperber and Wilson, is governed by one principle, relevance, since "[i]nformation processing involves effort: it will only be undertaken in the expectation of some reward" (1995: 49). Sperber and Wilson argue that what is communicated in verbal interaction is a set of assumptions that are made manifest to the hearer in different degrees. According to Sperber and Wilson, when interpreting an utterance, hearers begin from the assumption that the speaker intends it to be relevant to them, and they then search for a context in which the contextual effects are relatively large but the processing effort relatively low, whilst speakers must hypothesise about the hearer's cognitive environment as they attempt to ensure that what they communicate is relevant.

Sperber and Wilson's concern with both speaker and addressee, along with the centrality of hypotheses, I suggest, might appear to suggest some similarities with Vološinov's's concern with language as other-oriented and always addressed to another party, whether real or imagined. Brandist (2004), however, argues that Vološinov slides too easily between semantic and pragmatic meaning, effectively conflating them; but, I

would argue that Vološinov re-orients this distinction to one between socially organised persons. This alternative move, I would argue, is not incompatible with relevance theory: the semantics/pragmatics distinction in relevance theory is, as Carston (2002: 11) points out, seen as a distinction that has more of a close corollary with two types of *cognitive* rather than linguistic performance: decoding and inference. Vološinov's distinction between socially organised individuals is also predicated upon cognitive performance, for, in Vološinov's conceptualisation, what we say is based upon our *hypotheses* about the addressee, whether the addressee is real or imagined. However, in Vološinov's theorisation, cognitive performance does not have its basis in the individual psyche. Indeed, through Vološinov's dialogism we can see the cognitive through the lens of the social.

Returning to Vološinov's discussion of the 'exchange' between the couple where one states 'well' whilst the other remains silent, Vološinov writes of the participants' spatial and semantic purview, but he also stresses the importance of the wider, social, indexical field in his conceptualisation of *social* purview. As Collins (1999: 139) observes, for Vološinov language use is "an inherently value-laden activity [involving] taking positions and making judgements about things that matter in the world"; Vološinov's writes: "[i]n actuality, we never say or hear *words*, we say and hear what is true or false, good or bad, important or unimportant, pleasant or unpleasant and so on" (1986: 70, emphasis in original). It would seem that there are some parallels here between Vološinov's view and Sperber and Wilson's (1995: 86) notion of conceptual address:

> [c]oncepts ... are psychological objects considered at a fairly abstract level. Formally, we assume that each concept consists of a label, or address, which performs two different and complementary functions. First, it appears as an address in memory, a heading under which various types of information can be

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stored and retrieved. Second, it may appear as a constituent of a logical form, to whose presence the deductive rules may be sensitive. These functions are complementary in the following sense: when the address of a certain concept appears in a logical form being processed, access is given to the various types of information stored in memory at that address.

A conceptual address, according to Sperber and Wilson, can store three types of information:

> The *logical entry* for a concept consists of a set of deductive rules which apply to logical forms of which that concept is a constituent. The *encyclopaedic entry* contains information about the extension and/or denotation of the concept: that is, about the objects, events and/or properties which instantiate it. The *lexical entry* contains information about the natural-language counterpart of the concept: the word or phrase of natural language which expresses it (1995: 86; emphasis in original).

It is the encyclopaedic entry that is particularly important for dialogism; utterance comprehension, as Vološinov sees it, is mediated by the importance attached to things, events and meanings according to social grouping, since Vološinov argues that:

> [e]ven though we sometimes have pretensions to experiencing and saying things *urbi et orbi*, actually, of course, we envision this "world at large" through the prism of the concrete social milieu surrounding us ... we presuppose a certain typical and stabilized *social purview* toward which the ideological creativity of our own social group and time is oriented ... [t]*he immediate social situation and the broader social milieu determine ... the structure of an utterance* ([1929] 1986: 85-6; emphasis in original).

On this view, how individuals represent the world to themselves is not a 'free for all' for the atomistic individual, in complete control of their behaviour (Mills, 2003a: 31).

Vološinov, I would argue, offers a necessary corrective to what I would suggest is a myopic focus on the individual in relevance theory, for as Mills (2003a: 62) points out, an individual's cognitive processing does not take place in a vacuum. Greenall (2002: 196) argues that the experiencing subject in Sperber and Wilson's theory is mind and reason-driven, a private individual who is only incidentally social, motivated instead by the desire to fulfil their own personal needs – immediate processing gratification. Thus, one could argue, Sperber and Wilson's theoretical paradigm is

essentially monological, and the figure of the Cartesian subject looms large within it. However, from a dialogic perspective, individuals also have interests, attitudes and perspectives that are shared by members of the social groups to which they belong. What is necessary, Greenall argues, is to take into account the notion that relevance is socially regulated. In order to do so, Greenall (2002: 185-197) distinguishes between the relevance theory of Sperber and Wilson that, Greenall suggests, is based on *objective* relevance theory, and *subjective* relevance theory exemplified by Schutz and Luckmann (1973). Whilst in objective relevance theory *something* (a proposition) is relevant to *something* (a proposition), in subjective relevance theory, Greenall contends, *something* (an utterance or an object) is relevant to *someone*. The focus in subjective relevance theory is upon the criteria by which elements enter the attentional focus of the individual (Greenall, 2002: 185-6).

Schutz and Luckmann (1973) argue that the individual creates meaning by recourse to a·stock of socially structured experiential knowledge that provides her/him with three types of relevance: thematic relevance, interpretational relevance and motivational relevance. Thematic relevance refers to an element of context that has topical relevance for an experiencing subject, in a given situation, because of its unfamiliarity, or that it has an unusual property. Interpretational relevance refers to an element of context that is of importance to the individual for its capacity to solve a problem of interpretation. Motivational relevance refers to an element of context that has the property to assist the individual in their short or long-term purposes or goals. Furthermore, these forms of relevance are of two types. Relevance can be imposed; for example, in the case of imposed thematic relevance, it is the unfamiliarity of an object or an utterance that is surprising and grabs one's attention. By contrast, relevance can be motivated, as individuals choose the aspect of context that they wish to pay attention to.

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This motivation is split between motivation to turn one's attention to an act or utterance in order to fulfil a goal, and motivation to attend to an act or utterance because of an attitude, such as like, dislike or interest, towards or against it.

I agree with Greenall's (2002: 200) argument, that what Schultz and Luckmann provide is an opportunity to see that relevance has multiple, social, constraints, and that not all kinds of relevance seem to be required in each and every situation. However, I would argue that the implication in Schultz and Luckmann's relevance theory is that the individual's stock of social knowledge is somewhat static, and yet, as I have pointed out in section 3.5, dialogism emphasises the centrality of evaluation in the creation of socially generated knowledge that is also *negotiated, contested* and *transformed*. Indeed, what I have not made clear thus far, is how a dialogical conceptualisation of socially shared knowledge is constituted. Vološinov's notion of social purview as beliefs, assumptions and values of both the broader social milieu and of the social group to which one belongs, provides the starting point but requires modification in order, I would suggest, to bring to light its explanatory potential.

In Vološinov's work the notion of social grouping is problematically restricted. As I have suggested, Vološinov positions class as the defining factor in determining one's social group, and therefore the key influence on how an individual speaks and interprets. In his *Freudianism: a Marxist Critique*, Vološinov's view of the centrality of class in society is evident:

> [t]here is no person outside society and, therefore, outside objective socio-economic conditions ... Only as part of a social whole, in class and through class, does a human   personality become historically real and culturally productive ([1927] 1976: 15).

The significance of class is similarly evident in Vološinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*; he argues:

> [c]lass does not coincide with the sign community, i.e., with the community which is the totality of users of the same set of signs for ideological communication. Thus various different classes will use one and the same language. As a result, differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign. Sign becomes an arena of the class struggle ([1929] 1986: 23).

Class, is, however, but one variable that impacts upon individuals; a myopic focus upon class fails to take into account that gender, along with sexuality, race, ethnicity, age and dis/ability also affect the ways in which the individual speaks and interprets. Furthermore, as Thompson (1991: 8) points out, class is not a 'thing'; it is neither a structure nor a category, but can be more productively conceptualised:

> as something that in fact happens ... in human relationships ... class happens when some [people], as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other [people] whose interests are different from ... theirs".

Mills (2003a) provides a useful addition to this notion of class as relational phenomenon that I would argue provides a more sophisticated notion of class for Vološinov's theorisation of language; Mills argues that class,

> is also a way of being categorised by others. Classifying someone as being from the working classes may well be a part of a process of excluding that person from access to certain affiliations or privileges. Here, one's notion of another's class is based on stereotypes of the working class (2003a: 47).

Mills's conceptualisation of class as a categorisation links particularly well to Vološinov's theorisation of language as a value-laden activity involving position taking. However, the ways in which identities are constructed, and the ways in which individuals speak and interpret, are far more complex than the impact of how one categorises oneself in terms of class, or how one is categorised as belonging to a particular class. Furthermore, as Toolan (1996: 50) points out, some beliefs and assumptions are "undoubtedly more authoritative ... than others", but there is a lack of attention in Vološinov's work to the question of how social purviews come about and

have any form of authority. This under-theorisation, I suggest, can be addressed by a critical engagement with and modification of Linell's (2009) concept of double dialogicality.

3.3.3 Modifying Vološinov's dialogism: Double dialogicality as sociocultural practices and resources for meaning-making

As I noted in chapter one, section1.1.2 of this thesis, Brandist (2002, 2004a, 2004b) has consistently argued that Vološinov's dialogism has an interactional bias that separates social interaction from sociocultural structures, and it is this very issue that double dialogicality addresses. According to Linell (2009: 53), double dialogicality refers to the necessity to view an act or an utterance "both in its singularity and in its wider sociocultural and historical belongingness". In other words, double dialogicality is concerned with both situated interaction and sociocultural resources for meaning-making, and sees dialogue as taking place not only within exchanges between co-present participants but also in sociocultural practices. At the level of praxis, Linell contends, social acts and activities, communities and institutions, transcend situations and belong instead to what he terms situation-transcending traditions, involving the use of sociocultural resources for meaning-making which include, "language, concepts, knowledge about the world, identities and norms ... that govern expectations and efforts for meaning in concrete situations" (2009: 49). Indeed, Vološinov stresses the social embeddedness of the dialogical subject, for as he argues, cognition and communication are imbued with, and penetrated by, social influences. Marková (2003:4) stresses the centrality of social knowledge for the social life of humans, as she argues that:

> [o]ur ability to understand and evaluate events ... is an essential aspect of *commonly shared social knowledge* ... 'social knowledge' can refer to all kinds

of knowing in our everyday life, like common sense, formation and transformation of concepts and social representations, 'know how' skills, managing interpersonal interactions and relations, among others. Social knowledge is *knowledge in communication and knowledge in action*. There can be no social knowledge unless formed, maintained, diffused and transformed within society, either between individuals or between individuals and groups, sub groups and cultures.

There appears to be some parallels with Marková's argument here and Vološinov's dialogism. However, it is in the notion of the ordering of social knowledge that theoretical gaps and omissions loom large in Vološinov's work. Fully conceptualising double dialogicality in terms of situation-transcending traditions and practices and sociocultural resources for meaning-making, Linell argues, involves engagement with what Foucault (1972, 1981) theorises as discourses and discursive structures.

3.3.4 Ordering sociocultural resources for meaning-making: Discursive structures

As I have noted above, Linell (2009) suggests that engaging with Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse and discursive structures provides a way to conceive of sociocultural practices and resources for meaning-making, although Linell makes little, sustained, attempt to make clear exactly how such an engagement might be conceptualised (2009: 249). Mills (1997: 17) points out that Foucault sees discourse in the following way:

> as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49). In this sense, a discourse is something which produces something else (an utterance, a concept, an effect), rather than something which exists in and of itself and which can be analysed in isolation. A discursive structure can be detected because of the systemacity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context, and because of the effects of those ways of thinking and behaving.

Foucault (1972: 47) argues that madness, for example, "was constituted by all that was said in all the statements that named it, divided it up, described it, explained it, traced its developments, indicated its various correlations, judged it, and possibly gave it speech

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by articulating, in its name, discourses that were taken to be its own". For Foucault (1981: 57), however, there are differences in the types of discourse, with some more enduring than others:

> we may suspect that in all societies, with great consistency, a kind of gradation among discourses: those which are said in the ordinary course of days and exchanges, and which vanish as soon as they are pronounced; and those which give rise to a certain number of new speech acts which take them up, transform them or speak of them, in short, those discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, and are to be said again.

According to Foucault, then, discourses structure the individual's sense of reality, of the world, of oneself, and of others, and therefore the ordering human beings impose on the world is through the categorisation and interpretation of objects and experiences according to the discursive structures available to them (Mills, 2004b: 46). Whilst I do not intend to claim that the trajectories of Foucault's and Vološinov's work are entirely compatible, there are some initial grounds for seeing connections between Vološinov's work and Foucault's concept of discourse. As Danow (1991: 18) points out, the word *slovo* used by Vološinov can be translated from Russian to mean either 'word' or 'discourse', but he argues, "the two are essentially interchangeable, since a single word may in a given situation represent an entire discourse bearing its own ideology, intent or special meaning". A further connection between Vološinov's work and the concept of discourse, I would suggest, lies in the resemblance between Vološinov's distinction between behavioural ideology as 'activity', as speech, and established ideology as "systems of social ethics, science, art and religions" (Vološinov, [1929] 1986: 91), and Cameron and Kulick's (2003: 16) discussion of discourse:

> For linguists, 'discourse' is 'language in use' – a discourse analyst differs from a syntactician or a formal semanticist in studying not the internal workings of some language system ... but the way meaning is produced when a language is used in particular contexts for particular purposes. For critical theorists, on the other hand, 'discourses' are sets of propositions in circulation about a particular phenomenon. ... Although the two definitions of 'discourse' are different, it is

not difficult to make connections between them. On the one hand, the critical theorist's 'discourses' clearly involve the linguist's 'discourse': the practices that form the objects of which they *speak* (or write) are to a significant extent language-dependent practices of definition, classification, explanation and justification. On the other hand, the instances of language-use studied by linguists under the heading of 'discourse' are socially situated, and must be interpreted in relation to 'discourses' in the critical theorist's sense ... we think of [the two definitions] as mutually implicated.

What, however, is at issue here is Cameron and Kulick's description of discourses, for critical theorists, as "sets of propositions in circulation" (ibid.). This description ignores the institutional supports that valorise and bolster such propositions, and thus Cameron and Kulick's description fails to communicate Foucault's conceptualisation of discursive structures as mechanisms of social power.[47] Holborrow (2006: 2), however, points out that Foucault's theorisation allows for the potential to give language alone the weight of social power "as if language produced comparable effects to wars, plunder or disease". It is a straightforward conflation of language and discourse that I wish to avoid in this thesis. As Clark (2007: 68-79) argues, Foucault's argument rests upon the *combination* of conceptual systems that must be in place and that must be validated and sustained in order to operate as mechanisms of social power in daily life. Clark contends that in his work on sexuality, for example, Foucault describes a shift in the way in which sexuality was thought about but he also articulates the means by which this conceptual system was validated by detailing a set of procedures for producing the 'truth of sex' (2007: 69).

Foucault does, however, choose to de-centre the subject in his discourse theory, and instead focuses upon the production and circulation of knowledge that led to the

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[47] There has been much debate about the terms discourse and ideology, with scholars such as Eagleton (1991) and Fairclough (1992) using both terms in tandem (Mills, 2004b: 41).

notion of subjectivity itself; Foucault writes: "[o]ne has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework" (1980: 59). This de-centering, or in effect, erasure, of the subject is problematic for dialogism, since, Linell argues, from a dialogic perspective individuals are "not *entirely* at the mercy of social and discursive forces" (2009: 112, my emphasis). As King (2004: 57) argues, Foucault ignores the specifically social aspect of human existence, that it is humans who "mutually establish and sustain appropriate forms of conduct in reference to one another ... members of a society sustain their social relations with each other ... agreeing to certain forms of conduct" (2004: 57). However, it is, I suggest, useful to see Foucault's notion of discourse as held in tension with the potential for individual creativity. As Mills (2003a: 24) points out:

> it is important to distinguish between those utterances which can be seen to be relatively creative and those which are more recycled or which seem to be determined by agencies outside the individual her/himself. We need to be aware of utterances having a history outside the individual.

In order to mitigate against presenting a view of the subject as merely the effect of discursive structures, whilst maintaining the importance of sociocultural resources for meaning-making in the concept of double dialogicality, it is, I suggest, productive to align Vološinov's conceptualisation of the *other-orientedness* of language with both Bourdieu's (1990; 1991) (modified) notion of *habitus*, and the development in sociolinguistics of the notion of the community of practice (CoP) .[48] Making these modifications, I would argue, has two implications. Firstly, drawing upon the notion of habitus firmly positions the concept of practice within the theoretical terrain, a concept

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[48] Clark (2007: 64) makes the distinction between the community of practice model used as an explanatory tool and as a methodological tool. I use the CofP model in both senses, here as a way of theoretically extending the notion of community in Vološinov's dialogism, and as a methodology, albeit in modified form, in chapter four.

that is absent from Foucault's discourse theory (Clark, 2007: 74-75). Secondly, drawing upon the notions of habitus and communities of practice adds clarity and theoretical sophistication to Vološinov's reference to the importance of social groups and communities, circumventing any potential slide to viewing the subject engaged in self-construction in isolation.

3.3.5 Structuring sociocultural resources for meaning-making: Habitus

In his *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu (1990) sees structure as partially taken for granted and partly unconscious; as King (2004: 58) puts it, instead of following abstract social rules, individuals have an understanding of what is appropriate and acceptable so that a rule is followed in a particular way. The key concept in such a perspective is, for Bourdieu, what he terms habitus. Bourdieu defines habitus as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations", but which are "[o]bjectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules" (1990: 52). As Bucholtz (1999: 205) notes, Bourdieu's notion of habitus as both cognitive and linguistic structures thus refers to "the set of dispositions to act (e.g. speak, walk, read or eat) in particular ways which are inculcated through implicit and explicit socialization". These dispositions are linked to class, but the concept can be usefully extended to encompass a wider range of dispositions including, for example, gender. Indeed, Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002: 40) point out that whilst habitus is informed by class positions, the concept is certainly not completely explicable in terms of class affiliation. The habitus, according to Bourdieu, orients the individual's actions and dispositions without being entirely determining, giving the individual a 'feel for the game' (Mills, 2003a: 35). In

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his *Language and Symbolic Power*, however, Bourdieu (1991: 14) notes that this 'feel for the game' "should be seen, not as the product of the habitus as such, but as the product of the relation between the habitus on the one hand and the specific social context or fields within which individuals act on the other".[49] Mills (2003a: 35) points out that Bourdieu's habitus constitutes a "weaker, more mediated model of determinism", in that individuals *negotiate* with "what other people think and what others consider acceptable" and their own perception of what it appropriate behaviour for them.

The orientedness of habitus, the importance of others, and the notion of negotiation aligns well with Vološinov's view of the social nature of language. Whilst the habitus orients the individual according to the availability of cognitive and linguistic dispositions linked to social dimensions such as class and gender, what I would argue that Vološinov's dialogic perspective adds to the concept is a further qualification of the external definition of what is appropriate or tolerable. This qualification emerges in the centrality of the notion of the hypothesis in Vološinov's dialogism. As Mills succinctly puts it, for Vološinov:

> what we say is very much dependent on what we think the other person is likely to accept or understand, or what we think others expect from us or would like to hear; this notion of the other person is a hypothesis on our part and is not the same as the hearer's real wishes or views of the speaker (2003a: 26-7).

Eelen (1999) also draws upon the notion of the hypothesis in his modification of Bourdieu's habitus. According to Eelen, habitus can capture variability, as it is "uniquely placed to account for the co-occurance of regularity with individual variability"; this comes about since, Eelen argues,

> [on] the one hand, collective history creates a 'common' world in which each

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[49] I return to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of field in chapter five of this thesis.

[individual is embedded. On the other hand, each individual also has a unique individual history, and experiences the 'common' world from this unique position. The common world is thus never identical for everyone. It is essentially fragmented, distributed over a constellation of unique positions and unique perspectives. In this way habitus succeeds in specifying a set of principles of production of social action that engenders a world of unique human beings, a dynamic world of variability and coordinated subjectivity (1999: 222-3).

Eelan's modification of habitus, moreover, dovetails with Vološinov's central concern with other-orientation. Whilst as Mills (2003a) points out, society is in many ways a fictitious body, as Eelen (1999; 223) argues in his modification of Bourdieu's notion of habitus that we can conceptualise the construction of a 'common' world:

> [t]he indiviual's concept of a generalized Other, which is formed on the basis of contact with specific Others as well as through the media (TV, newspapers, books, movies, etc.) also combines commonality with individuality. It is formed from the perspective of a unique social position, but consists of information about other people and about the social world in general. Thus each individual has knowledge of many 'other' opinions and norms available in the world, which can engender abstractions about certain social 'facts' ... [a]s the basis on which people form their opinions, this knowledge then functions as both a constraining and an enabling factor.

This theoretical move is important since, as I argued in chapter one, postfeminist discourse has emerged as a dominating discursive system which has achieved systemacity through its suffusion across contemporary Western media forms, and thus provides a set of rules and resources which may have some effect on individuals.[50]

Bucholtz (1999: 205), however, considers Bourdieu's notion of habitus in need of modification, since, she argues, habitus presents the speaker as passive:

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[50] Moran's (2011) assessment of the importance of taking note of the media for contemporary feminism is, I suggest, timely and cogent. She argues that "[i]n the interregnum between female emancipation, and female politicians, businesswomen and artists finally coming into true equality, celebrity culture is the forum in which we currently inspect and debate the lives, roles and aspirations of women ... it is the main place where our perception of women is currently being formed" (2011:247).

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[a]lthough speakers are not bound by their habitus, which is inflected by the particular context in which it occurs, the tendency is to act in accordance with what has been naturalized as appropriate. Bourdieu sees the individual, then, more as a product of social structure than as a free agent. Practice at the local level – especially linguistic practice, which is embedded in the class habitus of the standard and the non-standard – is primarily in the business of reproducing existing social arrangements.

I would argue that aligning Bourdieu's notion of habitus with Vološinov's conceptualisation of the social nature of language presents the speaker as more dynamic and agentive. Yet, Bucholtz (1999: 210) argues that "identities are rooted in actions rather than categories", and because of this stress should be placed on capturing "the *multiplicity* of identities at work in specific speech situations" (1999: 210). Bucholtz thus advocates employing the community of practice model I briefly discussed in chapter one, section 1.2.3.4, as a methodological tool. In the next section, I consider the usefulness of the community of practice approach as a theoretical, explanatory, tool for further modifying Vološinov's reliance on a singular, homogenous notion of community as the social dimension of class. As Wenger (1998: 6) states:

> [w]e all belong to communities of practice. At home, at work, at school, in our hobbies – we all belong to several communities of practice at any given time. And the communities of practice to which we belong change over the course of our lives. In fact, communities of practice are everywhere.[51]

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[51] It is important to note here that Vološinov does suggest that a variety of social collectivities impact upon what individuals say and how they say it, somewhat prefiguring the notion of the community of practice. In his *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Vološinov ([1929] 1986: 20) discusses the concept of speech genre; he argues that "each social group has had and has its own repertoire of speech forms for ideological communication in human behaviour, each set of cognate forms, i.e., each behavioural speech genre, has its own corresponding set of themes". Expanding upon the notion of speech genres, Vološinov continues:

> [W]hen social custom and circumstances have fixed and stabilized certain forms in behavioural interchange to some appreciable degree ... one [can] speak of specific types of structure in genres of behavioural speech. So, for instance, an entirely special type of structure has been worked out for the genre of the light and casual causerie of the drawing room where everyone "feels at home" and where the basic differentiation within the gathering (the audience) is that

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As I will go on to argue, however, the notion of communities of practice is not without its conceptual and analytical problems.

3.3.6 Co-constructing social norms and values: Communities of Practice

Originally developed as a pedagogical approach (Wenger, 1998) and drawn

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> between men and women. Here we find devised special forms of insinuation, half-sayings, allusions to little tales of an intentionally nonserious character, and so on. A different type of structure is worked out in the case of conversation between husband and wife, brother and sister, etc. In the case where a random assortment of people gathers – while waiting in a line or conducting some business – statements and exchanges of words will start and finish and be constructed in another, completely different way. Village sewing circles, urban carouses, workers' lunchtime chats, etc., will all have their own types ... [t]he production processes of labor and the processes of commerce know different forms for constructing utterances ([1929] 1986: 96-7).

This broadening out of the notion of community is important, as is the development of the key notion of the speech genre, a concept that Vološinov applies to his methodological principles for the analysis of a work of art and its reception, a set of methodological prescriptions that, as I point out in chapter four section 4.1, are important for this thesis. However, these insights are not developed across Vološinov's work. Instead, across Vološinov's *oeuvre* there is a clear emphasis on class as the overarching determining factor in utterance production and comprehension. As I pointed out in section 3.3.2 of this chapter (pp.103-4), Vološinov stresses the importance of class in both his *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and his *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, but I would suggest that Vološinov's strongest statement regarding class is made in his three papers published in 1930 for the journal *Literaturnaia Ucheba* (Alpatov, 2004: 71), particularly in his article entitled "The word and its social function":

> [T]he class membership of the speaker organizes the stylistic structure of the utterance ... The class ideology permeates from within (by means of intonation, the choice and disposition of the words) every verbal construction and, not only by its content, but in   its very form expresses and realizes the relationship of the speaker to the world and other people, the relationship to the situation and the given audience ... the words of the speaker are always permeated with views, opinions, evaluations which, in the final analysis, are inevitably conditioned by class relations ([1930] 1983: 140-144).

upon and modified in linguistics (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1999; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999; Bucholtz, 1999), a community of practice is defined as:

> ...an aggregate of people who come together on a regular basis to engage in some enterprise (...) In the course of their engagement, the community of practice develops ways of doing things – practices. And these practices involve the construction of a shared orientation to the world around them – a tacit definition of themselves in relation to each other, and in relation to other communities of practice (Eckert 2005: 16).

Bucholtz argues that a CoP approach offers a nuanced and theoretically satisfying model, because it "allows researchers to examine, in a theoretically adequate way, both the actions of individuals and the structures that are thereby produced and reproduced, resisted and subverted" (Bucholtz 1999: 207). It is the CoP approach that Bucholtz (1999) uses in her study of nerd girls in an American high school, a group of high school members she presents as a counter-cultural group (1999: 211).

Explaining how nerd girls negotiate one particular aspect of their nerd identity, Bucholtz states:

> [f]or girls, nerd identity also offers an alternative to the pressures of hegemonic femininity – an ideological construct that is at best incompatible with, and at worst hostile to, female intellectual ability. Nerd girls' conscious opposition to this ideology is evident in every aspect of their lives, from language to hexis to other aspects of self-presentation. Where cool girls aim for either cuteness or sophistication in their personal style, nerd girls aim for silliness. Cool girls play soccer or basketball; nerd girls play badminton. Cool girls read fashion magazines; nerd girls read novels. Cool girls wear tight T-shirts, and either very tight or very baggy jeans; nerd girls wear   shirts and jeans that are neither tight nor extremely baggy. Cool girls wear pastels or dark tones; nerd girls wear bright primary colors. But these practices are specific to individuals; they are engaged in by particular nerd girls, not all of them (1999: 213).

Here, then, Bucholtz's study provides an insight into how the nerd girls differentially construct their gender identity within the community of practice, and this participant-oriented focus is important for this thesis because, as I stated in chapter two, it is these local practices and co-constructions of meaning that are missing from studies of chick

lit.[52] Furthermore, as an explanatory concept, the CofP entails a more nuanced understanding of community and community practices than the notion of community as social class in Vološinov's work.

Drawing upon the notion of communities of practice adds a theoretical nuance and sophistication to Vološinov's theorisation by making the notion of community complex: individuals are conceived of as engaging with multiple communities, with norms, meanings and values appropriate for each CoP co-constructed by that particular group's members. On the other hand, however, drawing upon these theoretical and explanatory notions focuses upon contingent social interactions and that would seem to undo, or at least to problematise, Vološinov's's central dictum: that a clear distinction between the individual and society is erroneous since the individual's use of language is mediated by the availability of expressions and meanings circulating at a particular time. Bucholtz's insight into the negotiations of nerd girls with notions of femininity is limited to local community practices; in other words, the ways of 'doing' femininity with which the nerd girls negotiate are those manifest in the school context, but the relationship between the local community and wider societal notions of femininity remains undertheorised and unanalysed.

This is one of the central issues with using a community of practice approach, as it is designed to deal with the individual and thus it becomes "extremely difficult … to

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[52] As Clark (2007: 61) notes in her succinct summary of the study, Bucholtz's analysis "operates on two levels. First, she identifies what she calls the 'identity practices' of nerds, which include both linguistic practices … and other types of practice … These are contrasted to the practices of mainstream high school groups. Second, she focuses on a particular friendship group of nerds, which she identifies as a community of practice".

discuss the impact of the values of the wider society" (Mills, 2008: 28). In her work on gender, language and politeness, Mills (2003a; 2011a) is critical of the ways in which the community of practice model has been employed. Care needs to be taken, Mills (2011a: 73) argues, when scholars focus upon the level of a community of practice (CoP) in order to analyse politeness:

> [e]ach CoP does not invent politeness norms from scratch, and the influence of the social norms as a whole and the norms developed within other CoPs needs to be considered. Politeness should be seen as a set of resources, which is evaluated in a slightly different way within each Community of Practice. However ... the set of resources is shared to a lesser or greater extent across the society, but is evaluated and inflected in slightly different ways within each CoP ... Politeness is a local negotiation of norms which are assumed by individuals to exist at the social or cultural level. Even if these norms are fictional, (and they generally are) they can still be assumed to have an effect.

Significantly for this thesis's concern with evaluation, Mills goes on to state that:

> [w]hat needs to be recognised is that a statement about politeness is a judgement of someone's behaviour ... A decision to be polite is an evaluation of one's own position in the CoP and constitutes a display of that assessment to the rest of the group ... If we accept that politeness is a judgement rather than being inherent in utterances, then we need to focus our attention on the evaluations which each particular CoP makes of politeness resources which are available to them ... A judgement of politeness or impoliteness does not, after all, evolve from nothing; it is based on hypothesised norms of what society as a whole, and the particular CoP judge to be polite or impolite (2011a: 74).

Mills's argument is wider in its import than a concern with politeness; these criticisms of the community of practice model hold in general and in particular in studies of language and gender. Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (2007: 28) express disappointment in the ways in which the community of practice model has been employed by language and gender scholars, as they argue that the model seems to have been used "with no reference to how their practice actually connects them to the wider world or to a wider discourses of gender and sexuality". This lack of theorisation of the relationship between the community of practice and the wider society, indeed of society itself, is

problematic for the approach taken in this thesis, not least because I argue that broader meaning making practices and regimes of value that circulate around chick lit impact upon what these novels are taken to mean and what form of value these novels, and their readers, are assigned. Eckert and McConnel-Ginet argue that the field needs to expand the concept of the community of practice:

> in two directions: 1) the comparative direction examines different but similar kinds of practice to explore generalisations about how practice contributes to the linguistic construction of gender ... 2) the relational direction locates communities of practice in relation to a world beyond – to other communities of practice, to social networks, to institutions (e.g. schools, churches prisons) and to more imagined global communities (e.g. nations, women) (2007: 27).

This thesis is concerned with the second of these expanded directions: the relational direction. In so doing, as Mills argues, what needs to be considered within community of practice work is:

> the role of external forces in the shaping of our notions of what is appropriate within Communities of Practice, and these external forces can be explicitly ideological, for example ideologies of femininity and masculinity which are manifested outside the particular CoP (in for example advertising, literature and the media), but which influence our thinking about our own position within CoPs (2011a: 79).

Whilst I agree with Mills's position, and it is clear that the aim is to bring a concern with wider societal norms to a predominant and problematic focus on contingent interactions in a particular CoP, I suggest that the phrase "external forces" needs some amendment since it implies a dichotomy between structure and agency (ibid.). As the concept of double dialogicality and the drawing together of Vološinov, Foucault and Bourdieu demonstrates, ideology does indeed influence what we think and say, how we conceptualise what is appropriate, and what we do in our daily practices, but this influence is not solely an external imposition. Rather, it is a more complex process emerging from the dynamic interplay between situated interactions and sociocultural resources and practices.

3.4 Summary

This chapter has set out the theoretical framework developed in this thesis, and that underpins its concern with meaning-making. The foundations for this theoretical framework are located in dialogism as an epistemological approach to conceptualising the complex processes of human sense-making in and through language, in cognition, communication and action (Linell, 2009: 28-9). In particular, it is the model of language and communication put forward by the dialogist Vološinov that is centrally placed within the theoretical approach developed here, according to which human meaning-making is semiotically mediated, interactional and contextual. The dialogic framework developed in this chapter, however, modifies Vološinov's dialogism in order to address the theoretical shortcomings that arise from his inadequate theorising of what constitutes social grouping, how socially shared knowledge is structured, and how the relations between the individual and socio-cultural structures are conceptualised. Accordingly, elements of additional theoretical perspectives are integrated in to the framework in order to more adequately theorise how social knowledge is sociohistorically ordered; how particular aspects of social knowledge become stable and durable through implicit and explicit socialisation, and how individuals actively engage with the co-construction of shared norms and values across multiple communities with which they are engaged in their daily life.

There are four, interrelated, implications for the conceptualisation of meaning-making that arise from the dialogic approach put forward in this chapter, and that give substance to the concerns of this thesis to examine how chick lit is made meaningful in multiple and complex ways. Firstly, meaning is not conceptualised as a purely cognitive phenomenon. Secondly, meaning-making cannot be understood in either

subjective or objective terms, as meaning arises from the interplay between individuals and their environments. Thirdly, meaning does not reside in lexical items or a language system; from a dialogic perspective, lexical resources have meaning *potentials* that are generated in combination with relevant contexts and contextual resources, which include the sociocultural resources of double dialogicality. Finally, meaning-making is intrinsically linked to evaluation. In the next chapter, I set out the methodological and analytical framework that is developed in this thesis in order to provide a means for exploring these dynamic and complex ways through which meanings emerge.

Chapter 4

Analytical framework: Dialogic discourse analysis

4.0 Introduction

I argued in chapter three, sections 3.0 and 3.4 of this thesis that as an epistemological framework for human sense-making, dialogism provides theoretical substance for the concerns in this thesis to reject a fixed and static conceptualisation of the location of the meanings that accrue to a cultural object. It is dialogism's conceptualisation of meaning as semiotically mediated, dynamic, emergent and embedded in social life that, I argued, is particularly important for the aims in this thesis to conceive of the construction and negotiation of meaning in a broad, multifaceted way. This chapter sets out the methodological and analytical framework developed in this thesis as a means to apply these theoretical insights, in order to explore the complex ways in which chick lit's meanings are constructed, interpreted and negotiated. The method of analysis put forward in this chapter is broadly conceived of as a dialogic discourse analysis.

The conceptualisation and development of a specifically termed dialogic discourse analysis[53] has been undertaken by a small but growing number of scholars, and applied to both written texts and situated interaction (e.g. Larraín and Medina, 2007; Linell, 2009; Marková et al, 2007; Martinez, Tomicic and Medina, 2012; Nystrand, 2002). Although there is no agreed upon configuration of analytical tools or

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[53] I have been careful here to refer to specifically named versions of dialogical *discourse* analysis, as a number of scholars have positioned their work as a dialogic analysis, without recourse to the term discourse (e.g. Gonçalves and Ribeiro, 2012; Leiman, 2012).

procedures,[54] the form of dialogical discourse analysis that most clearly shapes the framework developed in this thesis is the triple layered analysis developed by Marková *et al* (2007), which attempts to capture the dynamics of topics and themes that arise in situated interaction, and their relations to socially shared knowledge. In this chapter there is not, however, a straightforward application of Marková *et al's* analytical model. The dialogical discourse analysis developed here differs from the analytical models put forward to date, since, in keeping with the concerns of this thesis's theoretical development of dialogism to conceptualise the complex relations between the individual and social structures, it is designed to analyse both social interaction *and* socio-cultural and socio-economic practices, and focuses specifically on the analysis of a cultural form.

This chapter has a two part structure; such a division is necessary since the framework developed here needs to address both methodological and analytical issues. The first part of the chapter describes the methodology developed for the framework and its analytical trajectories. Section 4.1 sets out the existing methods suggested by Vološinov ([1929] 1986) for the analysis of a cultural object/form. However, having identified a number of shortcomings in the elements of the model proposed, section 4.2 introduces the paradigm that is positioned as the organising methodology for this thesis. As I noted in chapter one, section 1.3 of this thesis, the circuit of culture model (du Gay *et al*, 1997) takes into account the impact of multiple spheres in producing a full and

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[54] Despite this lack of cohesion and consensus, however, a number of these versions of a dialogic discourse analysis share an analytical focus upon sequence organisation, and specifically employ Conversation Analysis as a method of analysing conversational sequencing (Linell, 2009; Larraín and Medina, 2007; Martinez, Tomicic and Medina, 2012). CA tools and concepts are also employed in the dialogic discourse analysis developed here.

coherent account of the meanings which arise from and circulate around a popular cultural form, demonstrating the integrated relationship between producers and consumers.

Having outlined the structure and concerns of the circuit and culture model and its attention to both production and reception, the next two sections elucidate the approaches taken to data associated with each sphere. Section 4.3 sets out the approaches taken to the reception data gathered in this thesis, which consists of data from one-to-one interviews with chick lit readers and a reading group meeting. This section begins by discussing the scholarly debate concerning the use of interview data, in order to describe the approach to interviews taken here, that, following Benwell (2005), sees such data as situated accounts rather than transparent reports. The discussion then turns to the approach taken to the reading group data: a communities of practice approach (CoP). As I noted in chapter one, section 1.2.3.4, a CoP approach focuses on interaction at the level of the community, and attempts to describe the effect of group values on the individual.[55] However, the CoP model is modified in order to better suit the practices of a group engaged in a conceptual rather than a concrete endeavour, by drawing on an alternative but compatible conceptualisation of a community of interest (CoI). The final section of this first part of the chapter, section 4.4, sets out the approach chosen to attend to production data, a critical political economy approach to the cultural industries (Miège, 1987, 1989) that provides a set of analytical trajectories to interrogate how texts take the form that they do, focusing upon industry specific, economic and social relations of production.

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[55] The concept of a community of practice is also drawn upon in chapter three, section 3.3.6 of this thesis, but there it is employed as a theoretical concept in order to complexify Vološinov's restricted conceptualisation of social grouping.

The second part of this chapter attends to the analytical tools and concepts that are employed in the form of dialogic discourse analysis developed here. The model of dialogical discourse analysis constructed by Marková *et al* (2007) is positioned as a foundational paradigm for this thesis, since its concern with both social interaction and the expression of socially shared knowledge is relevant to the aim within this thesis to explore the reception of chick lit by both individuals and groups, and the ways in which societal norms, beliefs and values impact upon their evaluations. Section 4.5 of this chapter thus explains the three, interrelated, analytical levels that are constitutive of Marková *et al's* model, as it attempts to capture the dynamics of the topics that arise in situated interaction and their relations to socially shared knowledge. However, it is not Marková *et al's* intention to provide an analytical toolkit, but rather their aim is to highlight the various interactional features of focus group data concerned with group dynamics, the circulation of ideas and the expression of social knowledge that can be captured by adopting a dialogic perspective (2007: 51).[56] Furthermore, whilst Marková *et al's* model is specifically concerned with focus group data, the concerns of this thesis lie with the meaning-making, value-constituting, webs that circulate around a cultural form. The dialogic discourse analysis developed in this chapter thus differs from Marková *et al's* model in the tools and concepts deployed to analyse the links between the circulation of ideas and the expression of socially shared knowledge that Marková *et al* propose. Section 4.6 sets out these alternative concepts which are employed to, firstly, place emphasis on the dialogic view of meaning-making as intrinsically evaluative through the concept of stance-taking (Du Bois, 2007), appraisal theory and

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[56] Grossen (2007: 51) points out that Marková, Linell, Salazar Orvig and herself employ only those analytical concepts that they are familiar with through their own work. These analytical concepts include Goffman's (1974, 1981) concepts of footing and framing and his notion of participation frameworks, communicative activity types (Linell, 1998) and speaker positioning.

the language of evaluation (Martin and White, 2005), taste (Bourdieu, 2004) and

regimes of value (Bennet, Emmison and Frow, 1999); and secondly, through the theory

of rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), to attend to the ways in which

participants not only position themselves, but also construct and maintain social

relationships as they manage situated interaction; a diagram of the composition of these

elements is presented in figure 3 below.

Figure 3
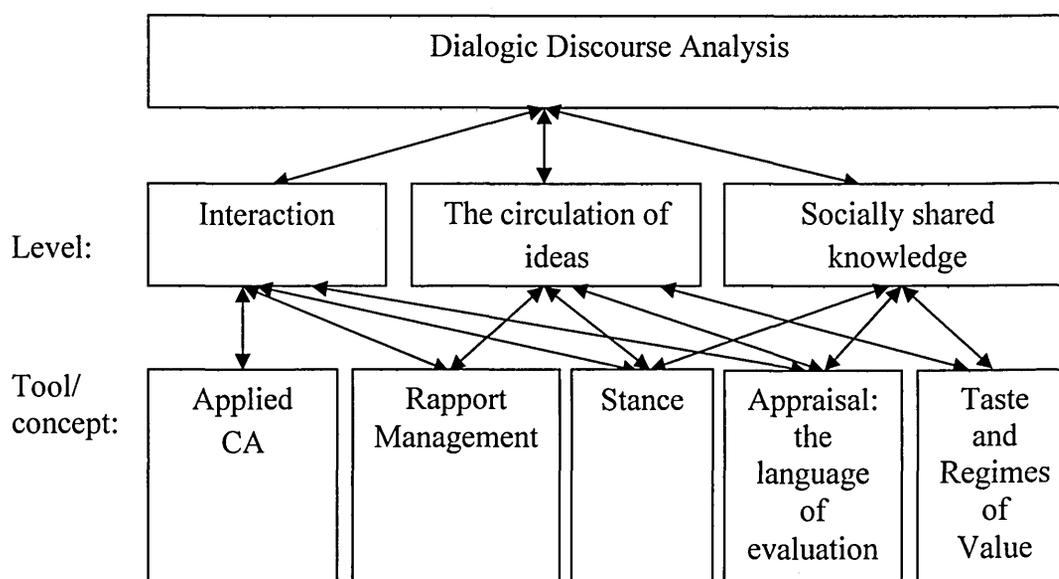
The components of the model of dialogical discourse analysis.

This chapter begins, however, with the issue of a dialogic methodology.

4.1 A dialogic methodology

In his recent discussion of dialogism, Linell (2009: 244) suggests that it may

well "appear that dialogism focuses mainly on talk-in-interaction and dialogue between

mutually co-present individuals", but, as he points out, a number of dialogicians have

in fact concentrated upon written texts (e.g. Nystrand, 2002). I would argue that

Vološinov's theorisation of language and communication is not, as Jones and

Collins (2006a: 47) put it:

> about boiling particular utterances, texts, and documents down to some mythical
> residue of stable and constantly reproducible forms and meanings but about
> finding and understanding the distinctive contribution that the relevant parties
> make by their situated communicative conduct to a developing sphere of activity
> or engagement. This means finding ways to discover the relevant factual
> relations—the interconnections, transitions, and contradictions—between the
> communicative conduct of the communicators and everything else that is going
> on in the developing and changing "integrated continuum" of practices.[57]

Vološinov ([1929: 1986: 95) includes the consideration of a cultural object, particularly

books, in his methodology, as he states that:

> [a] book, i.e., a *verbal performance in print*, is also an element of verbal
> communication. It is something discussable in actual, real-life dialogue, but
> aside from that, it is calculated for active perception, involving attentive reading
> and inner responsiveness, and for organized, printed reaction in the various
> forms devised by the particular sphere of verbal communication in question
> (book reviews, critical surveys, defining influence on subsequent works, and
> so on) ... the printed verbal performance engages, as it were, in ideological
> colloquy of large scale.

I would argue, however, that what Vološinov misses out here is the production

processes that are underpinned by a concern with conceptualising the group of readers

that will engage in 'active perception' of the book, and how this segmentation and

targeting is used as a marketing strategy. The circuit of culture paradigm has been

developed as an analytical model which attempts to provide a heuristic device to locate

the complex, multiple, ways in which the meanings of a cultural object are

constructed.[58] Drawing upon the circuit of culture model is, I suggest, a beneficial step

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[57] Although Jones and Collins (2006) are concerned here with the theoretical insights of
integrational linguistics as developed and described by Harris (1996), the explanatory
power of their comments is useful for the dialogic approach undertaken in this thesis
since in the article from which this quotation is taken, Jones and Collins directly refer to
Vološinov's theorisation of language and communication in order to expound their
position.

[58] The issue of methodology in Vološinov's work is problematic. It is important to note
that Vološinov does offer a set of methodological prescriptions that he argues are
necessary in order to re-orient linguistic research in general. Vološinov contends that:

> the methodologically based order of study of language ought to be: (1) the forms and types of verbal interaction in connection with their concrete conditions; (2) forms of particular utterances, of particular speech performances, as elements of a closely linked interaction – i.e., the genres of speech performance in human behaviour and ideological creativity as determined by verbal interaction; (3) a re-examination, on this new basis, of language forms in their usual linguistic presentation ([1929] 1986: 95-6).

However, the potential insights of this re-orientation of linguistic research are not borne out, since Vološinov fails to provide any concrete examples of how such a methodology would be put into practice. Furthermore, referring, methodologically, to the ways one can analyse the meanings of a cultural object, Vološinov does briefly discuss the importance of production practices and processes, although his position is inconsistent and therefore unclear. Vološinov ([1927] 1976: 115) first appears to dismiss analysis of the publishing industry, as he argues that "[t]here is nothing more perilous to conceive of [the] subtle social structure of verbal creativity as analogous with the conscious and cynical speculations of the bourgeois publisher who "calculates the prospects of the book market", and to apply to the characterization of the immanent structure of a work categories of the "supply-demand" type". However, Vološinov then goes on to acknowledge the importance of considering the economics of the book market whilst distinguishing between the impact of production practices and the more important role of reader response, ending with a statement of the importance of the impact of the book market according to disciplinary specialism that renders the analysis of production practices and processes extraneous:

> [u]nder the conditions of the bourgeois economy, the book market does, of course, "regulate" writers, but this is not in any way to be identified with the regulative role of the listener as a constant structural element in artistic creativity. For a historian of literature of the capitalist era, the market is a very important factor, but for theoretical poetics, which studies the basic ideological structure of art, that external factor is irrelevant (ibid.).

It would seem that for Vološinov, the regulation of verbal creativity lies in reception, but as I will argue in chapter five of this thesis, contemporary publishing has undergone a number of developments not least of which is the increased stress on marketing, which has impacted markedly on what is produced by the industry and how audiences are conceived of. Linell (2009), whilst not referring specifically to Vološinov, states that there are two dialogic methods for analysing a cultural form such as a book, although he does not provide any indication of how such methods should be put into practice; the first method would analyse contexts of both production and reception, whilst the second would study the text itself from a dialogic perspective by looking at the textual evidence for intertextuality and polyvocality, and this latter approach corresponds with the concerns of the feminist dialogic approach put forward by Bauer (1991) and Pearce (1994). This thesis attempts the former approach.

of practices that create and communicate the meanings and value of a cultural object such as a book.

4.2 The circuit of culture model as an organising methodology

Since the 'cultural turn'[59] of the early 1980s, contemporary cultural studies conceptualises culture as a process, a set of practices concerned with producing and communicating meaning, rather than a set of 'things' such as novels, TV programmes, and so on (Hall, 1997: 2-3). Thus, from this perspective 'things', in themselves, have no single, fixed meaning. This has led to a complex view of where the meanings of a cultural object are located. Du Gay *et al* (1997) argue that a full and coherent account of the meanings which arise from a popular cultural form requires a theoretical paradigm which assumes an interconnected and overlapping set of sites and practices. The "circuit of culture" paradigm Du Gay *et al* propose identifies five key processes and practices which overlap and interconnect in complex ways to produce meanings: representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation (Du Gay *et al*, 1997: 3).[60] The paradigm suggests a set of fluid interrelations between the construction of meanings through representational systems of language and/or semiotics; the meanings and practices associated with the cultural object in its production and marketing; the identities or subject-positions that are produced within and by representational systems; the ways in which consumers use and take up a cultural product and how this contributes to the identity of the consumer, which then feeds back into the production

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[59] Ray and Sayer (1999: 1) note that "one of the most striking features of social science at the end of the twentieth century has been the growth of interest in culture and a turn away from economy". They argue that this cultural turn includes "a turn towards discourse and away from materialism and the Marxist-inspired political economy [with its concern with] the persistence of economic forces and problems" (ibid.).

[60] See chapter one, section 1.3 of this thesis for a diagram of the circuit of culture.

process; and finally, how the meanings (and I would add the identities) associated with the product, and the product itself are regulated in culture. Thus, as Hall (1997: 4) argues, within the circuit of culture paradigm, "the question of meaning arises in relation to *all* the different ... practices" and therefore he postulates that meaning is constituted in a wider and more complex way than a focus on the text alone allows for. Moreover, such an approach emphasises the *active* role of participants and practices in the creation and negotiation of meaning.

The circuit of culture model allows for a complex and nuanced interrogation of the meanings of chick lit outside the boundaries of the text. Yet, the circuit of culture model is not without its shortcomings. In her work on the reception of men's magazines, Benwell (2005: 149) takes to task the circuit of culture model for its limitations; she argues this paradigm is weakened, firstly, by its failure to examine consumers' own accounts of the ways in which they use a cultural object, and secondly, Du Gay et al's application of the model neglects to undertake a linguistic analysis of the discourses circulating around the object (Benwell, 2005: 149). Barker (2008: 167) makes the point that "discourse work needs always to be conducted within an explicit recognition that talk of all kinds arises within the circuit of culture", and Allington (2011: 132) neatly summarises the issue thus:

> [o]bservation of real-world cultural practices is necessary if theoretical models of cultural process are to be anything more than speculations. But theoretical models of cultural process ... would seem no less necessary if we are to make any useful sense of the real-world cultural practices we observe (including those practices that involve talk about cultural practices).

The combination of data gathering sites and analytical methods undertaken in this thesis aims to address the issues Allington identifies by focusing on consumption and production. I discuss these data sets in the next section, beginning with reception data.

4.3 Approach to reception data

4.3.1 Interviews

It is necessary to briefly discuss the use of interview data because as Edley and Litosseliti (2010) point out, the use of research interviews has been robustly criticised, particularly by Potter and Hepburn (2005) and Silverman (2006). Potter and Hepburn (2005) consider interview and focus group data as compromised due to its artificiality, favouring instead what they term 'naturally occurring data'. For Potter and Hepburn, interview data is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, they argue that the interview is bound up with the researcher's agendas and categories. Secondly, they point out that often, volunteers are asked to participate in order to talk about a particular, given, topic, and thus often attend the interview/focus group under the perception that they must speak on behalf of the group/person/'category' that is central to the research. Thirdly, Potter and Hepburn consider interview and focus group data problematic because it is the researcher's concerns that are foregrounded, due to the scripting of questions (ibid.). Similarly, for Silverman (2006) data emanating from interviews and focus groups is problematic because it is 'manufactured'. Furthermore, Silverman argues, the theoretical approach taken to interview data impacts upon how this data is analysed. It is, he contends, important to consider the status accorded to interview data, and he distinguishes three approaches: positivism, emotionalism and constructionism.

The positivist's use of standardised interviews is criticised because the positivist belief that interviews are about eliciting and ascertaining facts and/or beliefs leads to an emphasis on the referential function of language. The emotionalist approach to interview data is criticised for its 'humanistic' position, with its assumption of the immediacy, authenticity and therefore the validity of subjective accounts of experience.

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The constructionist approach, an approach which is taken in this thesis, fares slightly better in Silverman's analysis due to its concomitant concern with how interview participants co-construct meaning and the concern to render this in transcription; however, Silverman does note that constructionism has been criticised for its potential narrow focus on conversational skills rather than the content of the interviews. In response to both Silverman, and Potter and Hepburn, Edley and Litosseliti (2010: 165) point out that there are some valid reasons for seeing the use of interviews and focus groups as legitimate and valuable research methods. It is entirely feasible, Edley and Litoseliti note, that a researcher might record multiple hours of casual conversation without encountering a single reference to the topic they are interested in, and therefore for issues of economy and time, interviews are useful (2010: 164). They argue that on the condition that they are understood as *interactional events*, interviews can be used for examining a whole range of issues, particularly for examining the content of peoples' talk as well as for seeing how peoples' responses or narratives are constructed (ibid.). Indeed, Benwell's (2003, 2005) work on men's lifestyle magazines has produced valuable insights into the reading practices of readers of these magazines through the use of interviews, and following Benwell, I view the interview data analysed in this thesis as "a situated account rather than a transparent report of reception" (2005: 147).

The interviews I conducted were semi-structured, in that I designed a set of questions and topics that provided guidance for each of the two interview discussions. Each interview was, however, approached in a flexible manner, since my intention was to engage each interviewee in a conversation-style interview in order to elicit as much information as possible. As Mullany (2007: 65) points out, "[a] conversational style interview, if conducted in a co-operative manner, may ... result in the interview being

more informal". One interview lasted for forty five minutes, whilst the other lasted one and a half hours; in both interviews I focused on three topics: the genre's relationship to feminism, its female protagonists and its thematic concern with romance, but one interviewee in particular mainly managed topic selection and change. In analysis of the interviews, all data including the interviewer's contributions are transcribed and considered, in keeping with seeing the interviews as situated accounts rather than transparent reports. A dual focus on the content and construction of talk is maintained in the second reception data-set: the reading, or book, group.

4.3.2 Reading Groups

Hartley (2001) has pointed to the increasing popularity of reading groups in the twenty-first century, estimating that in 2001 in the U.K. some 50,000 people belonged to reading groups. Peplow (2011: 2) suggests that reading groups have since grown in popularity, evidenced by a number of factors: firstly, in the U.K. most broadsheet newspapers now run book clubs, secondly, Richard Madeley and Judy Finnegan have hosted a highly popular book club on television since 2004[61], and thirdly, there has been a British sitcom about reading groups entitled *The Book Group*.[62] Academic

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[61] Rehberg Sedo (2011: 7) describes the format of the Richard and Judy Book Club thus: "[j]oined by two celebrity guest reviewers, the hosts introduced selected books chosen from more than 600 submitted by UK publishers to the show's producer. At the end of the season, and in conjunction with the British Book Awards, the book club concluded with viewers choosing Richard and Judy's Best Read of the Year. Borrowing and adapting key elements from Oprah's Book Club, such as the in-studio book discussion and the opinions of 'real' face-to-face book clubs, the husband and wife team became hugely important actors in the contemporary literary print culture field".
[62] I would add to Peplow's argument for the increasing popularity of reading groups the example of the U.K. *Channel 4* television book club entitled *The TV Book Club* (and presumably a competitor for the Madely and Finnegan club).From 2010-2012, The *TV Book Club* aired weekly during the summer on the U.K's Channel 4 television; the

interest in reading groups has also been increasing. From the ground-breaking studies of Radway (1987) on the romance reader and the sociology of book groups, and Long (1992) on the *concept* of reading as a collective activity[63], a number of scholars have focused explicitly on empirical work with groups of readers rather than the individual reader (Devlin-Glass, 2001: 572). Hartley (2001) conducted research with over 350 reading groups, observing book group meetings and undertaking interviews with group members, whilst Devlin-Glass (2001) examined the reading practices and tastes of a much smaller sample of women's book groups in Australia.

A further upsurge in academic interest in reading groups has occurred more recently, particularly with the emergence of two major funded studies. *The Discourse of Reading Groups* project has begun to publish its findings on the importance of reading groups in contemporary Britain, focussing in particular on the ways in which interpretations of books come about in the groups, and how argumentation occurs within the group meetings (Allington, 2011; Allington and Swann, 2009; O'Halloran, 2011; Swann and Allington, 2009). The *Devolving Diasporas* study has similarly begun to publish its findings on the reception of diasporic fiction in book groups around the world (Benwell, 2009). The special journal issue of *Language and Literature* (2009) also showcases a number of other studies. Lang (2009) focuses on a discussion between Liverpool residents involved in Small Island Read 2007: a project designed to encourage Liverpool residents to read Andrea Levy's (2004) novel *Small Island* as part

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format consists of a celebrity panel discussion of one of fewer than ten chosen books from fiction published in that particular year, with a special guest appearing each week.. During the programme, readers are encouraged to visit the show's website to leave their comments about each book on a forum. The weekly Sky Arts television programme *Mariella's Book Show* is now in its seventh season. Furthermore, BBC Radio 4 has a programme entitled The Book Club hosted by Jim Naughtie.

[63] As Long (1992) points out, reading has long been seen as a solitary endeavour.

of the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the passing of the Slave Trade Abolition Bill. Rather than examining the after-effect of the text on the reader, Lang's study demonstrates the reluctance to discuss topics of ethnicity and slavery that these readers brought to the novel. Erikson Barajas and Aronnson (2009) examine teacher-led book discussions in a Swedish school, and whilst Lang is concerned with the reader's self-positioning prior to discussing the book, Erikson Barajas and Aronnson are concerned with how readers position themselves during their booktalk. In their study of the school children's involvement with a specific text, Erikson Barajas and Aronnson demonstrate how these pupils position themselves as slow or fast readers, thereby constructing a reader hierarchy in their classroom talk.[64] These studies are all concerned with the complexities of the interactions between readers, between readers and texts, and between readers' evaluations and forms of socially shared knowledge, and these are concerns I share. During the research for this thesis, however, it became apparent that locating specifically chick lit reading groups who would allow recording of their sessions was particularly problematic, and requests to the few chick lit book clubs identified yielded negative responses. The reading group discussion I examine in this thesis consists of an audio recording of a meeting of the Hapley Road reading group.

4.3.2.1 The Hapley Road reading group

This is an established book group in the North of England which consists of

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[64] The continuing academic interest in reading groups is also demonstrated by three further, recent, publications, Lang's (2012) edited collection *From Codex to Hypertext: Reading at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, Benwell, Procter and Robinson's (2012) edited collection *Postcolonial Audiences: Readers, Viewers and Reception*, and Fuller and Rehberg Sedo's (2013) edited collection entitled *Reading Beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture.*

seven women, of varying age, who meet at various locations, most usually one another's homes, to discuss a chosen book which can be either fiction or non-fiction.[65] Chick lit had not been discussed before in a group session, but this group of enthusiastic and avid readers agreed to read a chick lit book and to allow me to attend the subsequent discussion session.[66] The group had previously read feminist fiction, and therefore I hoped that the group shared some assumptions about feminist discourse that might prove insightful for their discussion on chick lit. The group members were happy for me to select a chick lit book for them to read. I opted for India Knight's (2000) *My Life on a Plate*. The reasons for this choice are numerous: firstly, given that I did not know any of the book group members, I wanted a novel that dealt with a number of topics across the age divided subgenres of chick lit, and Knight's foci include marriage breakdown, motherhood, friendship amongst women, and body image. Secondly, I consider Knight's novel to exemplify chick lit's characteristic first-person confessional voice and its self deprecating humour, and therefore I hoped that the book group members would identify and have something to say about these features.

The meeting I attended and recorded lasted for one and a half hours, and five of the seven members were present. Given that not only was I present, but also a digital audio recorder was placed on the table that the group sat around, the observer's paradox requires consideration. As Milroy (1987: 59) states, "the very act of recording is likely

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[65] As with the interviews undertaken for this thesis, prior to recording I obtained written consent from each book group member and interviewee to record and use the data, and it was reiterated to each book group member and interviewee that as per the conditions contained on the consent form, it was my duty to protect their identities by making the data anonymous, and that any participant could withdraw from the study at any time. My involvement with the interviewees and the Hapley Road Reading Group was therefore consensual and met with ethical requirements for research.
[66] As I discuss in chapter six of this thesis, the chick lit genre was not unfamiliar to some of the group members

to distort the object of observation" or in other words both mine and the recorder's presence may have affected what the participants said and did. I rejected the option to minimise the effects of the observer's paradox by setting up the recording device and leaving the group to their discussion, since I felt that my presence would enhance my interpretation of the group members' interactional strategies. It became quickly apparent that the group not only expected but also required me to make a contribution to the discussion, and thus much valuable data would have been lost if I had left the room.[67] I explained my interest to the group in general terms, as being in their interpretations as skilled readers, and I attempted to avoid mention of the specifics of my research in order to reduce the extent to which my research focus influenced their talk despite, as I will show in chapter six, the group's questions.

As I noted in chapter three, section 3.3.6 of this thesis, the Community of Practice (CoP) model has been employed in sociolinguistic and sociocultural linguistic analyses as a methodological tool (Clark, 2007) to investigate both agency and structure in the actions of individuals who are members of a particular group. Although the studies of book groups most recently published by Benwell (2009), Swann and Allington (2009), O'Halloran (2011) and Allington (2011) do not explicitly refer to the groups studied as communities of practice, Peplow (2011: 12) employs the concept and indeed defines the book group in his study as an "archetypal" community of practice. Whilst I agree that there are grounds for defining a reading group as a community of practice, I define the Hapley Road reading group as an aggregate of people that demonstrate not only some of the characteristics of a CoP, but that also demonstrate

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[67] One of the benefits of remaining with the group during their discussions relates to non-verbal behaviour. I was able to observe the use of this communicative resource, and to record significant aspects of non-verbal behaviour in my field notes shortly after the discussion had ended.

aspects of an alternative but related construct: a community of interest (CoI). Although the concept of a CoI has been developed to address the challenges of collaborative design projects (Fischer, 2001; Fischer & Ostwald, 2003), I would argue that drawing upon both the construct of a CoP and the concept of a CoI allows for a more nuanced explanatory approach that more effectively deals with the constitution and practices of the Hapley Road reading group, which in its membership, practices and goals, renders somewhat problematic the definition of a community of practice.

4.3.2.2 Defining reading groups: Communities of Practice and Communities of Interest

A community of practice, according to Wenger (1998: 73), is defined by three constitutive features. Davies (2005: 561) points out that the first constitutive feature, mutual engagement "implies that some interaction involving co-presence is entailed in practice". The second constitutive feature is joint enterprise, but Davies argues, this is "a more complex concept than simply a shared goal: it encompasses both any physical outcomes and the process of meaning-making itself" (2005: 562). Finally, the third constitutive feature is a shared repertoire which involves the development of practices and resources for negotiating meanings. These practices, Davies argues, these "way[s] of doing" can be "instantiated through linguistic forms, personal common ground, a shared perspective on the world, and many other behaviours" (2005: 560-1). A community of practice is therefore defined by these three constitutive features - mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire - and their instantiation in co-presence, a joint endeavour and the development of practices and meaning-making.

Fischer (2001) outlines the issues which cluster around the particular

characteristics of a design community, features which, as Fischer and Ostwald (2003)

go on to map out, distinguish a community of interest from a CoP. Design communities,

Fischer, (2001: 3) writes:

> are increasingly ... composed of individuals who have unique experiences,
> different interests and perspectives about problems and who use different
> knowledge systems in their work. Shared understanding ... supporting
> collaborative learning and working requires the active construction of a
> knowledge system in which the meanings of concepts and objects can by
> debated and resolved.

This heterogeneity of design communities, Fischer and Ostwald (2003) argue, is one of

the central features that mark a difference between a community of practice and a

community of interest. Communities of interest, they state, constitute an aggregate of

people who they define by "their collective concern with the resolution of a particular

problem" (2003: 8). The shift here, then, is not only to a less rigid definition of

membership but also, and more importantly, to a concern with conceptual endeavours.

The distinction between a CoP and a CoI can also be seen in the models of participation

and learning in each construct. A CoP is characterised by legitimate peripheral

participation, which is a type of apprenticeship, where newcomers are positioned on the

periphery and move toward the centre as they become more knowledgeable. By

contrast, the participants in a CoI are considered as informed participants who are both

expert and novice, shifting in role according to their expertise and the topic under

discussion. Rather than a single knowledge system in a CoP, in a CoI there are therefore

multiple centres of knowledge due to these shifting roles (Fischer and Ostwald, 2003:

9). Meanings are thus co-constructed since participants bring to bear their knowledge in

a manner that complements but also informs one another (2003: 9-10). Here then, the

creation and maintenance of hierarchies which occur as a result of legitimate peripheral

participation, which Davies (2005) argues has been glossed over in much communities of practice work, is not overlooked in the community of interest model, but rather conceptualised as transitory, shifting and emergent.

Fischer and Ostwald are keen to point out, however, that a single community can demonstrate features of both a CoP and a CoI (2003: 9). Differentiation between the two constructs does not, therefore, mean that a CoP and a CoI are always discrete entities. I would argue that a number of the features Fischer and Ostwald identify as characterising a community of interest can be drawn upon in order to demonstrate that the Hapley Road reading group exhibits attributes of both a CoP and a CoI. The Hapley Road reading group most clearly exhibits two of the constitutive features of a CoP in that its participants are mutually engaged in a joint enterprise - to meet at a location on a regular basis to discuss together a chosen novel - and the group is therefore also defined by a shared domain of interest. However, in contrast to the relatively straight-forward identification of a shared enterprise in institutionally located groups where an activity occurs in relation to that institution, identifying the enterprise of a self-constituted group whose outcome is not concrete may well be difficult (Davies, 2005). In a CoI, however, the shared enterprise is indeed conceptual rather than concrete, as is the shared enterprise of the Hapley Road reading group. Furthermore, whereas the third and final constitutive element of a CoP, a shared repertoire, can include a shared perspective on the world (Davies, 2005: 560-1), the reading group members are members of other, multiple, communities of practice; they are individuals with different backgrounds and perspectives and therefore demonstrate instead the heterogeneous feature of a CoI. Of course, all members of any CoP are also members of multiple communities of practice; my point here is that with no institutional location, the part played by a workplace

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culture[68] in constructing a shared repertoire is absent, and therefore the heterogeneity of a CoI is more marked.

Participation is also a factor in which the Hapley Road reading group demonstrate attributes of a community of interest. The members of the reading group are concerned with debate and discussion of the meanings and characteristics of a cultural object and therefore demonstrate the informed participation of a CoI, since for informed participants in a community of interest, "the primary aim is to provide the opportunity and resources for ... debate" (Fischer and Ostwald, 2003: 9). I would suggest that the effects of this aim to foster debate can be perceived during the first moments of my arrival of the session. I was offered a warm welcome by Louise, Maria, Jane, Beth and Kerry[69], and they were quick to point out that they expected me not only to join in with the discussion, but also to ask questions. Indeed, at numerous points during the interview, members of the group looked directly at me in expectation of a response or the expectation of a question. The clear expectation of my involvement in the discussion from the beginning of the session, moreover, does not position me as a peripheral participant, which was something I was not expecting prior to my visit. Indeed, unlike the legitimate peripheral participation in a CoP, in the reading group no one group member is considered to be, or is positioned as an expert, rather each member proffers their own opinions as a skilled reader, either making a new point or agreeing/disagreeing with a previous speaker. As I will show in chapter seven of this

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[68] Following Schnurr (2009: 80) by workplace culture, I mean, "a system of shared meanings and values as reflected in the discursive and behavioural norms typically displayed by members, that distinguishes their workplace or organisation from others".
[69] These are pseudonyms given to the members of the Hapley Road Reading Group, as is the name of the group, and as are the names of the readers interviewed for this thesis.

thesis, the reading group clearly demonstrate the process of the co-construction and evolution of meaning through this type of debate.

Although the reception data collected for this thesis results in a relatively small data sample, I would argue that as at the time of writing there is but one empirical study of readers within the literature on chick lit to date (Montoro, 2012), therefore, albeit a small sample, the data in this thesis is revealing. This point also, I contend, holds for the fact that the Hapley Road reading group is not a book group formed exclusively to focus on chick lit. Furthermore, the type of in-depth qualitative analysis of chick lit reader's evaluations of the genre in a face-to-face context undertaken in this thesis has not been attempted before, and it would not, perhaps, be possible to do such detailed analysis in a wider data set. As Marková (2006: 144) points out, however, by definition, dialogism "focuses, theoretically and empirically, on understanding phenomena in their complexity and multiplicity", and as I noted in section 4.0 of this chapter, in view of the type of dialogism developed in this thesis that attends not just to social interaction but also to social practice, production issues are also important for the analysis undertaken in this thesis. In the next section I therefore introduce the production data sets drawn upon in this thesis, and discuss the approach taken to analysing them.

4.4 Approach to production data

Production practices are important in this thesis since I would argue that the move away from materialism and a political economy approach to economic forces is

problematic. Interrogating how texts take the form they do is a necessary undertaking since, firstly, as Hesmondhalgh (2007: 1-3) points out, the cultural industries[70] "have moved closer to the centre of the economic action in many countries and across much of the world", but their ownership and organisation has changed dramatically with the majority of texts produced being circulated by powerful conglomerations; and secondly, the ways in which the cultural industries now conceive of their audiences has changed radically. This focus on production is important, for as Bucholtz (2006: 494) argues:

> it is not an overstatement to assert that every aspect of sociolinguistics touches on political-economic issues. As those working in the many branches of the field continue to pursue their diverse research agendas, scholarship will benefit greatly from deeper and more extensive attention to this powerful and pervasive aspect of sociolinguistic life.

Although this thesis is not a sociolinguistic study, a concern with political economy is not incompatible with dialogism. In his recent conceptualisations of dialogism, Linell (2009: 23) argues that whilst "emphasizing the linguistic, communicative and cognitive construction involved in the dialogical appropriation and recognition of the world", dialogism "does not deny the "reality" of things in that (outer) world, the body, nature, time, space, social conditions, etc".

4.4.1 Critical Political Economy: two traditions

Although a political economy of culture approach has at times been depicted as a unified and single scholarly approach (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 34), the term critical political economy is currently used to distinguish its proponents both temporarily and

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[70] I use the term "cultural industries" following Hesmondhalgh, to mean "those institutions (mainly profit-making companies, but also state organisations and non-profit organisations) that are most directly involved in the production of social meaning" (2007: 12). This definition of the cultural industries thus includes "television ... radio, the cinema, newspaper, magazine and book publishing, the music recording and publishing industries, advertising and the performing arts" (ibid.).

theoretically. The term critical political economy marks a distinction from earlier

political economists such as Adam Smith, who, on the one hand, shifted focus away

from the perception of equating land and precious metals with wealth and towards

viewing value as determined by productive labour, but, in stressing National Income,

ultimately failed to address the conflict between national and general wealth (Mosco,

1996: 40). By contrast, critical political economy approaches generally analyse power in

relation to cultural production, and unlike traditional economists, view the economy not

as a separate domain but as interrelated with political and social life. There are,

however, distinctions between critical political economy approaches, marked by two

disparate traditions: the North American Schiller-McChesney tradition and the

European cultural industries approach.

The North American Schiller-McChesney tradition of critical political economy

stresses the strategic use of power, documenting the increase in the wealth and power of

the cultural industries and their links with political and business allies and which Mosco

(1996: 19), argues, "has been driven more explicitly by a sense of injustice that the

communication industry has become an integral part of a wider corporate order which is

both exploitative and undemocratic". What has been termed the cultural industries

approach developed in Europe, and as Hesmondhalgh notes, unlike the Schiller-

McChesney tradition which has been criticised for producing conspiracy-theory type

analyses, this approach is much more concerned to theorise and analyse what

distinguishes cultural industry from other types of industry (Hesmondhalgh, 2007:

36).[71] In this thesis I adopt a cultural industries approach in order to analyse the changes

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[71] Wasko (2005:30), however, argues that whilst Hesmondhalgh's claim about the
characteristics of the Schiller-McChesney tradition "do indeed apply to some US

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in the practices within the contemporary publishing industry, as this is clearly the field

of production most relevant to the concerns of this thesis with a form of popular fiction.

4.4.2 Critical Political Economy: a cultural industries approach

As Hesmondhalgh (2007: 35) points out, the cultural industries approach was

instigated in Europe by Miège (1987; 1989), who helped to disseminate the term

'cultural industries' at variance with the pessimistic view of Adorno and Horkhiemer

([1947] 1997), whose use of critical theory in the critique of culture was to become

termed the Frankfurt School (Wiggerhaus, 1998).[72] As I noted in chapter one of this

thesis, by the 1940s, Adorno and Horkeimer had coined the phrase the 'culture industry'

to refer to the processes of production of 'mass culture', which, run for profit, they view

as generating standardised and formulaic products. Miège (1989), however, is critical of

Adorno and Horkhiemer's undifferentiated treatment of a singular 'culture industry' and

their disdain for 'mass popular culture'. Adorno and Horkhiemer, Miège (1989: 10-12)

argues, demonstrate a "limited and rigid idea of artistic creation" and furthermore, he

argues, "the capitalization of cultural production is a complex, many sided and even

contradictory process".

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scholars, the wide range of [political economy] work that has been done in North
America has unfortunately been overlooked in this formulation". Although I
acknowledge Wasko's claim for the oversight in Hesmondhalgh's work, I would argue
that, as I demonstrate in chapter five of this thesis, in relation to the field of production
this thesis is most concerned with, much criticism of the publishing industry by critical
political economists displays a form of Frankfurt School pessimism that the cultural
industries approach was formulated to avoid, and therefore it is the cultural industries
approach I employ in this thesis.
[72] I have oversimplified in this brief definition of the Frankfurt School; as Wiggerhaus
(1998) shows in his rigorous treatment of the School's constitution, it politics and its
theory, the School and its key figures were often fragmented in location and theoretical
perspective.

The change in terminology reflects not only the problematisation of Adorno and Horkeimer's thesis but also an understanding of a more complex reality; the cultural industries, Miège contends, can be distinguished according to a set of "*social logics* relating specifically to the processes of production and labour that contribute to the supply of cultural commodities" (1989: 274, emphasis in original). These social logics, appear to be stable yet respond to changes within the industries, and are defined and differentiated as: the editorial production of cultural commodities; the flow production of broadcasting; the production of live entertainment and the production of electronic information (ibid.). Of concern for this thesis is the editorial production of cultural commodities. The cultural industries approach, Hesmondhalgh (2007: 35-6) argues, allows for consideration and explication of both the changes and the continuities in the cultural industries in a nuanced way, since it accounts for contradiction within the industry in its sensitivity to the historical variations in social relations of cultural production and consumption. Furthermore, production and consumption are not, in a cultural industries approach, seen as distinct phenomena; rather they are viewed as "different moments in a single process" (2007: 36). Here, the refusal to perceive production and consumption as discrete phenomenon aligns well with the circuit of culture model, which emphasises the interconnection and overlap of the set of sites and practices that constitute the circuit of culture.

Forming the foci of my analysis of the contemporary publishing industry are the emphases within the cultural industries approach on market structure, conglomeration and concentration, and variations in the social relations of production and consumption. This latter concern, with variations in the social relations of production and consumption, encompasses questions, not only about changes in the roles of workers in

the cultural industries, but also about changes relating to the ways in which what is produced in the cultural industries is valued. Given the importance of the issue of value, additionally I bring to these foci Bourdieu's (1984) analysis of value and the tensions between creativity and commerce in order to connect power dynamics in the publishing industry with the emergence of chick lit.[73] Indeed, as Linell (2009: 14) points out, dialogism "stresses the moral or evaluative dimensions of interpretation and understanding", and the examination of how evaluations are expressed and drawn upon in both written texts and face-to-face interaction is the major focus of the dialogical discourse analysis that I develop and employ in this thesis. In the remainder of this chapter, I therefore move from methodological concerns to the explication of the analytical tools and concepts that I draw upon and together to constitute a dialogical discourse analysis.

4.5 Dialogic Discourse Analysis

The dialogic discourse analysis that provides the foundations for the model developed here is paradigm proposed by Marková, Grossen, Linell and Salazar Orvig (2007). This particular dialogic discourse analysis is particularly concerned with the study of the construction and expression of socially shared knowledge. Linell (2007: 133) proposes that this form of dialogical discourse analysis should focus on three levels of analysis. The first level of analysis, Linell suggests, focuses upon interaction between speakers. Interaction, Linell states, is viewed as, "an intricate web of sense-making and sense-creating in which, in principle, each contribution is interdependent with previous and possible next contributions". For this level of analysis I draw upon

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[73] I elucidate Bourdieu's insights in chapter five of this thesis wherein I undertake my analysis of the contemporary publishing industry.

tools and concepts from Conversation Analysis (CA).

4.5.1 Level one analysis: interaction between speakers

Put in basic terms, CA studies naturally occurring conversation and focuses upon the ways that participants interact on a turn-by-turn basis (Mills and Mullany, 2011: 81). CA researchers see conversation as highly organised, and sequentially structured. Turns consist of turn construction units (TCU), which are projectable, as participants in an interaction are able to project when a TCU will be complete, and where a transition relevance place (TRP) occurs; that is, a discrete place at which transition to the next speaker can occur. The turn taking model also accounts for troubles in its organisation, as it acknowledges that gaps and overlaps do occur in talk. In cases where the turn-taking rules have been broken, participants can initiate a repair. Repair of troubles of speaking, hearing or understanding can be initiated by the speaker of the repairable item (self-repair) or repair may be initiated by the recipient of the item (other repair). Self initiated repair can be indicated by cut-off in a word or sound, sound stretches within words and fillers such as *uh* or *uhm, er, erm*. Other-initiated repair is indicated by specific question words such as *who, where* and *when,* or more generally by items such as *what* and *huh,* or a partial repeat of the trouble source can indicate other repair.[74] Another important aspect of sequential organisation is its embodiment in adjacency pairs. Consisting of two adjacent turns by two different speakers, the second turn (or second pair part) in an adjacency pair is functionally dependent on the first turn (first pair part). For example, a question creates a 'slot' within which an answer is

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[74] This set of practices through which participants can make a repair also include practices for resolving overlap by increased volume, higher pitch, faster or slower pace of talk, or repeating a just-prior utterance.

expected, and indeed, given the importance of interviews in the data for this thesis, the notion of functional dependency is important for this thesis.[75]

Given the significance also afforded to multi-party talk, what is also of analytical importance for this thesis is the range of tools and concepts used in CA to address not only the type of role speakers take on, but also how speakers position themselves in relation to their interlocutors, the amount and type of conversational space speakers are given access to, and thus what can be effectively achieved in interaction. As CA scholars (e.g. Hutchby and Woofit, 2008; Ten Have, 2007) have shown, participants in talk in interaction not only position themselves in relation to their interlocutors by taking on a particular role in adjacency pairs; participants can also attempt to dominate the conversation, grabbing a turn by interrupting, or they can employ collaborative and facilitative conversational strategies. Participants can, for example, demonstrate that they are paying attention to a speaker, and provide support and encouragement for the speaker to continue with back channel behaviour, by using interspersed minimal responses such as *mmm*, *okay*, *mhm* and *yeah* (Coates, 1996; Gumperz, 1982).[76] Furthermore, the issue of overlapping speech is more complex than an indication of a move to dominate the conversation. As Coates (1996) points out, simultaneous speech in multi-party talk relating to a particular theme can indicate shared interest and enthusiasm for the topic rather than competitiveness.[77] Furthermore, participants can position themselves in relation both to their addressee and to their own

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[75] Adjacency pairs also include a greeting-greeting sequence, a summons-answer sequence, an invitation-response sequence and a telling-accept sequence.

[76] As the term interspersed suggests, these minimal responses do not constitute a turn.

[77] In line with a third wave feminist linguistic perspective as set out in chapter one of this thesis, unlike Coates I do not see simultaneous speech in multi-party talk as gendered. This refusal to view some conversational strategies as gendered applies to the concept I go on to discuss: hedging.

utterances. Linguistic devices such as hedges, indicated by words and phrases such as *I mean, maybe, sort of, kind of,* are multifunctional, having the effect of dampening down the force of what is said, and in modifying the propositional content of an utterance, demonstrating sensitivity to the feelings of others. For example, hedges can allow a speaker to avoid appearing to position her/himself as an expert, or they can facilitate the expression of controversial views (Coates, 1996: 152-162).

Linell (2009: 414, emphasis in original) contends that CA is "arguably a dialogical approach" in its concern with other-orientation, and he considers CA to be a "rigorous approach to the systematic analysis of what is made *manifest* in talk in interaction". Here, Linell is indicating one of the issues with CA, in that its focus is solely upon *overt* interaction. The integration of CA in this thesis is therefore not wholesale, since as Linell points out, CA shuns the analysis of content and interpretation and thus has a "limited potential for fully exploring some other phenomena that are at the heart of dialogism: meaning [and] understanding" (2009: 414).[78] Whilst employing elements of CA in this first level of analysis, a dialogical discourse analysis addresses issues of content in its second level of analysis.

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[78] There is, however, a schism between what has been termed 'pure' CA and 'applied' CA (Ten Have, 2007). 'Pure' CA researchers are interested solely in the articulated concerns of the participants in the conversation, thus gender, for example, should only be analysed if an interactant makes a direct reference to gender (Mills and Mullany, 2011). As Ten Have (2007: 199) points out, however, applied CA refers to studies which use CA tools and concepts but allows for the consideration of context, wherein attention is paid to both local practices such as the sequential organisation of talk and any larger structures within which these are embedded. As Linell (2009: 179) points out, theoretically, CA locates meaning in interaction, independent of the context in which utterances are produced, but from a dialogic perspective, subject matter and the topics deployed in talk also contribute to meaning-making. In this thesis it is thus elements of an *applied* CA *analytical,* rather than theoretical, approach that are employed.

4.5.2 Level two analysis: interaction between thoughts, ideas and arguments

The second level of analysis in a dialogic discourse analysis is concerned with "the interaction between thoughts, ideas and arguments in the discursive or textual web that is generated by participants" (Linell, 2007: 133). This stage of analysis is not so concerned with speakers, but rather with content, with what sorts of content get introduced and taken up, but it also pays attention to what linguistic devices are used in doing so. Whilst acknowledging that such an approach is a kind of content analysis, Linell avoids using the term content analysis, since he contends that the term suggests a quantitative analysis wherein key words are identified and coded in terms of, often pre-determined, abstract categories. From a dialogic perspective, such a decontextualisation of words fails to apprehend the more complex sequence that contributions to dialogue are embedded in. In order to identify, classify and discuss the content manifest in talk, Linell (2007) proposes the use of three concepts: topics, themes and themata. Topics are defined as "things, subjects, states-of-affairs, ideas etc. that participants talk about for a while in a given situation", themes are defined as recurrent topics, and the term themata refers to the "general cultural assumptions" that underlie the topics and themes that are bought up in dialogue (2007: 134).[79] However, the third level of analysis in a dialogic discourse analysis moves from the management of topics and topical trajectories to a concern with the cultural assumptions that underlie the circulation of ideas.

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[79] Linell also shows how, through the analysis of focus group data, the use of devices to manage topics and topical trajectories serve the group members as a means to build an understanding of the issue(s) in focus. Analogies, or the proposal that the phenomenon/issue under debate is similar to some other phenomenon/issue, may function to typify an abstract idea, complementing or extending what has already been said, whereas distinctions, or the proposal of contrasts or opposites, contradict what has been said before. Furthermore, when speakers discuss a particular issue, the use of examples can activate associations, display attitudes or indicate 'types' of people or events/situations (2007: 155).

4.5.3 Level three analysis: expressing shared social knowledge

In her elaboration of the third level of analysis in a dialogic discourse analysis, Marková (2007b) introduces the notion of themata and proto-themata as tools for analysing the construction and articulation of shared social knowledge. According to Marková, proto-themata are sets of relational categories that are frequently used, with a long duration, and relevant personally and/or collectively, such as male/female, good/bad and equality/inequality (2007: 170). Marková explains that proto-themata are "meaning potentialities in waiting: once the situation obtains, they will start generating concrete contents in specific conditions and activate the formation of more complex forms of socially shared knowledge" , and they become themata only when explicitly formulated and talked about, entering topics and themes of discussion. (2007: 171).[80] The distinction between the two concepts is therefore one of explicitness and implicitness, since proto-themata are implicitly understood, socially shared cultural presuppositions. This is where, however, the dialogical discourse analysis undertaken in this thesis diverges from that of Marková *et al*. Although I do not deny the efficacy of the concepts of proto-themata and themata, yet I would suggest that the notion of the content generating shift from proto-themata to themata has some affintities with the Foucauldian sense of discourse, and it is this latter concept that I employ in this thesis.

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[80] Marková provides the following example: "For example, we can suppose that the relational category male/female established itself first phylogenetically with respect to biological reproduction. In human species, in and through cognition and communication, it became a proto-thema with meaning potentialities to be further developed in a variety of directions. For example, this proto-thema obtained specific meanings in relation to beauty, the management of household, work outside the home, responsibilities in family and so on. In other words, in certain socio-historical conditions the proto-thema male/female becomes a thema, it becomes thematised (2007: 171).

More significantly, however, whilst I retain the analysis of topical episodes and themes, I draw upon alternative tools and concepts to analyse the link between topics and themes and socially shared knowledge: stance, appraisal and regimes of value.

4.6 A modified dialogic discourse analysis: Stance

The definition of stance that I adopt in this thesis is that put forward by Du Bois (2007), since he defines stance as intrinsically dialogical:

> a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture, and other symbolic forms), through which social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field (2007: 163).

The dialogicality of stance is further emphasised by Du Bois, as he points out that "no stance stands alone. Each stance is already specific with respect to, for example, the participants it indexes, the objects it evaluates, and the dimensions of sociocultural value it invokes" (2007: 172). However, like Coupland and Coupland (2009: 229), I would argue that Dubois' view of the dialogic is at times too narrow, exemplified by what he terms a stance diagraph, where one speaker's stance aligns syntactically with another speaker's previous stance:

> A: I don't know if she'd do it.
> B: I don't know if she'd do it either
> (2007: 22).

Such a conceptualisation of the dialogic is confined to two speakers who are co-present, and comes particularly close to Giles' (1975) accommodation theory with its notion of convergence and divergence. Throughout the analysis of stance in this thesis, I therefore maintain a broader view of the dialogic constitution of stance. Indeed, given the importance attached to double dialogicality in this thesis, like Jaworski and Thurlow

(2009) and Coupland and Coupland (2009), I conceptualise stance taking as having sociocultural significance; as Coupland and Coupland (2009: 228) put it, some stances are "in one way or another, clearly hooked into wider social discourses ... or are contextualised in important ways by them". Central to understanding stance, Besnier argues, is the concept of indexicality, or how ideologies are projected through language. Silverstein (2003) distinguishes between first and second order indexicality in order to demonstrate how local (micro) contexts relate to broader (macro) social and cultural categories. As Jones (2009: 17) explains:

> [t]he "first order" layer of an indexical relationship would be ... the association that one makes between a particular linguistic item and a social factor (such as the use of expletives and taboo language with masculinity). "Second order" indexicality involves cultural meaning that is attached to the association made at the first order (such as "men are aggressive").

Silverstein does not position one layer of indexicality as occurring before another (Moore and Podesva, 2009). However, for Ochs (1992, 1996), indexicality comes about in two distinct stages: direct and indirect indexicality. Whilst direct indexicality does occur, language items which do directly index gender, for example, 'Mr', 'Mrs', 'girl' and 'boy' are few. Thus Ochs argues that indirect indexicality mediates between a linguistic feature and a social category. Mills and Mullany (2011: 73) illustrate indirect indexicality thus:

> the stereotypical view that women are more linguistically polite than men ... should be interpreted as an ideological expectation, held in place by powerful ideologies, which holds white middle-class behaviour for women as the most powerful, hegemonic discourse for all women to follow in Western societies.

Through stancetaking, individuals index social meaning. Englebretson (2007) argues that stance should be subdivided into three categories. Evaluation, or evaluative stance, encompasses value judgements, assessments and attitudes. Affect, or affective stance, refers to personal feelings. Finally, epsitemicity, or epistemic stance, encompasses

commitment (2007: 17). Ochs states that "linguistic structures that index epistemic and affective stances are the basic linguistic resources for constructing/realizing social acts and social identities" (1996: 420). However, all three categories of stance taking are important for the analysis undertaken in this thesis.

4.6.1 Affective stance

In a study of British and American English, Precht (2003) demonstrates that there are frequencies in the adjectives and verbs used to mark affect. The most frequently used adjectives include *good, right, nice great, bad, funny, sorry, wrong, awful, best*, and the most common boulomaic verbs, or verbs expressing desire, include *want, need* and *would like*. There is, Precht argues, a great degree of overlap in the stance markers used in both American and British English. However, distinguishing between two main types of affect, opinion, which Precht argues is used to express what one thinks, and emotion, used to express what one feels, Precht's data shows that the British English speakers had lower frequencies than American English speakers for emotion-expressing affect markers such as *mad, crazy* and *glad*. Additionally, verbs that express emotion, such as *love, mind* and *like* seem to have much higher frequencies in American English speakers' conversations. Whilst affective stance conveys personal feelings, epistemic stance conveys the speaker's stance towards what they are saying.

4.6.2 Epistemic stance

Kärkkäinen (2003, 2006, 2007) has investigated expressions of epistemic stance, which she defines as "different *attitudes* towards knowledge" (2003: 19, my emphasis).

Whilst Biber and Finnegan (1989) argue that the linguistic means used to express stance are hedges, emphatics, certainty verbs, doubt adverbs and possibility modals, it transpires in Kärkkäinen's data that epistemic stance in, American English is highly regular, as only a limited amount of epistemic stance markers are used frequently by speakers. The most common type of epistemic modality found in Kärkkäinen's data is the cognitive, or perception, or utterance verb, i.e. I *think*, I *believe*, I *guess*, it *seems*, I *know*, I *feel*, I *found*.[81] Stances are not, however, static phenomena; as He (1993) shows in his study of academic counselling sessions, stances can be transitory and variable, as speakers modify their modal values according to a number of factors. Low modality, expressed by modals such as *can, may, don't have to*, and adjuncts such as I *think*, and *perhaps* were used by students to make requests, to state personal desires and to proffer their own solutions to their academic issues. Counsellors used low modality to suggest options and to give advice. Both students and counsellors, however, used high modality conveyed by modals such as *must, should have to* and adjuncts such as *certainly* and *of course* when dealing with facts. Tsui (1991) shows how the epistemic item *I don't know* is used as a marker to avoid disagreement and to avoid commitment, whilst Beach and Metzger (1997) demonstrate that *I don't know* is also used strategically in order to avoid troubles-talk (Tannen, 1990) and to postpone or withhold acceptance of another's request.

Pichler (2007, 2008) also demonstrates the multifunctionality of the epistemic phrase *I don't know* in Berwick-on-Tweed English, taking the form of either a bounded

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[81] In a later study of the epistemic item *I guess* in conversation, Kärkkäinen (2007) demonstrates that stancetaking also emerges in the immediacy and to and fro of dialogue, as her data shows that *I guess* can also point to a sudden change in the speaker's state of knowing, or awareness, or orientation to a freshly discovered stance.

or an unbounded syntactic construction or functioning non-referentially as a discourse

marker. According to Pichler's studies, when in a bound syntactic construction, or a

form that takes a dependent complement, *I don't know* functions as an epistemic marker

by expressing the degree of commitment accorded to the proposition it is attached to.

So, for example, in 'I don't know whether she's a selfish character' the phrase is

operating as an epistemic stance marker. However, in an unbounded syntactic

construction, or a form that does not take a dependent complement, *I don't know* can

function as a discourse marker[82]. Furthermore, in this unbounded syntactic construction,

the phrase can also take no explicit referent, operating pragmatically as a filler.[83] What

Pichler's study illustrates, I would suggest, is that the mulitfunctionality of lexical items

must be accounted for in any analysis of stance.

Bednarek (2006) similarly sees epistemological stance as conveying various

attitudes towards knowledge, but he suggests that it is epistemological positioning that

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[82] The analysis of discourse markers (DMs), or lexical expressions such as *but*, *well*, *so*, *because*, *I mean*, and *y'know*, has also been undertaken by Fitzmaurice (2002, 2004) who examines the function of *you know* and *you say* in attributing a stance not to oneself but to an addressee in both writing and speech spanning the period 1650 to 2004, and Innes (2010) examines the function of *well* to express speaker stance in a courtroom. Like Pichler, Innes (2010: 100) draws attention to the multifunctionality of lexical items and phrases. Innes makes the point that her data demonstrates the varied function of *well* under three categories, the first I would argue relating to epistemic stance and the following two categories relating to evaluative stance: "[w]hen it falls into the agreement category, it is facilitating or mitigating in nature. When it is in the disagreement category, it is often used for explicit challenges or for utterances that are unpalatable in some way, whether for the speaker or the hearer. Finally, when it is evaluative, it is signalling the speaker's awareness that he or she is providing opinion but without its being either agreement or disagreement" (2010: 115).

[83] Drawing on Pichler's insights, in a study of language use in the university classroom Kirkham (2011) demonstrates that the phrase *I don't know* is used in a highly context specific way. In his study of an undergraduate English Literature seminar, Kirkham shows that one student's use of *I don't know* projects a tentative stance as she evaluates the possible causes and outcomes of narrative events whilst another student's use of the phrase projects an assertive and authoritative stance as he evaluates the same text in terms of how it *ought* to be interpreted.

indicates where one positions oneself and others with regard to a specific attitude. The focus of both Hunston (2000) and Bednarek (2006) on how assessments concerning knowledge are marked acquires significance for the analysis undertaken in this thesis, since all of the face-to-face interaction analysed emerges from engagement in an evaluative activity, and evaluation is the key aspect of the media reviews examined. Epistemological positioning is clearly an important aspect of a speaker's construction of their evaluative stance, since not only is evaluation preoccupied with the information/knowledge to which speakers refer in their propositions, but also epistemological positioning can afford authority to a speaker's assessment. For example, the expression of extent conveyed by the indefinite determiner in the phrase 'all women do *X*' adds weight to the assessment by positioning it as an expression of a matter-of-fact rather than the speaker's (or writer's) opinion. Indeed, Hunston (2000: 178) argues that there is a crucial distinction to be made between averral and attribution:

> [i]f a piece of language – spoken, written, or thought- is attributed, it is presented as deriving from someone other than the writer. If a piece of language is averred, the writer him or herself speaks. The distinction between averral and attribution is important to the study of evaluation because it can be used to position the reader to attach more or less credence to the various pieces of information.

Averral thus positions the 'self' as the source to which knowledge can be attributed, although there is a distinction between straightforward averral where the attribution is clearly to the self and where the attribution is disguised. In the example above, 'all women do X', the speaker's or writer's opinion is disguised by being attributed to 'people in general' through its appeal to generality. Although neither Bednarek nor Hunston make reference to the concept, I would argue that what has been referred to as actuality stance adverbials (Conrad and Biber, 2000) fit well within epistemological positioning. In their examination of stance adverbials, Conrad and Biber (2000: 65)

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argue that an actuality stance is constructed when the adverbials *actually* and *really* "claim that what is being said is not just an opinion but a true reflection of reality". As I have already suggested above, evaluation is a key aspect for the analysis undertaken in this thesis, and in the next section I explore the concept of evaluative stance.

4.6.3 Evaluative stance

Evaluation, Hunston and Thompson (2000: 6-10) argue, has three functions, two of which are to express "the opinion of the speaker or writer, and in so doing to reflect the value system of that person and their community", and to construct and to maintain relations between the speaker and hearer or writer and reader, "in particular by assuming shared attitudes, values and reactions".[84] Scheibman (2007) focuses on generalization and generality of meaning in English conversations, and she defines these stance-related functions as "expressions of position and attitude that are relevant to both individual speakers ... and to relational activities among participants" (2007: 111). In her data, Scheibman shows that these expressions designate types of people, things, attitudes and relations that index societal discourses, and that these expressions are used to demonstrate solidarity, to authorise opinions and to make evaluations. Scheibman points out that, for example, a shift from *I* to *you* can be used to generalise the speaker's experience in order to build empathy with other participants, whilst the phrase *you know* generalises from individual stance to appeals to societal norms and to the beliefs of other participants (2007: 133).

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[84] The third function of evaluative stance, Hunston and Thompson note, is organisation of the discourse which largely means the organisation of a text; this function is not as central to the concerns of this thesis.

Coupland and Coupland (2009) also show that evaluative stances can be towards social issues and debates. Examining stance in relation to body shape and weight, Coupland and Coupland track the connections between locally produced contexts of talk and more global discourses about body shape, weight and weight loss in two data sets, a geriatric medicine context in which doctors negotiate the issue of being overweight with elderly patients, and in magazine features about weight and body shape. What arises from this study is the view that the expression of stance not only has sociocultural significance in its ability to index wider societal discourses, but also a stance can be *attributed* to an individual or collective other than the speaker. Coupland and Coupland point out that within stance attribution, the degree to which an entitlement to 'speak for' another is presumed varies across social and institutional settings.

In both data sets, Coupland and Coupland find that, "authoritative, institutional voices attribute stances to laypeople (as patients and magazine readers) in relation to their body weight" (2009: 230). In the geriatric medicine data, stance attribution is "a rhetorical device by which doctors can emphathize with patients' feelings and ambitions, but also subtly mold them into healthier, more positive ... orientations" (2009: 245). In the magazine features context, Coupland and Coupland similarly find that magazines use stance attribution to shape "their targets' subjective orientations" but in this context, expectations about health are not the issue; rather the features attribute to the readers feelings of bodily inadequacy and aspirations for making improvements to their body shape and size (ibid.). Both contexts under study, Coupland and Coupland argue, show that stance attribution "is not stance inculcation, but it is... able to suggest that particular stances are normative and not to be ignored" (2009: 246).

Jaworski and Thurlow (2009) examine the expression of evaluative stance, and its ability to index wider societal discourses in their study of elite stance taking in travel writing. According to Jaworski and Thurlow, elitism refers to:

> a person's orientation or making a claim to exclusivity, superiority, and/or distinctiveness on the grounds of knowledge, authenticity, taste, erudition, experience, wealth, or any other quality warranting the speaker/author to take a higher moral, aesthetic, intellectual, material or any other form of standing in relation to another subject (individual or group) (2009: 196).

An elite stance in travel writing, they demonstrate, is expressed by a number of features: direct adjectival opinion markers, such as *grim, horrible, chic*; positive self-evaluation and negative other-evaluation; and an author's adoption of the register of an 'expert'. What is significant for this thesis is Jaworski and Thurlow's attention to the notion of taste, since I place Bourdieu's (1984) theorisation and analysis of taste as a key mediating concept between stance and social meaning.

4.7 Taste and regimes of value

Bourdieu ([1986] 2004) demonstrates that tastes are pre-eminently social in their organisation and constitution, used as a marker of social position. According to Bourdieu, unequal power relations are rooted in classificatory schemes which are employed to describe both everyday life and cultural practices. Issues of culture, lifestyle and, in general, taste, Bourdieu argues, are played out in a struggle between the classes in a continual process:

> [t]he classifying subjects who classify the properties and practices of others, or their own, are also classifiable objects which classify themselves (in the eyes of others) by appropriating practices and properties that are already classified (as vulgar or distinguished, high or low, heavy or light etc. - in other words, in the last analysis, as popular or bourgeois) according to their probable distribution between groups that are themselves classified ([1986] 2004: 482).

Taste, including aesthetic taste, according to Bourdieu, is closely connected to one's

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class and one's education. Thus what is deemed to be the most distinguished 'Art' or 'Culture' is defined by and the domain of those who are possessed of 'cultivated' tastes, and whom, by virtue of their class, status and education, are able to designate these tastes as indicators of superiority.

Of particular significance for the concern in this thesis with the attribution of value is Bourdieu's concern with the cultural field as a site of power and struggle. For Bourdieu, field refers to a specific, structured, social arena of social positioning and position-taking; in an interview with Loic Waquant (1989), Bourdieu provides a succinct definition of his thinking:

> I define a field as a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation ... in the structure of the distribution of power (capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (Wacquant, 1989: 52).

In Bourdieu's terms, capital refers to resources implicated in class distinctions and therefore relations of power. Rather than just economic capital, Bourdieu sees capital as multiple and diverse, and not always material. Cultural capital, as Johnson (1993: 7) explains, is "a form of knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts", the possession of which is accumulated through habitus, and symbolic capital "refers to degrees of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour". Cultural capital and symbolic capital are particularly important in Bourdieu's (1993) theorisation of the cultural field. According to Bourdieu, the cultural field is divided, hierarchically, through the opposition between the "autonomous pole" and the "heteronomous pole" (1993: 29). The autonomous pole concerns 'high' art such as novels considered to be 'literary' and therefore economic

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capital is eschewed in favour of symbolic capital, and the heteronomous pole concerns 'mass' forms, such as popular fiction, which are subordinate to the demands of economic capital (1993: 29-37). As Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002: 152) point out, in Bourdieu's analysis, the 'prize' in this competition for field-specific interests and resources is to become recognised as a gatekeeper in the field, authorised to make judgements about value. What is at stake, then, is knowledge about what constitutes legitimate culture. Whilst, as I indicated in the introduction to this thesis, I would argue that the 'high'/'low' culture distinction remains a powerful structuring concept for the evaluation of fiction, particularly women's fiction, rather than relying solely on Bourdieu's concept of field-specific values and logics, I draw upon the concept of regimes of value (Frow, 1995, 2007; Bennett, Emmison and Frow, 1999).

Bennett, Emmison and Frow (1999: 260) explain that the term regimes of value thus designates "an institutionally grounded set of discursive and intertextual determinations that inspire and regulate practices of valuation, connecting people to objects or processes of aesthetic practice by means of normative patterns of value and disvalue" (1999: 103-4). Drawing upon the concept of regimes of value addresses the reductiveness in Bourdieu's theorising identified by Frow (1995). According to Frow, Bourdieu collapses various social groups into a single, fixed and ahistorical 'dominant class', thereby assuming a common class experience amongst what are distinct groups of people, and proposes a single aesthetic logic that corresponds to this experience (1995: 31). However, according to Bennett, Emmison and Frow, regimes of value "are configurations which, while constantly mutating, have taken on a certain stability over time, but they are ... never simply expressive of, and never simply reflect a class structure" (1999: 260). This raises the possibility that a regime of value may be shared

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by individuals whose aesthetic tastes and values Bourdieu's model may well separate on the grounds of class differentiation. Furthermore, for Bourdieu, the primary function of cultural capital is to maintain or further social status, but Bennett, Emmison and Frow (1999) suggest that the functions of cultural capital are now more complex. Indeed, the more recently developed concept of the cultural omnivore (Peterson, 1992, 2005; Peterson and Simkus, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996) reformulates the link between cultural capital and social boundaries. The "omnivore thesis" (Sullivan and Katz-Gerro, 2007) contends that increasing numbers of people in Western countries appreciate and use a greater variety of cultural forms across the boundaries of 'high' and 'low' culture. Peterson and Kern (1996) argue, however, that omnivorousness does not mean liking cultural forms indiscriminately; omnivorousness, they contend, should not be conceived as an unwillingness to make judgements about cultural forms, rather what is more valued is the willingness to have and to learn from a diverse range of interests, with a particular emphasis on the rejection of snobbishness.[85] The cultural omnivore, then, is not necessarily attempting to further their social dominance, but rather expressing their openness to cultural diversity in the scope of their interests (Ollivier, 2008).[86]

In her study of the evaluations members of a focus group make of a television book club Lang (2010) provides empirical evidence for cultural omnivorousness with specific regard to literary tastes. Lang draws attention to the ways in which some

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[85] Whilst omnivorousness was first conceptualised as an attribute of an elite status (Peterson, 2005), subsequent studies (e.g. López-Sintas and Katz-Gerro, 2005) have disassociated omnivorousness from educated upper class groups, with Chan and Goldthorpe (2007) suggesting that women are more likely to be omnivores than men.
[86] Although, Eriksson (2011: 486) makes the point that "[i]f omnivorousness represents a new openness it is thus only in the sense of not prescribing a certain mono-cultural canon of aesthetic forms and artworks", and Warde *et al* (1999) suggest in their study that the most elite members of the restaurant-frequenting population in the U.K. found for themselves a source of reputation and status by demonstrating a wide range of tastes.

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individuals take care to camouflage taste preferences that could be perceived as snobbish. She highlights the mitigating strategies employed by focus group members to obscure potential snobbery, including stressing the subjectivity of one's opinion, circumventing any potential criticisms by voicing them oneself, and counteracting the negative evaluations put forward by also making some positive comments (2010: 325-6). [87] The insights into taste camouflaging Lang provides are important for the analysis of the reading group data in this thesis, as I show in chapter seven. It is, however, necessary to adopt two complementary sets of analytical tools and concepts, alongside those for the linguistic expression of stance, that address how evaluations are constructed. The first group of analytical tools is contained within what Martin and White (2005) term the appraisal framework.

4.8 Appraisal: the language of evaluation

According to Martin (2000: 145), the term appraisal refers to "the semantic resources used to negotiate emotions, judgements and valuations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations". The appraisal framework is thus concerned with "the subjective presence of writers/speakers as they adopt stances towards both the material they present and those with whom they communicate" (Martin and White, 2005: 1). Whilst the appraisal framework is related to work on evaluation in a number of models, it is work on stance that it is most closely related to (2005: 40). Appraisal is positioned by Martin and White as a significant resource for the construal of interpersonal meaning, and is regionalised as three interacting domains,

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[87] The book club in question is Richard and Judy's book club, aired on U.K. daytime television and presented by Richard Madeley and Judy Finnegin, the two former hosts of ITV's magazine-style daily daytime television programme *This Morning*.

termed attitude, engagement and graduation. The domain of engagement is concerned with adopting a position with respect to the attitudes and opinions a speaker or writer may express, and this domain, I suggest, relates to the expression of epistemic stance and epistemological positioning. The domain of graduation is concerned with "modulating meaning by degree", or in other words with the gradability of meanings according to positivity, negativity, intensity or amount (2005: 40). For example, Martin and White point out that the lexical item *break* can be intensified in different degrees according to lexical choice which "flags", or connotes, attitude, from, for example, *demolish* to *dismantle, smash* to *damage* (2005: 66). Whilst engagement and graduation are important, it is the domain of attitude which is most important for this thesis, as this domain is concerned with emotional reactions, judgements of behaviour and evaluations of things which, I would suggest, relates to the expression of affective and evaluative stance.

According to Martin and White, attitude involves "three semantic regions covering what is traditionally referred to as emotion, ethics and aesthetics", and thus the domain of attitude is split into a further three corresponding sub-domains: affect, judgement and appreciation (2005: 42). Affect is concerned with the lexical resources for construing emotional reactions/feelings, and again here I would include the expression of affective stance. The sub-domain of judgement is concerned with "attitudes towards behaviour, which we admire or criticise, praise or condemn" and again I would include the expression of evaluative stance (2005: 42). The analytical benefit of the judgement sub-domain, I would suggest, is its division into social esteem and social sanction categories of evaluation, each of which can be lexically construed positively or negatively. The social esteem category refers to judgements regarding

normality, or how special or unusual someone is, capacity, or how capable someone is, and tenacity, or how dependable someone is. For example, positive judgements of esteem can be realised through lexical items such as *normal* (positive capacity), *sensible* (positive capability) and *cautious* (positive tenacity). Negative judgements of esteem can be realised through lexical items such as *hapless* (negative normality), *immature* (negative capability) and *capricious* (negative tenacity). The social sanction category of evaluation refers to judgements regarding veracity, or how honest someone is, and propriety, or how ethical someone is. Again, both veracity and propriety evaluations can be either positive or negative. For example, a positive judgement of veracity can be realised through lexical items such as *honest*, whilst *deceptive* expresses a negative judgement of veracity, and *sensitive* expresses a positive judgement of propriety whilst *selfish* suggests a negative judgement of propriety. The domain of appreciation is concerned with "meanings construing our evaluations of 'things', especially things we make and performances we give" (2005: 56). In both of the sub domains of judgement and appreciation, I would include the expression of evaluative stance.

As a form of evaluation of both semiotic and natural phenomena, appreciation is organised by its further subdivision into three realms: reaction, composition and valuation. Here, though, I will consider appreciation as a form of evaluation of semiotic phenomena, or in other words as evaluation of works of fiction. According to Martin (2000: 160), the reaction realm of appreciation refers to "the degree to which the text ... in question captures our attention". The realm of composition refers to evaluations of the complexity and detail in a text, and I would add to this category Hunston's (2000: 199) point that the "clarity and pleasingness of the writing" is an important criterion for evaluating a book. The final realm of appreciation, valuation, refers to an assessment of

the social significance of the text, or as Hunston puts it, the "degree of accuracy and insight with which it tells its story" (2000: 199). This division into reaction, composition and valuation categories, I would argue, allows for a more nuanced analysis of the construction of an evaluative stance towards a work of fiction such as chick lit, since it enables the analyst to make clear what aspect of a text is being evaluated at what point in speech or writing. However, appreciation categories are not entirely unambiguous. As Martin and White point out, there is an often strong link between the appreciation variable of reaction and affect, as one could, for example, identify emotive lexis such as *captivating*, and *moving* as realisations of reaction (2005: 57). Furthermore, an evaluation about the degree of insight and verisimilitude in a book's content can also arguably be an assessment that depends upon what captures our attention about the delineation of character or social situation. Characterisation is a key element of a novel's construction, but I would argue that, although dealing with fictional material, positive or negative evaluations of characterisation are better viewed as judgements of behaviour. It is therefore, I suggest, necessary to distinguish between construing the emotions someone feels (reaction/affect), the importance someone attaches to a work of fiction (valuation), judgements of behaviour, and to whom or to what is credited the power to invoke these appraisals.

What distinguishes the appraisal framework from other models of the language of evaluation, according to Martin and White, is the system's aim to deal more comprehensively with affect; indeed, they point out that judgement and appreciation can be viewed as "institutionalised feelings, which takes us out of our everyday common sense world in to the uncommon sense worlds of community values" (2005: 45). It could be argued, however, that the use of appraisal theory is problematic for an

approach that is theoretically underpinned by dialogism, since the model would appear to suggest that it is the "linguistic system" (Jones and Collins: 2006: 46) that accounts for the possibilities of linguistic behaviour for participants in a communicative situation. Martin and White (2005: 94), however, state that "[t]he framework's orientation is towards meanings in context and towards rhetorical effects, rather than towards grammatical forms". Further, they state that "our maps of feeling (for affect, judgement and appreciation) have to be treated at this stage as hypotheses about the organisation of the relevant meanings" they "should not be treated as a dictionary ...which can be mechanically applied in a text analysis" (2005: 46 - 52, emphasis removed). Context is a particularly important variable in a dialogic discourse analysis, as the significance of what is said is dependent upon the type of communicative activity within which it takes place and what is occurring within this situated interaction, and it is, I suggest, in its orientation to meaning in context and meaning potentials that the appraisal framework is useful for this thesis. The final set of analytical tools and concepts drawn upon in this thesis are concerned with the intricacies of managing social interaction. Whilst the appraisal system can be brought to bear on the analysis of both speech and writing, the concern with the talk that is produced in reading group interactions requires attention to the contingencies of interaction in this particular evaluative activity, at the level of both the individual and the group.[88]

4.9 Rapport management, face and book group talk

O'Halloran (2011: 172) views book groups as sites of what he terms "informal

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[88] If, however, one was to apply the form of dialogic discourse analysis developed here to a different cultural form, it would be the concept of rapport management alone that would be drawn upon. The stress in this thesis on book group talk responds to its particular focus.

argumentation", and they "provide evidence of how 'ordinary people'—as opposed to

critics and academics—claim and challenge evaluations and interpretations of literature.

They also furnish evidence of how reading group members collaborate over their

evaluations and interpretations". In a corpus analysis of data from the discussions of ten

U.K. reading groups, O'Halloran differentiates between evaluation and interpretation,

locating the disparity between them in the differences between the construction of

claims, challenges and co-constructions. According to O'Halloran, a claim occurs when

a speaker makes a "changeable proposition about the novel"; a challenge occurs when a

speaker "challenges a previous claim" and co-construction occurs when "claims from

different speakers build on each other" (2011: 181). In coding the data according to

these categories, where claims and challenges are evaluative and co-construction is

interpretative, O'Halloran finds that co-construction does not begin until approximately

a third of the way through the group discussion which suggests that time is needed for

solidarity to be established (2011: 183).

I would argue, however, that O'Halloran's distinction between evaluation and

interpretation is challengeable, since any act of interpretation is in effect an act of

assessment and opinion. Moreover, empirically, O'Halloran's finding that co-

construction occurs after some time into the reading group session is not borne out in

the Hapley Road reading group interactions analysed in chapter seven of this thesis. I

do not disagree in principle with O'Halloran's claim for the necessity of solidarity

between members to be established, particularly since some large reading groups with

open membership may well have a less fixed pattern of those members who regularly

attend than the Hapley Road group, and therefore, given the presence of new or

infrequent participants who may not know each other well, some interactional work

may well need to take place to create a congruous atmosphere. However, from a dialogical perspective I would suggest that with its connotations of consensus building and commonality, the use of the term solidarity cannot adequately account for the nuances and intricacies of the interactional work required in a reading group.

Swann and Allington (2009: 254) point out that facework is a central element in reading group interaction, since there is a need to respect the face of the other group members who may interpret and evaluate the novel under discussion differently. The notion of 'face' is a concept that has been used, and discussed in detail, in linguistic politeness theory to refer to the public self-image each individual wishes to claim for themselves. In his work on social interaction, Goffman (1967: 5) defines face as the "positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [*sic*] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact", and it is this notion of face that Brown and Levinson (1987) develop in their theory of politeness. For Brown and Levinson, the notion of face is the major motivating force for politeness, and they adapt and expand the concept by splitting face into two categories: positive face and negative face. Positive face, according to Brown and Levinson, refers to a person's want to be liked, admired and needed by selected others, whilst negative face refers to a person's want to be unimpeded and not to be imposed upon by others. In any communicative act, Brown and Levinson argue, speakers simultaneously recognise their own and other interactants' face wants, which means that whenever speakers are engaged in a communicative act that may threaten another's face wants (a face threatening act), speakers select particular facework strategies that attempt to attend to these positive and negative face wants.

Peplow (2011) points out that there is always, in reading group interaction, a risk to a speaker's face when offering an interpretation of the novel under discussion. Identifying the occurrence of *X then Y* structures in his reading group data, or structures along the lines of 'at first I thought *X* and then I thought *Y*', Peplow argues that these formulations operate to minimise the sense that a speaker's interpretation may be prejudiced. This mitigation occurs since the illocutionary force of an *X then Y* structure is weaker than an unmitigated interpretation/evaluation that is expressed authoritatively, or indeed a direct evaluation that makes no attempt to take into account the face needs of the hearer. In his discussion of the *X then Y* structure, Peplow argues that the members of the reading group in his study, "want to appear enlightened and for their interpretations of texts to be accepted as legitimate. The *X then Y* structures are used in this context to mitigate the potential outlandishness of a speaker's interpretation" (2011: 13). In the reading group under study in this thesis, I would argue that it is not so much the potential outlandishness of an interpretation or evaluation that the members are keen to mitigate but rather the potential to appear biased, camouflaging any articulation of taste hierarchies (Lang, 2010). For Peplow, it is positive face needs that are closely attended to in reading group interaction, but the notion of positive and negative face has been robustly criticised within scholarly work on politeness (Mills, 2003; Spencer-Oatey, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2008).

Spencer-Oatey (2002, 2005, 2008) argues that Brown and Levinson's notion of face is individualistic, with this focus on the self failing to take into account the interpersonal, social aspect of face, and she contends that what Brown and Levinson term negative face needs are not necessarily face needs at all, but rather a concern for what she terms sociality rights and obligations. In response to the undertheorisation of

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the social component in Brown and Levinson's notion of face, Spencer-Oatey puts

forward the alternative concept of rapport management, which she defines as "the

management of harmony-disharmony among people". Rapport management entails

three interconnected components: "the management of face, the management of

sociality rights and obligations, and the management of interactional goals" (2008:

13).Within Spencer-Oatey's conceptualisation, face is "associated with

personal/relational social value, and is concerned with people's sense of worth, dignity,

honour, reputation, competence and so on". Sociality rights and obligations are

"concerned with social expectancies, and reflect people's concerns over fairness,

consideration and behavioural appropriateness" (2008: 13-14). The third and final

component in the rapport management framework, interactional goals, refers to "the

specific task and/or relational goals that people may have when they interact with each

other" (2008: 14).

Spencer-Oatey (2007) develops her conceptualisation of face in its relationship

to identity; the relationship between face and identity is viewed in a threefold

perspective to include both individual face sensitivities and group face sensitivities, but

under the singular term identity face.[89] Drawing upon Simon's (2004) self-aspect model

of identity, Spencer-Oatey (2007) argues that face and identity both relate to the notion

of a person's self-image which includes individual, relational and collective construals

of the self, including multiple attributes such as:

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[89] In Spencer-Oatey's early (2002) framework, face is split into two interrelated aspects: quality face is closely associated with self-esteem, as it is concerned with what Spencer-Oatey sees as our fundamental desire for other people to positively evaluate our personal qualities such as our competence, our abilities and our appearance. The second aspect of face, social identity face, refers to the desire for other people to recognize and sustain our social identities and roles such as team/group leader, close friend or valued customer. In her later work, however, Spencer-Oatey (2005, 2007) abandons this two aspect division.

- Personality traits (e.g. friendly)

- Abilities (e.g. good dancer)

- Physical features (e.g. dark hair)

- Behavioural characteristics (e.g. usually gets up early)

- Ideologies (Liberal Democrat)

- Social roles (e.g. manager)

- Language affiliation(s) (e.g. English,)

- Group memberships (e.g. female, academic)

This threefold perspective on the individual, the relational and the collective shares some affinity with a third wave feminist perspective on identity and its focus on interaction at the level of the community of practice, discussed in chapter one, section 1.2.3 of this thesis. There, I pointed out that from this dynamic perspective, identity is made up of multiple aspects that are brought into play at different times, in response to different contextual influences. Thus, following Mullany (2011), I integrate elements of the more explicit account of the role of the group in perceptions of face. Indeed, as I will demonstrate in the last chapter of this thesis, for the reading group under study in this thesis, group face sensitivities are particularly important in their discussions of chick lit.

4.10 Combining micro and macro approaches: invoking context and the role of the analyst

The form of dialogic discourse analysis set out in this chapter entails both a micro-level approach in its detailed, fine-grained analysis of talk-in-interaction and broader, macro-level concerns with society and social norms and values. These two approaches have, however, been positioned as epistemologically and methodologically

opposed, particularly in the debate across the pages of the journal *Discourse and Society*

between proponents of the more macro-oriented Critical Discourse Analysis[90] and those

who advocate the micro-oriented Conversation Analysis (Schegloff, 1997, 1999a,

1999b; Wetherell, 1998; Billig, 1999a, 1999b). The fundamental tensions between these

two analytical approaches concern the role of the analyst, what counts as relevant

context and the status of the analyst's findings. Van Dijk (1993: 252) contends that

"[u]nlike other discourse analysts, critical discourse analysts (should) take an explicit

socio-political stance: they spell out their point of view, perspective, principles and

aims, both within their discipline and within society at large". In the 1997 paper that

began the debate, Schegloff, however, argues that critical discourse analysis:

> allows students, investigators, or external observers to deploy the terms which
> preoccupy *them* in describing, explaining, critiquing, etc. the events and texts to
> which they turn their attention. There is no place for the endogenous orientations
> of the participants in those events; there is no principled method for establishing
> those orientations; there is no commitment to be constrained by those
> orientations ... there   is kind of theoretical imperialism involved here ... of the
> critics whose theoretical apparatus gets to stipulate the terms by reference to
> which the world is understood (1997: 167).

According to Schegloff, first and foremost, critical discourse analysts should conduct a

technical, rather than a socio-political analysis thus bracketing their politics, as it is only

when the data is understood in its "endogenous constitution" or what is evident and

relevant to the participants, that the analyst can know what kind of socio-political issues

the data allows her/him to address (1997: 168).

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[90] Following Foucault, CDA, particularly the model proposed by Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995), focuses upon the imbrication of discourse, power and subjectification. Largely engaging with written data, CDA investigates the way in which particular discourses are circulated and modified in texts, emphasising the linguistic strategies whereby texts position their readers within these discourses.

In response to Schegloff's view that CDA imposes the analysts' theoretical and political agendas onto the data under study, Wetherell (1998) argues that, firstly, CA's own methodology problematises Schegloff's prescription that analysis should be uncontaminated by theorists' own categories, since CA does indeed employ analytical categories to identify patterns in talk (1998: 402). Secondly, Wetherell argues that Schegloff's view of what constitutes participants' orientations is overly narrow:

> for Schegloff participant orientation seems to mean only what is relevant for the participants in this particular conversational moment. Ironically, of course, it is the conversation analyst in selecting for analysis part of a conversation or continuing interaction who defines this relevance for the participant. In restricting the analyst's gaze to this fragment, previous conversations, even previous turns in the same continuing conversation become irrelevant for the analyst but also, by dictat, for the participants. We do not seem to have escaped, therefore, from the imposition of theorists' categories and concerns (1998: 403).

Wetherell contends that a *complete* analysis must venture further than participants' orientations and therefore the limits of the text, requiring both a technical analysis that conversational analysis provides and a critical analysis; in her view: "[a]n adequate analysis would also trace through the argumentative threads displayed in participants' orientations and would interrogate the content or the nature of members' methods for sense-making in more depth" (1998: 404). For Wetherell, with its synthesis of the two approaches, critical discursive psychology offers an analysis that attends to both the why's and the how's of talk-in-interaction: "[i]t is concerned with members' methods and the logic of accountability while describing also the collective and social patterning of background normative conceptions" (1998: 405). The dialogism and the form of dialogic discourse analysis put forward in this thesis shares Wetherell's position that although context is invoked by participants, this does not mean, as Mills (2003: 49) puts

it, "that larger forces are not at work".[91] Furthermore, the analytical approach taken in this thesis does not bracket off larger epistemological issues, but rather draws upon Linell's point that:

> Dialogical theories deal with human sense-making. The subject matter of our studies is people's communication, cognition and interventions into the world, in real life. At one level we are concerned with what ethnomethodologists and Conversation Analysts call 'members' categories' … how participants "methodologically" (i.e., using their own mundane 'methods') make meaning and display their understandings in their actual real-world practices. [But] we cannot ignore the analyst's influence on the outcome of his or her studies. The analyst is also involved in sense-making, albeit on a 'second-order level'.

This second-order level role of the analyst involves a rebuilding of participants' constructions, "recontextualising them, under conditions of (attempting some kind of) generalization, systemization and explanation" (Linell, 2009: 29).

The issues of what counts as relevant context, the issue of the status of the analyst's findings and what constitutes an acceptable warrant and basis for the analyst's

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[91] There is indeed a similarity between the theoretical and analytical model put forward in this thesis and critical discursive psychology regarding the view of the relationship between social context and discourse. For Wetherell (2001: 389), the notion of society as argumentative texture is important for her approach: "[i]f we think of cloth or fabric, what is clear is that the threads are woven through the whole … [i]n this perspective even the particular words which are used evoke discursive history and current social relations". This notion of argumentative texture resonates with dialogism's contextual social constructionism, by which I mean that individuals are embedded in social environments within which some ways of thinking and behaving have become sedimented and valorised. There is, however, a distinct difference between the scope of critical discursive psychology and the dialogic discourse analysis I put forward in this thesis. As Potter (2010) points out, the primary focus of discursive psychology is upon how *psychological* matters are described and displayed in talk, but as this chapter has demonstrated, the dialogic discourse analysis developed in this thesis is concerned more broadly to analyse the interrelations not just between social interaction and social structure, but also between social interaction, social structure and *socio-cultural and socio-economic practices*.

interpretation has also been the subject of debate in language and gender studies, since as Bucholtz (2003: 51) notes, gender is pivotal to the controversy provoked by Schegloff's article as he uses gender to illustrate his point that social categories cannot be assumed to be analytically relevant without verifiable evidence within the interaction that they are relevant to participants. As McElhinny (2003: 34) points out, the problem for Schegloff is that social categories such as gender are not specifically linked to conversation; according to Schegloff (1987: 215-20) social categories are not:

> analytically linked to specific conversational mechanisms by which the outcomes might be produced .... [whereas] it might be relatively straightforward to warrant "two-party conversation" or "on the telephone" as contexts ... [b]ecause they are procedurally related to the doing of talk, evidence of orientation to them ordinarily is readily available.

However, this approach would seem to suggest a restrictive, predominantly role-based understanding of human relations and utterance production and comprehension. Whilst Schegloff's argument raises an important issue that alerts analysts to ask when gender is relevant rather than assuming that gender is always relevant, as McElhinny argues, Schegloff's argument ultimately suggests that gender is never relevant (2003: 35). McElhinny makes a further important point for the dialogic approach developed in this thesis, as she points out that in the last analysis, Schegloff's argument "simply returns us to abstract individualism" (ibid.). The dialogic discourse analysis developed in this chapter, however, not only examines how what the talk is 'about' is conveyed and how it is structured, but also draws upon the concept of stance-taking and an indexical view of language to afford a multi-level analysis of how linguistic features are used by individuals to position themselves within particular topics in particular interactive contexts, and how individuals are simultaneously positioned as they use linguistic features and interactional styles that have come to be indexed with specific meanings.

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I agree with Mills (Mills, 2003; Mills and Mullany, 2011) that the formation of armed camps and a stand-off between CA and CDA, micro-oriented and macro-oriented approaches, is theoretically unproductive, and that analysts should see "the necessity of synthesising elements from each approach" (Mills, 2003: 242). I also follow Mills' position with regard to the status of the analyst's findings:

> discourses do not simply emerge when we analyse an interaction closely, but rather 'emerge as much through our work of reading as from the text' ... [t]his focus on the best possible reading of the interaction may lead us to 'close the text to alternative readings' (Bauman and Parker, 1993: 156)... [w]e must instead, as analysts ... see the transcribed text as one element in the process of making sense of discourse, and our own interpretation as a justified analysis of the text, but nevertheless still one of many other interpretations (2003: 244).

The dialogic discourse analysis of the reader interviews and the book group discussion in chapters six and seven of this thesis is but one interpretation and therefore open to alternative interpretations of the data. Indeed, it is important to note that in the case of the book group meeting, my presence as a researcher and the expectations the group members may potentially have hypothesised regarding my beliefs, values and motivation was a factor in the discussion. Similarly, my decision to ask questions in the reader interviews undoubtedly shaped the subsequent discussion. However, this does not render either these question-answer episodes or the book group discussion as a whole invalid or inappropriate for scholarly examination, as long as this specific interactional context is borne in mind throughout. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Wetherell (2001: 398) points out that the debates amongst discourse researchers about what constitutes relevant context, the role of analyst and the status of the analyst's findings are not ones that can be resolved easily or dismissed. What the dialogic discourse analysis developed in this chapter attempts to do is to put forward a fresh synthesis of micro and macro-oriented approaches that is adequately reflexive about the status of its analysis.

4.11 Summary

This chapter has set out the methodological and analytical tools and concepts that are necessary for a dialogic discourse analysis that can provide an adequately nuanced framework for the analysis of the complex ways in which the meanings of chick lit are constructed and negotiated. Drawing on the dialogic theory developed in chapter three of this thesis, the dialogic discourse analysis developed in this chapter is designed to attend to the examination of the interdependencies and interrelations between individuals, between individuals and social socially shared knowledge, and between individuals and social practice, including their engagements with artistic productions that are made and encountered in the social world. The organising methodology chosen for such an approach, the circuit of culture paradigm, models an interrelated set of spheres, and therefore perspectives, from which the meanings of any cultural artefact can be analysed, stressing the integrated relationship between producers and consumers. Analytically, the dialogic discourse analysis developed here also draws on the dialogic theory that underpins this thesis in order to address the complexity of meaning-making in its multiple locations and aspects. Taking from dialogic theory the axiomatic principle that all interpretation and understanding is intrinsically evaluative, the tools and concepts gathered together, although diverse, all deal with the ways in which the construction and negotiation of meaning is bound up with evaluation, across both the spheres of production and consumption. It is to the sphere of production and an analysis of the ways in which the meanings and value of chick lit are constructed in the publishing industry that the next chapter turns.

Chapter 5

The publishing industry and the emergence of chick lit

5.0 Introduction

In contrast to the predominantly textually-oriented analyses within chick lit scholarship to date, this thesis sets out to explore how chick lit's meanings are constructed and negotiated in complex and multi-faceted ways. As I argued in chapter four, section 4.1, the organising methodology thus chosen for this thesis is the circuit of culture paradigm, which takes into account the impact of multiple spheres in producing a full and coherent account of the meanings which arise from and circulate around a popular cultural form, demonstrating the fluid interrelations between producers and consumers. This chapter focuses specifically upon the sphere of production within the circuit of chick lit culture. The aims of this chapter are to examine the changes that have occurred within the contemporary publishing industry, in order to explore the ways in which changes in production practices have shaped the ways in which chick lit, and its readers, have been conceptualised. The emergence of chick lit as a category and the consequent proliferation of chick lit novels from the mid to late 1990s onwards places chick lit firmly within a period of flux within publishing, a period within which, as Squires (2007a) argues, a perceived shift has taken place from editorial-led to sales and marketing-led publishing. It is the contention of this chapter that developments in the conceptualisation of the social relations between production and consumption have arisen from this shift in power, and have impacted upon the ways in which chick lit has been evaluated, and how its readers have been imagined, and addressed.

In order to address its goals, this chapter is organised according to a two part

structure. Beginning at section 5.1, the first part of this chapter examines the changing

landscape and practices of the book publishing industry.[92] Employing a cultural

industries approach to the particular social logics that are specifically related to book

production in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries provides this section with three

areas upon which to focus wherein changes have taken place. Section 5.1 explores the

issue of the changes in market structure that have occurred; section 5.2 examines the

transformations in patterns of ownership that have taken place; and section 5.3

considers the changes to channels of retail distribution that have been brought about.

Section 5.4 explores the shift from editorial-led to sales and marketing-led publishing

which has resulted from the intersection of these three changes in book production.

Beginning at section 5.5, the second part of this chapter examines the ways in

which the social relations between production and consumption have been

conceptualised as a result of the changes within the publishing industry outlined in the

first part of the chapter. Crucially, this part of the chapter explores how these shifts have

impacted upon the production of chick lit, and the ways in which the genre's readers

have been imagined and addressed. Section 5.5.1 explores what I suggest is the first of

these developments, concerned with the way in which publishing has been criticised for

what is perceived to be a decline in diversity and quality in a general 'dumbing down'

of the industry. The notion of a 'dumbing down' is important for this thesis, since a

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[92] I am concerned here with English language trade publishing, which Thompson (2012: 12) defines as "the sector of the publishing industry that is concerned with publishing books, both fiction and non-fiction, that are intended for general readers and sold primarily through bookstores and other retail outlets". As Thompson points out, other fields of publishing, such as academic publishing, are organised in different ways to trade publishing and thus "we cannot assume that the factors that shape the activities of trade publishers will be the same as those that shape the activities of publishers in other fields" (ibid.).

frequent criticism levelled at chick lit is its existence as the exemplification of the pursuit of profit over substance. This section therefore moves from general criticisms of the publishing industry to specific criticisms of chick lit as an example of the industry's move towards 'dumbing down' its products. Section 5.5.2 examines what I suggest is the second development brought about by the changes within the book publishing industry that has impacted upon the emergence of chick lit: the increasing importance of marketing activities. This section considers the ways in which the chick lit reader has been conceptualised and addressed through an examination of the development of chick lit cover design. This chapter begins, then, by mapping out the changes that have occurred within the publishing industry.

5.1 Market Structure

Perhaps one of the most striking developments in the book publishing industry has been the sustained increase in the number of titles published. The table below (*Table 1*) demonstrates the marked increase in the total number of titles published in the U.K , in two ten year periods: 1971-1973 to 1981-1983, and 1981-1983 to 1991-1993.

Table 1

	1971-1973	Percent rise	1981-1983	Percent rise	1991-1993
Total number of titles published in the U.K.	33,643	41	47,487	61	76,287
Number of fiction titles published in the U.K.	3863	29	4964	61	7980

Number of book titles published in the U.K. in two ten year periods: 1971-1973 to 1981-1983 and 1981-1983 to 1991-1993.

The number of fiction titles in particular showed an accelerated percentage increase in the two periods, from 29% in the 1971-1973 to 1981-1983 period, to 61% in the 1981-1983 to1991-1993 period. Similarly, the table below (*Table 2*) shows an increase in the number of titles published in the United States of America from 1970 to 2004:

Table 2

Year	1970	1980	1993	2004
Number of titles published in the U.S.	36,071	42,377	46,193	181,199

Number of titles published in the U.S. from 1970 to 2004 (Greco, Rodriguez and Wharton, 2007: 4-5).

The number of titles published in the U.S. has continued to rise, and by 2010 the figure for *new* titles published stood at 316,480 (Jones, 2011). Similarly, the annual number of new books published in the U.K. has grown steadily, as table 3 below demonstrates.[93]

Table 3

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Total Books Published	109, 143	136, 332	125, 331	128, 335	109, 319
Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total Books Published	116, 304	124, 918	135, 006	157, 039	151, 969

Annual total number of books published in the U.K. 2001-2010 (Nielsen Book, 2011: 3)

With the number of English language titles published worldwide rising from an

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[93] In their report on 2010 book production figures, Nielsen Book account for the drop in the 2010 total thus: "[t]he number of new books published in the UK in 2010 was 151,969; a decrease of -3.2% of the previous year's total of 157,039. However, in January 2010 the previous year's total was 133,224 and it is only with the late addition of 2009 titles (in particular digital product records) during 2010, that the number increased to 157,039" (Nielsen Book, 2011: 1).

estimated 1 million titles published in 2006 (Brown, 2006), to 4,211,902 in 2010

(Nielsen, 2011), competition for shelf space is intense and positioning new titles to

stand out in a crowded market is increasingly difficult (Rebuck, 2004; Brown, 2006).

Furthermore, competition for sales has increased with the burgeoning trade in used

books; for example, in the U.K. the charity shop Oxfam reported that its sales of

second-hand books had doubled over a four year period from 1999, selling 12 million

books in 2002, and in the U.S. in 2004, the revenue from used books totalled 2.2billion

dollars (Ahmed, 2003; Booksellers Association, 2012). However, despite the wealth of

existing and new titles published, half of the UK population seldom buy a book

(researchandmarkets.com, 2005), and in the US, a study by the National Endowment for

the Arts (NEA) found that the number of adults who choose not to read books had

increased by over 17 million during the ten year period 1992 to 2002 – with the total

number in 2002 of adults who choose not to read books standing at 89.9 million (Italie,

2004).

Within the publishing industry, anxiety has focused upon the challenges

emerging from the shift from an age of print to an electronic age, as books compete for

usage and sales against DVDs, movies, music downloads, worldwide web surfing ,

computer games, mobile telephony and the proliferation of satellite and cable television

channels. (Rebuck, 2004). Indeed, the 2002 US NEA study reported a decrease in the

number of 18 to 24 year olds who do read books, from 53 per cent in 1992 to 43 per

cent in 2002 (Italie, 2004), and in the UK in 2002, the 25 and under age group

accounted for just 5 per cent of book buyers (Burt and Grande, 2002). However,

sounding a death knell for books may well be premature as in 2008, despite one in four

adults not having read a book in the previous twelve months, 338 million books were

sold in the U.K. at a cost of £2,478m, a 13% increase by both volume and value than

2003 figures (Winterman, 2008). However, publishing is, as Brown (2006: 4) points

out, "a fairly low-growth industry", a factor which, he notes, impacts upon a further

marked development in the publishing industry: the onset of consolidation and its

impact upon patterns of ownership.

5.2 Consolidation

According to de Bellaigue (2004), the process of consolidation – mergers,

acquisitions and take-overs - has characterised and shaped many industries, however,

he contends that:

> [w]hat makes publishing's experience distinctive is the way the process has been
> sustained, starting in the 1960s, accelerating through the 1980s and thereafter
> being maintained at a rapid, albeit less frantic pace (2004: 3).[94]

De Bellaigue charts the process of consolidation from the post-war years to the

millennium in four phases. The first phase occurred in the 1960s and continued into the

early years of the 1970s. Underpinned by the belief, de Bellaigue argues, that "the

combination of communications and publishing companies spelled prosperity", in the

US Xerox acquired Ginn, a school publisher, CBS purchased the college textbook

publishing houses Holt, Rinehart & Winston, and RCA bought Random House (ibid.).

Similarly, in the UK London Weekend Television acquired Hutchinson, and Granada

purchased MacGibbon & Kee, Rupert Hart-Davies and Panther (de Bellaigue, 2004: 3).

However, in all these cases, the publishing houses were later cast-off, since, de

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[94] Whilst specifically concerned with the British publishing industry, de Bellaigue's
analysis is useful, I suggest, for the breadth of his focus.

Bellaigue posits, the differing management styles of communications and publishing companies proved difficult to combine. The second phase of consolidation within the publishing industry occurred during this same period. A wave of acquisitions of UK publishing houses by US companies, predominantly those, de Bellaigue contends, with "existing media interests" took place: Time Inc. acquired a 40 per cent stake in Andre Deutsch, Frederick Praeger purchased Phaidon Press, and Crowell Collier Macmillan acquired Geoffrey Chapman and Cassells (de Bellaigue, 2004: 3-4).

De Bellaigue dates the third phase of consolidation in the publishing industry from the mid 1970s, a time during which deregulation in the US in particular directly affected the publishing industry (2004: 4). The Traditional Markets Agreement, an informal agreement between American and British publishers reached in 1947, was broken-up by the Anti-trust suit of 1975, as publishers were charged with restraining trade by dividing up world markets (de Bellaigue, 2004: 4). In contrast to the mergers and acquisitions of the earlier phase, this phase is characterised by the acquisitions of publishing houses by publishing houses, and by the 1980s According to de Bellaigue, by the 1980s acquisitors included German, French, Australian and Canadian companies, focused in large part upon the purchase of US publishers.

The fourth phase of consolidation in the publishing industry de Bellaigue places from the 1990s onwards. During this most recent phase, mergers and acquisitions have continued, but at a less rapid pace. U.S. and U.K. publishing houses continue to be bought and sold, and European companies have continued to play a prominent role in mergers and acquisitions; however, this phase is characterised by a reduction of mergers between publishing groups, and by the emergence of financial buyers rather than trade

buyers (de Bellaigue, 2004: 5). As a result of these waves of conglomeration and consolidation, contemporary publishing is now dominated by a small number of large publishing groups which are themselves subsidiaries of larger, global, multimedia conglomerates. In October 2012, the market share of the U.K. book market, for example, shows that six companies make up Britain's top publishers (Table 4).

Table 4

Company	Volume market share - millions	Value market share - millions	Volume market share – %
Random House	27.9	£158.6	19.8
Hachette	18.7	£122.7	13.3
Penguin	16.4	£109.7	11.6
HarperCollins	12.2	£75.5	8.6
Pan Macmillan	5.6	£32.2	4.0
Simon & Schuster	3.6	£21.2	2.6

U.K. Market share for Britain's top 6 publishers in 2012 (Smallman, 2012: 12)

However, with the merger in November 2012 of Penguin and Random House, Smallman (2012: 12) reports that a number of publishing professionals fear that the "set of 'big six' publishers will dwindle to just two". The merger of Penguin and Random House, Smallman notes, will result in the creation of the largest publisher in history, with annual revenue of £2.5billion and a one quarter share of the worldwide English language book market (ibid.). This most recent amalgamation means that the market will be dominated by an even smaller number of very large conglomerates, whose resources reduce further the unequal access small publishers have had to the market.

Both the second phase in the mid-1970s of mergers and acquisitions and the

most recent phase of consolidation from the 1990s identified by de Bellaigue gesture to

the strategy of synergy, or an attempt to synchronize and forge connections between

related technologies, particularly as these two phases of consolidation involve

acquisitions of publishing houses by multimedia organisations. As Brown (2006: 4)

points out:

> [a]ll manner of media synergies, between television channels, radio stations,
> syndicated newspapers, glossy magazines ... and suchlike can be pressed into
> promotional service, which helps build the all-important buzz that transports
> titles to the top of the bestseller lists.

However, the inability to harmoniously bridge the differing management styles which

de Bellaigue posits as the primary reason for the expulsion of publishing houses from

broadcasting and electronics companies during the first phase of consolidation

illustrates a theoretical point made within a cultural industries approach; that is, as

Negus (1997: 94) points out, despite the potential of synergy there is often a

> lack of 'fit' between the ... macro structures of ownership which are put in place
> by ... formal acquisitions, and the more messy informal world of human actions,
> working relationships and cultural meanings through which the companies'
> goals have to be realized on a day to day basis.

In other words, cultural production is not simply bound up with economic processes, but

is also intersected by workplace cultures, by which, as I stated in chapter four of this

thesis, following Schnurr (2009: 80) I mean "a system of shared meanings and values as

reflected in the discursive and behavioural norms typically displayed by members, that

distinguishes their workplace or organisation from others". Commenting specifically on

large multimedia conglomerates in the U.S., Moss Kanter (cited in Sims, 1993: 1)

observes:

> [t]he book people feel a sense of intellectual superiority over the people in film,
> who in turn look down on media that have small elite audiences ... [t]hey resist
> like crazy the idea that they owe any allegiance and cooperation to anyone in
> any other part of the business, even if they are in the same company.

In conveying this occupational division[95] in terms of a contested hierarchy – the "intellectual superiority" felt by those in book publishing, and those who "look down" on books for their "elite audiences" – Moss Kanter's observations point to the broader social divisions identified by Bourdieu ([1986] 2004). As I pointed out in chapter four, section 4.8 of this thesis, according to Bourdieu (1993: 29), the field of cultural production is divided, hierarchically; whilst economic capital is eschewed in the perception of 'high' art such as novels considered to be 'literary' in favour of symbolic capital, 'mass' forms such as popular fiction are perceived to be subordinate to the demands of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1993: 29-37). Implicit in the comments of Moss Kanter (1993), then, is the micro-level conflict, under conglomeration, emerging from such an opposition.

Whilst conglomeration has clearly been a driver for change in the publishing industry, however as Squires (2007a) argues, changes in the book retail environment have had an equally strong impact upon contemporary publishing, as the consolidation of interests by retailers has arguably paralleled the consolidation undertaken by publishing houses. These changes in the publishing industry are also important for the concerns of this thesis, since, as I will go on to discuss in section 5.2 of this chapter, the effects of the interrelations between consolidation in patterns of ownership and narrowing channels of distribution have impacted upon the production of chick lit.

5.3 Channels of distribution

Particularly during the 1990s, the book business witnessed marked changes

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[95] These occupational divisions can be seen in terms of communities of practice within a workplace, a model I discussed in chapter three, section 3.3.6 of this thesis.

regarding channels of distribution, central to which has been the increase in the number

of chain bookstores (Brown, 2006). For example, in the UK Waterstones currently has

300 stores situated on the high street, in shopping centres and on university campuses in

the U.K., Ireland, the Isle of Man, the Isle of Wight, Jersey, Brussels and Amsterdam

(Kean, 2005b). UK retailing group WH Smith PLC operates 543 high street stores

across the U.K., with a further 259 outlets at airports, train stations and motorway

services areas (WHSmith, 2007).[96] By contrast, the number of independent book stores

is declining: according to the Booksellers Association, the number of independents in

the U.K. fell from 1700 in 2000 to 1400 in 2007 (Teather, 2007). As Brown points out,

whilst declining numbers of independent book stores and rising numbers of chain book

stores is not a recent phenomenon, the situation has intensified since the demise of the

U.K. Net Book Agreement (NBA).

The NBA constituted an agreement between publishers that their books should

be subject to a net, or minimum, retail price and thereby, with effectively discouraging

price-cutting, assuring retailers of the maintenance of the value of their stock (Ansell,

1998). As Ansell (1998: 248) notes, whilst the NBA was examined by the Restrictive

Practices Court in 1962 and was found not to be disadvantageous to the consumer, by

the 1990s increasing numbers of publishers and book retailers were abandoning the

agreement, leading to its collapse in 1995 and finally to its formal abrogation by the

Restrictive Practices Court in March 1997. Since the demise of the NBA, the chains

have thus been able to undertake price-cutting strategies, thereby increasing their market

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[96] In the U.S., for example, booksellers Barnes & Noble have followed a path of continued acquisition and expansion, making the presence of chain bookstores clear; the company's largest purchase in 1987 of B. Dalton Bookseller entailed the acquisition of 797 retail bookstores, followed in 1989 by the acquisition of Doubleday Book Shops from Bertelsmann (Barnes and Noble Inc., 2007).

share. In the U.K., for example, chain book stores had a 41.3 per cent volume share of the market in 2004, whereas independent book shops had a 10.6 per cent volume share of the market (Booksellers Association, 2007).

Brown (2006), however, points to two further developments that have impacted upon increasingly concentrated channels of distribution. Firstly, large supermarket chains such as Tesco and Asda in the U.K. and Costco and Wal-Mart in the U.S. have diversified into book selling. As Ansell (1998: 249) points out, Asda's trading director claimed much of the credit for the demise of the NBA, and according to de Bellaigue (2004: 188-9), its collapse "lifted books into the classification of products suitable for year-round promotion", and pricing freedom afforded large supermarkets "a new marketing tool that offered good margins". Supermarkets, de Bellaigue argues, exert considerable influence, not only on retail prices, but also on discounts from publishers, since, "by joining forces and channelling their orders through merchandizing wholesalers, to whom they concede part of the discount, they save on management time, but also secure maximum leverage in negotiations with their suppliers" (de Bellaigue, 2004: 189).[97] As Laing (2008: 10) points out, "[s]upermarket bookselling is viewed by some as having opened up the market to those formerly less likely to visit bookshops", and indeed, supermarkets have expanded the market to a wider cross section of the

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[97] Writing in the *Observer*, Robinson (2004) similarly notes that the supermarkets have "transformed the dynamics of the industry ... [s]upermarkets are driving margins down by demanding huge discounts from publishers and most of them will only deal with sales representatives from the largest houses". Independent publishers, Robinson concludes, will therefore find it increasingly difficult to compete as supermarkets "grab more of the market ... [b]ut then" Robinson adds, "books – just like cornflakes – are rapidly becoming just another commodity". Robinson's sympathies clearly lie with the independent sector, as the present participle verbs "driving ... demanding" and the verb "grab" firmly position supermarkets as aggressive and domineering, construing a negative judgement of capability.

public beyond the AB social grade booksellers have traditionally competed over (Laing, 2008: 4).[98] Notwithstanding expanding the market, supermarkets have impacted noticeably on market share; the Booksellers Association (2007) reports figures for UK retail book sales for the period 1997-2006, placing the volume U.K. market share for supermarkets at 6.4 per cent in 2004, increasing to 9.0 per cent in 2006. This steady increase is the more striking in the collation of figures for percentage change in UK market share experienced by retail outlets for the period 2001-5: chain bookshops experienced an 18 per cent increase, independent bookshops experienced a sixteen per cent decrease, while supermarkets experienced a *ninety per cent* increase (ibid.). However, the entrance of supermarkets into the book market has created a particular issue for publishers, for as Squires (2007a: 32) points out, "the economy of supermarket sales tends towards short-termism and concentration, with retailers stocking a very select number of titles for limited periods".

The advent of online book retailing, most notably Amazon.com, is the second development that has impacted upon the emergence of increasingly concentrated channels of distribution. Again, figures from the Booksellers Association (2007) demonstrate a steady increase in the UK market share for online book retailers: by volume, market share for internet retailers rose from 9.2 per cent in 2004 to 11.2 per cent in 2005, increasing to 13.2 per cent in 2006, and similarly, market share by value increased from 8.7 per cent in 2004 to 10.9 per cent in 2005, rising to 12.2 per cent in 2006. Book Marketing Limited (BML) has collated data concerned with consumer book purchase sources in the U.K. in 2010, which indicates the sustained domination of the

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[98] Laing writes of the AB social group thus: "traditionally, those people visiting bookshops tend to be better educated, with a higher income and a higher TEA (terminal education age) than that of a wider cross section of the public" (2008: 4).

chains as a channel of distribution, demonstrated in the table below.[99]

Table 5

Source	Volume %	Value %
Chain Bookshops	30.3	37.5
Independent Bookshops	4.5	5.4
Bargain Bookshops	8.1	3.7
Supermarket	13.6	10.0
Other Retail	11.2	7.7
Direct Mail/Book Club	6.1	6.3
Internet-Only Retailer	26.1	29.5
Total Books	*100*	*100*

Consumer book purchase sources in the U.K., 2010 (Book Marketing Limited, 2011).

However, what the BML data also highlights is the, now small, percentage gap that

separates the volume percentage share of the category claimed by the chains and that

claimed by internet-only retailers. There is frequent agreement that the interaction of

conglomeration within publishing and increasingly concentrated channels of

distribution has created a shift from editorial-led to sales and marketing-led publishing

(Brown, 2006; Squires, 2007). Such a shift has, however, caused concern within the

industry, with criticisms of this development clustering around the demise of the

'gentleman publisher'.

5.4 The shift from editorial-led publishing to sales and marketing-led publishing

The figure of the gentleman publisher has been important for the book

publishing industry. Clark (2007: 14) explains that: "[t]he phrase 'gentleman' has been

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[99] Book Marketing Limited (2011, no page numbers) notes that "[t]he UK consumer book market can refer both to sales of what are defined by publishers as 'consumer books', and to purchases of books by consumers (i.e. the general public)". They also state that the consumer book category represents UK sales of consumer books totalling £1,693m in 2010. This 'consumer' category, I would argue, corresponds to the kinds of books with which trade publishers are concerned.

used historically to describe grand publishers of belles lettres, or derided as gentlemen

who ran their companies by the seat of their pants, [or] who adopted a paternalist

management style". Here, Clark refers to three aspects of the way in which the

'gentleman' publisher has been understood: firstly, the association of the gentleman

publisher with literature regarded for its aesthetic value, with "belles lettres", and

therefore positioned as 'keepers of the cultural flame'; secondly, the suggestion, implied

in the phrase "ran their companies by the seat of their pants", that 'gentlemen'

publishers were amateurish but possessed economic capital, and thirdly, the adoption of

a "paternalist management style". As Clark (2007) points out, the era of the

'gentleman' publisher was disappearing by the 1970s, and the contemporary publishing

industry has witnessed a marked shift, in that increasing numbers of women now work

in publishing at editorial level, and less frequently, at executive level, so that Friedman

and Yorio (2006, no page numbers) describe twenty-first century publishing as "female

heavy". However, the publications of three former publishing professionals to which I

now turn demonstrate that the construction of the gentleman publisher has still been

drawn upon during the latter half of the twentieth century and the early years of the

twenty-first century in order to critique the impact of consolidation and conglomeration

on the publishing industry.[100]

Squires (2007a: 19) argues that in the memoir of former Chatto & Windus

editor, Jeremy Lewis, the depiction of the changes in office space "hints at some of the

major changes in recent publishing history", particularly the shift from small, often

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[100] Whilst I do not claim that the extracts from these three authors are representative, I
contend that they are indicative.

family-run publishing companies:

> the last ten years I spent with a small but well-regarded firm, which has since been absorbed into an American conglomerate and transplanted to a modern office block, all open-plan and winking VDUs, but was, when I went there in the late 1970s, the epitome of an old-fashioned literary publisher

> the floors were covered with blue lino, the telephones were Bakelite and the furniture Utility [...] and the place was staffed by loyal, long-serving spinsters in cardigans and sandals, and – for much of the firm's history at least – amiable and highly civilised men with large private incomes (Lewis cited in Squires, 2007: 19).

Whilst Squires leaves the description to speak for itself, I suggest that the language of it is evocative, particularly in the attitudinal resources according to the category of judgement deployed, which express Lewis's evaluative stance towards conglomeration. As I pointed put in chapter four, section 4.9 of this thesis, in the appraisal system of analysis, judgement refers to attitudes towards people and their behaviour which are either admired or criticised. These judgements are divided into evaluations concerned with social esteem, including judgements about normality, capacity and tenacity, and evaluations concerned with social sanction, including judgements about veracity and propriety. In the first extract from Lewis's memoir, the collocation of the verbs "absorbed" and "transplanted" construct the pre-takeover firm as an organic, living entity which has been acted upon by a shadowy force, as these transitive verbs are passivised, and the individuals who have instigated the take-over are absent from the text; thus, although shadowy figures, Lewis's account expresses a negative judgement of propriety (2007: 19). Furthermore, the verb "transplanted" evokes a clinical procedure, suggesting a sense of impersonality and therefore expressing a negative judgement of capacity (ibid.). The description of the post-takeover office in the first paragraph reinforces a sense of impersonality, as it is filled with monitors without reference to their operators, however the pre-takeover office described in the second

passage is occupied by human agents. In this second extract, Lewis's account reveals a

contrasting positive judgement of both social esteem and social sanction, as the human

inhabitants of the pre-takeover office are described as "loyal" and "highly civilised" and

thus positive judgements of propriety, "long serving", which is a positive judgement of

tenacity, and "amiable", a positive judgement of capacity (2007: 19).

The culture/commerce dichotomy underpins the more explicitly critical

indictments of conglomeration made by Andre Schiffrin (2000) and Jason Epstein

(2001), both former publishing professionals. Epstein (2001: 1), founder of Anchor

Books, states that:

> book publishing has deviated from its true nature by assuming, under duress
> from unfavourable market conditions and the misconceptions of remote
> managers, the posture of a conventional business. This has led to many
> difficulties, for book publishing is not a conventional business. It more closely
> resembles a vocation or an amateur sport in which the primary goal is the
> activity itself rather than its financial outcome (2001: 4).

Epstein's comments are saturated with judgement resources which intensify his

negative evaluative stance. A negative judgement of propriety is inscribed in the phrase

"deviated from its true nature" by the choice of verb (ibid.). This negative judgement is

further intensified, as unlike Lewis who is careful to avoid being directly critical of

human agents, Epstein follows with a negative judgement of capacity "under duress

from unfavourable market conditions and the *misconceptions of remote managers*"

(2001: 4, my emphasis). However, I would suggest that the statement that publishing's

"primary goal is the activity itself rather than its financial outcome", resonates with the

construction of the gentleman publisher who is not only associated with the

guardianship of 'high' culture, but also disassociated from commerce (ibid.).

Schiffrin (2000: 5), a former publisher at Pantheon books, similarly draws upon the construction of the 'gentleman publisher'. Like Lewis, Schiffrin refers to changes in office space as indicative of the shift from 'culture' to 'commerce'; however, here Schiffrin explicitly refers to the figure of the 'gentleman publisher' in order to support his argument:

> [p]ublishing used to be considered, at least in English-speaking countries, a "profession for gentlemen." That euphemism refers to the payment of comparatively low salaries – book people for many decades were paid at roughly the same rate as academics. Today, publishers have raised their salaries into the millions ... [p]ublisher's offices keep getting more and more expensive ... [e]ditors and publishers have come to expect the comforts of corporate life (Schiffrin, 2000: 120-1).

Whilst books have always been commodities (Brown, 2006; Squires, 2007a), as Moran (1997) points out, the construction of the gentleman publisher obscures the activities of book promotion, as it is based on an implicit, internal, hierarchy that valorises editorial roles as those most apparently disassociated from commerce. The shift from editorial-led publishing to sales and marketing-led publishing has not only impacted upon perceptions of the role of the editor, but has also resulted in two major interrelated developments for the ways in which the social relations between production and consumption have been perceived.

5.5 Conceptualising the social relations between production and consumption.

The first of the developments brought about by interaction between conglomeration within the publishing industry and narrowing channels of retail distribution is concerned with the way in which publishing has been criticised for what is perceived to be a decline in diversity and quality in a general 'dumbing down' of the

industry. The second development is concerned with one of the ways in which the industry has attempted to address the issue of the competition that arises from an overcrowded marketplace and narrowing channels of distribution, through marketing according to gender. Both of these developments, I suggest, have impacted upon the ways in which chick lit has been conceived of.

5.5.1 The 'dumbing down' of the publishing industry and the rise of chick lit

The central debate which not only underpins discussions of the changes in the book business, but has also characterised criticisms of chick lit, revolves around issues of diversity and quality. As I have argued in section 5.1.2 of this chapter, one striking aspect of the way in which the changes in the industry have been perceived is concerned with the shift from editorial-led publishing. According to Murray (2002), criticisms of the perceived devaluation of the role of the editor such as those made by Schiffrin and Epstien I discussed earlier are rooted in cultural pessimism. Indeed, given that, as I have argued, the figure of the gentleman publisher rich in cultural capital and 'keeper of the cultural flame' underpins their criticisms, it is unsurprising that Epstein and Schiffrin express cultural pessimism. Epstein states, for example, that:

> the retail market for books is dominated by a few large bookstore chains whose high operating costs demand high rates of turnover and therefore a constant supply of bestsellers ... [m]any valuable books – most, in fact – are not meant to be best-sellers, and these tend to be slighted in the triage of contemporary publishing and bookselling
> (2001: 12-13)

and he continues a few pages further by asserting that, best-selling authors "whose faithful readers are addicted to their formulaic melodramas ... need publishers only to print and advertise their books and distribute them to the chains and other mass outlets" (Epstein, 2001: 19). Concepts of literary value, readership and a high/low cultural

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divide loom large in Epstein's comments. Epstein constructs a clear division between books which are of literary value, and those which are not, since "valuable" books are not "best-sellers"; this negation clearly establishes that literary value therefore does not accrue from commercial success (Epstein, 2001: 13). Secondly, literary value is implicitly defined, again, by that which it is not, since the work of the best-selling authors Epstein names - significantly all authors of 'genre fiction' - is negatively evaluated as "formulaic" (Epstein, 2001: 19). What is also telling in respect to the construction of a negative evaluative stance, I would argue, is Epstein's use of the noun "triage" to describe the practices of contemporary publishing and book retailing, and his use of the adjective "addicted" to describe the readers of best-sellers. According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1995), triage refers to "the act of sorting according to value", and "the assignment of degrees of urgency to decide the order of treatment of wounds, illnesses etc.". These two definitions, I would suggest, coalesce in Epstein's usage, suggesting that contemporary book publishing and retailing forgoes innovation, diversity and quality and instead valorises the production and dissemination of 'mass' and therefore 'low' culture in the pursuit of profit by 'medicating' the "addicted", passive, consumers of standardised products (Epstein, 2001: 19).

Schiffrin (2000) is similarly trenchant in his comments on contemporary publishing; his central premise is that publishing is now a branch of the entertainment industry, and therefore impoverished for, as Hesmondhalgh (2005: 153) notes, whilst the term entertainment suggests pleasure, it does not carry the deeper, creative connotations which arise from the term art. According to Schiffrin:

> [i]t is widely assumed today that approaches employed lucratively in the entertainment industry will yield similar results when applied to publishing. The standards of the entertainment industry are also apparent in the content of best-

seller lists, an ever- narrower range of books based on lifestyle and celebrity
with little intellectual and artistic merit (2000: 5-6)

and he goes on to wryly state: "[i]t is not up to the elite to impose their values on readers, publishers claim, it is up to the public to choose what it wants – and if what it wants is increasingly downmarket and limited in scope, so be it" (Schiffrin, 2000: 103). As with Epstein's comments discussed above, concepts of value and a high 'elite'/low 'mass' cultural divide are central to Schiffrin's argument for the homogenisation and simplification of culture. The noun "downmarket" clearly expresses a negative value appreciation and thus a negative evaluative stance towards the books considered popular. As I noted in chapter four, section 4.9 of this thesis, lexical items can function as graduation resources to grade meanings, thus illuminating how phenomena are evaluated by degree. The graduation resources in Schiffrin's comments modify the evaluative terms and thus intensify his negative evaluation: "*ever-narrower* range of books... with *little* intellectual and artistic merit ... *increasingly* downmarket ... *limited* in scope" (ibid., my emphasis).[101] Although the pronouncements of former editors, Epstein and Schiffrin, are a response to both the specific economic and cultural shifts in contemporary publishing and to a perceived undermining of the editorial function predicated upon the construction of the 'gentleman publisher' as cultural gatekeeper, arguments for the 'dumbing down' of the publishing industry are also to be found in both academia and journalism.

In his scholarly essay entitled 'The Publishing Industry', the political economist Miller (1997) argues that despite the apparent choice afforded by the proliferation of

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[101] See chapter four, section 4.9 for a discussion of graduation and intensification resources in the appraisal framework.

titles available for purchase in the chain bookstores, publishing is in a sorry state.[102]

Like Epstein and Schiffrin, Miller argues that the pursuit of profit has led to a decline in

the quality of books being published, as a shift has occurred within publishing in which

the focus is upon books concerned with dieting, gardening, cooking, interior design and

self-help (Miller, 1997: 108-113). That Miller considers that this shift demonstrates a

serious decline in publishing standards resonates strongly through the negative

valuation inscribed in the choice of adjectives for such 'lifestyle' books, as he draws a

contrast between pre- and post-conglomeration publishers:

> [c]ertainly they did their fair share of the eternal dreck; but for them it was a
> necessary evil – and that, finally, is the crucial difference between then and now.
> As book lovers and businessmen, they did the high-yield *trash* in order to be
> able to afford the gems they loved (although the gems might also sell) ... today
> *crap* is not a means but (as it were) the end (1997: 117, my emphasis).

Whilst Miller rejects the notion of any 'golden age' of publishing, yet the gendering of

this extract with the noun "businessmen" would seem to evoke the era of the 'gentleman

publisher' that Epstein and Schiffrin lament (Miller, 1997: 114). Although Miller's

article may well be intentionally polemical, his argument is underpinned by taste and

the construction of literary value. Whilst Miller raises some important and valid

concerns about the practices of conglomerates, his argument for a decline in publishing

standards rests largely upon the way in which, as Schiffrin (2000: 6) terms it,

"intellectual and artistic merit" is construed, and, as I have noted, Miller's view of

'lifestyle' books is clear.

It is, however, largely in the field of journalism that the 'dumbing down' of the

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[102] The existence of a "golden age" of publishing (a notion which is apparent in the part-memoir part-critiques of Epstein and Schiffrin), Miller contends, is a fallacy, since, he says, "[re]visit any seeming golden age and read it *all*, and what you'll find is mostly dreck", however Miller asserts that indeed "books have gotten worse: worse in every way" (Miller, 1997: 114, emphasis in original).

publishing industry is discussed with specific reference to chick lit. One particularly

illustrative example is Scarlett Thomas's (2002) article for the UK newspaper *The*

Independent, tellingly entitled 'The great chick lit conspiracy'.[103] Whilst Thomas is not

explicitly concerned with an overall decline in the quality of books published, yet she

does position chick lit as indicative of contemporary publishing's concentration upon

inferior texts in its excessive concern with the accumulation of profit. Despite ostensibly

positioning the piece as investigative and therefore, if only implicitly, objective,

Thomas's argument is saturated with attitudinal lexis which constructs a negative

evaluative stance predicated upon taste and notions of literary value. As I pointed out in

chapter four, section 4.7.3 of this thesis, Jaworski and Thurlow (2009) identify what

they term an elite stance, which indexes wider societal discourses through recourse to

notions of taste, experience or knowledge and is expressed through the following

elements: identifiable adjectival opinion markers, adopting the register of an expert,

positive self-evaluation and negative other-evaluation. Thomas's article, I suggest,

deploys adjectival opinion markers, adopts the register of an expert, constructs negative

other-evaluation and thus demonstrates the adoption of an elite stance.

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[103] A further example is Rachel Cooke's (2007, no page numbers) article for *The Observer*. Noting that HMV, the parent company of Waterstone's, not only announced the closure of 30 stores, but also stated that its remaining shops would concentrate upon novels, cookery books and children's books, Cooke writes that the head of Waterstone's, Gerry Johnson, "has denied that this change of focus is a dumbing-down, but no one who knows anything about the book business believes him. Last week I spoke to several high-profile people in the industry, and they all said the same thing: we're talking chick-lit and Jamie Oliver". Earlier examples of the view of chick lit as a sinister dumbing down exercise on the part of the publishing industry are found in the comments of Beryl Bainbridge (Ezard, 2001), who lambasts chick lit for pandering to the shallow concerns of contemporary young women and favouring young authors , and Celia Brayfield (cited in Ezard, 2001, no page numbers), novelist and former literary prize judge, who states, "The ideal author, from the viewpoint of a modern publisher, is a twentysomething babe making her debut in chick lit who will look hot posing naked in a glossy magazine".

In spite of the plural pronoun *we* potentially functioning as an engagement resource by suggesting a degree of alignment between the putative reader and writer in the opening lines of the article, "before chick lit takes its glass of Chardonnay and limps off into the sunset, it is worthwhile asking if we can learn anything from the experience", Thomas's argument is not underpinned by the assumption of taken-for-granted knowledge. Thomas's authorial voice is an authoritative one, expressed by the use of multiple declarative sentences, but I would suggest that the expert register Thomas claims, and the elitist stance she expresses, is most effectively constructed by frequent negative other-presentation in the contrast built between the views expressed by chick lit supporters and Thomas's ability to counter them. In her article, Thomas counters three claims made for the genre: firstly, that chick lit is not formulaic, secondly, that publishers are meeting the demands of booksellers, and thirdly, that the commercial success of chick lit subsidises the publication of more literary fiction (ibid.).Thomas, however, firmly evaluates chick lit negatively as formulaic and simplistic by her use of the adjective "Identikit" to describe chick lit covers and by employing the adjectival phrase "join-the-dot" to describe the plots of chick lit novels – a phrase associated with children's puzzle books (2002, no page numbers). Furthermore, chick lit authors are, Thomas asserts, "little more than assembly-line workers", and to substantiate her point, Thomas cites the comments of (anonymous) bestselling authors, who claim that they have been asked to write to format restrictions. Interestingly, here Thomas turns from what I pointed out in chapter four, section 4.7.2 of this thesis is averral, where the speaker/writer is the source of the proposition, to attribution, where the language is attributed to someone else. This shift in epistemological positioning adds weight to Thomas's argument by incorporating a dissenting voice other than the author's.

Thomas then turns to the claim that publishers are merely meeting the demands of booksellers; Thomas writes: " [i]t's so thoughtful of capitalism to give us exactly what we want ... [f]unny that chick lit is the cheapest thing for publishers to produce, and the easiest for them to get hold of ... this stuff is not hard to write" (2002, no page numbers). Here, again, the superlative forms of the adjectives *cheap* and *easy* negatively evaluate chick lit. In considering the third claim made for chick lit, that its commercial success subsidises the production of more literary fiction, Thomas avers that whilst "at the more literary imprints, profit comes from successfully publishing cutting-edge non-fiction alongside "challenging" fiction", yet she argues, "[i]t seems rather silly to suggest that frothy romance should appear in this equation at all" (ibid.). Chick lit, Thomas contends, "obscure[s]" what she terms "more interesting women's fiction", the use of the verb "obscure" suggesting that the marketplace has therefore been flooded (2002, no page numbers).[104] Thomas's argument that homogeneous fiction has flooded the marketplace due to the publishing industry's excessive concern for the accumulation of profit rests, primarily, upon the premise that chick lit is 'bad'; however, largely the

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[104] I would also suggest that in pointing to commercial fiction authors in general as little more than assembly-line workers and therefore subject to the 'top-down' power of publishing houses to re-work manuscripts and to enforce format restrictions, Thomas's argument is not only widely generalised, but also problematised by considering the practices of the author James Patterson. Thriller-writer Patterson is the author of over thirty four books, eighteen of which have reached number one on the New York Times best-seller list, his novels having sold over 130 million copies worldwide (Grossman, 2006) and in the UK, Patterson topped the library most-borrowed list for 2006 to 2007, released by the organisation Public Lending Right (2008); according to the PLR, Patterson titles were lent over 1.5 million times by libraries during the period July 2006 to June 2007. As Grossman (2006, no page numbers) points out in his article for *Time* magazine entitled 'The Man Who Can't Miss', Patterson took control of the design and marketing of his 1992 novel *Along Came a Spider*, paying for a television advertisement himself when his publisher declared a lack of interest in doing so, and redesigning the novel's cover – subsequently, Patterson designs the covers for all his novels. Furthermore, Patterson does not write alone: having decided to co-write a "golf novel" (Grossman, 2006), *Miracle on the 17th Green* with journalist Peter de Jong, Patterson has since co-written eight of his novels, as Grossman notes, "[h]e'll whip up a detailed outline, then ship it off to his collaborator for a first draft".

evidence for this view is based upon Thomas's own particular tastes and assumptions that index regimes of value based on gendered literary value.

Thomas's taste in fiction is clearly what she considers "more interesting women's fiction", however, that there exists "*more interesting* women's fiction" is Thomas's own opinion, and she avoids mentioning that some readers may well find chick lit interesting (2002, no page numbers). As Thomas's subjective reference to "more interesting *women's fiction*" might suggest, her argument is underpinned by perceptions of hierarchical generic categorisation and assumptions regarding audience (ibid., my emphasis). According to Thomas, chick lit does not constitute a discrete genre, but rather, belongs to the category of romance fiction since she states at the very beginning of the article that "Mills and Boon has recently launched its own chick lit imprint, thus reclaiming territory that is rightfully its own" (2002, no page numbers). However, with its militaristic connotations and usage to refer to a clear demarcation of domain, Thomas's use of the noun *territory* in relation to Mills & Boon romance fiction is telling. In maintaining that chick lit belongs to this generic category, rather than the more amorphous category 'women's fiction', Thomas's objections to chick lit would seem to be in part premised upon maintaining a distinction between fiction of high and low (or no) value. Thomas's objection to chick lit, I would suggest, is also, albeit implicitly, in part premised upon distinguishing between audiences of women, including Thomas herself; for, coupled with the clear positioning of chick lit as simplistic, as Thomas's use of the adjective in her phrase "frothy romance" suggests, as I pointed out in chapter one, section 1.2.1 of this thesis, it has become 'common sense' that romance fiction is a trivial form offering easy pleasures for mindless, passive consumers (Hollows, 2000: 68-72).

A more complex account of the emergence of chick lit, however, comes to light

by taking into account the interaction between changes in the political economy of

publishing and the pervasiveness of postfeminist discourses across media forms which

emphasise the notion of biological essentialism.[105] At the heart of chick lit's emergence

as a publishing phenomenon, Gill (2003: 51) argues, is the industry's adoption of an

approach to gender that is central to postfeminist discourse: the 'equal but different'

approach made popular by the soaring numbers of self-help books published, such as

John Gray's *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*.[106] According to Gill, chick

lit's emergence and the adoption of markedly gendered book categorisation is

underpinned by the collapse of the Net Book Agreement, and the sharp increase in the

number of discount book clubs which placed gender at the centre of their marketing

strategy, and attempted to establish what she describes as "the clear blue water of

gender difference between 'his 'n hers' books" (2003: 51). Whilst I agree with Gill's

comments about the emergence of an explicit sexually differentiated form of address in

the codification of books and book categories, I would suggest that the collapse of the

NBA and the rise of discount direct mail book clubs alone is a combination that

insufficiently accounts for the aspects of the political economy of the publishing

industry that impacted upon such a marketing strategy.

The publishing industry, Murphy (2010) argues, was quick to recognise and

respond to data showing a larger number of women than men who buy books.[107] Squires

(2007a: 30) points out that it was the development in the 1990s of Electronic Point of

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[105] I have discussed biological essentialism in chapter one, section 1.2.2 of this thesis.
[106] See chapter one of this thesis for a discussion of postfeminist discourse.
[107] According to Trollope (2012, no page numbers), for example, "more than 67% of books sold in the U.K.are bought by women".

Sales (EPOS) that provided the publishing industry with precise sales data, through the scanning of bar codes to carefully monitor stock and sales. EPOS, Squires argues, allowed publishers access not only to their own but also to their competitors' sales data, providing strong indicators of themes and seasonal trends. Tepper (2000) suggests that the contemporary publishing industry has embraced the importance of sales and marketing, now possessing and using a wealth of data from its own surveys, although this data is generally not easily accessible outside of the industry. The interrelationship between gender and genre was an issue of particular importance to sectors of the publishing industry concerned with dwindling sales of romance fiction, and a desire to attract a younger demographic (18-35) to the genre, and indeed publishers such as Harlequin were relatively quick to embrace the genre and encourage its writers, and readers, by creating their own chick lit imprint (Craddock, 2004). Furthermore, as I have pointed out, increasingly concentrated channels of distribution resulted in a dramatic shift in market share, which means that only a handful of retailers emerged as powerful participants in the dynamics of the field, with the key players being chain bookstores and supermarkets, rather than direct mail companies Gill refers to. The gendered colour coding of chick lit's pink book jackets is particularly advantageous for marketing books to supermarket buyers. Gaynor Allen, Tesco's buying manager for books, points to the importance of book covers for supermarkets because of the quick purchase decision that shoppers make, she states:

> [o]ur aim is to get the customers passing down the aisle to stop and pick a book
> up [t]hey are not browsing like in a Waterstone's. There is no point having a
> true-life story with a pink jacket and a flower. In a way it is formulaic, and we
> do encourage [publishers] to experiment with jackets. But at the end of the day,
> when we do the product selection we know what sells (Allen cited in Neill,
> 2008, no page numbers)

and sales director of Transworld publishers, Martin Higgins, (cited in Wood and Stone, 2011, no page numbers) states that "women's fiction is [now] predominantly sold in the supermarket sector".

The increased level of competition within retail channels and the success of the supermarkets have also impacted upon the marketing strategies adopted by chain bookstores. As Laing (2008: 77) notes, "[m]ost chain bookshops have adopted a discount-oriented approach to bookselling with tables covered in various promotional offers", and 'his 'n hers' marketing has been adopted by the chains to maximise the potential for unplanned purchases, to the extent that Murphy (2010, no page numbers) states, "[t]he "women"s' section of any bookstore is instantly recognisable. Placed just inside the door to maximise passing trade, tables are piled high with pink or pastel books". Indeed, as Gill (2003: 51) argues, "[e]very aspect of [chick lit] books, from the colour and design of the cover to where and how they are advertised, follow rigidly prescribed gender lines", and therefore in the next section I examine how the cover design of chick lit books illustrates this change in the way in which publishers have conceived of, and addressed, their audiences, beginning with the book that has been labelled the chick lit *ur text*: Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Ferris & Young, 2006).

5.5.2 Imagining and addressing the audience through chick lit book covers

As I noted in chapter 2, section 2.1 of this thesis, the consensus of opinion within chick lit scholarship is that Fielding's (1996) novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* inspired the chick lit phenomenon; however, the story of Bridget is not wrapped in the kind of pink cover that has now become characteristic of chick lit. It is unsurprising that

publishers sought to replicate the success of Fielding's novel, since the paperback edition had reached number one in the UK bestseller lists by August 1997, and by 2001 the novel had sold in excess of two million copies in the U.K. and eight million copies worldwide (Whelehan, 2002: 66). However, the shift in the ways in which the genre and audience of chick lit has been subsequently conceived of by the publishing industry can be discerned in chick lit cover design. The photograph shot by Nick Turpin for Fielding's newspaper column adorns the 1996 cover for Fielding's novel (figure 4 below).

Figure 4
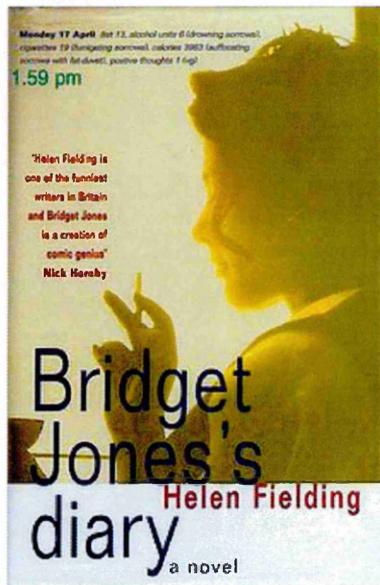
Front cover of Fielding's (1996) Bridget Jones's Diary

A photograph of a woman in profile stand silhouetted against a window, lost in a reverie of thought, with a smile playing subtly upon her lips. The photograph, I suggest, consciously plays on a life-art tension, a tension which is found within the pages of the novel, conveyed by the confessional tone and the artifice of the fictional diary format. The use of a photograph creates a sense of realism and hence authenticity, yet the soft focus of the camera lens, the sepia tones and the play of light and shadows suggest an

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air of mystery. The combination of visual image and text is, however, suggestive; the photographed woman's subtle smile is evocative of a knowing woman, and with the descriptive part of the title *Bridget Jones's Diary* emphasised by the difference in font size towards the final part of the title, *a novel*, the suggestion is that the reader is being given access to the private thoughts of this shadowy figure. Furthermore, the sepia tones and soft focus summon a reminiscent feel to the image, and indeed I would suggest that the model's hair style is subtly evocative of a nineteenth century Austen heroine, thus, although indirectly, locating the novel within a literary genre. However, in the years following the publication and commercial success of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, a distinctive kind of chick lit cover art was established.

I would argue that with the reception and commercial success of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, publishers saw an opportunity for commercial success based upon the imagination of and targeting of particular groups of consumers. Market segmentation is defined, according to Ferrell and Hartline (2008: 163), as:

> the process of dividing the total market for a particular product or product category into relatively homogeneous segments or groups. To be effective, segmentation should create groups where the members within the group have similar likes, tastes, needs, wants, or preferences but where the groups themselves are dissimilar from one another.

Therefore, as Laing (2008: 81) points out, "the overall market segmentation approach is an attempt to reduce the heterogeneity of consumers by segmenting them into smaller more similar, homogenous groups in order that any marketing can be targeted as effectively as possible to a group with very similar needs". Segmentation variables, or bases, divide the market according to a range of characteristics. The two segmentation variables that I would suggest are important for how the market for chick lit has been

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conceptualised are demographic segmentation and psychographic segmentation. Demographic segmentation relates to gender, occupation, social class or income, and within this category it is gender that is most immediately apparent in its relevance. Psychographic segmentation relates to categorisation according to interests, dividing consumers into groups according to lifestyle, motivation or personality characteristics, since, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2006: 199), whilst some consumers may share the same demographic group, it certainly does not mean that they share the same psychographic outlook. Laing (2008: 83) argues that psychographic market segmentation is not only difficult to measure and to analyse, but also its application to the book business is questionable. According to Laing, given the relatively low value of books, the costs involved in this kind of segmentation are better suited to the pursuit of consumers with high spending power and towards the marketing of high value goods such as cars and electrical items. Indeed, with the collapse of the NBA and the entrance of the supermarkets into bookselling, the cost of a paperback novel has fallen dramatically in the U.K. (Thompson, 2012). However, I would argue that a mixture of demographic and psychographic segmentation clearly underpins the design features of the chick lit novels that were published in the wake of *Bridget Jones's Diary*. These categorisations which are encoded in cover design, I would argue, are predicated upon the entanglement, as Gill (2007) would put it, of stereotypical notions of femininity and feminine concerns and interests associated with the emotional 'inner life' and the domestic, with the notions of independence that characterises postfeminist discourse.[108]

In her concern to analyse the articulation of postfeminist discourse in advertising media, Lazar (2009: 381) states that:

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[108] I have discussed postfeminist discourse in chapter 1, section 1.2.2 of this thesis.

[i]n a postfeminist social order, women proudly and enthusiastically embrace conventional codes indexical of 'femininity' with an element of fun and self conscious play. One of the codes of femininity taken up and re-signified … to fit within a postfeminist ethos is the colour pink … [p]ostfeminist pink marks such qualities as fun, independence and confidence, while at the same time reaffirming unambiguously women's gendered identity.

As I have pointed out, a clear and consistent characteristic of chick lit cover design is the use of pink or pastel colours; these explicitly gendered colours, long associated with femininity, act as design shorthand: a simple signifier for potential buyers in a demographically targeted market segment that these novels are clearly for women. Yet, as Lazar points out, postfeminist pink also signifies self-conscious playfulness, and I would argue that publishers have worked with this kind of ethos in chick lit cover design. Pink hues, cursive script and floral motifs adorn a number of chick lit books, exemplified by the cover design for Jill Mansells' chick lit novels *Rumour has it* (2010), *Making your Mind up* (2006) and *Staying at Daisy's* (2011) (figure 5 below).

Figure 5
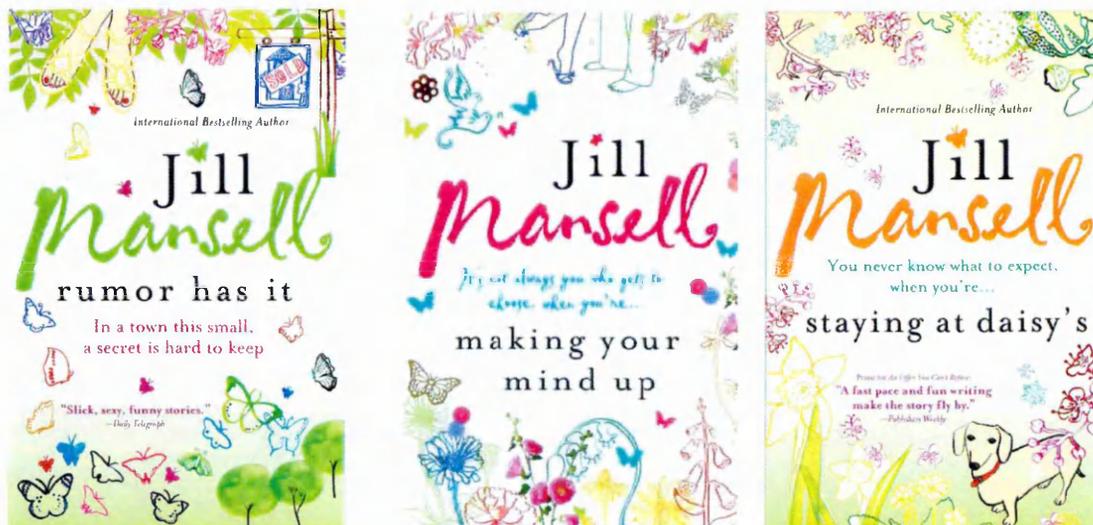
Indexing femininity through colour, typescript and floral motifs: front covers of Mansell, (2010), (2006), (2011).

It is this kind of explicit and unabashed embrace of conventional codes that index

femininity that, I suggest, addresses audiences as sophisticated consumers by, as Gill (2007a) puts it, flattering them with the recognition that they are well aware of attempts to manipulate them. This address to a 'knowing', sophisticated consumer is also apparent, I would suggest, in the more retro, kitschy designs exemplified in figure 6.

Figure 6

Emphasising artifice through combining gendered colours and cartoon artwork: front covers of Colgan, (2011), Kelk, (2009), Toon, (2011).

On these covers, the splashes of postfeminist pink (Lazar, 2009) and background pastel hues are coupled with cartoon images of women, suggesting artifice as well as a sense of fun.

Alongside the use of gendered colour hues in both background and typescript, Day (cited in Gay, 2011, no page numbers) points to the use of a number of design features and strategies in chick lit cover design that are also drawn upon in women's magazines in their appeal to their intended audience, including soft focus, photography and domestic objects. The use of such gendered design features are also present in the cover art for Samantha March's (2011) chick lit novel *Destined to Fail*, Fiona O'Brien's (2012) novel *The Love Book*, and Adele Park's (2012) *Tell Me Something*. The cover of March's (2011) novel *Destined to Fail* (figure 7) includes both soft focus and

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photography. Deploying a photograph on the front cover of the novel puts into play a realistic representational code, as this particular form suggests a reflection of reality, that what the prospective reader is being offered is a 'slice of life'.

Figure 7
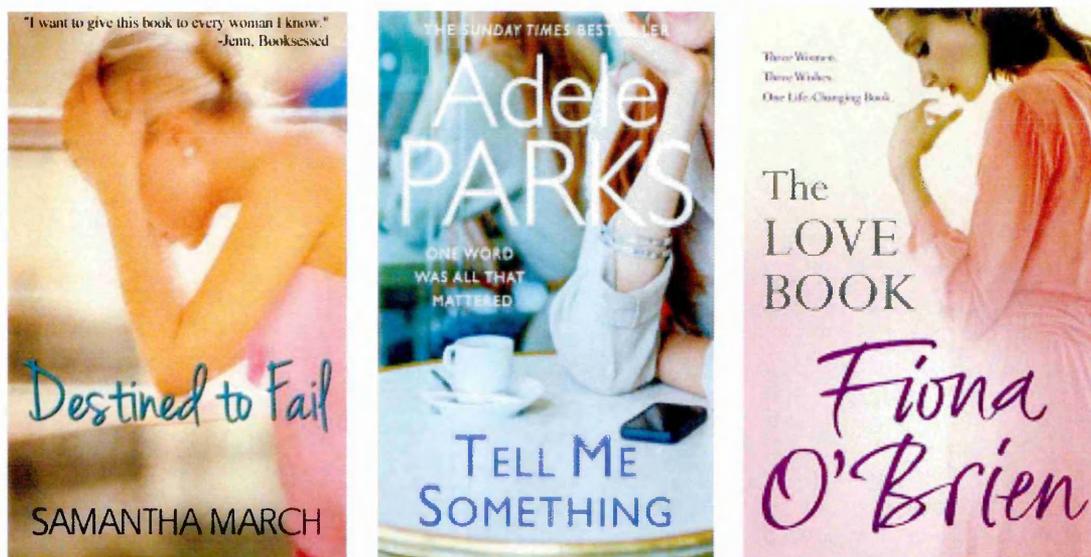
Gendered audience address through soft focus, photography and domestic objects: front covers of March, (2011), O'Brien, (2012) and Parks (2012).

It is, furthermore, through this frozen moment conveyed by the photograph that the reader can infer the 'gist of the story', and indeed, the foregrounding of a female model against a blurred background makes clear that it is a woman that is the subject of the story. The soft focus, however, conveys a sense of vulnerability (Betterton, 1987) and the model's pose implies emotional pain. As a concern for feelings and emotions is stereotypically associated with femininity, the novel's intended recipients are clearly gendered, with the pastel pink of the model's garment completing the gendered signifiers that this is a book for women about women. Similarly, on the cover of Fiona O'Brian's (2012) *The Love Book* (figure 7), a combination of devices signify the book's intended recipients. Alongside the saturation of pink hues, the photographic image foregrounds the female model and points to the subject of the novel, and the pensive

pose of the model, with her head in sharp focus but her body blurred, implies a concern with the female psyche. The cover of Adele Parks's (2012) *Tell Me Something*, (figure 7), similarly plays with the association between femininity and the concern with feelings and their expression in its address to the intended audience. The inclusion of a cup and saucer and a table in the photograph's frame is reminiscent of the domestic sphere which has conventionally been associated with femininity, however, the reflection of the model in the window behind her places the frozen scene in a café or coffee shop interior. Although the photograph does not allow one to see the model's face, the imperative construction of the title 'tell me something' and the direction of the gaze the viewer of the cover is invited to take places her as occupying the space that the scene represents, and suggests involvement in an intimate conversation (Kress and van Leeuwan, 1996: 149). The representation of domestic items as signifiers of an intended gendered audience can also be seen in the cover design for Sheila O'Flanagan's novels *Better Together* (2012), *All for You* (2011), and *Dreaming of a Stranger* (2008) (figure 8).

Figure 8

Gendered audience address through the depiction of domestic objects: front covers of O'Flanagan (2012), (2011), (2008).

On these covers, a dining table, crockery, a chair and a bed combine with splashes of postfeminist pink (Lazar, 2009) to signify that these are books for women.

Harzewski (2009: 11) argues that the term chick lit not only designates a genre, but is also "practically an adjective for a lifestyle". According to Berlant (2008: viii- x), the construction of what she terms a "women's culture" is brought about and characterised by a view that:

> the people marked by femininity already have something in common and are in need of a conversation that feels intimate, revelatory, and a relief even when it is mediated by commodities ... and even when its particular stories are, on the face of it, vastly different from each other and from any particular reader ... [the] presumption that there is a structure of relevancy, address, and absorption enables the consumers of "women's culture" to feel that their emotional lives are already shared and have already been raised to a degree of general significance while remaining true to what's personal. This means that people participate in it who may share nothing of the particular worlds being represented ... [c]ommodified genres of intimacy, such as ... "chick lit" circulate among strangers, enabling insider self-help talk such as "girl-talk" to flourish in an intimate public. These genres claim to reflect a kernel of common experience and provide frames for encountering the impacts of living as a woman in the world.

I would suggest that the presumption which Berlant argues underpins the notion of a "women's culture" that there is "a structure of relevance, address and absorption" regardless of whether one shares the particular story world being presented or not, is encoded in the ways in which chick lit book covers also segment and address their audience according to the type of protagonist and her lifestyle depicted within a particular novel (ibid.). As Attenberg (2006, no page numbers) points out, a number of design features can be traced across chick lit that signify the novels' themes: a cocktail glass "indicates a sexy edge and big mistakes in pursuit of happiness; a whimsical, cursive title alerts consumers that the narrator will eventually knock over a tray of

glasses in a roomful of glaring partygoers [and] a high heel forecasts a …. shopping-prone city dweller", and these features are exemplified in the covers in figure 9 below. With its martini glass on the cover, Forte's (2011) *From London with Love* sees its protagonist live a problematic double life complicated further when she falls in love,

Figure 9
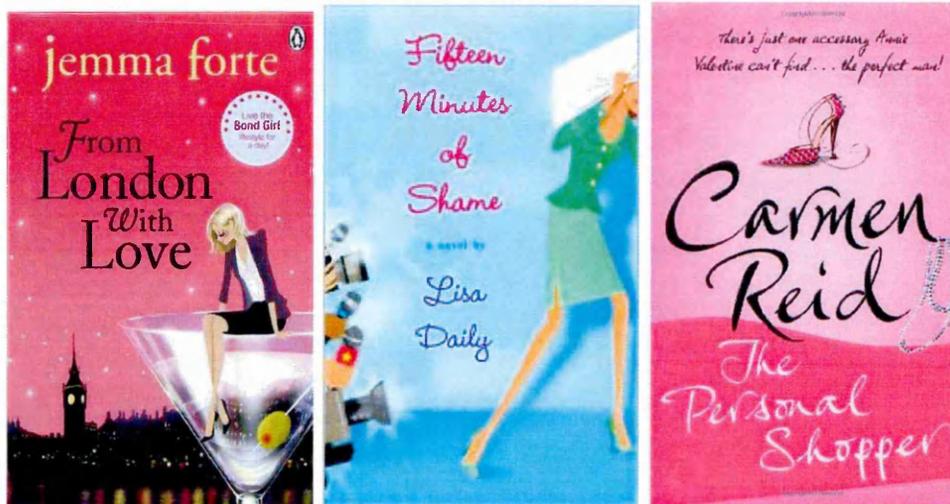
Thematic signifiers: front covers of Forte, (2011), Daily, (2008) and Reid, (2007).

Daily's (2008) *Fifteen Minutes of Shame*, adorned with flouncy, cursive typescript, details the public humiliation suffered by its protagonist, and sporting a high heeled shoe on its cover, Reid's (2007) protagonist in the *Personal Shopper* is a shopping-obsessed Londoner.

There are, however, a further two trends that have developed in chick lit cover design. The use of silhouettes have appeared on a number of chick lit books, with silhouettes forming a central feature of the cover design across a number of novels by the same author, such as Anna Maxted (figure 10 overleaf) and Mandy Baggot (figure 11 overleaf). Whereas thematic signifiers such as cocktail glasses and shoes convey a particular type of protagonist and her lifestyle, a silhouette obscures any sense of the characteristics or lifestyle of the woman depicted, although signifying her thematic

importance as a subject. Erasing features that, on the Maxted covers might depict time or place, or on the Baggot covers where place is indicated by background, erasing any sense of time, the use of silhouettes suggest universal experiences.

Figure 10
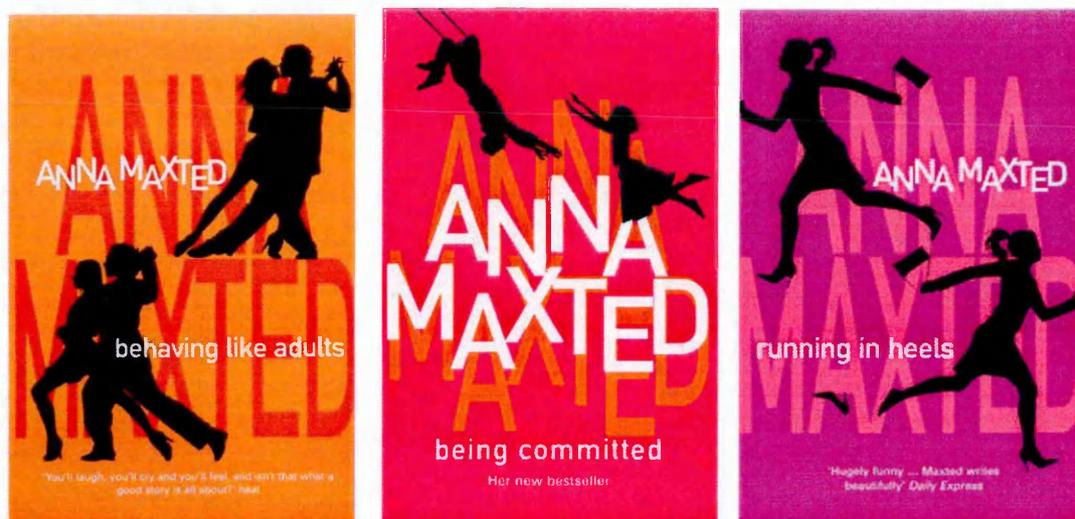
Silhouettes as cover theme: front covers of Maxted, (2003), (2005), (2004).

Figure 11

Silhouettes as cover theme: front covers of Baggot, all three novels published 2011.

These silhouettes function as an 'everywoman' figure that has no specific, clear relationship to the particular lifestyle and storyworld depicted in the text, but rather, I would suggest, to the genre's broader concern with women's experiences.

Signalling a resonance with the genre is important, but Kean (2005b: 28) points out that publishers are also concerned to avoid too much repetition:

> [g]one are the quirky little cartoon girlies and in their place are legs sticking out like stumps from sofas and beds … [a] debut chick-lit title needs to have resonance with the rest of the genre so that potential readers will want to pick it up, but it should not merge into other titles as so often happens.

Attenberg similarly points to the move in chick lit cover design towards what she describes as "an army of headless women" (2006, no page numbers). Indicative of this design trend, I would suggest, is the cover re-design for Adele Parks's chick lit novels. The first, 2001, edition of Adele Parks's second novel, *Game Over*, bears some resemblance to the cover of a novel from another author credited with starting the chick lit genre, Marian Keyes's (1997) *Watermelon* (Whelehan, 2005) (figure 12 below).

Figure 12
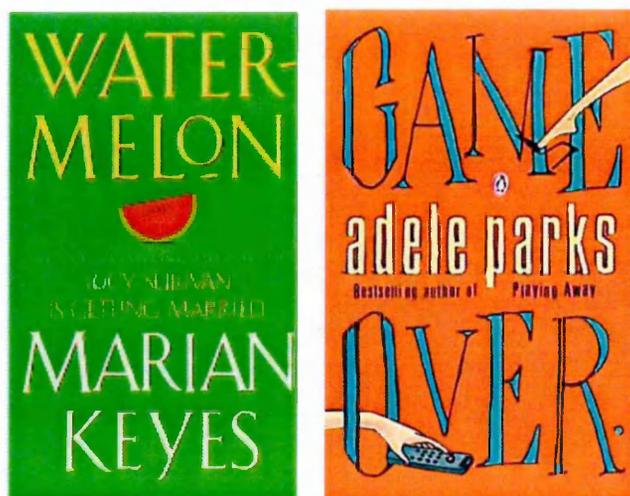
Primary background colour and large typescript design similarities: front cover of Keyes (1997) and Parks (2001).

The cover design of Parks's novel resonates with the cover of Keye's *Watermelon* in its use of a block, primary colour for the background, and small cartoon images in contrast to the large typescript that fills the majority of the space of the cover. However, by 2011, these original design features are replaced in the cover re-design (figure 13 below) by a photograph of a model's legs.

Figure 13
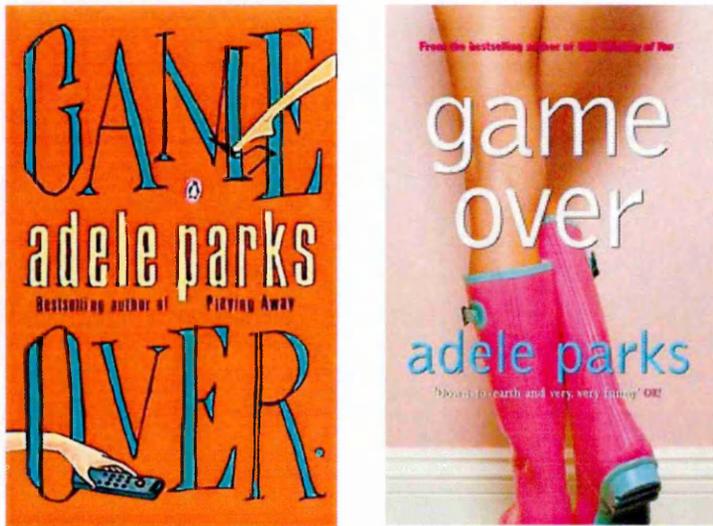
Cover re-design of Parks's second novel: first edition 2001 cover on the left hand side and the 2011 cover re-design on the right hand side.

Resonance with the genre is suggested by the postfeminist pink (Lazar, 2009) of the model's wellington boots, but any communication of the model's individuality - through face, eyes or hair - is removed by the focus upon a body part. As Shields and Heinecken (2002: 41) argue, "[u]sing body parts to represent the entire woman" is an often-used convention in advertising. On the one hand, similar to the use of silhouettes, the erasure of any sense of individuality suggests that this is an 'everywoman' figure, and that her story, the centrality of which is conveyed by the foregrounding of the, albeit headless, model, can be widely appreciated. Furthermore, it could be argued that publishers deploy body cropping on book covers in order to further signify the potential

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for reader identification, since the absence of a head allows the reader to imagine themselves in the figure's place. However, these representations of women as an assemblage of parts portray women as objects. Such objectification, I suggest, is more apparent on the 2011 cover, since despite the inclusion of a cartoon leg in the 2001 cover, as I pointed out earlier, the use of a photograph puts into play a more realistic mode of representation. Body cropped photographic images make up the 2012 re-designed covers for Parks's complete backlist, a selection of which are reproduced in figure 14 below.[109]

Figure 14
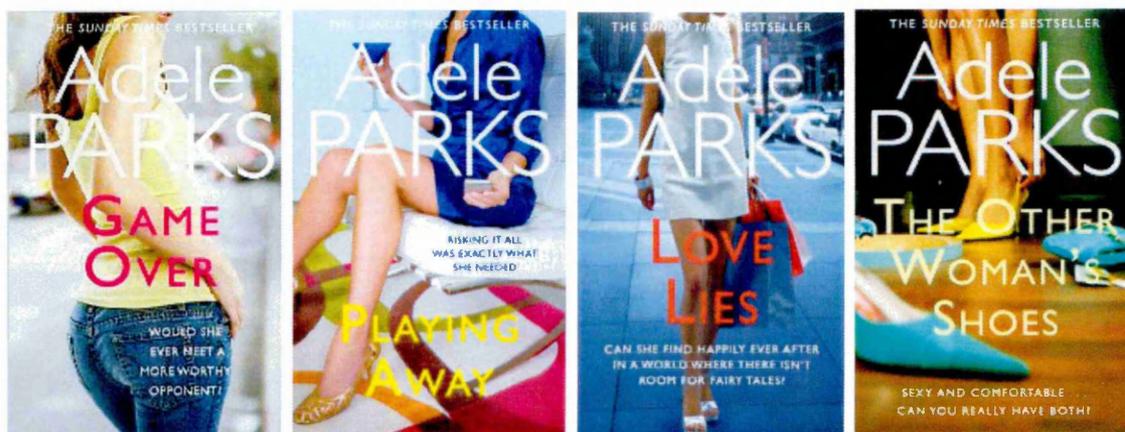
Examples of the 2012 body cropped cover re-design for Parks's backlist.

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[109] What is interesting about the new cover design for *Game Over*, compared to the version in figure 13 is the more overt sexualisation of the image. The dark colour of the model's jeans contrasts against the light pastel yellow colour of the model's top and the grey, blurred background of the photograph, pulling the viewer's gaze to the model's bottom. The direction of the viewer's gaze is also, I suggest, brought to this point of focus by the placement of the bright pink lettering of the title, again an eye-catching contrast to the muted colours of pastel yellow and grey, and the positioning of the strapline. Although the term strapline is commonly used in newspapers and magazines to refer to a subheading, book publishers have begun to use the notion of a strapline, including them on book covers as a concise description of a book's content or themes, often comprised of a single sentence that works as a hook, intended to entice the reader (Olinghouse, 2012).

As Squires (2007a: 63) points out, however, "although marketing activity profoundly influences consumer decisions ... it is still open to debate and argumentation ... like the texts with which it deals, [marketing] is open to interpretation by communities and individuals within those communities". Indeed, the readers interviewed for this thesis, Charlotte and Annabel, express diverse views of chick lit cover art. According to Charlotte, the use of bright colours in jacket design influences her decision to select a book for potential purchase:

1. S: does the book cover art make a difference as to whether you buy
2.   it or don't buy i[t
3. C: [erm yeh if it's got a bright cover it's one of the ones I pick up
4.   first to read the back of

(Appendix, Interview 1, lines 19-23).

Annabel similarly lists bright colours as influential in book choice, but expresses her dislike for hearts and flowers on jacket design (line 3-4), the codes that I argue above index femininity:

1. S: what catches your eye then in the cover art=
2. A: =erm I don't know really I think it's
3.   even as basic as y'know bright colours and yeh just a cover being attractive
4.   itself, erm modern I think as opposed to hearts and flowers y'know cos that
5.   kinda puts me off really but yeh an eye catching bright modern cover will draw
6.   my attention
7. S: what do you think-what's your opinion of y'know the hot pinks and th-the
8.   y'know cartoon women do y[ou have
9. A: [I quite like that yeh I do like that yes erm yeh that
10.   does draw my attention to be honest, yeh erm I-I don't know, I think th-they run
11.   into danger when they put pictures of actual people on there erm because you're
12.   readin it really to find something to identify with, and humour, and er to cheer
13.   up really, to make yourself feel quite so bad-not bad perhaps but neurotic and
14.   paraniod and y'know you feel like oh everybody else is out there gettin on with
15.   these and I'm doing these silly things which the books are full of people's like
16.   y'know little idiosyncrasies and little stupid things that they do and so er I think
17.   that a picture of a real person erm I dunno I think it takes away from the whole
18.   escapism

(Appendix, Interview 2, lines 47-76).

Interestingly, Annabel expresses her dislike for photographic images on chick lit jackets (lines 10-11), and thus what I have argued above is a marketing strategy designed to offer a 'slice of life' appears to have failed to entice this particular reader, precisely because of its realistic representational code (lines 16-18).

5.6 Summary

This chapter has explored the ways in which changes in production practices in the publishing industry have shaped the ways in which chick lit, and its readers, have been conceptualised. It has been argued that as a result of the interaction between industry conglomeration and the concentration of retail channels of distribution, the intensification of marketing activities in contemporary publishing has led to a shift from product differentiation and vertical market structure, to market segmentation and horizontal structuring according to gender, interests and lifestyle. The expression of an explicitly sexually differentiated form of address and market segmentation can be discerned in chick lit cover art. From the cursive script, colours and use of domestic objects that explicitly and conventionally index femininity, to cartoon drawings that signify the kind of lifestyle experienced by the protagonist, to the female silhouettes and cropped photographic images of women that function as 'everywoman' figures and suggest universal experiences, chick lit jacket design addresses its imagined and intended audience with semiotic material that reflects the industry's assessment of demographic and psychographic segmentation. Of course, despite the influence and impact of marketing strategies on consumers, marketing activities are not entirely determining; indeed, the chick lit readers interviewed for this thesis express diverse views on what type of book jacket design they like, and dislike. This chapter's brief

engagement with the views expressed by real, rather than imagined, readers presages the concerns of the next two chapters of this thesis. Chapter six focuses upon interviews with chick lit readers, while chapter seven focuses upon a reading group meeting, with both chapters similarly concerned to analyse the ways in which these readers construct their evaluative stances towards chick lit.

Chapter 6

Readers' evaluations of chick lit: interviews

6.0 Introduction

In chapter five, I showed that consumers play a critical role in the chick lit production process, as they are invoked by producers as imagined audiences to whom chick lit is aligned according to their assumed tastes and preferences. However, consumers also have an effect in the cultural field as meaning-makers of the products to which they are aligned in the minds of producers, as, according to the circuit of culture paradigm, the stage of production does not determine the outcome of any other stage in the circuit of chick lit culture. This chapter thus marks a shift in the thesis's focus from the sphere of production to the sphere of reception, as it is the first of two chapters focused on readers and their evaluations of chick lit. As I argued in chapter one, section 1.0 of this thesis, within the scholarly literature on chick lit to date, the interpretations and evaluations of the genre largely afforded primacy are those of the 'professional reader' in the media and the academy. This chapter begins to address the lack of empirical evidence for how 'non-professional' readers construct their evaluations of chick lit, by focusing upon the attitudes towards and evaluations of chick lit that emerge within one-to-one interviews with two self-avowed chick lit readers. The analysis of the interview data in this chapter applies the elements of a dialogical discourse analysis mapped out in chapter four of this thesis. As I noted in section 4.6.3 of that chapter, a dialogical discourse analysis examines the content manifest in talk, the linguistic devices used in its expression and the shared social knowledge that underlies the content that is introduced and taken up[110], and this attention to content entails the identification

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[110] See chapter four, section 4.6 of this thesis for a discussion of the concept of socially shared knowledge in dialogic theory.

of topics and themes in the data. This chapter is organised according to the analysis of four particular topics and themes that arise within the interviews, and that resonate across the evaluations made by both the 'non professional' readers interviewed here, and 'professional' readers in the media and the academy.

The chapter has the following structure. Section 6.2 examines the readers' evaluations of the tone of chick lit novels, a topic resonant with the issue of a textual construction of intimacy that has interested a number of scholars (Guerrero, 2006; Mabry, 2006; Whelehan, 2005). The next section, 6.3, relates to the theme of value and genre which runs across both scholarly and media attention to chick lit, as this section examines the ways in which the readers index notions of literary value in their own evaluations of chick lit. This focus on the interplay between evaluations of chick lit and forms of socially shared knowledge continues in the following sections. Attending to a thematic concern with the political trajectory of the genre that can also be traced across both scholarship and media commentaries concerned with chick lit, section 6.4 examines the ways in which the readers evaluate chick lit's relationship to feminism. Section 6.5 explores the evaluations the readers make of chick lit's representation of femininity, paying particular attention to chick lit's relationship to the notion central to postfeminist discourse: that the key source of identity for a woman is her body, a relationship that has interested scholars in particular. In the final section of analysis, section 6.6, the focus shifts to examine how the readers invoke their own social identities as women as a central interpretative resource in their evaluations.

Throughout this chapter, all three levels of a dialogical discourse analysis are applied to the interview data. As I noted in chapter four, sections 4.6.2 to 4.6.4 of this thesis, the first level of analysis examines the interaction between speakers, drawing

upon tools and concepts from Conversation Analysis to explore the sequential

organisation of talk, the type of role speakers take on, and how speakers position

themselves in relation to their interlocutors in the sense-making web generated by

participants. The second level of analysis is concerned with what particular content is

made manifest and taken up during the interaction, examining particular topical

trajectories that emerge across talk. The third level of analysis examines the

construction and expression of forms of socially shared knowledge, including discourse

in the Foucauldian sense and regimes of value, which, as I noted in chapter four, section

4.8 of this thesis, Bennett, Emmison and Frow (1999: 260) define as: "an institutionally

grounded set of discursive and intertextual determinations that inspire and regulate

practices of valuation, connecting people to objects or processes of aesthetic practice by

means of normative patterns of value and disvalue". This level of analysis draws upon

the concepts of indexicality and stancetaking along with the tools to analyse the

language of evaluation provided by appraisal theory to explore the link between the

emergence and linguistic expression of topics and themes in the reader's evaluations of

chick lit, and the forms of socially shared knowledge that underpin them. These three

levels are not, however, discrete. Indeed, in this chapter, it is the combination of these

three levels of analysis and their respective analytical tools and concepts which brings

to light the ways in which these particular readers construct and negotiate the meanings

and value of chick lit within what Long (2003) would term the contemporary "matrix of

communication", a matrix wherein the media and educational institutions ascribe

particular social meanings to the genre, evaluations that themselves draw upon and

bolster cultural regimes of value. However, this chapter begins with an introduction to

the interview dataset in section 6.1.

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6.1 Presentation of the interview data

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, two one-to-one interviews with chick lit readers were undertaken for this thesis. Both interviewees are self avowed chick lit readers, and both interviewees read chick lit regularly, with Charlotte reading two to three chick lit novels a month and Annabel reading one chick lit novel a week, which positions them both as knowledgeable readers who are arguably familiar with the genre's characteristics and themes. The first interviewee, Charlotte, agreed to the interview taking place at an institution in the North of England. The second interviewee, Annabel, agreed to an interview taking place during the evening at her home in the Midlands area of the U.K. There are marked differences in the organisation and progression of the two interviews: firstly, the length of the two interviews differs in that the interview with Charlotte lasts for forty-five minutes whereas the interview with Annabel lasts for one and a half hours. Secondly, Charlotte's turns are much shorter than Annabel's, and thirdly, unlike Charlotte, Annabel not only expands upon the topic under discussion but also selects new avenues for discussion. In comparison to Annabel's interview, the interview with Charlotte appears to be a little clipped.[111]

The differences between the interviews can, on the one hand, be accounted for in terms of the interview time and setting. There is little expansion of Charlotte's turns and this could well reflect the time limitations of a lunch break interview and the more formal institutional setting. Annabel's longer turns, and topic expansion, change and management could be seen to reflect the more relaxed and informal interview setting. On the other hand, the differences between the interviews could well reflect the impact

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[111] As a result of Charlotte's characteristically brief turns, I asked more questions than I had planned to, which is also reflected in the differences between the two interviews.

of the researcher; although both interviewees knew prior to the interview that I had read a number of chick lit novels, Charlotte knows me primarily as a researcher interested in chick lit whereas Annabel knows me primarily as a chick lit reader. As I noted in chapter four, section 4.4.1 of this thesis, my intention was to engage each interviewee in a conversation-style interview in order to elicit as much information as possible, but it is possible that Charlotte perceived of the interviewer-interviewee relationship in more formal terms. Furthermore, it is worth noting again that, as I pointed out in chapter four, section 4.10 of this thesis, my decision to ask questions in the reader interviews undoubtedly shaped the subsequent discussion. However, as Edley and Litosseliti (2009:164) point out, interviews are particularly useful for obtaining new information, and as I have noted, there is at present no scholarly analyses of readers' responses to chick lit in a face-to-face context.

Although the interview with Charlotte did not result in the kind of extended discussion and co-construction I had hoped for, whether through the interview time and setting or assumptions about the formal rather than informal relationship between us, yet as short as Charlotte's responses are, analysis of the interview begins to address the absence of such data in the scholarly literature on chick lit. Indeed, one of the insights gained from an examination of both Charlotte's and Annabel's interviews relates to the ways in which these readers evaluate the construction of the relationship between text and reader. As I discussed in chapter two, section 2.2 of this thesis, a number of scholars have been particularly interested in the textual construction of intimacy in chick lit (Guerrero, 2006; Mabry, 2006; Whelehan, 2005), although whether or not chick lit readers construe the narrator-reader relationship as an intimate one has until now been left unexamined.

6.2 Evaluating chick lit's 'intimacy'

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, the application of a dialogic discourse analysis to the interview data necessitates the identification of topics and themes. Whilst this endeavour has resulted in the identification of a number of topics that emerge in and across the talk, with the use of one-to-one interviews which were semi-structured as a way to guide, rather than control, the discussion, the research design itself incorporated the planned presence of particular topics in the data. The topic of the textual construction of intimacy in chick lit was one such topic that I was keen to elicit information on. I asked both Charlotte and Annabel how they would describe the tone of a chick lit novel, and both readers provided similar assessments. Charlotte's answer is contained within the next extract.

Interview 1 Extract 2

```
1.R:    erm (2.46) how would you describe the tone of a chick lit novel?
2.C:    how do you mean?
3.R:    erm the style of writing
4.C:    o:h erm it's like chatty
5.R:    erm is there a particular tone and style that you enjoy
6.R:    just that it's-it's easy going it's like having someone sat opposite you telling you
7.      a story, gossiping
```

(Appendix 1, lines 63-69).

Charlotte's response to my question is to ask for clarification, and on initial consideration Charlotte's turn on line 4 can be seen to be hesitant, conveyed by the filler "erm" (line 4). However ,Charlotte goes on to express her compositional appreciation more confidently in lines 6-7, but it is, I suggest, her use of the adjective "chatty" (line 4) that is significant as it clearly resonates with the scholarly interpretations of the construction of these narratives. As I noted in chapter two of this thesis, Guerrero (2006: 91) argues that the power and appeal of chick lit novels emerges from the "remarkable ability to make the reading experience nearly indistinguishable from a

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conversation with our best girlfriends". Indeed, in Charlotte's next turn beginning on line 6, she compares the tone of chick lit novels to conversation: "like having someone sat opposite you telling you a story". It is, though, interesting that Charlotte then adds information to her evaluation, adding the verb "gossiping"(line 7), a gendered term associated with empty and trivial talk, a point to which I will return.

Annabel's assessment bears some similarities to Charlotte's evaluation of the tone of chick lit, as she too assesses the tone of chick lit in terms of speech:

Interview 2 Extract 2

```
1.R:    what would you describe as the tone of a chick lit novel
2.A:    er the tone, well written in the first person (.) they are written how you would
3.      speak they just (.) including colloquialisms and everything as well (.) and
4.      they're just-they're just so easy going (.) just normal everyday how people
5.      interact with each other and it's very honest I think and down to earth and
6.      normal and er if you read in certain literature some of it is hard going erm
7.      Thomas Hardy (.) Shakespeare even y'know and it's gonna take you some time
8.      to read it cos you're sortin that out and it's faluting and y'know convoluted and
9.      oh god the erm description passages in some of 'em oh my god that go on for
10.     ages don't they but these are just very to the point (.) humorous erm everyday
11.     language (.) there's nothing erm what's the word (.) condescending going on or
12.     y'know you're not feeling that you're inadequate that you can't understand
13.     anything it's all very down to earth straightforward as you would jus-as you
14.     would talk to somebody on a day to day basis (.) normal
```

(Appendix 2, lines 187-200).

In a similar way to Charlotte's initial hesitancy, the discourse marker "well" (line 2) which prefaces Annabel's compositional appreciation could indicate difficulty or reticence in supplying the evaluation requested (Schiffrin, 1989), however I would argue that Annabel goes on to take a confident and authoritative evaluative stance conveyed by the declarative "they are written how you would speak" (line 2). Annabel goes on in lines 2-4 to add to her compositional appraisal that she considers this construction of the narrative voice to be like conversational, informal speech, an assessment repeated later in lines 13-14. Returning to the discourse marker *well* that I

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noted above prefaces Annabel's initial evaluation in the data extract (line 2), I would argue that whilst this marker does not indicate difficulty for Annabel constructing her compositional appraisal, the frequent small pauses (lines 2-4) indicate her sensitivity towards the content of her upcoming *valuation* appraisal.[112] Annabel initiates a topic expansion that emerges from her positive assessment of what she terms the "easy going" (line 4) composition of chick lit as she compares it with the language of other literary texts (lines 6-9), which she presents negatively. That Annabel employs the phrase "easy going" (line 4) is interesting since it is a phrase that is used in Charlotte's compositional appraisal of chick lit discussed above:

Interview 1 Extract 3

6.C: just that it's-it's easy going it's like having someone sat opposite you telling you
7.   a story, gossiping

(Appendix, Interview 1, lines 68-69).

However, Charlotte does not explicitly invoke notions of literary value at all during the interview, but, as I will go on to show, literary value is an issue Annabel addresses on several occasions. Indeed, the issue of literary value constitutes the first unplanned theme I identified as emerging from the interview data, a theme which forms the focus of the next section.

6.3 Valuing chick lit

From the dialogical perspective which forms both the theoretical and analytical basis of this thesis, other-orientation does not simply include dialogue with co-present individuals. As I pointed out in chapter three, section 3.8 of this thesis, a more complex

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[112] As I pointed out in chapter four, section 4.9 of this thesis, in appraisal theory, the valuation realm of appreciation includes evaluations of the importance an individual attaches to a work of fiction, some of which, as I will go on to demonstrate, draw upon formalised, institutionalised valuations.

account of other-orientation suggests that an individual is also in 'dialogue' with forms of socially shared knowledge ranging from notions of what are appropriate and acceptable actions and inclinations through the implicit and explicit socialisation of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), to discursive structures (Foucault, 1972) and regimes of value, or the propositions about a particular phenomenon that are valorised and held in place by institutional supports (Bennett, Emmison and Frow, 1999; Frow, 1995, 2007). The emergence of the topic of literary value in the interview data is therefore important to this thesis both theoretically and analytically. Since the concept of literary value is created and bolstered by a regime of cultural value which constructs a high/low distinction, its expression, elaboration and transformation in the interview data not only provides empirical evidence for dialogism's stress on dialogue between the individual and forms of socially shared knowledge, but also allows for a comparison of the evaluations made by 'non-professional' readers with the evaluations of the genre's literary value made across both scholarly and media commentaries.

In the extract from Annabel's interview discussed in the section above, Annabel goes on from her description of chick lit as easy-going to further describe chick lit as "honest", "down to earth" and "normal" (line 5), and this assessment is compared to "certain literature" (line 6), as Annabel constructs an evaluative stance which indexes notions of literary value.

4.   they're just-they're just so easy going (.) just normal everyday how people
5.   interact with each other and it's very honest I think and down to earth and
6.   normal and er if you read in certain literature some of it is hard going erm
7.   Thomas Hardy (.) Shakespeare even y'know and it's gonna take you some time
8.   to read it cos you're sortin that out and it's faluting and y'know convoluted and
9.   oh god the erm description passages in some of 'em oh my god that go on for
10.   ages don't they but these are just very to the point (.) humorous erm everyday
11.   language (.) there's nothing erm what's the word (.) condescending going on or
12.   y'know you're not feeling that you're inadequate that you can't understand
13.   anything it's all very down to earth straightforward as you would jus-as you
14.   would talk to somebody on a day to day basis (.) normal

(Appendix, Interview 2, lines 190-200).

Annabel's reference to the notion of literary value is indexed by the specific naming of the canonical writers Hardy and Shakespeare (line 6). Furthermore, Annabel's use of the phrase "y'know" (line 7) after the naming of these authors indexes the assumption of shared understanding of the literary canon and literary value, since, as Scheibman (2007) argues, the phrase *y'know* appeals to taken-as-shared knowledge. However, the concept of literary value is one which Annabel reverses. Her stance is conveyed by attitudinal lexis: whereas Annabel uses adjectives to describe the language of chick lit in terms of its veracity, "down to earth", and normality ,"normal" (line 5), the adjectives "faluting" and "convoluted" she uses to describe the language in canonical literature convey unnecessary complexity, and on what I would argue is their pragmatic functioning, the phrases "oh god" and "oh my god" convey disdain for long passages of description (lines 8-9). Interestingly, Annabel invokes but reorders similar criteria for the evaluation of literary value to the literary scholar Wells (2006: 68), discussed in chapter two section 2.1.1 of this thesis. Wells asserts that specifically *literary* language entails 'rich' description, but she argues that it is precisely the absence of 'rich description' and complexity of language, what Wells refers to as a "demand on attention and intellect", that, for her, makes chick lit inferior. The delicacy involved in expressing Annabel's evaluative stance conveyed by the fillers "er" and "erm" (lines 6 and 10) is therefore towards stance-taking that goes against established cultural regimes of value.

I have suggested that unlike Annabel, Charlotte does not explicitly invoke notions of literary value although she uses the same adjectival phrase as Annabel.

Interview 1 Extract 4

6.C: just that it's-it's easy going it's like having someone sat opposite you telling you
7.   a story, gossiping

(Appendix, Interview 1, lines 68-69).

However Charlotte's use of the phrase suggests an absence of complexity, that chick lit is unchallenging, which, along with the self-initiated repair of "story" to "gossip" which as I noted earlier is gendered and associated with empty and trivial talk, suggests an implicit stance towards chick lit that is predicated upon at least awareness of regimes of cultural value. Martin (2000) points out that if appraisal is not explicitly evoked, the speaker or writer can be positioning the other interlocutors to make the kind of appraisal implied. Whether an individual stance or an invited stance, I would argue that what is being indexed in Charlotte's interview is the gendered notion of the hierarchical division of literature according to seriousness, a value judgement which has been circulating since the early twentieth century for, as Virginia Woolf ([1929]1993: 67) once put it, "[t]his is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing room". Such an evaluative stance, I would argue, is further indexed by the adjectival markers concerned with weight that appear in Charlotte's interview data and that I have emphasised below:

Interview 1 Extract 5

C: yeh just that it's **light** hearted

(Appendix 1, line 51, my emphasis)

Interview I Extract 6

C: er horror, I read a lot of Stephen King, er like more true accounts of murderers I suppose, a lot **heavier**.

(Appendix 1, lines 130-131, my emphasis).

Although the operation of stancetaking towards issues of value is subtle in Charlotte's interview data, Annabel more clearly indexes notions of literary value on several more occasions in her interview, particularly in her evaluative stance towards chick lit critics.

That the issue of literary value is something which Annabel wishes to raise again is demonstrated in her management of the topic that is initiated by a question I pose further on in the interview. In the scholarly literature on chick lit, one of the claims that is uncritically reproduced is that for its readers, chick lit deals with the concerns real women are experiencing (Ferris and Young, 2006), and thus in the interviews this was one topic I wished to elicit information on. Annabel's response is, however, interesting for the reference to the criticism of chick lit that prefaces her appraisal of the novels' thematic concerns.

Interview 2 Extract 3

```
1.R:    erm how closely do you think that the concerns that are expressed erm resemble
2.      the concerns of today's women
3.A:    erm yes, er yeh I know there's a big (.) school out there that moans about erm
4.      it's all romance and finding a partner and things like that and er in a lot of books
5.      that is a concern in there but that's a realistic concern for both men and women
6.      who are-we actually are hoping to find somebody to love and to love us aren't
7.      we really, it's the way of the world, yeh it's not something stupid that should be
8.      mocked, that is what the majority of people want, erm so yeh so that's a concern
9.      erm and I think fighting erm fighting for independence, fighting erm for
10.     understanding, to be heard, to be taken seriously (.) yeh I think it's all very
11.     relative, I really do
```

(Appendix 2, lines 301-311).

Annabel's turn begins hesitantly, with the fillers "erm" and "er" marking thinking time, and rather than subsequently offering her appraisal of the genre's themes, Annabel refers to the negative evaluations of chick lit made by others, and therefore undertakes what Coupland and Coupland (2007) refer to as stance attribution (line 3). Annabel's identification of chick lit's critics, however, is vague (line 3). The adjective "big" (line

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3) suggests a substantial entity, and Annabel's micro pause suggests that she is taking care to select an appropriate/relevant word. The noun Annabel chooses, "school", is interesting for its didactic connotations, and the expression 'big school' connotes an established assemblage of people without, however, reference to particular individuals or organisations (line 3). Indeed, Annabel refers to this 'school' as being "out there", again a vague locative expression that obscures any clear identification (line 3).

Despite this ambiguity, I would suggest that the evaluative stance that Annabel attributes to the "school" in this extract can be seen in published chick lit criticism in the media (line 3). Annabel's reference to negative evaluations that chick lit is "all romance and finding a partner" (lines 3-4) resonates with articles published in U.K. newspapers by Brooks (1999), Young (cited in Gibbons, 1999), Walter (2000) and Thomas (2002)[113]. On the occasion of the publication of the second Bridget Jones book, in *The Guardian* Brooks (1999, no page numbers), writes of chick lit:

> [i]t denies women any complexity, presenting a two-tier persona wearing the public face of feminism, but beneath yearning for a romantic hero to mop her up off the floor and iron out her insecurity. It imagines women at once validated and transfigured by their relationships.

Brooks takes a confident epistemic stance to her negative appraisal of chick lit's concern with romance conveyed by the declarative sentences, positioning herself as an authoritative voice. The verbs "mop" and " iron" belong to a semantic field of domestic chores, and this negative connection between romance and the quotidian is interesting given that in the same year, Young was quoted in *The Guardian* as declaring those books written in the same vein as *Bridget Jones's Diary* "parochial", and "tend[ing]

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[113] As Craddock (2004: 43n 14) points out, there are many examples of negative evaluations of chick lit's preoccupation with love and therefore its connection to mass-market romance in the media. I chose four articles in order to demonstrate the regularity of these types of comments; to list more would become repetitious, and furthermore an extended discussion is not possible given the space constraints of the thesis.

towards the domestic in a piddling way" (Gibbons, 1999, no page numbers). Walter (2000, no page numbers), writing in *The Independent*, similarly ascribes chick lit's primary thematic concern to romance: "the heroine, a metropolitan thirtysomething with a circle of drunken, funny friends, is rather exercised about whether she will ever find love ... In the end she always finds it", and she describes the genre as presenting a "constant chatter about weddings, weddings, weddings, and love, love, love". Again, declarative sentences convey the authoritative epistemic stance Walters takes, and the verb phrase "constant chatter" invokes a negative evaluative stance towards chick lit predicated upon notions of literary value that are equated with seriousness since "chatter", like gossip, is associated with empty talk.[114]

Annabel, however, takes up a negative evaluative stance towards such criticism and the notions of literary value that it indexes, as she constructs a dichotomy of experience and desire that positions the critics at variance with the majority of people. In line 6 of extract 3, Annabel makes a self-initiated repair to the plural pronoun "we" and this choice of pronoun shifts her subsequent comments to a generalisation, aligning her stance with the many. This generalisation is reinforced as Annabel expresses her evaluation confidently, with the adverb "actually" (line 6) indexing an actuality stance, which, as I noted in chapter four, section 4.7.2, suggests that what is being claimed, that both men and women are looking for love, is not merely an opinion but a reflection of reality (Conrad and Biber, 2000). The rhetorical question "aren't we really" appeals to common knowledge and indeed Annabel's declarative that immediately follows this attempt at persuasion, "it's the way of the world", reinforces the idea that what she is

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[114] As I have also argued in chapter five, section 5.5 of this thesis, Thomas (2002) also negatively equates chick lit with romance, most clearly seen in her use of the noun phrase "frothy romance", with the premodification conveying shallowness.

saying is indeed truth not opinion (lines 6-7). The combination of generalisation, the use

of a plural pronoun and the expression of an actuality stance therefore implicitly

positions chick lit's critics in an out-group. Furthermore, Annabel's negative judgement

of behaviour conveyed by the verb "moans" portrays these critics as small-minded, as

the verb connotes inconsequential, petty complaints (its synonyms include whinge and

whine). I would argue that this understanding of Annabel's stance is borne out in her

further references to chick lit criticism.

Annabel discusses the topic of chick lit criticism and literary value again in the

interview, and it is Annabel who selects the topic in her response to my question about

whether she thinks the term chick lit suitably describes the novels.

Interview 2 extract 4

```
1. R:   yeh, erm do you think that the term chick lit describes these novels well
2. A:   erm I don't really know about this erm I think in some ways perhaps the term is
3.      what's causing all these derogatory comments y'know chick lit y'know cos if
4.      they actually spent time reading these books I don't-I don't know if these (.)
5.       people do but I think well you can't do or you wouldn't make the comments
6.      you do about 'em so I don't mind it
9. R:   so I was gonna ask you whether you liked or disliked i[t
10.A:                                                          [I don't  particularly like
11.     it but there's more things that are important (.) I'm not offended by being a
12.     chick
13.R:   are you not that doesn't offend you or=
14.A:                                             =not particularly, erm I don't like being
15.     called a bird I s'pose, but I s'pose it's a same-similar thing that chick, bird in't it
16.     er I would  imagine that that term has yes has got a lot to do with the outcry
17.     about it because people that say it's dumbin down and things like that and that
18.     chick lit-that does give you that image of the air head, doesn't it that and the
19.     pink nove[l w]ell the pink book it wouldn't even be a nove[l w]ould it erm so
18.R:                [yeh]
19.A:   yeh  I think it perhaps has done a lot of damage, as I say personally I haven't
20.      taken offence, but that's because I choose not to
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(Appendix 2, lines 388-408).

Annabel initially expresses her uncertainty about the suitability of the term chick lit,

choosing instead to shift the topic by re-introducing the subject of chick lit criticism. As

in extract 5, Annabel does not identify these critics, but rather uses the ambiguous plural pronoun "they", and in line 4 there is what I suggest is an analytically significant small pause. This micro pause after "these" suggests that Annabel has paused to consider an appropriate noun, but the noun she chooses, "people", is also ambiguous (line 4). Annabel's epistemic stance towards her own evaluation, however, becomes more confident after the conjunction "but" as she expresses her evaluation with an increased level of modality compared to the previous inclusion of hedges and fillers in her utterance (line 15). Indeed, Annabel maintains her focus on the topic, despite my attempt to return to the topic of the genre's name in line 9.

In lines 13-14, Annabel's is a preferred response in that she answers the question in line 12, however within her turn she shifts the topic focus back to her view that the term chick lit itself is partially responsible for the genre's negative reception. In line 16 Annabel uses the phrase "dumbing down", which has a particular resonance with criticism of chick lit in the media. As I discussed in chapter five, section 5.5 of this thesis, it is largely within print journalism that chick lit has been discussed as exemplifying a perceived 'dumbing down' of the publishing industry in its pursuit of profit, and although Annabel does not expand on this, her use of the phrase, I would suggest, clearly indexes at least her awareness of this type of evaluation. Furthermore, Annabel maintains her focus on the construction of literary value in lines 18-19:

18.   chick lit-that does <u>give</u> you that image of the air head, doesn't it that and the
19.   pink nove[l w]ell the pink book it wouldn't even be a novel would it erm so

(Appendix, Interview 2, lines 404-406).

Annabel's use of the discourse marker "well" in line 19 prefaces a repair, but the utterance following the repair is a stance *attribution*. As I pointed out in chapter three,

section 3.5 of this thesis, dialogism stresses the individual's potential for dialogue with abstract third parties conceived of as generalised voices and perspectives, and I would argue that here Annabel incorporates the perspective of the absent and thus far abstract chick lit critics she has concerned herself with, and it is this attributed stance that Annabel is not only responding to but also disputing. The repetition of the premodifier "pink" connotes a colour associated with femininity, and the repair of the noun phrase from "pink novel" to "pink book" effectively strips chick lit of a *literary* categorisation, thus indexing a specifically gendered notion of literary value predicated upon the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture which conceives of popular fiction as gendered feminine and therefore inferior, as I discussed in chapter 1, section 1.2.1 of this thesis (lines 18-19). This interpretation of the concept Annabel is indexing is borne out, I would suggest, firstly, by her clarification of the repair after a small pause, "it wouldn't even be a novel would it", with the use of the intensifier "even" making clear that there is indeed a hierarchical distinction between novel and book, and secondly by the tag question "it wouldn't even be a novel *would it*" in its appeal to a taken-as-shared understanding of this particular construction of literary value (line 19, my emphasis).

Annabel's use of the phrase "dumbing down" is something that interested me during the interview, and in the next section of the data overleaf which immediately follows extract six above, I selected what I considered to be an appropriate TRP[115] in order to ask Annabel about the phrase:

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[115] As I noted in chapter four, section 4.6.2 of this thesis, a transition relevance place (TRP) is a discrete place at which transition from the current to the next speaker can occur. Here I consider the ending of Annabel's declarative turn on line 24 to be an appropriate TRP.

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<u>Interview 2 extract 5</u>

1.A: I don't really >@wanna get involved in that@> if that's what they wanna call a
2.   book then fine (.) if I enjoy a book I enjoy a book
3. S: I noticed you talked about dumbing down, so you're aware of erm a lot of
4.   charges (.) criticisms that are levelled at chick lit y'know how it's er:[m have]
5. A: [oh yeh]
6. S: you read them in newspapers or=
7. A   =I don't know actually where I've read-I'm
8.   aware of it very aware of it erm I must have done I must have read erm I think
9.   yeh cos you get reviews in newspapers don't y-I used to read *The Guardian* a lot
10.   and the times on occasion and stuff so yeh I think that whole I used to have erm
11.   (.) yes I used to be in that book club and I'm very aware of a school of people
12.   who are I think are academics who are looking down their noses at it and
13.   y'know I struggle with it cos y'know to me it's not dumbin-I mean look at
14.   Shakespeare (.) they think Shakespeare's the best thing since sliced bread and
15.   that was just dirty filth, well ↑it ↑was ↑wasn't it (.) I mean if you read it and
16.   understand it it's just dirty filth it was of its time (.) it was common (.) for
17.   common people so yeh I struggle with this whole dumbing down thing I mean
18.   what do they want I we suppose to-er only read books that we need a dictionary
19.   to understand ((laughs)) no I really don't get it I really don't.

(Appendix, Interview 2, lines 409-428).

Annabel initially interrupts to confirm that she is indeed aware of the 'dumbing down'

criticism of chick lit, although she expresses her uncertainty as to where she has heard

them. What is interesting, however, is that Annabel returns to her description of chick lit

critics as a "school", but on this occasion she clarifies the constitution of this group:

"I'm very aware of a school of people who are I think are academics who are looking

down their noses at it" (lines 11-12). I have argued that the most evident sources of such

an evaluative stance are found in newspaper articles and reviews but Annabel attributes

this stance to academics. Although the term "academics" can also be wide in its

application (line 12), yet in the three extracts (5, 6 and 7) discussed which temporally

follow one another in the interview there is a progression of increased confidence in

Annabel's expression of her assessment, culminating in her identification of the group

of people to whom she attributes a negative evaluative stance. Furthermore, the notion

of the hierarchy of literary value which underpins this attributed stance is a topic

Annabel has repeatedly selected and one to which she returns yet again, and the increase in confident epistemic stance reaches its culmination as this time Annabel leaves no doubt as to her stance towards such notions of literary value.[116]

That Annabel is indexing a particular hierarchical notion of literary value that is predicated upon a 'high'/'low' binary division is conveyed, as in extract four, by the proper noun "Shakespeare", and the pronoun "they" (line 14) refers anaphorically to the "academics" thus making clear the subjects to whom Annabel attributes this stance, which also reinforces the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy established by Annabel in extract five. The phrase "they think Shakespeare's *the best thing since sliced bread*" (lines 14, my emphasis) is a phrase used in areas of the U.K. to express that something or someone is highly valued, but Annabel's challenge is an inversion of the high/low construction of literary value. Rather than positioning Shakespeare's work as *the* elite and *for* the elite, Annabel's declares that it is "dirty filth", that is "common" and "for common people" (lines 16-17). Indeed, the challenging nature of Annabel's turn is indicated by the illocutionary force of her utterances, as the noun phrase "dirty filth" and the adjective "common" express derogatory sentiments at variance to the veneration that might be expected for "the best thing since sliced bread".[117]

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[116] I would argue that the discourse marker "I mean" on line 13 functions here to mark the speaker's orientation to the upcoming utterance (Schiffrin, 1989), marking that what will follow is a challenge.

[117] The stance Annabel attributes to chick lit critics both here and in extracts 5 and 6 earlier positions them as elitist, and this evaluation and stance attribution bears striking similarities to the findings of Steiner (2008). In her work on online reader reviews of a chick lit novel discussed in chapter two, section 2.2.2 of this thesis, Steiner notes that in the chick lit reader reviews she examines, these 'non-professional' readers express disdain for the professional critic, positioning them as either ignorant of the genre or elitist.

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Across three sections of the interview, then, Annabel selects the topic of the negative evaluation of chick lit, culminating in what I suggest is her most unambiguously expressed stance attribution. To date, scholarly work on chick lit has referred only to responses to negative evaluations of chick lit that are published in the media (Ferriss and Young, 2006: 2), but Annabel's repeated indexing of regimes of high culture (Frow 1995: 146) and the criteria by which value is ascribed and expressed, however, brings to light empirical evidence of the relationship between the evaluations of an actual chick lit reader and the evaluations of professional reviewers and critics, demonstrating that for this particular chick lit reader, the views of the professional critics are risible. In the next section I maintain the focus on the individual's engagement with, and expression of, socially shared knowledge, as I examine Charlotte and Annabel's stance towards the relationship between chick lit and feminism.

6.4 Evaluating the relationship between chick lit and feminism

Unlike the unplanned emergence in the data of the topical trajectory concerned with literary value, I planned for a discussion of the topic of chick lit's relationship with feminism in the interview questions I posed. Given the absence of scholarly engagement with actual chick lit readers, I was keen to elicit information from Annabel and Charlotte about their views on the matter, and thus I asked the opinion of both interviewees on the charge of anti-feminism that has been levelled against chick lit.[118] However, Annabel's response is lengthy, and begins with quite an assured epistemic stance, conveyed by what starts as a declarative sentence within which the cognitive verb phrases "I don't think", "I think" (line 3) constitute averral (Hunston, 2000),

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[118] In the media, Chick lit author Jenny Colgan (2001, no page numbers) is perhaps one of the most outspoken commentators on negative evaluations of chick lit, blaming what she calls "hairy leggers" for perpetuating damaging criticism of the genre.

positioning Annabel as the source of the statement; this is an interactional move that requires a degree of confidence:

Interview 2 extract 6a

```
1.R:                    I'd like to ask your opinion on-on er chick lit has been described
2.        as anti-feminist(.) erm have you an opinion on that
3.A:    I don't think it's anti feminist (.) I think this whole feminist thing (1.6) I mean
4.        I'm not quite sure I know where I stand because things seem to go to extremes
5.        to me erm at the end of the day we are still women (.)  and there are certain
6.        things that women like (.) y'know we do like erm to look our best at times (.) we
7.        do like to make an effort (.) erm we do like to be with somebody who we love
8.        and who loves us er I don't know  anti feminist er well I s'pose you could say
9.        what is feminism (.) well  to me (.) feminism is y'know, just the want to be
10.        treated equally and with respect (.) the same respect that men get treated with to
11.        be listened to (.) erm not dismissed (.) erm given the same chances erm given the
12.        same pay for doin the same jobs y'know that's all feminism is about and I don't
13.        like it when its taken to the extreme when it's actually anti men y'know that's
14.        just ridiculous (.) it's just >@what is going on there@> (.) so I don't see how it
15.        can be anti-feminist
```

(Appendix 2, lines 358-370).

Annabel's stance, however, quickly becomes less confident with a pause after the two cognitive verb phrases, followed by the hedged "I'm not quite sure where I stand" and the appearance of a filler "erm" on line 5. This less confident epistemic stance conveys the difficulty Annabel is having in providing an evaluation, and indeed as I introduce the topical trajectory, the hesitancy in my question turn indicated by a false start (line 1) and fillers (lines 1 and 2) suggests my own awareness of the potential difficulty in providing the evaluation I am asking for. However, Annabel's tentative epistemic stance does not convey a difficulty in expressing her appraisal of whether chick lit is anti-feminist; rather it is a difficulty with the *concept of feminism.*

Although she does not suggest that feminism is unnecessary, Annabel constructs her understanding of feminism as predicated upon the fight for equality; however, her stance is that this agenda has been taken too far, conveyed by the noun and adjective in "things seem to go to *extremes* ... taken to the *extreme*" (lines 4 and 13, my emphasis)

suggesting excessiveness, and she has thus taken on board a negative representation of feminism. Although Annabel does not construct her stance as elitist, she does construct a negative other-evaluation. Indeed, I suggest that a cline is created from the reasonable to the excessive, since whereas Annabel positions her own understanding of feminism as moderate and fair, predicated upon wish to be treated "equally and with respect" (line 10), she attributes an anti-men stance to what she considers feminism "taken to the extreme", with the adverbial in the phrase "it's actually anti-men" (line 13), functioning to suggest that what she is expressing is not opinion but truth.

I would argue that Annabel subtly rejects the view of chick lit as anti-feminist by constructing a generalisation that renders what she perceives as the kind of anti-men feminist criticism untenable. Following Annabel's assessment that "things seem to go to extremes", "things" I would argue referring anaphorically to the "whole feminist thing", the phrase "at the end of the day" (line 5) bestows an air of finality and authority to the proposition that follows. The repetition of the plural pronoun "we" (lines 5, 6 and 7) marks a shift from an individual to a generalised stance which indexes the notion that all women are concerned with their appearance and with relationships, echoing two of chick lit's thematic concerns. The presupposition here is that firstly such concerns are a result of sex, indicated initially by the inclusion of, and emphasis on, the adverb *still* in the phrase "we are still women" and by the subsequent repetition of the noun "women", with the repeated emphasis on the verb in the phrase "we <u>do</u>" adding a further expression of certainty and validity (lines 5-7). Secondly, that as a result of such an essentialist 'truth', the criticisms of chick lit's thematic concerns are unsustainable.[119] That this generalisation is positioned as normative, I would argue, is further reinforced

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[119] I will return to the notion of biology as the root cause of the differences between men and women in section 6.5.2 of this chapter

by the discourse marker "y'know" (line 6) which functions here, as Schiebman (2007) argues, to appeal to a taken-as-shared understanding of societal norms.

Whereas Annabel takes a stance towards feminism and attributes a particular stance to some feminists, Charlotte's response is markedly different:

<u>Interview 1 extract 7</u>

1.R: chick lit has been described as anti-feminist (.) do you see it as anti-feminist
2.C: erm (3.08) I have to think what feminist really means
3.R: that's ok do you think that that really matters
4.C: I think it (1.56) I think it does show stereotypes of women that maybe not
5.   everyone wants to fall into them but that's how we are, and whether you want to
6.   admit it or not (.) yeh dunno

(Appendix, Interview 1, lines 132-137).

Charlottes's turn begins with the filler "erm" (line 2) which initially suggests hesitancy, but the following pause of a little over three seconds suggests not just an uncertain epistemic stance, but a clearly noticeable difficulty in providing an evaluation. A three second pause in face-to-face interaction is quite a marked silence, which I would argue Charlotte is aware of when she provides a declarative sentence to account for her silence: "I have to think what feminist really means" (line 2). Unlike Annabel, Charlotte does not express a stance towards feminism, but instead makes a careful claim to knowledge of its meaning. Charlotte's claim to knowledge simultaneously operates to mitigate both the weight of her evaluation and to save face by assuaging any inference that she is claiming complete ignorance. The intensifier "really" in ""I have to think what feminist really means" (line 2) implies that she may well have some understanding of the concept but that it is a complex issue. Indeed, that Charlotte goes on to give an appraisal that not only shifts in the degree of confidence she expresses in her epistemic stance but also offers contradictory appraisals reinforces the difficulties she has in providing her response to the issue of feminism. Charlotte's evaluation is contradictory

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in terms of both content and epistemic stance; initially she negatively evaluates chick lit for presenting stereotypes, suggesting that chick lit is anti-feminist, but this negative evaluation is mitigated somewhat by her hedging "I think it does show stereotypes of women that **maybe** not everyone wants to fall into" (lines 4-5, my emphasis). Charlotte then contradicts herself. The discourse marker *but* encodes the cognitive effect of contradiction (Blakemore, 2002), and indeed, in the following utterance Charlotte asserts that these stereotypes are now factual representations, with the inclusion of the pronoun "we" in the declarative utterance "that's how we are" creating a generalisation that authorises her opinion (line 5). However, yet another rapid shift in epistemic stance occurs as Charlotte ends her turn with the incongruous utterance "yeh dunno" (line 6). Whereas Charlotte appears guarded in her response to the issue, as I have shown, Annabel is more forthcoming in her evaluations, and I suggest that Annabel expresses what can be seen as a feminist stance herself in her interview, since what I will refer to as Annabel's concern with 'the beauty myth' in her reference to chick lit's concern with bodies and appearance indexes feminist discourse. Indeed, the topic of chick lit's representation of femininity is a topic that emerges in the data in both a planned and an unplanned manner.

6.5 Evaluating chick lit's representations of femininity: beauty and the body

As I noted in chapter two, section 2.1.4 of this thesis, a number of scholars have highlighted chick lit's depiction of anxiety, and Gill and Herdieckerhoff (2006) in particular have brought to attention the anxiety which abounds in chick lit novels in the protagonists' preoccupation with the shape, size and look of the body. Indeed, according to Gill and Herdieckerhoff, in its relationship to the notion of the body as the key source of identity, chick lit's preoccupation with appearance is one of the major elements that

characterises the genre's articulation of a distinctively postfeminist sensibility. The topic of chick lit's representation of femininity as a bodily property comes about differently in the two interviews. In Charlotte's interview, I initiate the topic of the body and appearance.

Interview 1 extract 8

```
1. R:   yeh how do you feel about the concerns around body image and career, do you
2.      think they resemble the concerns of women today
3. C:   er yeh all women are concerned about their body image and about a job, maybe
4.      not the way it's shown in the books but yeh alot are bothered about it
```

(Appendix, Interview 1, lines 99-102).

Posed as a direct question, Charlotte takes up the issue and offers a clear appraisal of the social significance of chick lit's thematic concern with body image. Despite the filler "er" (line 3) that marks the beginning of her turn potentially suggesting hesitancy, Charlotte takes an authoritative epistemic stance, making what Scheibman (2007: 112) refers to as a generic generalisation, or a distant reference to and quantification of people. The subject of the noun phrase refers to a general class, "women" and the indefinite determiner "all" (line 3) reinforces the generalisation as all encompassing, thus conveying her evaluation as a matter of fact description of the world: that "all women are concerned about their body image" (line 3). However, Charlotte then begins to mitigate the assuredness of her epistemic stance conveyed by the hedge "maybe" as she offers a valuation appreciation of chick lit that problematises the authenticity of its representation of the issue: "maybe not the way it's shown in the books" (line 4). Although she maintains that body image and appearance are important concerns for women, she employs mitigation in relation to the generality of her earlier assertion; it is now "a lot" of women rather than "all" women who are concerned about their bodies (line 4). Charlotte is therefore subtly questioning the representation of concerns with the body in chick lit, which accounts for her shift in epistemic stance; as Hunston (2000)

points out, averral, or the positioning of oneself as the source of a statement, is an

interactionally delicate move that can often become problematic as one opens oneself to

potential challenge and criticism. By contrast, in Annabel's interview the emergence of

the topic of beauty and the body is initially unplanned and the topic develops in a more

complex way. Annabel selects the topic of chick lit's relationship to what I am terming

'the beauty myth', since the target of her focus would seem to echo the standard

feminist critique of male-created perceptions of beauty perpetuated by advertising and

the media (Gamble, 2000: 158).

6.5.1 Critiquing the 'beauty myth'

Annabel raises the issue of body shape and size initially in response to my

question about what things she finds funny in chick lit:

<u>Interview 2 extract 7</u>

```
1. A:                                    I mean the book I'm reading at the moment
2.       is er Louise Bagshaw erm Monday's Child and there's a woman that lives with
3.       two models  erm and one of the models is saying that she's curvy and er the
4.       author says to her erm well the character says to her y-you  can't be curvy cos
5.       you're a 34B >@y'know that just makes you laugh@> and you think yeh
6.       that's true and I think I'm a 34B I've  got curves ((laughs)) but y'know it's just
7.       funny
8. R:  so some of it's about appearance (.) about anxieties over appearance
9. A:  yes it's all stuff that we do go through as women on a daily basis because we're
10.      surrounded by them (.) by the so called perfect woman which is non existent
11.      and they're all airbrushed and if y'know you had a personal trainer and a
12.      personal stylist and spend two hours in make up and hair every day then we can
13.      all look grand can't we  ((laughs)) yeh but yeh it is things that we as women go
14.      through and society and men expect a certain standard (.) magazines (.) y'know,
15.      er it's ju-I think it is a relief y'know just to be able to go yeh  warts and all this is
16.      how we are, I think it's a relief yeh like I say it's a thank god for that
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(Appendix 2, lines 170-186).

In lines 1 to 7, Annabel relates her evaluation of chick lit's humour to a scene in the

book she is presently reading, and in my turn, I focus Annabel's mention of body image

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and appearance. It is in Annabel's response to my request for clarification that she begins to take a stance towards the beauty myth. Annabel begins her turn on line 9 with a declarative sentence that affirms chick lit's thematic concern with appearance and its social significance. The repetition of the plural pronoun "we ... we're" (line 9) marks a shift from an individual stance to a generalisation which affords Annabel's appraisal authority: "it's all stuff that we do go through as women on a daily basis". The discourse marker *because* on line 9 signals the advance of a causal clause (Schiffrin, 1987), and here Annabel identifies the reason why chick lit's concern with appearance is a resonant one, with the lexical expression "so called" functioning to mark the negativity of her evaluation by suggesting that the following noun phrase is misleading: "we're surrounded by them, by the so called perfect woman" (line 10).

Annabel then clarifies her stance by elaborating on the constructedness of the perfect woman in terms of resources and time, with her laughter reinforcing her negative evaluative stance by suggesting that such efforts are risible (lines 11-13). In lines 14-16 Annabel returns to the beauty myth after having highlighted the constructed nature of 'perfection', and here Annabel's stance towards the underpinnings of the image of the 'perfect woman' indexes a feminist discourse in that she locates this image in society, particularly in the expectations of men, an image that she then locates as being perpetuated by the media. Annabel, however, implies that chick lit debunks the image of what she termed earlier in the extract the "perfect woman" (line 10) by offering a "warts and all" representation of women that is, for Annabel a "relief" (lines 15-16). There is, however, a degree of contradiction in Annabel's stancetaking, as whilst she indexes feminist discourse in her critique of the beauty myth, she also takes

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an oppositional, biological essentialist stance towards gender, as she discusses the self-help books she reads besides chick lit.

6.5.2 Expressing a biological essentialist stance

As I noted in chapter one, section 1.2.2 of this thesis, the reassertion of the belief in nature as the fundamental reason that women and men are different is a key component of postfeminist discourse, and this biological essentialism has been fuelled by the rapidly growing market in self-help literature[120]. It is thus theoretically significant for the dialogical approach taken in this thesis that in her interview, Annabel draws upon a further form of socially shared knowledge, but, it is also analytically significant that she initiates a new topical trajectory that discusses self-help books. Examination of the relationship between chick lit and self-help books has been largely confined to the sphere of scholarship[121]. Smith (2004, 2005, 2008) in particular has explored this relationship at length.

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[120] Neville (2008: 3) states that "market surveys have reported that the sale of self-help/popular psychology books has grown exponentially since the 1970s". Poynter (2008) notes that in 1997, the year before the release of Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* in America, 1,818 self-help titles were published in the U.S.A. alone, generating $538 million, whilst Wilson states that the self-help industry in the U.S. is currently worth $10billion a year. According to Wilson (2011), in the U.K. it is currently estimated that the self-help genre has earned its producers £60million from 2006 to 2011. The practice of buying and reading self-help books is, however, clearly gendered, for as Neville also notes, between 75 to 85% of those who buy self-help books are female (2008: 5).

[121] The link between chick lit and self-help literature has been commented upon in print journalism, but has not been examined in any sustained manner in that medium. For example, writing for *The Atlantic*, Dafoe Whitehead (1999, no page numbers) places chick lit within what she terms "dump literature", or popular literature, including a number of self-help books, that contain a genre-crossing, signature thematic concern with, she puts it, "getting dumped – by a boyfriend or a boss or both". However, Dafoe Whitehead's main concern in her article is what she terms the "plight of the high-status

According to Smith (2008: 11), a number of chick lit novels directly reference self-help literature, representing their protagonists engaging in various ways with these texts. Smith points out that it could be argued that the very inclusion of self-help books in chick lit narratives contributes to the dissemination of the gendered ideas and expectations they proffer. On this view, she argues, chick lit readers are implicitly assigned a passive role of imbibing the ideologies on offer. By contrast, Smith assigns chick lit a subversive role, as she argues that upon close examination, chick lit challenges and mocks the advice given by these self-help manuals. Smith's argument is predicated upon the notion of readers' familiarity with the style and content of self-help books, and yet presently there is no evidence to suppose that chick lit readers are also readers of self-help literature. Annabel's interview is thus significant in that the topic of self-help books is one that *she* selects when asked what kind of books apart from chick lit that she reads.

Prior to the following extract, I asked Annabel about her book choices and she talked about having read a number of books by the crime writer Patricia Cornwell, and here she continues her discussion of her reading choices:

Interview 2 extract 9

1. A: I like a lot of different things
2.   erm so there's not really any type I don't think (.) apart from travel I do enjoy
3.   travel-travel literature (1.98) and self-help books ((laughs)) I love havin a laugh
4.   at them erm I've bought a lot of books about self esteem and things like that and
5.   ways to make yourself happy and yeh and a lot of er er like *Why Men Lie And*
6.   *Women Cry* that's funny and er I think thats-that goes with *Women Can't Read*
7.   *Maps* that one, what is it er, y'know those kinds of things I mean I'm very
8.   interested in erm social issues erm people I'm interested in people so anything
9.   that deals with kind of thing
10. S: so you have pretty much a-a-a-you're not reading them purely for self help

woman" for whom neither her love life nor her working life are settled or secure, and what she sees as the ensuing "new mating system".

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11.   you've got a critical eye on it then because you-you laugh at some of i[t then
12.A: [yes yeh
13.   erm I have gone through stages when I've bought these books because I thought
14.   they would help me but I'm not that naive anymore ((laughs)) but I am just
15.   interested in people y'know definitely so anything in that kind of vein I find
16.   interesting cos them ones about men lying and women crying they actually go
17.   into the science behind the actual differences between men and women in the
18.   brain and things so it's not just a-a y'know a self help book they do actually go
19.   into y'know the physical differences between us erm yeh y'know how-how men
20.   will look just straight forward they can't-they don't have the peripheral vision so
21.   when they're lookin in the fridge they >@can only see straight in front of em@>
22.   It explains a lot of things (4.12)((laughs))

(Appendix, Interview 2, lines 523-544).

Annabel brings up the topic of self-help books in line 3, and her evaluative stance

towards the genre oscillates between a derisory evaluation of its value and a positive

evaluation of its insights. Initially Annabel constructs her evaluative stance as a

distanced and negative one; despite identifying self-help literature as books that she

likes, "I do enjoy travel-travel literature ... and self-help books" (line 3), Annabel laughs

immediately after the noun phrase, which mitigates the strength of her prior statement.

This mitigation continues in her declarative sentence "I love having a laugh at them"

(lines 3-4) which constructs a negative evaluation of self-help books: these books are

meant to be therapeutic rather than comic and therefore evaluating them as humorous

questions their value. This negative value evaluation is reinforced by Annabel's

elaboration in lines 13-14 where she depicts her changing engagement with self-help

literature as a transition from naivety to maturity. However, Annabel's stance shifts

from a negative appraisal to a positive appraisal of the social significance of certain

books in terms of their degree of insight, as she endorses the biological essentialist

position proffered by the self-help books she references.

In lines 16-20 Annabel attributes authority to certain books by drawing attention

to the branch of knowledge that they draw upon: "they actually go into the *science*

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behind the actual difference between men and women in the brain" and in so doing she makes a clear disassociation from the categorisation of self-help book "so it's not just a a-y'know a self help book", with the phrase "y'know" here assuming the superiority of scientific knowledge is commonly understood. In positioning the authority of scientific knowledge as ratifying certain books, Annabel also positions the very notion of biological essentialism as fact, as she employs an actuality stance conveyed by the repetition of the two adverbs "actually" and the adjective "actual" (lines 16-17). The inclusion of the marker "y'know" again operates as an appeal to shared knowledge that further reinforces Annabel's assumption of the veracity of biological essentialism. For Annabel, then, there are clear, biologically rooted, reasons for the disparate behaviours of the sexes, and although Annabel does not return to the topic of biological essentialism in the interview, she does repeatedly construct generalisations about women's experiences, as does Charlotte, although to a lesser degree. In so doing both Annabel and Charlotte invoke their social identities as women as a key interpretative resource in their evaluations.

6.6 Invoking social identity in evaluation

In her analysis of online reader reviews of chick lit discussed in chapter two, section 2.2.2 of this thesis, Steiner (2008) argues that a key component of the reviews she studied is the importance for the readers of being able to relate their own experiences to the events and thematic concerns of a chick lit novel.[122] As I argued in

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[122] In her study of book groups, Bessman Taylor (2012: 154) also notes that readers "supplemented the work under consideration ... with details from their own experiences or their interactions with others in order to gain a better understanding of aspects of the narrative such as character motivation".

chapter three, section 3.8 of this thesis, Marková's (2003:4) dialogical definition of social knowledge encompasses not just discourse in the Foucauldian sense, but also includes "all kinds of knowing in our everyday life". I would argue that not only from a dialogical perspective but also from the third wave feminist perspective I set out in chapter 1, section 1.2.3.4 of this thesis which sees identity as fluid, multi-faceted and diversely invoked and enacted according to context, the invocation of one or several aspects of identity as an interpretative resource is to be expected. Indeed, as I have indicated above, Steiner's findings have some resonance with the interview data, albeit to varying degrees.

In response to my direct question, and thus a planned topic choice, Charlotte is initially tentative in her answer and she neither confirms nor denies any potential resonance between her own experiences and those represented in chick lit, conveyed by the adverb "possibly" (line 2):

Interview 1 Extract 9

```
1. R:  did you ever feel that a character's emotions or experiences resembled yours
2. C:  erm possibly but erm like amplified alot, like concentrated versions of how I feel
3.     at times
4. R:  what kinds of emotions and experiences do you think have some kind of
5.     association with how you'd feel
6. C:  erm just a lot of the ones involved in the romances really kind of bein unsure if
7.     you're with the right person and then always wantin it to turn out right
```

(Appendix, Interview 1, lines 103-109).

Charlotte then goes on to suggest that there is, however, a link, but that the intensity with which the emotions and experiences are represented does not resemble her own experiences or emotions. On the second occasion, however, Charlotte appears to contradict herself somewhat by suggesting that for her, reading chick lit is principally not to relate the novels to her own experiences:

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Interview 1 Extract 10

1. R: ok I wonder when you're actually reading a chick lit novel are you thinking
2.   about your own life as you're reading it
3. C: ah occasionally, it's like to get away from my own life but occasionally it makes
4.   me think about my own life

(Appendix, Interview 1, lines 152-155).

By contrast, in Annabel's interview the topic of relating one's experiences to the events

and characters represented in chick lit is initiated by Annabel herself.

In the next extract, Annabel is initially discussing the book stand in her local

library dedicated solely to chick lit, and that it is the titles of the books, rather than their

covers, that she peruses. My question on line 3 operates as a request for clarification of

the sort of titles she looks for, but Annabel changes the topic slightly by widening the

focus from choice of title to other components of a novel's construction that she relates

to according to her personal experiences:

Interview 2 extract 10

1. A: so much effort but when I go to that stand it's the titles I think I'm looking at
2.   more than anything
3. R: more than the covers it's the titl[es w]hat kind of title are you looking for
3. A: [yeh]
4. R: roughly or=
5. A: =erm well the kind of books I'm attracted to are sort of
6.   (.) obviously things that-that speak to me and I can identify with so y'know
7.   thirty something kind of struggle with who you are, finding the right path in life,
8.   things you like, so it's something that resonates that kind of y'know it's saying
9.   that to me and things that are like erm I suppose ones that are like people's
10.   search for mister right as well and all the wrong people they've been through
11.   and they fi-y'know those kind of things interest me as well erm again just cos
12.   y'know we're all perhaps interested in finding mister right at some point

(Appendix, Interview 2, lines 103-116).

Initially, the hedge "sort of" (line 5) and the following small pause expresses a hesitant

epistemic stance, suggesting a slight degree of apprehension towards the content of her

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upcoming evaluation; but the hedge is immediately followed by the adverb "obviously" (line 6), marking a rapid shift to a more assured stance. The experiences depicted in chick lit that Annabel identifies and relates to are recounted in a sequential manner without hesitation and therefore without doubt, "who you are, finding the right path in life, things you like" (lines 7-8). Annabel then makes a generalisation about women to legitimate and bolster her evaluation which, conveyed by the indefinite determiner "all", is initially expressed as a matter of fact: "we're all perhaps interested in finding mister right at some point" (lines 12). However, Annabel's epistemic stance rapidly becomes less positive towards her appraisal of the significance for all women of chick lit's depiction of protagonists who are preoccupied with finding a partner. Along with fillers in lines 9 and 11 and a false-start in line 11 which suggest a degree of hesitancy, the generalisation is immediately mitigated by the adverbial "perhaps" and the frequency adverb phrase "at some point" (line 12). Whilst, then, Annabel is confident in what she perceives to be the degree of fit between her personal experiences and the experiences depicted in chick lit, she is careful in the degree of generality that she claims for the correspondence between personal experience and chick lit's concern with romantic fulfilment.

Annabel's stance-taking, however, is complex and shifting. Returning to extract eight of Annabel's interview discussed in section 6.4 of this chapter, Annabel's identity as a woman is a particularly important interpretive resource in her evaluation of criticisms of chick lit that situate the genre as anti-feminist. Challenging such a view of chick lit, Annabel identifies two of the major thematic concerns in chick lit, anxiety over appearance and the search for romantic fulfilment, as particularly meaningful:

Interview 2, extract 6b

5.   to me erm at the end of the day we are still women (.) and there are certain

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6.   things that women like (.) y'know we do like erm to look our best at times (.) we
7.   do like to make an effort (.) erm we do like to be with somebody who we love
8.   and who loves us er I don't know anti feminist er well I s'pose you could say

(Appendix, Interview 2, lines 360-363).

In contrast to her later mitigation, in this extract the declarative form of Annabel's

utterances convey confidence in the degree of fit she attributes not just to her own

experiences and their resonance to those depicted in chick lit, but also in the generality

of women's experiences and chick lit's themes, since the plural pronoun "we" clearly

includes Annabel herself. Both Charlotte and Annabel, then, can be seen to construct a

multifaceted and variable stance towards chick lit.

6.7 Summary

This chapter has examined the meanings and values two chick lit readers ascribe

to the genre, in the face-to-face setting of an interview. Employing a dialogical

discourse analysis, this chapter has analysed the content of the interviews in terms of a

triple layered analysis that focuses on the identification of topics and topical trajectories,

examines their progression and management, and explores the ways in which the

interviewees draw upon and transform socially shared knowledge and the ways that

they assume as shared certain kinds of knowledge about, or applicable to, the

phenomenon under discussion. Analysis of the interviews shows that topics identified in

the data concerned with literary value, chick lit's relationship to feminism, the genre's

preoccupation with appearance and the size and shape of the body, and its thematic

concern with romantic fulfilment are also voiced across and within what Long (2003)

terms the matrix of communication, or a milieu wherein the media and educational

institutions ascribe particular social meanings to chick lit. However, the evaluations put

forward by the 'professional readers' within the contemporary matrix of communication

do not correspond with the evaluations and experiences of the two 'non-professional' readers interviewed. For Annabel in particular, the notion of literary value is invoked, challenged and reversed, affording chick lit a social significance that is often denied, especially by media commentators. However, as Marková (2007: 164) points out, "[s]ocially shared knowledge is not an entirely coherent and consistent, monolithic body of knowledge", and indeed, the evaluations constructed by Charlotte and Annabel are complex, often containing ambiguities, vagueness, ambivalence, tension and contradiction, drawing upon multifaceted aspects of their own identities as interpretive resources as well as forms of socially shared knowledge. The invocation of identity as an interpretive resource is a major aspect of analysis in the following, final, chapter of this thesis, as the focus on reception continues yet shifts to a different communicative context: the reading group.

Chapter 7

Readers' evaluations of chick lit: book group talk

7.0 Introduction

This chapter is the second in this thesis to focus on readers and how they construct their evaluations of chick lit, but in this chapter the communicative context within which these evaluations take place shifts from the interview setting explored in the previous chapter to the setting of a book group meeting. In this chapter a dialogic discourse analysis is applied to the examination of the reading group discussion, which, following the analysis implemented in chapter six of this thesis, encompasses three analytical levels by exploring the content manifest in talk and the topics and themes that are taken up, the linguistic devices used in the expression of these topics and themes, and the social knowledge that underpins them. As with the reader interviews analysed in chapter six, dialogism's stress on other-orientation is incorporated into the analysis in this chapter at the level of both the dialogue between individuals and the dialogue between the individual and socially shared knowledge. However, in this chapter, the notion of other-orientation becomes particularly theoretically and analytically significant, as it is a key element of the reader identity that informs and underpins the group's practices, norms and values, and thus the construction of their evaluations.

This chapter has the following structure. Section 7.1 examines the construction of the reader identity that I argue is enacted in the group and that frames the ways in which the group members construct their evaluations. This reader identity, I argue, is a multi-dimensional construction, comprising two core elements: paying careful attention to rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), or the management of harmony/disharmony between people, and the use of mitigating strategies and the

camouflaging of taste hierarchies and preferences in order to appear unbiased and reasonable in one's evaluations of the novel under discussion. Whilst I argue that the camouflaging of taste preferences is an important aspect of the reader identity constructed by the group members, it needs to be borne in mind that, as I point out in chapter 4, section 4.10 of this thesis, my presence undoubtedly shaped the book group talk, and may well have encouraged the group to strive to appear unbiased in their interpretations of the novel. The group members could well have hypothesised that these were my expectations, and it is possible that they set about ensuring that their contributions met these hypothesised expectations. Having established the group norms and values that underpin the ways that the Hapley Road readers construct their evaluations, section 7.2 focuses on the interplay between evaluations of chick lit and forms of socially shared knowledge, as this section examines the ways in which the readers index notions of literary value in their own evaluations. In the final section of analysis, section 7.3, the focus shifts to examine how the Hapley Road readers invoke aspects of their own personal and social identities as interpretative resources in their evaluations.

Following the analysis of the interview data undertaken in chapter six of this thesis, throughout this chapter all three levels of a dialogical discourse analysis are applied to the reading group data. As I noted in chapter four, sections 4.6.2 to 4.6.4 of this thesis, the first level of analysis examines the interaction between speakers, drawing upon tools and concepts from applied Conversation Analysis to explore the sequential organisation of talk and how speakers position themselves in relation to their interlocutors. However, the analysis of non-verbal behaviour becomes more significant in the analysis in this chapter, as the group members often use non-verbal resources

such as gaze, facial expressions and silence in their interactions.[123] Furthermore, in this chapter the analysis of the interaction between the speakers is complemented by the concerns of Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management analytical framework to examine the management of social relations in interaction in a way that captures individual, relational and collective construals of the self. The second level of analysis is concerned with what particular content is made manifest and taken up during the interaction, examining particular topics that emerge across talk. The third level of analysis examines the construction and expression of forms of socially shared knowledge, including regimes of value, which, as I noted in chapter four, section 4.8 of this thesis, Bennett, Emmison and Frow (1999: 260) define as: "an institutionally grounded set of discursive and intertextual determinations that inspire and regulate practices of valuation, connecting people to objects or processes of aesthetic practice by means of normative patterns of value and disvalue". This level of analysis draws upon the concepts of indexicality and stancetaking along with the tools to analyse the language of evaluation provided by appraisal theory to explore the link between the linguistic expression of the reader's evaluations of chick lit, and the forms of socially shared knowledge that underpin them.

One of the major differences between the evaluations made in the book group session examined in this chapter and the reader evaluations in the interview data in chapter six of this thesis emerges in the disparity between the amounts of compositional appraisals, which as I have pointed out in chapter four section 4.9, refers to evaluations of the complexity and detail in a text including evaluations of the writing. Unlike Annabel and Charlotte's evaluations examined in chapter six of this thesis, the members

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[123] Indeed, dialogism takes such non-verbal resources into account as contextual resources for sense-making (Linell, 2009: 16-18).

of the Hapley Road reading group make frequent and sustained evaluations of the author's style of writing, and the novel's plot construction and characterisation. This disparity can of course be attributed to the group's constitution as a community of interest[124] and its particular designation as a reading group, wherein the specific endeavour is to engage in interpretive discussion and debate, but what is distinctive about the evaluations made by the Hapley Road readers is the group identity that informs them. It is with the examination of how this group identity is constructed that this chapter begins.

7.1 Constructing a reader identity: rapport management, mitigation and the camouflaging of taste hierarchies and preferences

As I pointed out in chapter four, section 4.10 of this thesis, the evaluations expressed in a book group discussion need to be carefully managed and negotiated. Swann and Allington (2009) stress the centrality of face work in reading group interactions, as they argue that whilst making an evaluation, individuals need to respect the face of the other group members, or the public self-image each individual wishes to claim for themselves, as other group members may well interpret and evaluate the novel under discussion differently. According to Peplow (2011), face work in reading group interaction is demonstrated by the use of *X then Y* structures, or structures along the lines of 'at first I thought *X* and then I thought *Y*'. Peplow argues that these formulations operate to mitigate the illocutionary force of the utterance and to minimise the sense that a speaker's interpretation may be outlandish. In the reading group under study in this thesis, however, it is not just the potential outlandishness of an evaluation that the members are keen to mitigate, but a significant aspect of such mitigation is to attempt to

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[124] Chapter four, section 4.4.3 of this thesis discusses the concept of a community of interest and its relationship to the constitution of the Hapley Road Reading Group.

camouflage any articulation of taste hierarchies and/or preferences (Lang, 2010). As I have argued in section 4.8 of chapter four of this thesis, the concept of the cultural omnivore (Peterson, 1992, 2005; Peterson and Simkus, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996) suggests that an increasing number of people in Western countries are unwilling to make judgements about cultural forms predicated upon a 'high' and 'low' culture binary, and are particularly keen to reject and distance themselves from snobbishness. Whereas Peplow is concerned with face work in reading group interaction in individual terms, it is this attempt to disassociate oneself from bias and snobbishness that forms a central aspect of the *group's* construction of a 'readerly identity'. Indeed, I have argued that the Brown and Levinson (1987) notion of face Peplow relies on is problematic for its focus on the individual and disregard for any social aspect of face. It is Spencer-Oatey's (2008) conceptualisation of face as individual, relational *and* collective, including both individual and group sensitivities, that is adopted in this thesis.[125] Although identity and face are not synonymous, for as Spencer-Oatey also (2007) points out, identity has a much broader scope than face, I follow Miller (2013: 76) who contends that:

> the processes by which face is managed and through which identities are constructed happen concurrently and are *co-constitutive* ...That is, (a) relational work is understood as a constitutive aspect of identity construction and (b) identity construction is understood as a necessary process for mobilizing relational work.

From this perspective, the role of the group becomes an important aspect of perceptions of face, and the Hapley Road Reading Group's use of *X then Y* structures in their compositional appraisals can be seen as an enactment of a group identity, rather than solely the individual's desire to appear enlightened.

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[125] This is discussed at length in chapter four, section 4.10 of this thesis.

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7.1.1 Mitigating Strategies

The use of mitigating *X then Y* structures occurs early on in the Hapley Road reading group discussion. The data extract below details the opening moments of the meeting, and here in order to facilitate the start of a discussion I ask an open question directed to the whole group[126]; Kerry is the first group member to respond:

<u>Extract 1</u>

```
1. R:   what do you think?
2. K:   well at first I really hated it ((laughter))
3. R:   really?
4. K:   yeh ((laughter)) but then it kind of (.) grew on me and I enjoyed it by the end
5. R:   wh-why did you hate it?
6. K:   I didn't-I didn't like the way-the style it was written in I didn't-I didn't think
7        the main thing was I didn't like the main character I found the char[acter]
8. B:                                                                          [a:::h]
9. K:   irritating ((laughter)) and it was just like [y'know really really irritating]
10.B:                                                 [yeh I found her very irritating]
11.K:   at the beginning but then she=
12.B:                                  =she improved didn't she [as the book went on
13.K:                                                            [yeh she did improve
14.     definitely and yeh kind of warmed to her a bit and you start to empathise with
15.     her a bit
```

(Appendix 3, lines 1-15).

It is with an *X then Y* structure that Kerry begins her evaluation, with *X* (line 2) framing the interpretation at *Y* (line 4). As an opening evaluation, the *X then Y* structure allows Kerry to stress that her reading of the novel had altered, mitigating against any potential sense that her evaluation is biased. This mitigated framing of an evaluation, moving from dislike to enjoyment, appears to open up the opportunity for co-

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[126] Again, non-verbal communication is important here. The opening of the Hapley Road reading group session I attended was marked initially by Louise's observation that it was time to start, but then silence followed, accompanied by all of the group members looking at me expectantly, as clearly they expected me to begin the discussion. It is possible, I suggest, that this is part of the group's established practices if it normally behoves the member who chose the text to begin the discussion.

construction and consensus building as the discussion begins to gain momentum. Kerry employs another *X then Y* structure in her evaluation of the novel's main character, again stressing that her evaluation altered from finding the character irritating to empathising with her and thus mitigating against any potential appraisal of her evaluation as unfair or blinkered. Kerry's shifting appraisal of the protagonist is ratified by Beth, as she proffers a supporting overlap in Kerry's use of an *X then Y* structure (lines 10-11), demonstrating what Du Bois (2007) terms a stance diagraph as Beth's stance aligns syntactically with Kerry's stance, particularly with the repetition of the adjective "irritating" to describe the main character. This alignment and consensus is then strengthened as it is Beth whose latched utterance completes Kerry's *Y* section of the evaluation, adding her own contribution that it is the character that improves as the book goes on (line 13). The *Y* element of the evaluation is then further supported by Kerry, with the use of the actuality stance adverbial *definitely* (line 14) legitimising Beth's contribution to the evaluation.

Louise similarly employs an *X then Y* structure in her evaluation of the style of writing in the novel:

Extract 2

```
1. L:   mmm (.) I found erm the style was very (.) I mean it's-it's a very bullet style
2.       y'know that-that I found that at first and it [took a while to get the pac]e of
3. K:                                                  [mmm I found that as well]
4. L:   the writing and er I thought it was humorous I thought that a lot of her insights
5.       were very astute and she y'know her observations were a:h↑ you know you
6.       kind of go o:h↑ yes↑ well↑ she said that very well but it was a very sort of short
7.       attention span writing it was like y'know the sentence was y'know >four words
8.       six words three words four words< erm=
```

(Appendix 3, lines 38-45).

Louise initially negatively evaluates the style of writing, since to describe the style as "bullet style" and "short attention span writing" implies a lack of complexity (lines 1

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and 6-7). Louise then puts forward a more positive reaction appraisal of the novel's humour, forming the Y element of the structure. Here, however, Louise's is not simply, or solely, an *X then Y* structure. What I would suggest this extract demonstrates is the additional inclusion of the type of mitigating strategies Lang (2010) identifies as functioning to camouflage the articulation of taste preferences by counteracting the negative evaluations put forward by also making some positive comments. Louise continues after what would suffice as a mitigating Y element to make two further positive evaluations of the social significance of the novel due to the novelist's insights and observations, before reiterating a negative compositional appraisal of the style of writing. That such mitigation evidenced in Louise's comments is a group practice rather than solely an individual practice, I would argue, is suggested in that it is only when Louise mitigates her negative evaluation by explaining that "it took a while to get the pace of the writing" that Kerry offers support for Louise's compositional appraisal. Indeed, in the next extract, an interactional trouble spot emerges from one group member's failure to mitigate her evaluation.

Extract 3

1. J: that's a very core bit of the
2.   book isn't it (.) the my life on a plate summing up that she's <u>not</u> happy really
3.   °not really°
4. M: well sh-she's er she's a very selfish character
5. J: o(hh)h >@yee-she's yes@> and ((laughter))yes
6. M: ((laughter)) on the one hand her husband is doing the right thing but on the
7.   other he's not depicted as a fantastic husband either erm but there's not much
8.   about him actually but er she-she's quite a selfis[h person erm I have no
9. J: [[it's um
10.K: [[maybe it's a kind
11.M: sympathy with her
12. K: of good a way of y'know the style of writing that she came across as a selfish
13.   character and not she wasn't very likeable from the beginning because then it
14.   stops her being portrayed as like the victim (.) y'know when things are going
15.   wrong cos if she was really nice from the beginning then [you-you might kind]
16. M: [but it's not a victim]
17. K: of be like er:m(.)you might start feeling sorry for her

(Appendix 3, lines 239-256).

In this extract, Maria offers a challenge to Jane's evaluation of the pertinence of the book's title, but she neither attempts to minimize the threat to Jane's face, here her ability as a skilled reader, nor does she mitigate her negative evaluation. Indeed, despite the laughter quality of her voice, Jane's response shows a degree of discomfort as not only is there an audible outbreath in her initial "oh" (line 4) suggesting surprise, but also her response consists of fragments, in effect saying nothing at all. Maria, I would suggest, 'gets it wrong'; by joining in with the laughter (line 5) she misreads the interactional trouble spot created by her lack of mitigation and attention to the face needs of other group members, and she continues to take an assertive epistemic stance towards the novel wherein her epistemological positioning, indicated by her use of the actuality stance adverb "actually" which, as I pointed out in chapter four, section 4.7.2 of this thesis, conveys a self-assured attitude towards the accuracy of one's appraisal (line 8). However, both Jane and Kerry simultaneously interrupt Maria following the repetition of her evaluation of the character as "selfish" (line 8) which suggests that this type of unmitigated evaluative stance breaks with the norms of the group. Mitigation strategies are not, however, the only components that I suggest characterise the reader identity enacted by the Hapley Road readers.

7.1.2 Rapport management and camouflaging taste hierarchies

In the next data extract, Maria's actions are once more negatively evaluated by the rest of the group members, again pointing to the importance of group norms in the Hapley Road reading group. However, the extract of the group discussion below illustrates all of the components that I argue constitute the reader identity that the Hapley Road reading group members enact, and that underpins their practices and thus the construction of their evaluations of the chick lit novel under discussion: avoiding

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appearing prejudiced in their evaluations, camouflaging taste preferences and

hierarchies, and paying attention to rapport management.

Extract 4a

1. L: I was surprised my expectations were-I have to say I was erm I mean I've read
2.   on airplanes and in various places what I would call chick lit I don't know
3. ((laughter))
4.   if it was or not but (.) and it was y'know I mean I remember skimming page[s
5. M: [mm
6.   hmmm]
7. L: sort of lik]e actually I'm gonna skip this paragraph and let's see if there's
8.   y'know what's interesting here ok I'll read this part (.) and this actually I read
9.   ev-I really wanted to read every single word (.) I thought she was (.) I mean
10.   part of that was just not so much the story as her writing I thought it was quite-
11.   it was compelling y'know and the-the story had its weaknesses and erm y'know
12.   the plot it wasn't maybe er that sophisticated a plot there wasn't-there weren't
13.   like lots of intrigues and stuff but I-I wanted to follow y'know what happened
14.   to everyone an-um (.)
15. M: yeh I agree with <Louise> that it's er it was above my expectati[ons
16. L: [yeh better than
17.   I thought it was gonna be
18. M: I thought it was a good book (.)that we agreed to-to read but I s'pose there's a
19.   lot of different type of books why did you choose this one have you got others
20.   that you've asked other people to read (.)what are you trying to find out
21. J: ((chuckles))
22. B: But is-like are you assuming that chick lit is gonna be kind of rubbishy?
23. K: [[mm hmm
24.M: [[er (.) y[es c]os if it's badly written I can[t write-read it
25.L: [[Yeh   [yeh]
26.B: [yeh yeh but in the end maybe we
27.   shouldn't assume that thou[gh (.)] y'[know
28.J: [no no]
29.L: [maybe not (.) that's right

(Appendix 3, lines 323-350).

In her compositional appraisal, Louise enacts the reader identity that informs the

group's practices, as her negative evaluations of the novel's "weaknesses" in its story

(line 11) and its plot, that for her "wasn't... that sophisticated" (line 12), are mitigated

by counteracting these negative comments with a positive reaction appraisal, which as I

pointed out in chapter four, section 4.9 of this thesis, refers to the degree to which a text

captures one's attention, conveyed here by Louise's evaluation of the writing as

"compelling" (line 11). However, this extract, I would suggest, demonstrates a clear

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exasperation with Maria's *failure* to enact a reader identity. Prior to this exchange, I had

previously avoided talking about my research, despite direct questioning from Maria[127],

but her questions to me in this extract (lines 18-20) suggest that she is not taking rapport

management into consideration. As I noted in chapter four, section 4.10 of this thesis,

within the rapport management theoretical framework (Spencer-Oatey, 2008) sociality

rights refers to social expectancies regarding fairness, consideration and behavioural

appropriateness; questioning me again on a topic I clearly did not wish to discuss

therefore does not take into consideration my sociality rights. Indeed, I would suggest

that Maria's actions are negatively interpreted by the group. As I have pointed out in

chapter four, section 4.4.3.3 of this thesis, the group's constitution as a community of

interest (CoI) shapes their relational practices in terms of the importance of debate, and

the group often ask questions of each other during their discussions[128], however, silence

follows Maria's question to me and the only response is Jane's chuckling, which I

would argue shows responsiveness to an interactional trouble spot. As Sifianou (1997:

64-5) points out, whilst some silences carry no propositional content, communicative

silences are those that carry meaning and illocutionary force, and I would suggest that

the marked silence during this extract is indeed a communicative silence.

Beth then challenges Maria overtly, by asking her directly about the prejudices

that underpin her evaluative stance towards the novel (lines 22), given that Maria has

implicitly invoked a high/low binary by declaring that the chick lit novel was "above"

her expectations, thereby failing to camouflage any potential taste hierarchies (line 15).

Interestingly Kerry and Louise simultaneously answer *for* Maria (lines 23 and 25), that

she does indeed assume that chick lit is "rubbishy", joined by Beth herself in line 26

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[127] See Appendix 3, lines 157-166.

[128] See, for example, Jane's question to the group in lines 193-194 of the transcript in
Appendix 3.

who, having also answered for Maria, effectively censures Maria's stance by suggesting that assumptions about the genre's value should not be made. The non-verbal behaviour at this point was particularly telling: Kerry, Louise and Beth all directly looked at Maria as they answered for her, each person nodding their head vigorously in an affirmative up-down direction. This combination of gaze, gesture and utterance, I suggest, demonstrates a strong sense of solidarity amongst the women against a perceived prejudicial evaluation, which reinforces the group's constructed reader identity as normative. Indeed, even Beth's criticism of Maria is enacted within the parameters of the reader identity, since the shift from the use of the first person singular pronoun "you" in her direct question to Maria (line 22) to the plural pronoun "we" in her suggestion that prejudicial assumptions should not be made (line 26) shifts the sole focus of attention from Maria and lessens the force of the criticism.[129] In her admonishment of Maria's failure to camouflage taste hierarchies in her evaluation, Beth is also indexing the concept of literary value, and in the next section I examine the topic of literary value that emerges during the group discussion.

7.2 Valuing chick lit

As I pointed out in chapter six, section 6.3 of this thesis, the conceptualisation of other-orientation in dialogism is complex and encompasses not just 'dialogue' between co-present individuals but also suggests that an individual is in 'dialogue' with forms of socially shared knowledge, including regimes of cultural value, or the propositions about a particular aesthetic object/phenomenon that are valorised and held in place by institutional supports (Bennett, Emmison and Frow, 1999; Frow, 1995, 2007). As I also

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[129] It is important to bear in mind here that my presence in the discussion may well have intensified the group members' desire to appear unbiased in their interpretations of the novel and thus impacted upon the rest of the group's response to Maria.

argued in that section, the expression, elaboration and transformation of notions of literary value in the reader evaluations collected for this thesis thus not only provides empirical evidence for dialogism's stress on the dialogue between the individual and forms of socially shared knowledge, but also allows for a comparison of the evaluations made by 'non-professional' readers with the evaluations of the genre's literary value made across both scholarly and media commentaries. In data extract 4a discussed in the previous section of this chapter, Beth's censorship of Maria for her presumptions about chick lit is thus theoretically and analytically interesting for what it suggests about taken-as-shared knowledge relating to literary value. Beth's use of the term "rubbishy" on line 20 of extract 4a echoes the frequently expressed criticism in the media that chick lit is inferior, most clearly seen in the American journalist Anna Weinberg's synonymous choice of noun in her evaluation that chick lit novels "really are *trash*: *trash* that imitates other, better books ... and *trash* that threatens to flood the market in women's reading" (Weinberg cited in Razdan, 2004, no page numbers; my emphasis). The topic of the interplay between gender and literary value arises immediately after Beth's admonishment of Maria's assumptions about chick lit's value. Shifting the trajectory of the discussion back to more solidary ground, Beth provides a rationale for Maria's negative evaluative stance towards chick lit:

Extract 4b

```
1. L:                                    maybe not (.) that's right (2.14)
2. R:  [[Bu
3. B:  [[It's just the word chick i[sn't it isn't i[t? makes you think of
4. L:                             [↑mm hmm]
5  M:                                      [th-the peo[ple that would re:: (.) read
6      that sort of book yeh are not over (0.43) erm
7. B:  dumb blonde s[ort (.) >@ye:[h>
8. M:               [yeh (.) they [have to-to be able to read pla::in language (.)
9. K:                      [↑excu:[se me]
10.M:  simple language
11.B:  ((laughter points to her hair))    [>@dumb b[londes@>] ((laughter))
12.J:                                    [mmm mmm exactly  ]
13.B:  y'know assuming that chicks are not very intellige[nt and we're
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14.J: [no not intelligent]
15.B: gonna read a rubbis[hy book
16.J: [absolutely

(Appendix 3, lines 350-365).

Beth draws upon the negative connotations that have accrued to the term *chick* when

applied to women in relation to intelligence, and, along with Maria, suggests that the

very name of the genre implies that the books are inferior, although the laughter quality

of Beth's voice along with general laughter within the group suggests that the Hapley

Road readers are discussing these connotations of gender and genre with a degree of

humour and irony. The stances taken by the Hapley Road readers towards the issue of

the novel's literary value are, however, complex, shifting and contradictory. Somewhat

later in the discussion, the topic of the book's cover art and what it potentially signifies

about the quality of the novel within it is raised by Beth:

Extract 5

1. B: [[yeh yeh but the cover is off putting is[n't it
2. K: [yeh but it-it would be good to not have
3.   the preconception before you start readin[g it because y'know as soon
4. B: [yeh]
5. K: as you see that the cover you know=
6. B: =it looks rubbishy somehow doesn't it it
7.   l[ooks
8. M: [but [but
9. K: [yeh so so y-y'know you kind of start reading it with that kind of mind
10.   set whereas it would be better if you could just start reading it with not having
11.   any kind of impression y'kn[ow not
12.L: [yeh yeh definitely=
13.B: =yeh yeh it's i[t
14.M: [can you
15.   attempt to define chick lit then?
16.R: (3.48) ((clears throat)) mmm yeh I'll do that in a bit
17. ((laughter))
18.J: You'd certainly-you'd want to go round reading it wrapped in a brown cover
19.   anyway you don't want anyone to know you're actually reading it
20. ((laughter)) 3.49

(Appendix 3, lines 1061-1080).

Beth's negative evaluation that introduces the topic of the novel's cover (figure 15 overleaf) is not strongly expressed, as her choice of the phrase "off putting" carries less illocutionary force than, for example, the synonymous adjectives distasteful, repellent, disgusting or offensive (line 1), and the tag question "isn't it" with which Beth completes her evaluation also functions to lessen the force of the declarative. Thus in accordance with the group's enactment of a reader identity, mitigation compensates for the articulation of a taste preference, although Beth goes on to employ the unmitigated disparaging term "rubbishy" she has previously used.

Figure 15
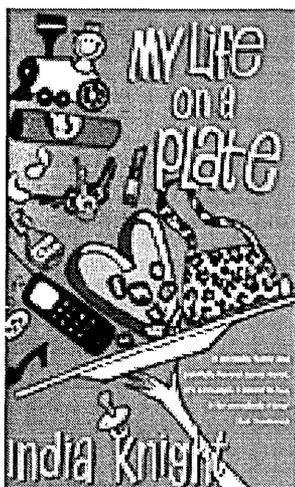
Front cover of Knight (2000).

Whilst agreeing with Beth's negative evaluation, Kerry, however, shifts the focus from the potentially perilous area of individual taste preferences by making a generalisation, conveyed by the repetition of the pronoun "you" to refer to collective rather than individual experience (lines 3-5 and 9-11). Beth makes a further negative evaluation predicated upon taste. Like Kerry, she mitigates any potential specific attribution to the evaluation by making a generalisation conveyed by the pronoun "you", as she declares that one would not wish their reading of the novel to be apparent, and this time her evaluative stance is more certain and authoritative, conveyed by the actuality stance

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adverbial "certainly" (lines 18-19). Despite the group laughter, however, the ensuing silence is marked due to its length, and this reticence to take up Beth's point, I would argue, suggests that regardless of the mitigation, Beth's value evaluation of the novel is a little too close to the arena of personal taste preferences and the articulation of 'snobbishness'.[130]

In chapter six, section 6.3 of this thesis, I argued that one of the evaluations made by 'professional' readers of chick lit's literary value, or rather its perceived lack thereof, draws upon the criteria of literary language, with, for example, literature scholar Wells (2006: 68) criticizing the absence of "rich description" in chick lit, and writer and novelist Merrick (2006a: ix) comparing the "carefully crafted language" of literary fiction to what she terms as chick lit's "clichés". As I also argued, in her interview, chick lit reader Annabel indexed but ultimately reversed such standards of literary value in her compositional appraisal of the tone that characterises chick lit, valorising what she describes as chick lit's conversational style over what she terms the "convoluted", "faluting" and "condescending" language of canonical literary texts (Appendix, Interview 2, lines 211-221). The issue of literary language also emerges in the Hapley Road reading group discussion. In the data extract overleaf, Maria brings up the topic of the novel's style of writing.[131]

Extract 5

1. M: the key thing that made it work for me is the style (.) I think

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[130] There is, of course, another prior marked silence in this exchange (line 13). As I have argued, earlier in the discussion (extract 4a) Maria's break with the group's norms was met with silence. I would suggest that the silence at this point in this extract is a similarly communicative one.

[131] In this section of the discussion, the pause at the end of Maria's evaluation is quite marked, and as had happened on several occasions, the group members all directed their gaze towards me. I assessed this non-verbal behaviour as signalling their expectation that I make a comment on Maria's appraisal. I opted to ask Maria a question to draw her out on the point she had already made.

2.   that's the key thing that made it work (2.19)
3. R: what was it-what is it about the style that made it-made it work for you
4. M: well its-I thought it was cleverly written (.) and the certain way erm that she
5.   uses erm erm vocabulary that I didn't know
6. ((laughter))
7. L: yes yeh it's very conversation[al
8. R: [pard-very?
9. L: it's conversational (.) yeh style um yeh it is
10.M: and yeh I don't think she looks down on us (.) she doesn't look down on the
11.   reader either wh[ich is y'know quite nice erm
12.L: [mmm mm-hmm mm-hmm yeh it's not condescending

(Appendix 3, lines 949-960).

Like Annabel, Louise identifies the style of writing in Knight's chick lit novel as conversational, and Louise aligns her evaluative stance with Maria's assessment that the author "doesn't look down on the reader" (lines 10-11) by agreeing, "yeh it's not condescending" (line 12). This co-constructed compositional appraisal echoes Annabel's evaluation of the tone of chick lit novels, with both Louise and Annabel choosing to employ the adjective "condescending" in their evaluations. Although at this point in the discussion neither Maria nor Louise are explicitly invoking the concept of literary language as a criteria of literary value, I would argue that similarly to Annabel's appraisal, the co-constructed observation that the book is *not* condescending indexes at the very least an awareness that literary language can be viewed as overly elaborate and complex.

In the next data extract, the issue of literary value is explicitly raised:

Extract 6

1. L: [I don't know if I um related to her so much but I definitely
2.   related to a lot of what she said (.) more than I imagine (.) er relating to it
3.   having not had children let's say or not being married so I-I can certainly relate
4.   y'know a lot of the little things (.) the things she said (.) I sort of went ((finger
5.   click))oh [yeh ok] so ((finger click)) I felt that or something and a lot of them
6. B: [mmm]
7. L: are very s[pecif]ic to her situation er (.) y'know but so erm (.) but again I think
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8. B: [mmm]
9. L: the writer's good enough that she-that she makes-she makes observations and
10.   has insights tha-that a lot of people can appreciate (.) not just if you're in that
11   situation yourself so er that's erm (.) I think that's one of the-that's one of the
12.   prejudices I have about chick lit actually (.) is that it's very narrow and very
13.   specific (.) and it's about a condition and a situation and it's not necessarily (.)
14.   broader contemplation of y'know of
15.B: Yes
16.L: y'know the things that great literature concerns itself with so (.) erm (.) but
17.   y'know that-that's-that's a prejudice because actually our lives ↑are made up of
18.   a lot of sm<u>all</u> details and little things and thoughts and conversations with our
19.   friends and (.) and erm (.)it's good to see somebody who's good at putting it
20.   on paper=
21.K: =mmm
22.L: y'know=
23.J: =the small details, I sp-well they often are the stuff of great literature as
24.   wel[l aren't they the right small deta[ils that lea]d you in
25.L: [yeh absolutely]   [mm-hmm]

(Appendix 3, lines 560-584).

Louise's turn begins with her evaluation of what she can relate to in the novel, making a

positive valuation appraisal of the degree of insight with which the novel tells its story

(lines 2-5). However, a shift occurs as the valuation appraisal alters from positive to

negative (lines 11-14). As I noted in chapter four, section 4.9 of this thesis, lexical items

can function as graduation resources to grade meanings, illuminating how phenomena

or objects are evaluated by degree. The graduation resources in Louise's evaluation

comprise the adjectives "narrow" and "specific", with both terms intensified by a

preceeding adverb "very", and this negative attitudinal lexis indexes the notion of

literary value that is predicated upon the capacity attributed to great literature that

derives from the breadth of its scope and the universality of its appeal (Palmer, 1991: 2-

3). Indeed, Louise explicitly invokes this notion of literary value as she compares what

she sees as chick lit's restricted focus to the " broader contemplation of ... the things

that great literature concerns itself with". This type of negative evaluation of chick lit's

value is articulated in Merrick's (2006a) introduction to her edited collection of short

stories, entitled *This is not Chick Lit*, an evaluation that sparked debate in the media,

particularly the *Huffington Post* (Merrick, 2006b; Pine, 2006), and instigated the

publication of an anthology of short stories entitled *This is Chick Lit* (Baratz-Logstead,

2006) as a riposte to Merrick (Pine, 2006). According to Merrick:

> [c]hick lit's formula numbs our senses. Literature, by contrast, grants us access
> to countless new cultures, places and inner lives. Where chick lit reduces the
> complexity of the human experience, literature increases our awareness of other
> perspectives and paths. Literature employs carefully crafted language to expand
> our reality, instead of beating us over the head with clichés that promote a
> narrow worldview. Chick lit shuts down our consciousness. Literature expands
> our imaginations (2006a: ix).

Both Merrick and Louise construct their evaluations on the basis of chick lit's perceived

narrowness, although Merrick's comments are more dismissive of chick lit than

Louise's. Indeed, I would argue that the concern to avoid appearing biased and

'snobbish' that is a crucial element of the reading group's normative reader identity

plays an important role in the way in which Louise constructs her stance towards chick

lit. Whilst Louise's comments do not strictly take the form of an *X then Y* structure, she

does mitigate her position by explicitly stating that her view of chick lit as narrow is a

"prejudice", and she goes on to produce an utterance that I would argue fits with the

notion of an altered evaluation that underpins an *X then Y* structure, as the adverb

"actually" suggests a shift from a preconception to a reflection on reality:

```
17.     y'know that-that's-that's a prejudice because actually our lives ↑are made up of
18.      a lot of small details and little things and thoughts and conversations with our
19.      friends and (.) and erm (.)it's good to see somebody who's good at putting it
20.     on paper=
21.K:           =mmm
22.L:   y'know=
23.J:           =the small details, I sp-well they often are the stuff of great literature as
24.     wel[l aren't they the right small deta[ils that lea]d you in
25.L:       [yeh absolutely]                   [mm-hmm]
```

(Appendix 3, lines 571-584).

I would suggest that the importance of the enactment of the reader identity for the group

is further apparent as Jane takes up and supports Louise's altered evaluation of what

constitutes literary value, with the self-repair in line 23 eradicating any potential

suggestion of her uncertainty towards the validity of Louise's point. The reader identity is not, however, the only form, albeit a multifaceted form, of identity that the Hapley Road reading group members draw upon in constructing their evaluations.

7.3 Invoking personal and social identity in evaluation

I pointed out in chapter two, section 2.2.2 of this thesis that in her analysis of online reader reviews of chick lit, Steiner (2008) argues that a key component of the reviews she studied is the importance for the readers of being able to relate their own experiences to the events and concerns depicted in a chick lit novel, and in the analysis of the chick lit reader interviews in chapter six section 6.6, I have shown that both Annabel and Charlotte invoke their social identities as women as key interpretative resources in their evaluations of chick lit. It is, I argued, unsurprising that an invocation of aspects of identity should occur, since from a dialogical perspective an individual is in dialogue not just with co-present individuals but also with absent Others, including, as Linell (2009: 102-3) puts it abstract, generalised voices, as well as social knowledge, in the forms of ideas, concepts, knowledge about the world, identities and norms that govern expectations and efforts for meaning making. Indeed, the invocation of aspects of identity as an interpretative resource is also a recurrent component of the evaluations made by members of the Hapley Road reading group. Like Annabel and Charlotte, the reading group members do not speak from a single, uniform and fixed identity, as they actively position themselves in multiple, sometimes contradictory, ways, and they evoke the voices of absent others as well as aspects of their own identities as interpretative resources. What particularly distinguishes the invocation of identity in the Hapley Road reading group from that in the interview data, however, is the complex positioning that frames such an interpretative act due to the importance for the group of enacting a

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readerly identity. The following data extract opens with Jane supporting Kerry and

Beth's previously stated negative reaction appraisal towards the beginning of the novel:

Extract 7

1. J: I didn't-I didn't like it much at the beginning either ((coughs)) partly because
2. ((laughter))
3. J: erm I was-my mother hasn't read it, my ninety one year old mother has <u>not</u> read
4.   it and I was talking to her about it this evening and she said yes it's the sort of
5.   book that puts everything in that once upon a time was always missed out
6.   y'know the toilet stuff, the sex s[tuff that's in] <u>su[ch</u> detail and o]o:: I
7. B: [((chuckle))]
8. K: [((laughter))   ]
9. J: don't need to read this y'know and I'm not nin[ety one but] I did
10.B: [((laughter))]
11.J: think (.)I did think – I mean it's quite a while since I read it and now I've only
12.   got a third of the way back through it quickly reading it again <u>actually</u> it's quite
13.   well struct[ured and s]ome of these people particularly looking at these sort of
14.B: [mm hmm]
15.J: archetypal girlfriends-<u>women</u> friends of Clara (.) the fabulous wonderful
16.   perfect maternal Stella whose had all those affairs in the background (.)and the
17.   single Tamsin and the erm and Naomi who's so <u>perfectly</u> turned out and whose
18.   husband's completely letting her down erm they were a set of archetypes in a
19.   way erm that her um her situation with her husband who she felt so secure with
20.   erm what was going on between her and Robert that she wasn't fully aware of
21.   was kind of thrown in sharp focus by these women's (.) other women's
22.   situations and actually by the end of it I thought it was quite cleverly structured
23.   >NO NO< by the re-read[ing of it]
24.B: [mm hmm]
25.J: erm I'm really beginning to feel that actually it was put together very niftily
26.   and I think that that was pretty smart of her y'know er:m so <@I've changed
27.   me mind@> as well

(Appendix 3, lines 63-90).

Although Jane appears to be about to provide a rationale for her negative evaluation

signalled by the conjunction "because", the filler "erm" which immediately follows

suggests a degree of hesitancy in actually doing so, and with the ensuing self-repair

(line 3), she quickly evokes the voice of an absent other, her mother, prefaced by the

reporting clause "she said" (line 4). Shifting from averral, or positioning oneself as the

source of a statement, to demonstrating another, absent, person's stance serves two

interrelated goals. On the one hand, presenting an evaluative stance that is not one's

own allows the speaker to express a view without explicit commitment, for as Marková (2007: 120) argues, "[u]sing the words of others implies in some way accepting … their perspective", and in this extract I would suggest that evoking the voice of her mother allows Jane to bring into play values regarding what is considered appropriate content for literature that could be perceived as old-fashioned. On the other hand, presenting views as not one's own allows a speaker to refute them, and here I would suggest that evoking the voice of her mother also allows Jane to distance herself from the values articulated, and to position herself as having come to a more considered evaluation, thus enacting the reader identity. Indeed, that Jane is actively constructing this particular identity is, I suggest, further demonstrated in this extract as she displays another facet of the reader identity in her attention to potential identity face sensitivities of the group. In her discussion of the adult women characters depicted in the novel, Jane makes an interesting repair from "girlfriends" to "women friends", replacing one gender category, "girl", with an alternate gender category from the collection of terms that refer to females: "women". Stokoe (2011: 110) argues that in a self-initiated repair of a gender category "when the first categories uttered do the job of referring but get repaired anyway, speakers fix the functional inadequacy of the first reference", and thus in Jane's repair the trouble source is the term *girl*. Jane's repair is what I would argue Stokoe describes as "self presentational, relevantly to the current interactional context" (2011: 93). As I have pointed out in chapter four, section 4.4.2 of this thesis, the Hapley Road reading group had previously chosen for discussion feminist non-fiction texts, and I would suggest Jane's repair from girl, a term with infantilising and patronising connotations when applied to adult females (Mills, 1989: 104), to the term women, with this second category audibly stressed, provides evidence that she is taking into account any potential feminist sensibilities held by group members, and presenting herself as what Stokoe (2011: 98) terms a "gender aware speaker".

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The complexity and diversity of speaker positioning that takes place in the reading group discussion is also more marked than in the interviews with chick lit readers Annabel and Charlotte, since whereas Annabel in particular relates her own experiences to the events and characters represented in chick lit, the reading group members put themselves in the place of the fictional characters in the novel under discussion. This latter interpretative act should not, however, be seen as a simple move towards identification with a fictional character; firstly, as I argued in chapter two, section 2.2.1 of this thesis, the concept of reader identification is both theoretically and analytically problematic, and secondly, in the Hapley Road reading group, any interaction with the characters in the novel under discussion is not a simple engagement, but an element in the complex and shifting way in which these readers present themselves. In the extract below, the group are discussing the break-up of the central character's marriage and Beth comments that it is the protagonist's husband who ends the relationship:

Extract 8

```
1. B:                                                      he finishes it doesn't
2.      he bu- bu[t
3. K:            [yeh I was kinda surprised he finished it
4. B:   and yeh and obviously she was to[o sh[e just tho]ught they'd kinda jog along
5. J:                                      [mm]
6. K:                                          [ya-I agree]
7. B:   like that I s'pose I don't think she'd 've finished it would she, not really
8. L:   I donno (3.12)
9. R:   I don't know, do you think she'd have finished it in the end?
10.M: N[o
11.B:    [I don't think she would don't think na[h I ]don't think she would though
12.K:                                            [nah]
13.L:   Probably not but I mean in a break up it's always hard to say what y'know yes
14.     one person might have done the breaking up but the other person always
15.     contributes in some way to making i[t permissibl]e for the other person to do
16.B:                                        [mmm yeh  ]
17.L:   it or to say I'll be fine you can leave [or all these various ways of saying
18.B:                                            [yeh]
19.L:   (3.70) [[contributing to it
20.K:          [[she was thinking a lot about the children so that's probably why she
21.     [woul]dn't have [finished it (.) but if it hadn't been for them she would've
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22.L: [mmm]   [mm hmm mm hmm yeh]
23.B: yeh yeh probably

(Appendix 3, lines 289-311).

Beth begins the interpretative move of putting herself in the place of the character in

line 7, with her tag question seeking support for her assessment of what the the

protagonist's actions might have been if the novel's plot had been different.[132] Kerry

also puts herself in the character's place, as she puts forward her own assessment of the

character's motivations (lines 20-21). However, Louise's turn differs, as her

contribution to the discussion also functions in a self-presentational way. Responding to

Beth in line 13, Louise's assessment of what the protagonist might have done is brief,

"[p]robably not", and she rapidly shifts to making a generalisation about relationship

breakdowns, with the adverbs "always" not only suggesting the generality of her

evaluation but also functioning as actuality stance adverbials, suggesting that what

Louise is saying is a matter of reality rather than opinion. Furthermore, Louise puts

forward a deliberately balanced account of relationship breakdown that does not

apportion blame to any single party, which, in its impartiality, I would suggest, also

frames her self-presentation within the boundaries of the reader identity construction

that underpins the group's practices. In her self-presentation, Louise is negotiating her

place within the group, subtly, but I would argue effectively, positioning herself as an

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[132] The response Beth receives from Louise, however, is short and non-committal, and the marked silence that follows is accompanied by all members of the group looking towards me, presumably in anticipation of my own evaluation. Echoing Louise's evasion, I repeat Beth's question, thus attempting to minimise my input. This is an example of the group's practices regarding informed participation that involves frequent shifts in epistemological positioning from individual to individual, and which is characteristic of the group's constitution as a community of interest (see chapter four, section 4.4.3 for a discussion of the concept of a community of interest and its relationship to the constitution of the Hapley Road Reading Group).

experienced and knowledgeable, in effect worldly wise, member of the group.[133]

Indeed, Louise presents herself as knowledgeable and experienced on several

occasions during the reading group discussion.

Louise's self-presentation as an experienced and knowledgeable member of the

group can be seen again in the extract below. The group are discussing the depiction of

the protagonist as a mother; this discussion is prompted by Jane's question to the group,

which, with the use of the present tense and the pronoun "she" (line 2) effectively asks

them to put themselves in the place of the character:

Extract 9


```
1. J:                                                                    how do you
2.     think-how do you think she feels about the children?
3. M: Not much
4. B:  Now I don't kno::[w
5. K:                     [I don't kno[w I think there were quite a few moments where
6. B:                                 [yeh I thought she was quite
7. K:  she seemed real[ly
8. B:                  [yeh I yeh I t[hought she was caring towards the children
9. K:                               [I thought more of her  resentment's towards her
10.    husband for not seeming to care about the children b[ut she-I thought she-
11.B:                                                      [Yeh]
12.K:  she was right, y'know, she showed a lot of like ten[der]ness towards the kids
13.B:                                                     [yeh]
14.K:  where he didn't show any so tha[t that maybe what annoyed her
15.B:                                 [no he didn't want to spend any time with them
16.    did he really
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[133] As I pointed out in chapter four, section 4.4.3.2 of this thesis, within work that takes
the community of practice model as its methodological apparatus, the creation of
internal hierarchies is overlooked. Davies (2005: 271) notes that in the CoP model
proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998), there is but one distinction in
a CoP, between those members on the periphery and those who are full members.
However, as I have argued, viewing the Hapley Road reading group as a CoI wherein
members shift their epistemological positioning from more knowledgeable to less
knowledgeable in order to foster debate allows for the possible identification of internal
hierarchies that are transitory, shifting and emergent. I would argue that the analysis of
Louise's invocation of aspects of her personal identity as experienced and worldly-wise
shows a form of self-presentation that places Louise in a prominent position within the
group.

17.K: yeh
18.L: h-uh
19.J: She describes how she would always read the shortest possible book to
20.J: the[m and so o]n whereas the perfect Stella would read the l[ongest book
21.M:　　[mmm yeh]　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[now that's funny]
22.J: and w]ould really be child focused=
23.M:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　=now that's something I can r[elate to
24.B:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[>@she did
25.　 read to them though didn't she@>]
26.M: example in the evening every so o]ften when she goes I want a story and oh
27.　 gosh well get a short one the[n and s]o and er
28.J:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[yes yes]
29.M: So erm so y[eh
30.B:　　　　　　[[yeh that's fair enough
31.L:　　　　　　[[I think it's partly a device for showing that she's still (.) y'know
32.　 she hasn't completely given over herself ah-t and saying I'm- I'm now just the
33.　 perfect mother now I mean, she['s he]r she has he[r situations
34.J:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[mmm]
35.B:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[she's got her o[wn yeh]
36.J:　 [she's still a human being in her own right
37.L: and she yeh she doesn't wann]a(.) yeh we-we find ourselves as parents (.) as
38.　 mothers y'know frequently in situations which (.) y'know in the abstract it's
39.　 one we wanna be there in the big picture, but in the moment we might not
40.　 wanna be there(.) we might not wanna do that particular thing at that time (.)
41.　 and in general yes we wanna be reading to our children but we might not wanna
42.　 read right then and there y'know and erm I think that erm (.) yeh that's all I
43.　 wanted to say

(Appendix 3, lines 504-549).

Kerry and Beth both put themselves in the character's shoes and speak from what they perceive to be her position, whilst Maria invokes her social identity as a mother, as she claims a resonance between the situation depicted in the novel where the protagonist chooses a book to read to her child because of its short length and her own experiences as a mother (lines 22-27). Although Louise does engage with Beth's question about potential character motivation, it is Maria's point about the correspondence between the situation depicted in the novel and her personal experience as a mother that Louise takes up. Like Maria, Louise invokes her social identity as a mother as an interpretive resource, and this is conveyed, I would argue, by a combination of the plural pronoun "we", which, includes Louise herself, and her clarification from "parents" to "mothers" (line 37-28). However, Louise expands upon Maria's point which is firmly located in

her own experience by making a generalisation; along with a the invocation of mass experience conveyed by the plural pronoun "we", the declarative form of her utterances convey confidence in her claim for the generality of women's experiences as mothers and their resonance with those depicted in the novel, with the repetition of the phrase "y'know" appealing to shared knowledge and to consensus (lines 38-42). On the one hand, Louise's contribution bolsters and supports Maria's appraisal, but on the other hand, the combination of her construction of a generalisation and her assured epistemic stance affords her appraisal of the social significance of the text more authority than the contributions made by the other group members in this section of the discussion.

Even when Louise does not draw upon the explanatory power of a generalisation and the assuredness of a confident epistemic stance to position herself as knowledgeable, she draws upon aspects of her own experiences that position her evaluation as predicated upon a degree of insight into the world and society. Prior to the extract below, Maria and Louise have been discussing the author's construction of a conversational tone in the novel:

Extract 10

```
1. M:                                                        yeh and she
2.      doesn't take herself seriously erm
3  J:   do[esn't she?
4. L:      [but she presents when she presented the bulimic erm sister (.) I mean er yes
5.      er very (.) y'know I've been-had some-some people very close to me go
6.      through some things not that thing specifically (.) and er there's there's no (.)
7.      it's just-it's kind of a c-cartoon almost a carica[ture not eve]n-not even a
8. B:                                                    [yeh it's not]
9. L:   caricature necessarily but just a-just a one dimensional just a sketch and there's
10.     nothing that reflects that-that that you know you might say erm (.)to me there's
11.     nothing that I could say well (.) that I could relate to that particular thing or that
12.     psychologically y'know or emotionally that it's j[ust fact y'know that's th]e
13.B:                                                   [it was glossed over a bit]
14.L:   fact she's bulimic just labels she's bulimic (.) she's on her fourth husband (.)
15.     she's this(.) she's been cheated on by her husband she's-and there's no
16.     dimensionality to anybody and erm I think I did expect it and-and as I-as I read
17.     the book I expected it (.) I didn't y'know expect it more I just accepted that erm
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18.   and said well she's dealing with this dimension, albeit one dimensional, she's
19.   dealing with it in a very witty way and I'm enjoying it so I read it but it- I did-I
20.   did think it was one dimensional (.) a lot of the people were (3.92)

(Appendix 3, lines 961-982).

Louise puts forward a negative evaluation of the representation of a female character in the novel suffering from bulimia. Prefacing her evaluation with her personal experience adds weight to Louise's appraisal, with the use of an intensifier and adjective in the phrase "some people *very close* to me" suggesting an intimate degree of understanding which again positions Louise as a particularly knowledgeable member of the group.[134]

What this data extract also shows, however, is that like chick lit readers Annabel and Charlotte discussed in chapter six of this thesis, Louise's stance towards the novel, and towards chick lit in general, is complex and somewhat contradictory. Louise's compositional appraisal of the novel in extract 11 shows a similarity to critical reviews of chick lit in the media. The phrase "one-dimensional" (line 23) that Louise applies to the characterisation in the novel can be seen in media reviews of the genre as a whole. Reed (2009), for example, writes in *The Guardian* newspaper that chick lit contains "one-dimensional, shoes-and-romance-obsessed characters". It is, I suggest, telling that Louise initially states that she "expected" a lack of what she describes as "dimensionality" in the novel's characterisation. As I have argued in section 7.3 of this chapter, in extract 7 of the reading group data Louise admits that one of what she termed the prejudices that she held towards the quality of chick lit was predicated upon what she saw as the genre's narrow and restricted focus. Although Louise situates this

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[134] Whereas, as I pointed out in chapter six, section 6.6 of this thesis, according to Bessman Taylor's (2012: 154) study of book groups, readers "supplemented the work under consideration ... with details from their own experiences or their interactions with others in order to gain a better understanding of aspects of the narrative such as character motivation", here Louise draws upon her personal experience to evaluate the writer's compositional skills.

value evaluation within an *X then Y* structure which suggests a change in opinion and thus as I pointed out adheres to the group's desire to appear unprejudiced in the enactment of a reader identity, I would argue that this evaluation of chick lit's reductiveness underlies her expectation of the novel's characterisation. Indeed, I would suggest that the alteration of the verb in Louise's subsequent clarification downplays the degree of pre-meditation, "I didn't y'know *expect* it more I just *accepted* that erm" (line 17, my emphasis), which, followed by her inclusion of a counter-acting positive appraisal of the writer's "witty" treatment of the issues, suggests her awareness that her reference to her own expectations may well be perceived to infringe upon the impetus to camouflage the articulation of taste preferences within the group's practices.

7.5 Summary

This chapter has examined the ways in which the members of the Hapley Road reading group construct, and co-construct, their evaluations of a chick lit novel. As with the reader interviews analysed in chapter six of this thesis, this chapter has examined the content of the reading group discussion in terms of a triple-layered, data driven, dialogical discourse analysis. This analytical approach focuses upon the identification of topics and topical trajectories, examines their progression and management, and explores the ways in which the reading group members draw upon and transform socially shared knowledge and the ways that they assume as shared certain kinds of knowledge about, or applicable to, the novel under discussion. What echoes across the analysis of the reading group discussion in this chapter and the reader interviews in chapter six is the invocation of aspects of personal and social identity as interpretive resources. In a similar way to the chick lit readers interviewed for this thesis, for the members of the Hapley Road reading group relating one's personal experiences to the

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fictional experiences depicted emerges as an important aspect of evaluating the novel under discussion. What is distinctive about the interpretive practices of the Hapley road reading group, however, is the way the group members put themselves in the place of the character in order to better understand that character's motivation. Compared to the analysis of the reader interviews, what is also distinctive about the analysis in this chapter is the identification and examination of the group's enactment of what I have termed a reader identity. This multi-dimensional identity performance impacts upon the ways in which the group members construct their evaluations. By camouflaging taste preferences and paying careful attention to rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), whether attending to the identity face needs or the sociality rights of the other members of the group, the enactment of this reader identity frames the group members' evaluations, positioning them as thoughtful, reasoned and unbiased readers.

That is not, however, to suggest that the Hapley Road readers are uncritical, nor that their evaluations do not index regimes of cultural value. Indeed, the topic of literary value arises on several occasions during the book group discussion, echoing the evaluations of chick lit's value voiced across and within what Long (2003) terms the matrix of communication, or a milieu wherein the media and educational institutions ascribe particular social meanings and value to chick lit. However, the members of the Hapley Road reading group are engaged in complex and multi-dimensional self-presentation in a group dynamic, wherein the evaluations put forward do not solely derive their significance from the dialogue between the individual and forms of socially shared knowledge, as the established norms and practices of the group which constitute the enactment of a reader identity frame and guide what is said, and how it is said. I would argue that examining how a chick lit novel is made meaningful in this type of

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complex communicative context offers a fruitful alternative avenue for the analysis of

the reception of chick lit, one that examines a 'space' where social and private reading

practices intersect.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.0 Introduction

As I stated in chapter one, the aims of this thesis were two-fold. Firstly, the aim was to formulate new, sufficiently nuanced dialogic theoretical and methodological frameworks that are not only applicable to the theorisation and analysis of human sense-making as interactional and contextual, but that are also capable of conceptualising and analysing the construction and negotiation of the meanings of a cultural object as dynamic, emergent, and firmly embedded in social life. This thesis is thus intended as a contribution to present-day dialogism. Secondly, the goal was to apply these dialogical frameworks in order to critically interrogate the complex web of meaning-making practices and processes which circulate around the form of popular fiction known as chick lit, paying particular attention to the spheres of production and reception. The concern with conceptualising the construction of chick lit's locations as multifaceted and multiply located arose from the identification of what I consider to be a major weakness in the majority of the scholarly analyses of chick lit; namely, that chick lit's meanings have largely been located within the pages of the novels themselves, and for the most part, the reader has been problematically theorised. This thesis is also, therefore, intended as a contribution to chick lit scholarship.

8.1 Original contribution to knowledge in relation to theory

The dialogical theoretical and methodological frameworks developed in this thesis arose from the identification of a set of inadequacies in the theory put forward by the scholar whose work I position as the basis for the form of dialogism proposed here,

V.N. Vološinov ([1927] 1976; [1929] 1986). As Brandist (2002) has pointed out, Vološinov's dialogism focuses too closely on the interaction between individuals, isolating social interaction from sociocultural structures. Whilst not referring specifically to Vološinov, in his recent, extensive, survey of dialogism's aims and principles, Linell (2009) has also argued that, although social, interpersonal interaction has a central place in dialogism, yet it is equally important to theorise and analyse the interdependencies and interrelations between individuals, sociocultural praxis and socially shared knowledge. This thesis attempts to respond to the issues identified by formulating a new dialogic framework that is capable of applying equal focus to social interaction and socio-cultural structures.

The approach to dialogic theory proposed in this thesis builds upon Vološinov's theory of language and communication, but makes a number of modifications in order to formulate a more theoretically convincing account of the interrelations between social interaction and socio-cultural structures. These modifications involve bringing together a wide and diverse range of approaches that are not generally used in relation to dialogism. From Vološinov, the theoretical framework developed here takes three principles as axiomatic: other-orientation, addressivity and semiotic mediation. According to Vološinov's dialogic theory, all communication and cognition is mediated by language or some other semiotic system, which is ideological in nature. All signs are simultaneously located in the material world whilst possessing interpretative potential; thus there is an inherent dualism in signs, as they have a prism-like capacity to refract something else. However, the interpretive potential of a sign can only arise in situated, specific social interaction and thus meaning is tied to human beings in their material, social and organisational contexts. According to Vološinov, a speaker does not

concentrate on linguistic forms, but rather s/he is concerned with the meanings a linguistic expression acquires in a particular social context. In other words, all language is perspectivised, and indeed Vološinov argues that all language use is a value-laden activity involving making judgements and signalling one's own perspective in relation to it, since all signs are imbued with an evaluative accent. The process of accentuation is, however, also dependent upon the context within which the utterance is enunciated, as all communicative acts are not only always addressed to someone, whether real or imaginary, but also determined by the shared beliefs and opinions of the community to which the individual belongs. I have argued, however, that Vološinov fails to adequately theorise what constitutes social grouping, how socially shared knowledge is structured, and how the relations between the individual and socio-cultural structures are conceptualised; it is these shortcomings that contribute to his inadequate attention to the interdependencies and interrelationships between the individual and socio-cultural structures.

The dialogic theoretical framework developed in this thesis brings together insights and concepts from relevance theory (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973), discourse theory (Foucault, 1972; 1980), practice theory (Bourdieu, 1991) and linguistics (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1999), as well as more recent dialogic theorising (Linell, 2009; Marková, 2003), to address the theoretical limitations identified. The concept of other-orientation is extended from the focus upon co-present interlocutors in Vološinov's approach by drawing upon Linell's (2009) more complex conceptualisation of other-orientation. Within this account, individuals can directly or indirectly orient utterances not only towards those who are present in the situation, but also towards an abstract, imagined third party. The category of abstract third parties extends the notion of voice

from the individual to the social, as perspectives attributed to societal institutions and professions can be expressed directly or indirectly, appearing as generalised voices.

Within the notion of other-orientation, the importance of responding to a prior utterance and anticipating future responses suggests a close relationship between utterance production and utterance comprehension. However, I have argued that Vološinov's account of utterance comprehension is unsatisfactorily theorised, as he makes problematic assumptions about what constitutes shared knowledge that are, in the last analysis, predicated upon his own, rather than the interlocutor's perspective. In order to address these shortcomings, I have proposed the incorporation of Schutz and Luckman's (1973) subjective relevance theory into the dialogical theoretical framework. This form of relevance theory contends that what is made and taken to be relevant in talk-in-interaction is socially constrained. One of the major criticisms I have levelled against Vološinov's work, however, is his failure to adequately theorise shared, social knowledge, and to explain how some ideas, opinions and perspectives on topics become more authoritative or widely acknowledged than others beyond a myopic focus on class affiliation as a determining structure. In order to address this difficulty, and to make explicit a dialogic understanding of socially shared knowledge, I have drawn upon the concept of double dialogicality (Linell, 2009).

Double dialogicality entails that sense-making encompasses both the specific situation, and what is termed sociocultural, situation-transcending traditions. In other words, double dialogicality sees human sense-making as made up of local, situated interactional accomplishments which are also part of sociocultural practices. These practices involve the use of sociocultural resources for meaning-making, which include language, concepts, knowledge about the world, identities, and norms that regulate both

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expectations and meaning-making acts in concrete situations. Incorporating Foucault's (1972; 1980) theory of discursive structures allows for a conceptualisation of how social knowledge is socio-historically ordered, as according to Foucault, ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of behaving and ways of thinking and talking about things that become sedimented structure the individual's sense of the world. Bourdieu's (1991) theorisation of habitus, however, is held in tension with Foucault's theory of discursive structures, as on this view, individuals have a capacity to act as they draw upon and negotiate with particular aspects of social knowledge that become stable and durable through implicit and explicit socialisation. The final additional theoretical approach drawn upon in the theoretical framework developed in this thesis in order to provide a nuanced conceptualisation of what constitutes social grouping and socially shared knowledge is the notion of a Community of Practice. As a theoretical construct, this model is concerned with how individuals actively create their own communities in their personal, social, and work lives, and how they co-construct shared norms and values appropriate within the particular community of practice they are engaged with.

The approach to dialogic theory I have proposed in this thesis thus evolved from my attempt to address what I consider to be the limitations of Vološinov's theorisation of dialogism, and in so doing to construct the type of dialogism that, in its concern to accord both social interaction and the interrelations and interdependencies between social interaction and social structures equal importance, Linell (2009: 80) terms a "full blown dialogism". However, this thesis also proposes a methodological and analytical framework that applies these theoretical insights as a means to explore the complex ways in which chick lit's meanings are constructed, interpreted and negotiated.

8.2 Original contribution to knowledge in relation to analysis

The dialogic discourse analysis proposed in this thesis follows and relates to the theoretical modifications concerned with the interrelations between the individual and social structures that have been made. The form of analysis formulated in this thesis is designed to analyse both social interaction *and* socio-cultural and socio-economic practices, in order to address what I consider to be the limitations of Vološinov's methodology for analysing a cultural form, specifically a work of fiction; namely, that Vološinov does not take into account the production processes that are concerned with the conceptualisation of the reader, which has become a significant endeavour in the contemporary publishing industry as market segmentation and targeting is becoming increasingly important. The concept of a dialogic discourse analysis has been developed and applied more recently by a small number of scholars(e.g. Larraín and Medina, 2007; Marková *et al*, 2007; Martinez, Tomicic and Medina, 2012; Nystrand, 2002), and the model that informs the framework developed here is the dialogic discourse analysis proposed by Marková *et al* (2007). This paradigm is concerned with three, highly interrelated and interdependent, levels of analysis: the interactions between individuals, the interactions between thoughts, ideas and arguments, and the interrelations between discourses. Central to these analyses is the examination of the construction and negotiation of meaning and its relation to socially shared knowledge.

The form of dialogical discourse analysis set out in this thesis, however, differs from Marková *et al's* model in the organising methodology that is employed in order to deal specifically with the analysis of the meanings that accrue to a cultural object. Drawing on the circuit of culture model (Du Gay *et al*, 1997) allows for a nuanced

account of where the meanings of a cultural object are located, by modelling an interrelated and overlapping set of sites and practices that stress the interrelations of production and consumption. Furthermore, the form of dialogic discourse analysis developed in this thesis differs from the model proposed by Marková *et al* in the range of analytical tools and concepts brought together to analyse the construction of meaning and its relation to socially shared knowledge within the spheres of both production and consumption.

The diversity of the tools and concepts gathered together in the framework makes possible an analysis of the multiply-located, value-constituting, meaning-making webs that circulate around a cultural form. These analytical tools and concepts all address the crucial dialogic principle that human sense-making clusters around meanings and values, and that all interpretation and understanding is intrinsically evaluative. A critical political economy approach to the cultural industries provides the foci to analyse how a set of logics specific to the publishing industry relating to changes within the industry and their impact on market structure have an effect on what gets produced and how these products are valued. The combination of the concepts of stance-taking (Du Bois, 2007), taste (Bourdieu, 2004) and regimes of value (Bennet, Emmison and Frow, 1999), along with the appraisal framework approach to the language of evaluation (Martin and White, 2005) and rapport management theory (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), provide the tools to analyse the ways in which the evaluations of a cultural form are constructed and negotiated, whether in a written text or in interaction, and their relation to socially shared knowledge , particularly those value ascribing, sedimented, forms of social knowledge that are bolstered and upheld by institutions.

8.3 Implications of the thesis

The integration of theoretical perspectives not generally associated with dialogism into the framework formulated in this thesis has implications for theoretical developments in the field. Ideally, in its concern with producing a theoretically convincing approach to a dialogic account of the interrelations and interdependencies between the individual, social interaction and social structures, the dialogic theoretical framework developed here will be of interest to other dialogicians, and to scholars in other disciplines concerned with a critically oriented approach to social scientific research. The new form of dialogic discourse analysis formulated in this thesis also has implications for analytical developments in the field. The most obvious avenue for further research is to attempt to apply these frameworks to other cultural objects/forms. However, the final aspect of the implications of this thesis lies in its attention to reception and its empirical investigations.

The two empirical studies in this thesis to which I apply a dialogic discourse analysis, show that the interrelationships and interdependencies of the dialogue between the individual and socially shared knowledge are crucial to both individual and collaborative constructions and negotiations of chick lit's meanings and its value. In this way, this thesis will be of interest to dialogicians interested in exploring the expression of socially shared knowledge. The studies of reader evaluations of chick lit in this thesis also provide insights for scholars interested in chick lit, or more generally scholars in reception studies, into how actual readers construct and negotiate the meanings and value of chick lit novels. As I argued in chapter two of this thesis, within the scholarly literature on chick lit to date, there has been little work undertaken with readers, and the

few empirical studies that do so are largely concerned with the comments made by readers in an online context (Scanlon, 2005, 2006: Steiner, 2008). The analysis of the face-to-face interviews undertaken with chick lit readers and the examination of the reading group discussion of a chick lit novel here go some way to addressing this lack of empirical work in the field.

The dialogic approach to chick lit formulated in this thesis is theoretically and analytically sensitive to developments and changes in meaning-making across multiple contexts, demonstrating that chick lit's meanings are neither fixed nor static, but under constant and complex negotiation. However, its wide-ranging combination of theoretical and analytical components makes the dialogic approach formulated in this thesis open to a broad range of scholarly enquiry. My hope is that I have demonstrated the rich potential of the new and complex dialogical theoretical and analytical frameworks developed in this thesis, not only for dialogicians, but also for scholars interested in meaning-making and interaction across a range of disciplinary boundaries.

Interview 1 Transcript

R: Researcher
C: Charlotte

1 R: Erm how often do you, or did you, read chick lit novels?
2 C: erm probably about three books a month
3 R: thre[e a month, cool
4 C: [two or three a month
5 R: erm where do you mostly get your books from
6 C: charity shops or special offers in Tescos
7 R: oh erm so have you ever bought a chick lit novel whilst you're shopping for
8   food cos it was there
9 C: yeh if it was on offer
10 R: if it was on offer
11 C: yeh
12 R: have you bought chick lit novels on the table displays, y'know three for two,
13   have you bought them on those aswell
14 C: nah
15 R: no ok (.) erm (.) does the book cover art make a difference as to whether you
16   buy it or don't buy i[t
17 C: [erm yeh if it's got a bright cover it's one of the ones I
18   pick up first to read the back of
19 R: yeh yeh (.) what do you think of the cover art have you got any opinions on
20   y'know the bright colours or y'know the way the women are depicted on it
21   with t[he
22 C: [erm no not really (.) erm I think it's really obvious which are
23   chick lit (.) by the cover y'know but otherwise (.)
24 R: Then it's good for you to be able to identify the kinda books you want to be
25   reading
26 C: yeh
27 R: excellent yeh (.) erm does the publisher's blurb y'know the publisher's copy
28   on the back does that have a-an effect on whether you actually read the book
29   or not
30 C: yeh
31 R: what-what catches your eye on the copy
32 C: well erm just if it sounds interesting really (1.15) yeh
33 R: yeh erm ((clears throat)) do you look for a particular publishing imprint, erm
34   there's red dress isn't there an[d
35 C: [no
36 R: erm do book reviews ever influence you in whether you read a novel or you
37   don't=
38 C: =er (1.79) no not really I think on the front if it's got a sticker to say
39   that it's like a bestseller or one of the Richard and Judy ones I'll read the back
40   but it won't change if I buy it or not
41 R: ok (.) erm who do you think chick lit appeals to
42 C: mmm women definitely erm possibly younger women, yeh and busy people

43 R: busy people?
44 C: >@busy people oh yeh@> busy people who don't have enough time to get
45   into an in depth book cos it's quick
46 R: it's quick?
47 C: yeh
48 R: erm do you think humour is an important element of chick lit
49 C: yeh definitely
50 R: is it one of the things you enjoy about it
51 C: yeh just that it's light hearted, it's always got a feel good ending
52 R: yeh
53 C: yeh so
54 R: wh-what is it that you find funny, are there any particular elements of the
55   humour that you find funny
56 C: erm (2.21) I'm not sure, not particularly just
57 R: ok is there a particular type of erm female character that you prefer
58 C: >@ I-er ones that get what they want'> the really confident women
59 R: confident women?
60 C: yeh
61 R: is there a particular type that you don't like
62 K: erm (1.48) no not really
63 R: erm (2.46) how would you describe the tone of a chick lit novel?
64 C: how do you mean?
65 R: erm the style of writing
66 C: o:h erm it's like chatty it's
67 R: erm is there a particular tone and style that you enjoy
68 C: just that it's-it's easy going it's like having someone sat opposite you telling
69   you a story (.) gossiping
70 R: yeh erm from whose point of view do you like the story most told
71 C: erm I think all the one's I've read have just been from like a main female
72   point of view so that's the one woman
73 R: do you think make characters are important to the novels
74 C: er yeh but more for like, comedy, not cos they've got serious parts, they're
75   just a nice extra
76 ((laughter))
77 R: erm are there any particular plots that you have in mind when you're
78   choosing a book or you decide to read one?
79 K: erm usually ones that revolve around romance and revolve around weddings
80   (.) yeh
81 R: what characteristics do you think make a successful female character in a
82   chick lit novel
83 K   erm being a bit of a bitch ((laughs)) erm being really confident, erm not
84   being, not particularly being bothered about what anyone else thinks, having
85   like their mates around and stuff
86 R: yeh, er how closely do you think that characters in chick lit novels resemble
87   women in real life
88 K: erm I don't think they do really, I think they resemble more of what girls
89   have in your head than how you actually are, I think they're more how you'd
90   like to be
91 R: erm how closely do you think that the concerns in the novels resemble the
92   concerns of today's women

93 K:	er a fair bit, n-not in the way they're portrayed but the underlying ones than
94	yeh kind of I think most women get to the point where they want to kind of
95	settle down and be married and have a good job, I think it kind of revolves
96	around that alot
97 R:	yeh the search for the y'know the perfect fel[la
98 K:	[the happy ever after
99 R:	yeh how do you feel about the concerns around body image and career, do
100	you think they resemble the concerns of women today
101 K:	er yeh all women are concerned about their body image and about a job,
102	maybe not the way it's shown in the books but yeh alot are bothered about it
103 R:	did you ever feel that a character's emotions or experiences resembled yours
104 K:	erm possibly but erm like amplified alot, like concentrated versions of how I
105	feel at times
106 R:	what kinds of emotions and experiences do you think have some kind of
107	association with how you'd feel
108 K:	erm just a lot of the ones involved in the romances really kind of bein unsure
109	if you're with the right person and then always wantin it to turn out right
110 R:	erm do you think that the term chick lit really describes these novels well
111 K:	e:::rm not sure I think it, in the way that that who it's aimed at yeh
112 R:	so do you like the term chick lit=
113 K:	=no not particularly
114 R:	why
115 K:	>@it's too clichéd it's too stereotyped@> it like er
116 R:	so you wouldn't approve of being called a chick yourself
117 K:	>@no@>
118 ((laughter))	
119 R:	erm what do you think makes a chick lit novel, what elements have got to be
120	in there to be chick lit
121 K:	er women, romance, daft men
122 R:	daft men ((laughs))
123 K:	yeh ((laughs))
124 R:	do you ever discuss chick lit novels with friends, with other readers
125 K:	n oo:::
126 R:	so it's a very personal engagement with it
127 K:	yeh I think there's only been one other person that I've swapped a couple of
128	books with and that's been it
129 R:	if you read other books other than chick lit what kind of books do you read
130 K:	er horror, I read a lot of Stephen King, er like more true accounts of
131	murderers I suppose, a lot heavier
132 R:	chick lit has been described as anti-feminist (.) do you see it as anti-feminist
133 K:	erm (3.08) I have to think what feminist really means
134 R:	that's ok do you think that that really matters
135 K:	I think it (1.56) I think it does show stereotypes of women that maybe not
136	everyone wants to fall into them but that's how we are, and whether you want
137	to admit it or not yeh dunno
138 R:	erm have you ever read a chick lit novel that you've re-read because you've
139	enjoyed it
140 K:	nah I never read a book only once
141 R:	how do you then choose a novel, what is it that you're looking for

142 K:	more the life, I think the ones I tend to read the characters are in their
143	twenties early thirties but it's more what the story's about than how old the
144	character is
145 R:	do you think the heroine, if she is a heroine, has to grow up, is that part of the
146	story you enjoy
147 K:	yeh it's definitely the end that's the good part
148 R:	do you think that chick lit novels are basically romance
149 K:	yeh
150 R:	have you ever read romances before chick lit or
151 K:	no
152 R:	ok I wonder when you're actually reading a chick lit novel are you thinking
153	about your own life as you're reading it
154 K:	ah occasionally, it's like to get away from my own life but occasionally it
155	makes me think about my own life
156 R:	do you have a favourite chick lit book
157 K:	I don't actually
158 R:	Have you read any of the offshoots of chick lit like the vampire ch[ick lit or
159	y'know when it's an older female character that's now
160 K:	nah]
161	got kids=
162 K:	=oh I've read some of those
163 R:	how did you find them
164 K:	kind of very similar actually, I find them a lot easier to get, I never
165	understand the character
166 R:	do you feel that that's important then, you've got to understand the character
167 K:	yeh, otherwise the ending doesn't have much meaning if you don't
168	sympathise with the character

Appendix 2

Interview 2 Transcript

R: Researcher
A: Annabel

1 R: how often do you, or have you read chick lit books
2 A: well I've usually got one on the go all the time erm depending on how busy
3   my life is is to how quickly I read em, I've read em in one day y'know goin at
4   it, or sometimes I've read em for a week or two, but yeh constantly I've got
5   one if I haven't got one I have to go and get one
6 R: so you've got one a week or, would you say, or one every couple of weeks
7 A: er as I say it really depends what I've got going on in my life, I mean at the
8   moment I go to the library so erm I've got a couple out from the library, I
9   used to always get three out so one a week really but yeh one a week
10 R: well that brings us on to the next question really, but where do you mostly get
11   your books from
12 A: I mean at the moment I get them from the library <omitted> charity shops
13   I've recently been introduced to erm I used to be a member of a book club
14   QPD so I used to get alot of stuff sent er I do go in supermarkets cos they're
15   cheap so it's always something to do with finances, er I do always have a
16   look in Waterstones it is isn't it now, er Ottakers, yeh so just to keep abreast,
17   er when I was in the book club it was great because I got erm y'know the
18   leaflet-pamphlet thing sent through every month so I could see what was
19   coming oput and I was really up to date then but now it's just having a mosey
20   round really
21 <2 lines omitted>
22 R: have you ever bought a chick lit novel from a supermarket whilst shopping
23   for food, you didn't go in spe[cifically] have y- have you ever bought a chick
24 A: [yes yes]
25 R: novel as part of a booksellers three for two offer
26 A: in the Works yeh they do them y'know=
27 R: =yeh, have you gone specifically for
28   chick lit or is it cos it's a three for two you've picked up a chick l[it
29 A: [no no I
30   specifically go for the chick lit I like the easy reading, y'know switch off
31   escapism for a bit eyh
32 R: yeh does the book cover art make a difference to whether you'll read a book
33   or not
34 A: I can't deny I suppose that I'm drawn to certain covers I think yeh it does
35   have an effect, but I always read the back and if I like it I'll always just start
36   to read the front page to see if it's a style of writing that I actually get on with
37   because I've looked at them before and some of 'em are written n a way I just
38   can't y'know I just can't read 'em so erm yes it does attract me erm the title
39   obvio[usl]y the title attracts=
40 R: [yeh]   =yeh but what catches your eye then in the cover
41   art=

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42 A: =erm I don't know really I think it's even as basic as y'know bright
43   colours and yeh just a cover being attractive itself, erm modern I think as
44   opposed to hearts and flowers y'know cos that kinda puts me off really but
45   yeh an eye catching bright modern cover will draw my attention
46 R: what do you think-what's your opinion of y'know the hot pinks and th-the
47   y'know cartoon women do y[ou have
48 A: [I quite like that yeh I do like that yes erm yeh
49   that does draw my attention to be honest, yeh erm I-I don't know, I think th-
50   they run into danger when they put pictures of actual people on there erm
51   because you're readin it really to find something to identify with, and
52   humour, and er to cheer up really, to make yourself feel quite so bad-not bad
53   perhaps but neurotic and paraniod and y'know you feel like oh everybody
54   else is out there gettin on with these and I'm doing these silly things which
55   the books are full of people's like y'know little idiosyncrasies and little stupid
56   things that they do and so er I think that a picture of a real person erm I dunno
57   I think it takes away from the whole escapism it's not erm y'know I'm not
58   really pickin them up to er to read somebody's life story y'know, er I love to
59   identify with the bits and bobs but really it's a story and that's the whole
60   point of i[t so] no I don't
61 R: [yeh]
62 A: no I don't think I like the real life covers so much er cartoons
63   great=
64 R: =you like the cartoons
65 A: yeh definitely cos it always puts like a slight humour slant on it as well I
66   think erm and that's one of the things I really like about chick lit the fact a lot
67   of them are hilarious, and you can really laugh and at the time you're
68   laughing at yourself as well cos you're identifying with some of things that
69   you've perhaps done or you know somebody that's done or y'know yeh so er
70   to me that says that there's a bit of a sense of humour going on and it's not
71   taking itself too seriously
72 R: . yeh d-do you think that erm have you seen any of the lad lit covers, y'know
73   authors like Nick Hornby and Mike Gayle, Mike Gayle did My Legendary
74   Girlfrie[nd a]nd tha[t
75 A: [yes]   [I've read a lot of Mike Gayle's book erm yeh I like the
76   lad lit as well I must admit e[r
77 R: [yeh
78 A: yeh erm when you're looking at the library you can only see the ends of them
79   so it's not so much covers
80 R: In that respect when you're looking-looking at just the spines of books is it
81   then the colour that guides you to where=
82 A: =I suppose it is really I've not really
83   give it that much thought but yeh I suppose certain colours do stand out erm
84   er let me think as an example it's not like lad lit or anything but Irvine Welsh
85   when he-on the spines of his books bold type and so it actually draws your
86   attention, bright colours and bold type and that will draw your attention
87   straight away and you're likely to go and pick that up and have a look at it so
88   yeh yeh type facing and something that you can look at and see straight away
89   if you if you can't really read it properly then I tend to- especially if I'm short
90   for time n the library cos I do just do a sca[n
91 R: [yeh
92 A: yeh

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93 R: would you-do you think it's fair to say then that you are looking for pink
94 covers, you're looking for or mauve or something like that
95 A: yeh thay do stand out yeh I mean they've got like a li-a little chick lit section
96 in the library anyway[y
97 R: [a separate section=
98 A: =yeh yeh it's just on a little stand it's
99 not very big but the first thing I do is I go is to the erm quick choi[ce erm and
100 R: [yeh]
101 A: the second place I go to is ther[e, e]rm just cos I'm lazy probab[ly ((laughs))]
102 R: [yeh] [no no]
103 A: just cos it's not so much effort but when I go to that stand it's the titles I think
104 I'm looking at more than anything
105 R: more than the covers it's the titl[es w]hat kind of title are you
106 A: [yeh]
107 R: looking for, roughly or=
108 A: =erm well the kind of books I'm attracted to are sort
109 of obviously things that-that speak to me and I can identify with so y'know
110 thirty something kind of struggle with who you are, finding the right path in
111 life, things you like, so it's something that resonates that kind of y'know it's
112 saying that to me and things that are like erm I suppose ones that are like
113 people's search for mister right as well and all the wrong people they've been
114 through and they fi-y'know those kind of things interest me as well erm again
115 just cos y'know we're all perhaps interested in finding mister right at some
116 point
117 R: yeh erm the y'know th-the publisher's copy on the back cover
118 A: yes
119 R: erm that influenc[es y'kn]ow mmm yeh what are you looking for in that
120 A: [it does]
121 R: is it story or::
122 A: yeh story content the idea of basically what the book's gonna be about as I
123 say the first thing I'll do is I'll have a look at the title, obviously if the
124 colour's bright it will-it'll draw my attention erm the next thing I do is to read
125 that blurb on the back
126 R: yeh
127 A: erm and I have very often put them back after reading that on the back
128 R: yeh er what did you wh-wh-what would put you off then do you think
129 A: er ones that are sort of like just romantic just y'know silly things er I can't be
130 done with silly stories, it's got to have a bit of realism to it, something that I
131 can believe in cos even though I said y'know it's just a story y'know you've
132 still got to believe in it it's got to be grounded really possible
133 R: possible
134 ((inaudible))
135 A: and I read the writing and see if I can get on with that
136 R: right yeh have you ever chosen a book by looking for a particular publisher's
137 imprint I mean there's erm Harlequin's chick lit imprint is erm red dress have
138 you ever chosen ((Annabel shakes her head)) no
139 A: no, I've er gone with, when I've read a book by a certain author and I've
140 liked it I have gone to look for other books of that author but not for a
141 particular publisher no
142 R: ok erm do book reviews influence your choices

143 A: erm I don't think so not really erm I don't really read them cos I like to make
144   my own mind up erm y'know I've read books that have been slated that have-
145   that have er y'know it's the same with films and anything y'know erm I like
146   to make my own mind up about things and as I say once I've read the back
147   and checked out the style of writing it's usually a pretty good omen that I'm
148   er I;'m gonna enjoy it
149 R: I think yo-you've mentioned this but I was gonna ask you, do you think
150   humour is an important element of chick lit
151 A: very very I think humour is one of the most important things in life full stop
152   cos you've got to be able to have a laugh and a joke or else god you wouldn't
153   want to get out of bed in the morning would you so er yes very very y'know
154   the whole genre y'know it's not supposed to take itself too seriously it is a
155   light and y'know escapism and something nice and we all love a happy
156   ending which most of 'em have got and y'know I've laughed out loud so
157   many times when I've read books=
158 R: =what belly laugh
159 A: yeh proper laugh out loud belly laughs and yeh I can't-can't sit down and
160   read a book like that that isn't making me laugh
161 R: what kinds of things in chick lit then do you find really funny, what's central
162   to the humour do you think
163 A: erm it's the realism in it it's like the silly little things that you do yourself, I
164   mean I can't think of any particular example at the moment er In just can't
165   put my finger on a particular example but it's perhaps things you've done
166   yourself or you know somebody's done, it's just hilarious and witty, y'know
167   very witty and references to TV film and things like that things that are
168   current, funny references y'know like they do those films that basically take
169   the piss out of certain erm you can get an aspect of that in the book as well
170   erm, cos I-I wish I could put my finger on-I mean the book I'm reading at the
171   moment is er Louise Bagshaw erm *Monday's Child* and there's a woman that
172   lives with two models erm and one of the models is saying that she's curvy
173   and er the author says to her erm well the character to her y-you can't be
174   curvy cos you're a 34B >@y'know that just makes you laugh@> and you
175   think yeh that's true and I think I'm a 34B I've got curves ((laughs)) but
176   y'know it's just funny
177 R: so some of it's about appearance, about anxieties over appearance
178 A: yes it's all stuff that we do go through as women on a daily basis because
179   we're surrounded by them, by the so called perfect woman which is non-
180   existent and they're all airbrushed and if y'know you had a personal trainer
181   and a personal stylist and spend two hours in make up and hair every day then
182   we can all look grand can't we ((laughs)) yeh but yeh it is things that we as
183   women go through and society and men expect a certain standard, magazines,
184   y'know, er it's ju-I think it is a relief y'know just to be able to go yeh warts
185   and all this is how we are, I think it's a relief, yeh like I say it's a thank god
186   for that
187 R: what would you describe as the tone of a chick lit novel
188 A: er the tone, well written in the first person (.) they are written how you would
189   speak (.) they just (.) including colloquialisms and everything as well(.) and
190   they're just-they're just so easy going (.) just normal everyday how people
191   interact with each other and it's very honest I think and down to earth and
192   normal and er if you read in certain literature some of it is hard going erm
193   Thomas Hardy (.) Shakespeare even y'know and it's gonna take you some

194	time to read it cos you're sortin that out and it's faluting and y'know
195	convoluted and oh god the erm description passages in some of 'em oh my
196	god that go on for ages don't they but these are just very to the point (.)
197	humorous erm everyday language (.) there's nothing erm what's the word (.)
198	condescending going on or y'know you're not feeling that you're inadequate
199	that you can't understand anything it's all very down to earth straightforward
200	as you would jus-as you would talk to somebody on a day to day basis (.)
201	normal
202 R:	so you feel that it speaks to yo[u and n]ot just in the fact that you're engaging
203 A:	[yes yes]
204 R:	with it but it is speaking to you
205 A:	yeh yeh it's a voice that you could be listening it could be your-a mate talking
206	to you
207 R:	from whose point of view do you most like the story being told
208 A:	er mainly the ones I read are from y'know first person
209 R:	and you enjoy that cos there are some that are written in third
210 A:	yes, no I think the majority of the ones are read are in first person cos I get on
211	with that yeh
212 R:	yeh yeh well I guess because one of the thing's you've said you enjoy is that
213	relationship ju[st
214 A:	[yeh yeh and it is like you're having a relationship with them
215	like I say it's like your mate y'know talking to you it's talking to you it's
216	telling you what's going on that voice is telling you it's talking to you yeh
217	[defin]etely you're right you've got like a relationship going (.) you feel like
218 R:	[yeh?]
219 A:	feel like you know them yeh
220 A:	yeh yeh
221 R:	erm do you feel male characters are important
222 A:	yes I do yes ((laughs))
223 R:	you do yeh
224 A:	yes
225 R:	what type of-is there a type of male character you enjoy reading about
226 A:	well I like, as we mentioned earlier, I like lad lit as well, Mike Gayle I've
227	read a lot of his books, and I've read some-Nick Hornby I've read a lot of his,
228	and I do enjoy it cos again you're feeling like you've got an insight in some
229	way you've got a relationship going with this-even if it's male, it's the same
230	thing except it's their little neuroses and y'know and that can be laugh out
231	loud as well erm I think because as I said it's gotta be-you gotta believe in it
232	y'know it's gotta be real y'know I mean some of the stories are a bit y'know I
233	think yeh well it wouldn't really happen but by the time you've got into it you
234	let 'em off you say ok well it's been a good story I'll let you off with that (.)
235	yeh cos erm yeh it has gotta be real because we don't live in a single sex
236	world and the other sex are important to us no matter how we try to say
237	they're not they are it's just a fact of life so yeh I think a balanced story yeh
238 R:	is there a particular type of central female character that you prefer
239 A:	well as I said earlier I like the ones that are in their thirties, this is only cos
240	this is just like me y'know, struggling with who they are, what they wanna do
241	with their lives, y'know struggling with being comfortable with themselves
242	and er there appearance and that Louise Bagshaw, that tuesday's child I read
243	that was very much like that er she used to dress in baggy clothes and doc
244	martins this that and the other and then she had to get this other job and she

245	went to the other extreme and it was like a battle with well y'know perhaps
246	this isn't me but perhaps I ought to y'know smarten up a bit so she found a
247	middle and y'know all that soul searching, and er just finding your path in life
248	and yeh I like those kind of characters erm that are a bit lapsidasical y'know
249	cos I can relate to that and doing stupid things and er muddling along, the
250	kind of things I like
251 R:	is there a particular type of er f-female character that you don't like
252 A:	I don't like the ones erm that are er too girly but they're normally planted in
253	the book they're not the person that you're having this relationship with
254	they're normally planted ((laughs)) as a reference point y'know or anything
255	that goes along the lines of erm ob<u>session</u> with er hair and nails and and
256	y'know that paints the woman as a stereotypical person that we-that
257	surrounds us every day that annoys me cos- well the majority of women <u>I</u>
258	know aren't like that, yes we like to take a pride in our appearance but it's
259	not the be all and end all of the y'know we can be quite serious people we
260	have careers, we have passions, we have beliefs, y'know political beliefs so
261	y'know we're interested in things so that whole kind of air head character no
262	I don't like that
263 R:	yeh erm er are there particular elements of the story line that you're looking
264	for and that you enjoy
265 A:	erm elements of the story line
266 R:	is there a particular story, a narrative progression that you're looking for
267 A:	It's just like what I was saying earlier the person that's struggling and then
268	coming good in the end it's that y'know-a happy ending's a cliché but
269	y'know but I don't want to finish reading a book and be thoroughly depressed
270	do I ((laughs)) I'm probably starting to read that book cos I'm taking my
271	mind off something else, erm so yeh I like the happy ending y'know girl does
272	good and that, sorts it out, y'know happy, maybe meets a partner
273 R:	yeh, it's er been suggested that alot of chick lit novels are about a woman's
274	journey t-to grow up, do you think that's true or is that something that you
275	ha[ve found
276 A:	[no:: I don't think growing up's particularly the right turn of phrase, I think
277	it's more finding yourself, understanding yourself, knowing y'know finding
278	your likes, your dislikes, what you'll put up with grow-personal development,
279	I own;t say growing up I'd say personal development, about the development
280	of a woman
281 R:	yeh erm what characteristics do you think make a successful female character
282 A:	er characteristics, er it's what I've been talking about really, humour y'know
283	it's gotta be about the humour, er a bit dizzy I think, not air head dizzy but
284	y'know oh no I've done that again y'know that kind of thing that we do every
285	day, and a fighter, definitely a fighter, I don't like er roll over and die
286	characters I like a fighter erm I suppose imperfections, just y'know real-
287	realism in the character, I think, like I say, that's why I don't like the air head
288	that's all y'know cos that's not real I just like to er I dunno y'know I like to
289	be able to relate it to myself and every other woman that's out there walking
290	the streets ((laughs)) er yeh battler definitely a battler yeh
291 R:	erm how closely then do you think that the female characters resemble real
292	women
293 A:	I think it depends on the book, erm y'know some books aren't that great, we
294	all know that there are books out there aren't that great, but I think the ones
295	I've read and got on with I think very closely, to be honest some of the little

296   insights into the characters and how they're thinking and er what they're
297   saying (.) how they're reacting to things I think they do very closely,
298   resemble-resemble wome[n but y'know the ones that-obviously I'm looking
299   for a certain thing which is that I'm gonna relate to anyway erm but definitely
300   the ones that I pick up and read yeh I think they're realistic, yeh I do
301 R: erm how closely do you think that the concerns that are expressed erm
302   resemble the concerns of today's women
303 A: erm yes, er yeh I know there's a big (.) school out that moans about erm it's
304   all romance and finding a partner and things like that and er in a lot of books
305   that is a concern in there but that's a realistic concern for both men _and_
306   women who are-we actually are hoping to find somebody to love and to love
307   us aren't we really, it's the way of the world, yeh it's not something stupid
308   that should be mocked, _that_ is what the majority of people want, erm so yeh
309   so that's a concern erm and I think fighting erm fighting for independence,
310   fighting erm for understanding, to be heard, to be taken seriously (.) yeh I
311   think it's all very relative (.) I really do
312 R: I think you mentioned body concerns and appearance and that so do you think
313   that those that are expressed in chick lit are concerns that today's women are
314   actually going through
315 A: yeh yeh definitely (.) I mean we're surrounded with it (.) you pick a magazine
316   all you can see is perfect bodies (.) and nobodies bodies are like that it's a
317   load of rubbish (.) and it's very dangerous y'know you hear about eight nine
318   year olds that are anorexic now (.) that's disgraceful (.) er y'know if they can
319   erm access some of this literature and see that it's very normal (.) we all have
320   lumps and bumps and y'know nobody has perfect skin we all struggle with
321   things it is a concern because (.) y'know in so many walks of life women
322   aren't taken seriously or they're dismissed and one of the first things you get
323   pulled down for is your appearance (.) as a woman y'know your weight (.) if
324   you're attractive or not and it is (.) still to this day it is very much there (.) I
325   mean most women feel terrible about themselves because y'know they don't
326   conform to this image
327 R: so so y-you wouldn't agree then (.) I mean one of the charges that's been
328   levelled against chick lit is that it's actually perpetuating the b[eauty myth-it's
329 A: [no not at a[ll
330 R: [that
331   y'know so you think that it does the opposite it's saying no we're not
332   perpetuat[ing
333 A: [well the books I've read yeh yeh it's that internal struggle I think
334   that I was talking about that people go through and when they find that
335   they're happy with themselves and I think anybody (.) once you can love
336   yourself and be happy with yourself it doesn't matter(.) it doesn't matter what
337   anybody else says (.) and that's what it's about to me (.) I don't know what
338   books they've been reading but they're not the ones I have
339 ((laughter))
340 R: erm have you ever thought that a character's emotions or experiences
341   resembled your own at any point
342 A: yes many a time I don't know if I can think of any specifics but there has
343   been many a time where I've been quite shocked actually in some cases
344   y'know christ almighty that's me, it jus-y'know I'm reading it and it sounds
345   like me, many a time

346 R: do you think then that that would be a general thing, that character's emotions
347   and experiences resemble emotions and experiences of today's women
348 A: I think so, y'know we all like to to give this er made out, of who we are and
349   that's not always the case y'know you can't judge a book by its cover as they
350   say, y'know you can project a very confident y'know women can say oh no
351   that doesn't bother me but I honestly do think that yes erm a lot of emotions
352   and issues raised in these books are quite important and they are facing
353   women today, and it's like solidarity, it makes you feel like you're not alone
354   (.) if you read something and you think Christ almighty that's me, it somehow
355   makes it better (.) you're not alone
356 R: yeh I'd like to ask your opinion on on-er chick lit has been described as anti-
357   feminist(.) erm have you an opinion on that
358 A: I don't think it's anti feminist (.) I think this whole feminist thing (1.6) I mean
359   I'm not quite sure I know where I stand because things seem to go to
360   extremes to me erm at the end of the day we are still women (.) and there are
361   certain things that women like (.) y'know we do like erm to look our best at
362   times (.) we do like to make an effort (.) erm we do like to be with somebody
363   who we love and who loves us er I don't know anti feminist er well I s'pose
364   you could say what is feminism (.) well to me (.) feminism is y'know just the
365   want to be treated equally and with respect (.) the same respect that men get
366   treated with to be listened to, erm not dismissed (.) erm given the same
367   chances erm given the same pay for doin the same jobs y'know that's all
368   feminism is about and I don't like it when its taken to the extreme when it's
369   actually anti men y'know (.)that's just ridiculous(.) it's just >@what is going
370   on there@> (.) so I don't see how it can be anti-feminist cos they're givin you
371   er they're givin you a way to think oh christ I am normal and if y'know (.)
372   what's lad lit (.) if chick lit books are anti feminist what's ↑lad lit cos lad lit's
373   doin the same sort of thing but that's just for men er and there are a lot of
374   people that enjoy reading them (.) so no erm I don't think its anti-feminist at
375   all but I do struggle with the whole feminist thing anyway as I've said cos all
376   I want is to be treated equally erm and to be given respect (.) to be not judged
377   on appearances er y'know and that's all that matters to me really
378 R: erm, (3.74) have you ever discussed chick lit with friends or with other
379   readers
380 A: erm a bit (.) erm I don't talk about it a lot to be honest, no
381 R: n[o?
382 A: [no it's my like private little haven and I quite like havin that y'know I get
383   in bed, get my pyjamas on and get in bed, have a fag, have a glass of pop or
384   whatever by the side of me and I can lose myself in this little world so yes it's
385   quite a personal thing (.) yeh I've said to people before oh I'm reading this
386   book and that book and the other book and it's been really good but as a
387   general rule no it's my little er my little world that is
388 R: yeh, erm do you think that the term chick lit describes these novels well
389 A: erm I don't really know about this erm I think in some ways perhaps the term
390   is what's causing all these derogatory comments y'know chick lit y'know cos
391   if they actually spent time readin these books I don't-I don't know if these (.)
392   people do but I think well you can't do or you wouldn't make the comments
393   you do about 'em so I don't mind it
394 R: so I was gonna ask you whether you liked or disliked i[t

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395 A: [I don't particularly like
396   it but there's more things that are important (.) I'm not offended by being a
397   chick
398 R: are you not that doesn't offend you or=
399 A: =not particularly, erm I don't like being
400   called a <u>bird</u> I s'pose, but I s'pose it's a same-similar things that chick, bird
401   in't it er I would imagine that that term has yes has got a lot to do with the
402   outcry about it because people that say it's dumbin down and things like that
403   and that chick lit that does <u>give</u> you that image of the air head, doesn't it
404 A: that and the pink nove[l w]ell the pink book, it wouldn't even be a novel
405 R: [yeh]
406 A: would it erm so yeh I think it perhaps has done a lot of damage, as I say
407   personally I haven't taken offence, but that's because I choose not to
408 R: yep
409 A: I don't really >@wanna get involved in that@> if that's what they wanna call
410   a book then fine (.) if I enjoy a book I enjoy a book
411 R: I noticed you talked about dumbing down (.) so you're aware of erm a lot of
412   charges (.) criticisms that are levelled at chick lit y'know how it's er:[m have]
413   [oh yeh]
414   you read them in newspapers or=
415 A   =I don't know actually where I've read-I'm
416   aware of it very aware of it erm I must have done I must have read erm I
417   think yeh cos you get reviews in newspapers don't y-I used to read *The*
418   *Guardian* a lot and the times on occasion and stuff so yeh I think that whole I
419   used to have erm (.) yes I used to be in that book club and I'm very aware of
420   a school of people who are I think are academics who are looking down their
421   noses at it and y'know I struggle with it cos y'know to me it's not dumbin-I
422   mean look at Shakespeare (.) they think Shakespeare's the best thing since
423   sliced bread and that was just dirty filth (.) well ↑it ↑was ↑wasn't it I mean if
424   you read it and understand it it's just dirty filth it was of its time(.) it was
425   common (.) for common people so yeh I struggle with this whole dumbing
426   down thing I mean what do they want I we suppose to-er only read books that
427   we need a dictionary to understand ((laughs)) no I really don't get it I really
428   don't
429 R: can I ask y-what do you do with a novel once you've read it
430 A: return it to the library mate ((R laughs)) no the ones I've bought I keep, I do
431   keep, erm when they're getting out of control and I've got too many books
432   I'll go through them and there's certain ones I've obviously that I've
433   absolutely loved and I won't want to give away erm but if I need to do my
434   book cases out cos I think well I can't have any more book cases then I will
435   give them to charity, to a charity shop (.) erm I have reread books though,
436   books that I've loved
437 R: you have
438 A: yes I have
439 R: that's one of my questions, er yeh that's interesting, y'know for something
440   that's accused of er throw away fiction=
441 A: =y-well y'see I don't think that it is I
442   think that there's a lot of messages in there
443 R: have you taken any messages from it
444 A: well like I say I've read things and I've thought Christ almighty y'know
445   that's me erm that Tuesday's child I read I really really enjoyed that I actually

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446		got that out the library so I haven't got a copy of that but I would actually but
447		a copy of that erm because it just <u>meant</u> something to me, y'know it was that
448		struggle, that internal struggle and I really felt it at the time that I was reading
449		it, I was <u>really</u> <u>there</u> with her, not knowing who you are, uncomfortable-even
450		down to the clothes that you wear y'know, really felt it and I would read that
451		again
452	R:	you definitely think that they've got a message
453	A:	yes I do, very often-I mean there are books that I've read that I've thought ah
454		well that's it then, that's a bit of fluff, y'know, but there are books that I can
455		almost sigh y'know when I've read it and feel (ooph) y'know, feel a little bit
456		more fulfilled and a little bit more aware I think erm almost erm almost a bit
457		more educated in a way I mean these books are looking at things from
458		different angles, different points of view that you perhaps <u>don</u>'t look at
459		yourself cos you-y'know can be very blinkered cos our way is our way, you
460		find when you do group work with anybody that y'know people can
461		introduce you to a different way of looking at things, and whilst you don't
462		necessarily change your opinion it just widens the horizons a bit and makes
463		you a more rounded person so yeh
464	R:	I'm thinking of er y'know people like Anna Maxted and Marianne Keyes and
465		a lot of their work's a lot darke[r y']know they're dealing with some <u>real</u>
466	A:	[yeh]
467	R:	life issu[es
468	A:	[anna maxted e:[r yes
469	R:	[running in heels=
470	A:	=yes I read that not long ago yes I did
471		enjoy that one yes (.) I think that was one of the ones where things started
472		happening where I thought well y'know I'm not sure about this but I'll
473		forgive you (.) wasn't that the one where er::[m
474	R:	[it's the eating disorder
475	A:	no(h) ↑<u>oh</u> no running away from richard, no that's, is that not anna maxted
476	R:	no
477	A:	sorry I-I confused that with that, I don't know, I've definitely read some anna
478		maxted cos I've got one on my bookshelf and I can't remember what it is (.)
479		getting personal is that her
480	R:	getting ove[r it
481	A:	[getting over it yeh I've read that
482	R:	it's about date rape
483	A:	yes I've read that yes that was very powerful, you see there is a serious side
484		to (.) this stuff, and there are women out there dealing with things like that
485		erm
486	R:	is that something you'd like to see chick lit erm address
487	A:	what specifically date rape=
488	R:	=no no jus-bigger issues I mean like we just said,
489		anna maxted talks about eating disorders erm she also talks about date rape as
490		well as loss, grief
491	A:	yeh grief and loss yeh erm I don't know really if you need <u>more</u> cos like you
492		say there are authors out there who are dealing with this erm (5.13) [[er
493	R:	[[s-s-it's
494		not central to what you're looking for=
495	A:	=no:: not personally no, I think it's a
496		very personal thing isn't it, everyone's looking for something to relate to so if

497	you <u>have</u> suffered from date rape then perhaps they would want more of that,
498	if you <u>have</u> suffered from an eating disorder y'know I think it is very <u>very</u>
499	personal I think because we are all just looking for something to help us, to
500	relate to, to y'know make us feel like we're not on our own
501 R:	so you like to be able to relate to <u>certain</u> things
502 A:	yeh I do yeh, but I mean those books that y'know dealing with date rape I did
503	very-I thought that was very good, I do like those sort of things but
504	sometimes I just want-y'know it depends on what kind of mood I'm in
505	sometimes I just want something that's not as heavy as that, just your average
506	daily struggles and your yeh, but they <u>are</u> important yeh (.) it's a way that
507	perhaps people that've been through those kinds of things that perhaps they
508	feel they can't talk about them or they can't get any help with them that could
509	help, it really could
510 R:	um er (2.51) if you do read books other than chick lit what kind of books do
511	you go for
512 A:	I like Bill Bryson books, I'm really interested in travel, er so I really like
513	travel books erm (4.45) what did I read that I really loved (.) er-the lovely
514	bones did you ever read that=
515 R:	= yeh alice sebold
516 A:	yeh I loved that book, to me it's not a particular <u>type</u> of book it's something,
517	erm (.) that was when I used to be in my book club I'd <u>read</u> the blurb in the
518	magazine and if I was just attracted to it y'know I'd get it, I'm not staunch in
519	my types y'know if somebody asked me what kind of music I liked I'd
520	struggle with it cos I like what I like erm if I was drawn to something I'd
521	have a look and er I <u>used</u> to read a lot of patricia cornwell
522 R:	yeh
523 A:	yeh (.) I liked the *Davinci Code*(.) Dan Brown y'know I like a lot of different
524	things erm so there's not really any type I don't think (.) apart from travel I
525	do enjoy travel-travel literature (1.98) and self-help books ((laughs)) I love
526	havin a laugh at them erm I've bought a lot of books about self esteem and
527	things like that and ways to make yourself happy and yeh and a lot of er er
528	like *Why Men Lie And Women Cry* that's funny and er I think thats-that goes
529	with *Women Can't Read Maps* that one (.) what is it er (.) y'know those kinds
530	of things I mean I'm very interested in erm social issues erm people I'm
531	interested in people so anything that deals with kind of thing
532 R:	so you have pretty much a-a-a-you're not reading them purely for self help
533	you've got a critical eye on it then because you-you laugh at some of i[t then
534 A:	[yes ye
535	herm I have gone through stages when I've bought these books because I
536	thought they would help me but I'm not that naive anymore ((laughs)) but I
537	am just interested in people y'know definitely so anything in that kind of vein
538	I find interesting cos them ones about men lying and women crying they
539	actually go into the science behind the actual differences between men and
540	women in the brain and things so it's not just a a-y'know a self help book
541	they do actually go into y'know the physical differences between us erm yeh
542	y'know how-how men will look just straight forward they can't-they don't
543	have the peripheral vision so when they're lookin in the fridge
544	they >@can only see straight in front of em@> It explains a lot of things
545	(4.12)((laughs))
546 R:	ok well (.) if you were to s-s-to give me erm could you tell me what are the
547	elements that make a chick lit novel then what is chick lit

548 A: oh god that's a tuff one isn't it erm
549 R: what has it <u>got</u> to have in it to make it a chick lit novel
550 A: well you've <u>got</u> to have your heroine y'know the woman that you relate to
551   that you go through everything with (.) erm
552 R: do you find a direct relation then do [y-
553 A: [direct relationship with her yeh=
554 R: =er er y'know do you relate to, are there just bits you relate to or y'know do
555   you feel you have to relate to all of i[t for it to be successful
556 A: [no you don't relate to all of it (.) no erm
557 A: I think some bits you don't but you can find them funny anyway and you can
558   y'know perhaps know someone whose a bit like that or y'know it's not just
559   you yourself it's in any walk of life you've got your family you've got your
560   friends y'know you're surrounded by other people so you can see little traits
561   from other people erm you definitely have to be able to relate in some way
562   and I think for you to love it you do have to have some element of personal
563   personal relating to it, erm humour humour you've gotta have some humour
564   in there erm (4.63) a bit of realism it's gotta be fairly realistic y'know you
565   can't have people flying off to the moon it's just not gonna work is it >@I'm
566   just flying off to@> oh for god's sake I'm not reading this (1.7) what was
567   that <u>stupid</u> book (.)that Mr Darcy one where she kept going back in time
568 R: yeh
569 A: oh my god I did actually finish tha[t
570 R: [Alexandra potter=
571 A: = ((groans)) I can't get
572   on with tha[t that's just yeh no that's just stupid that's
573 R: [meetin mr darcy]
574 A: not a successful book to me no no no=
575 R: =so it traversed the boundaries of
576   realism for you=
577 A: =yeh absolutely I'm not going back in time to meet mr darcy, I
578   don't think so erm and yeh cos the woman in the bookshop ended up bein
579   erm (1.27)
580 R: Jane Austen
581 A: yeh I mean honestly have you ever [heard anything like it ((laughs))
582 R: [((laughs))
583 A: I just can't get on with it, it's got to be realistic ish I mean you get away with
584   certain-and you think well yes that's pushing the boundaries a bit but I'll let
585   you get away with it but yeh you've gotta be able to relate it's got to be fairly
586   realistic, you've got to have your heroine, humour er er I can't think of
587   anything else
588 R: well final question then, who do you think chick lit appeals to
589 A: I think it appeals to many different women from all different walks of life, all
590   classes all creeds, all colours, I don't think there's any specific type of
591   woman that's attracted to it I think cos y'know you'll find perhaps high
592   powered lawyers, y'know you'll find people that work in a shop, people who
593   work in a factory, <u>all</u> ends, I think <u>all</u> spectrums and all ends because we do
594   have things in common not matter where we come from all backgrounds I
595   think it appeals to a very wide range
596 R: and so-so those-those things in common what would they be do you think
597 A: erm it's back to that struggle y'know with being who you are, y'know the
598   images we're surrounded with because we are all surrounded by those and

599	y'know we very often think that we're not good enough, that we don't
600	conform to that, we're not good enough, we've got cellulite ↑hey most
601	women have got cellulite y'know erm yeh that whole being in a man's world
602	thing y'know not being listened to erm y'know even people who y'know are
603	high up on their career ladder don't ac-struggle I think to get where they are
604	erm I think we've all got insecurities yeh we've all got insecurities I mean it
605	is refreshing y'know really refreshing to read an honest account
606 R:	so you find it very honest then
607 A:	I do yeh that's why it's so funny because it is-it's something that you
608	wouldn't dream of saying oh guess what I did last night y'know and it's so
609	refreshing for it to just be there in black and white
610 R:	so you find it very honest
611 A:	yeh I do
612 R:	er do you think it deserves to be a genre on its own that it is very different
613	that there's something that makes it different
614 A:	yeh I do, I think the world's a better place for having chick lit.

R: Researcher
K: Kerry
L: Louise
B: Beth
J: Jane
M: Maria

1 R: what do you think?
2 K: well at first I really hated it ((laughter))
3 R: really?
4 K: yeh ((laughter)) but then it kind of (.) grew on me and I enjoyed it by the end
5 R: wh-why did you hate it?
6 K: I didn't-I didn't like the way-the style it was written in I didn't-I didn't think
7   the main thing was I didn't like the main character I found the char[acter]
8 B: [a:::h]
9 K: irritating ((laughter)) and it was just like [y'know really <u>really</u> irritating]
10 B: [yeh I found her very irritating]
11 K: at the beginning but then she=
12 B: =she improved didn't she [as the book went on
13 K: [yeh she did improve
14   definitely and yeh kind of warmed to her a bit and you start to empathise
15   with her a bit but at the beginning I think cos it's all kind of straight in there
16   and it's very kind of full on I think she seems a kind of she seems a very
17   extreme character you don't see the kind of more subtleties of the character
18   so she seems very irritating and yeh ((laughter)) and she seemed really self
19   involved and I kept thinking like GET OVER YOURSELF ((laughter))
20 B: ((laughter))
21 M: I -I well I think I enjoyed the book because I didn't ex<u>pect</u> anything erm
22   special and er didn't ex<u>pect</u> to en<u>joy</u> the book to start with and so I read it
23   quite quickly and actually I enjoyed it pretty much the whole thing yeh (.)
24   and I thought it was quite er entertaining really I <u>didn't</u> - I didn't read it
25   thinking oh I'm going to feel sympathy with a character or another er so
26   maybe that's why I wasn't irritated by the book which my friend told me she
27   was irritated by the character [aswel]l ((inaudible))
28 K: [mmm]
29 J: mmm
30   ((pause))
31 B: I didn't really find it very funny because it says it's wickedly funny on the
32   cover I really didn't find it funny sort of mildly
33 K: ((harrumph))
34 B: amusing in some places <@but not wickedly funny at all but perhaps
35 K: ((laughter))
36 B: that's just my sense of humour@> I don't know but (.) mmm it was alright
37   you know↑
38 L: mmm (.) <u>I</u> found erm the style was very (.) I mean it's-it's a very bullet style
39   y'know that-that I found that at first and it [took a while to get the pac]e of
40 K: [mmm I found that as well]

41 L: the writing and er I thought it was humorous I thought that a lot of her

42   insights were very astute and she y'know her observations were a:h↑ you

43   know you kind of go o:h↑ yes↑ well↑ she said that very well but it was a

44   very sort of short attention span writing it was like y'know the sentence was

45   y'know >four words six words three word[s four w]ords< erm=

46 M: [a::hm I]   =a::h it's

47   interesting because it's not always all the way through I m[ean the style

48 L: [no:: it got deeper

49   it g]ot a little bit more yeh

50 M: cha]nges [a lot actually

51 J: [mmm mmm m[mm

52 K: [I agree at the beginning I found it hard to read

53   because there were lots of like long sentences that were [split]into little bits

54   like y'know brackets [and] all over

55 L: [right]

56 B: [yeh]

57 K: y'know like so: it made it y'know the sentence was kinda broke-by the end

58 K: of the sentence I was thinking <@what was she going on about in that

59 B: ((laughter))

60 K: sentence@> and then I read it again and I was like oh oka:y it seemed to be

61   talking about three different things in one sentence

62 L: yeh it's (.) yeh I found it a little choppy (4.85) er

63 J: I didn't-I didn't like it much at the beginning either ((coughs)) partly

64   because

65 ((laughter))

66 J: erm I was-my mother hasn't read it, my ninety one year old mother has <u>not</u>

67   read it and I was talking to her about it this evening and she said yes it's the

68   sort of book that puts everything in that once upon a time was always missed

69   out, y'know the toilet stuff, the sex s[tuff that's in] <u>su[ch</u> detail and o]o:: I

70 B: [((chuckle))]

71 K: [((laughter))   ]

72 J: don't need to read this y'know and I'm not nin[ety one but] I did

73 B: [((laughter))]

74 J: think (.)I did think – I mean it's quite a while since I read it and now I've

75   only got a third of the way back through it quickly reading it again <u>actually</u>

76   it's quite well struct[ured and s]ome of these people particularly looking at

77 B: [mm hmm]

78 J: these sort of archetypal girlfriends-<u>women</u> friends of Clara (.) the fabulous

79   wonderful perfect maternal Stella whose had all those affairs in the

80   background (.)and the single Tamsin and the erm and Naomi who's so

81   <u>perf</u>ectly turned out and whose husband's completely letting her down erm

82   they were a set of archetypes in a way erm that her um her situation with her

83   husband who she felt so secure with erm what was going on between her and

84   Robert that she wasn't fully aware of was kind of thrown in sharp focus by

85   these women's (.) other women's situations and actually by the end of it I

86   thought it was quite cleverly structured >NO NO< by the re-read[ing of it]

87 B: [mm hmm]

88 J: erm I'm really beginning to feel that actually it was put together very niftily

89   and I think that that was pretty smart of her y'know er:m so <@I've changed

90   me mind@> as well

91 K: Well it was a good ending a good kind of rounding up of everything yeh (.)
92   y'know things were neatly tied anyway
93 J: [[oh ye:::s yes (.) yes abs]olutely that she kept the threads going
94 B: [[yeh yeh the ending was]
95 J: from s-sim what's his name Dunphy [and] erm the awful-the crazy Max
96 B: [yeh]
97 J: person that her Mum was going to marry nothing was dropped it all came
98   together at the end with the wedding and so on erm yeh (0.5)
99 R: so were you satisfied [with with
100 M: [I was disappointed by the end end ((inaudible)) you
101   could almost have stopped in Paris where they've gone [off their separate
102 B: [yeh when they're
103   separate ways]
104 M: ways] Yeh I di]dn't think that the relationship with the dancer would actually
105   work it doesn't seem really realistic erm but=
106 K: =yeh I kind of agree with that
107 J: ((chuckle)) but a bit of a shock (.) but it is only a story=
108 L: =well it was almost as
109   if she needed to be erm you needed to leave it thinking she's (.) she's ok in
110   some way [and th]at ye[h
111 B: [mmm]
112 K: [I think it would have been better if she'd been ok on
113   her own though, y'know if you'd seen her being [ok on] her own
114 B: [mmm]
115 M: Actually I thought it was their wedding they were getting married again her
116   and her husband three months later=
117 K: =oh when it started with the wedding scene?
118 M: yeh and I thought oh that's nice ((laughter))
119 ((laughter))
120 J: no no sadly no (.) but she wasn't going to stay with that dancing dunphy was
121   she, she wasn't going to stay with him [it was just a fling she wanted
122 K: [[no]
123 M: [[I d]oubt it it'd be it wouldn't be
124   long before ((inaudible)) the mother saying the fourth time
125 J: excitement
126 K: Yeh I just saw more him as being someone who just came into her life and
127   came and made her tr-trigger y'know certain thoughts about like things
128   aren't working rather than someone who she'd end up with
129 B: yeh
130 L: I-she's not actually with him at the end I don't think is she?
131 K: [[we::l
132 J: [[I think she is
133 M: [[yeh she is
134 L: oh ok
135 K: °she kind of is and isn't°
136 ((pause))
137 L: but ((clears throat)) (.) as far as the style it seemed that I was aware through
138   the whole reading of it that-that I felt that there was a gap between what the
139   writer was capable of doing [becau]se I also felt there was some skill and
140   some
141 B   [mmm]

321

142 L: niftiness in what she was doing and she was erm she was deft and she was a
143　good writer I thought and what-what sort of the expectation of the reader
144　was I thought there was a real a sort of gap there like c'mon if I'm reading
145　you already someone whose a good writer then (.) then it should be
146　presented a little more (.) n-not seriously maybe that's not the word but
147　(4.41) erm (.) erm she should have paid more attention to the style than I
148　thought °and maybe work a bit more on that°
149 B: Mmm
150 M: I feel I liked the style I was quite I would have I think I'm keen to read more
151　of her books erm but it made me wonder what is chick literature because
152　that's not what I expect it to be (1.6)
153 R: What did you expect it to be?
154 M: More of (.) er (.) erm (.) °I don't really know° I s'pose >@teenage romance
155　[tha]t kind of book@>
156 R: [yeh]
157 M: What (.) how do you define ch- is that er literature that is just aimed at
158　woman is that what chick lits are er (.)
159 R: o::h it's-that's a slippery term
160 ((laughter))
161 M: I suppose that's the introduction[n of your PhD
162 ((laughter))
163 L:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[yeh well yeh that's what you're gonna
164　spend 180 pages doin right?
165 ((laughter))
166 R: >@Pretty much yeh@>
167 ((laughter))
168 R: I'm I'm interested did it-did it challenge your expectations in any way, was
169　it not what you thought it was gonna be
170 B: [[yeh yeh it was what I [yeh thought it was gonna be
171 K: [[yeh
172 J:　　　　　　　　　　　　[nah it was exactly what I thought it was going to be
173 B: [[yeh it's exactly what I thought it was gon[na be] but you realise what it is
174 K:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[yeh I]
175 B: basi[cally it was what I was expecting
176 K:　　　[yeh same kind [of
177 J:　　　　　　　　　　　　[not meaning to seem proud of ourselves but [it was
178　what we ((cough))
179 B:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[yeh yeh
180　what we were expecting it was
181 R: Were there any surprises at all, were you surprised by anything, I mean you
182　just said the structure was surprising=
183 J:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　=it was quite solid really if you-in it-as far as
184　it went y'[know
185 M:　　　　　　[I-I was surprised by the style I think it's a good style [I me]an it
186　does
187 R:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[yeh]
188 M: vary a lot and I think it reflects when she does write like bullet points it
189　reflects other chick lits of certain characters and then it changes in different
190　context
191 K: I was quite surprised by the end (.) I didn't think that it-that it would have-I
192　didn't think it'd have that kinda type of ending y'know er h[im leaving her

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193 J:                                                    [wha oo::: what
194        ↑did you think
195 K:     I don't know (.) I (.) like (.) that was a much mo:re realistic ending than I
196        thought it was gonna be although I did think that her then going off with that
197        guy Dunphy (.) Dumphy?
198 B:     Dun[phy
199 K:        [Dunph[y
200 J:             [yes yes [that's his name his first name's Sam
201 K:                      [I thought that was a little unrealistic element to the end
202        (.)I thought the kind of whole break down of the marriage [was (.) and like
203 L:                                                                [mmm]
204 K:     the right thing [to happen and I wouldn't have expected this er of y'know a
205 B:                     [yes yes]
206 K:     chick lit book I would [have thought it'd be
207 L:                            [you thought you'd want fairytalers
208 K:     a bit (.) yeh
209 L:     y-ah
210 K:     yep
211 ((pause))
212 R:     that's interesting
213 K:     mmm
214 J:     I thought he would go off with another ma::[n you know there were
215 L:                                                [yeh yep ((inaudible))
216 J:     ti::mes when one though[t he was going to be ↓ga:[y
217 B:                            [oh really?]               [oh I didn't I didn't think
218 J:     that oh there were indications of things that upset Robert or made Robert
219        react I can't remember where it wa[s (.)] there was something wh[ich
220 B:                                       [aah ]
221 M:                                                                     [the
222        husband?
223 J:     yes
224 L:     yeh yeh
225 ((pause))
226 J:     I can't remember now where it was but there was one point where I
227        [thought] yes he's really responding to something he's-he's actually going to
228 K:     [ mmm ]
229 J:     say that he's gay when he leaves [but he] didn't he just went on with the
230 M:                                      [mmm]
231 J:     women's wonderful Vogue  clothes (.) I like the turning point on page one
232        hundred and two where she actually uses the title my life on a plat[te that's]
233 K:                                                                         [oh yeh ]
234 J:     clever and she goes on to say
235 ((Jane reads aloud a passage from the novel))
236 J:     and then she says you're lucky to know Richard so well y'[know cos she's
237 K:                                                              [mmm]
238 J:     talking to poor Nomes and Nomes is trying to plot out what to do to
239        counteract the affair with Acne gir[l an]d I-that is that's a very core bit of the
240 L:                                         [yeh]
241 J:     book isn't it (.) the my life on a plate summing up that she's not happy
242        really °not really°
243 M:     well sh-she's er she's a very selfish character
                                   323
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244 J: o(hh)h >@yee-she's yes@> and ((laughter))yes
245 M: ((laughter)) on the one hand her husband is doing the right thing but on the
246   other he's not depicted as a fantastic husband either erm but there's not
247   much about him actually but er she-she's quite a selfis[h person erm I
248 J: [[it's um
249 K: [[maybe it's a kind
250 M: have no sympathy with her
251 K: of good a way of y'know the style of writing that she came across as a
252   selfish character and not she wasn't very likeable from the beginning
253   because then it stops her being portrayed as like the victim (.) y'know when
254   things are going wrong cos if she was really nice from the beginning then
255 M: [but it's not a victim]
256 K: [you-you might kind] of belike er:[m(.)you might start feeling so]rry for her
257 R: [do you think that's important]
258 K: too much it might be y'know make the book a bit too pathetic but whereas it
259   just makes it kind of=
260 R: =is that important that she's not a victim-not portrayed
261   as a victim do you th[ink y'kno[w as readers
262 B: [[↑mm hmm]
263 L: [[important to the story or=
264 R: =yeh as readers
265   y'know?
266 L: yeh ↑mm [hmm
267 B: [yeh I think so [yeh
268 J: [but when [it comes to the weeke]nd she is
269 M: [that's quite interesting]
270 J: portrayed as a victim y'know she actually does have erm a life where
271   husband comes home and has to have peace and quiet on Saturday [and]
272 K: [yeh]
273 J: often on a Sunday too she takes the children out=
274 B: =yeh doesn't help with the
275   children at a[ll
276 L: [but that doesn't make her-I mean I don't know that makes her
277   life difficult but I don't know but I don't think that she's a victim
278   characterologically she seems-she seems to she complains she says I'm not
279   satisfied with this and ultimately by the end of the book things have changed
280   so I mean er if-if she really were showing her as a victim I think she might
281   have stayed in that y'know had delusions about what she could do to make it
282   better and sort of persistent in thinking well it's me it's me it's me it's my
283   fault it's my fault it's erm it's not that he's the wrong person for me or that
284   my life, my job this, and my husband this and but she, erm, and by the end
285   of it she's out of it she's out of that at least
286 J: but only cos h[e:: leaves only cos he:: goe[s
287 B: [yeh yes exactly it wasn't]
288 L: [yeh but the=
289 B: =he finishes it doesn't
290   he bu- bu[t
291 K: [yeh I was kinda surprised he finished it
292 B: and yeh and obviously she was to[o sh[e just tho]ught they'd kinda jog along
293 J: [mm]
294 K: [ya-I agree]

295 B: like that I s'pose I don't think she'd 've finished it would she, not really
296 L: I donno (3.12)
297 R: I don't know, do you think she'd have finished it in the end?
298 M: N[o
299 B: [I don't think she would don't think na[h I]don't think she would though
300 K: [nah]
301 L: Probably not but I mean in a break up it's always hard to say what y'know
302   yes one person might have done the breaking up but the other person always
303   contributes in some way to making i[t permissibl]e for the other person to do
304 B: [mmm yeh]
305 L: it or to say I'll be fine you can leave [or all these various ways of saying
306 B: [yeh]
307 L: (3.70) [[contributing to it
308 K: [[she was thinking a lot about the children so that's probably why she
309   [woul]dn't have [finished it (.) but if it hadn't been for them she would've
310 L: [mmm]   [mm hmm mm hmm yeh]
311 B: yeh yeh probably
312 J: now I think she could have s[a
313 K: [whereas he didn't seem to be thinking that
314   much about the children did he really=
315 J: =n[:o
316 M: [he's not too keen on the kids either
317   actually
318 ((laughter))
319 J: No (.)no no oh ((takes bowl of crisps))they're lovely(.) they're going to
320   make an awful noise on the tape
321 R: That's fine
322 <3 lines omitted>
323 L: I was surprised my expectations were-I have to say I was erm I mean I've
324   read on airplanes and in various places what I would call chick
325 ((laughter))
326   lit I don't know if it was or not but (.) and it was y'know I mean I remember
327   skimming page[s sort of lik]e actually I'm gonna skip this
328 M: [mm hmmm]
329 L: paragraph and let's see if there's y'know what's interesting here ok I'll read
330   this part (.) and this actually I read ev-I really wanted to read every single
331   word (.) I thought she was (.) I mean part of that was just not so much the
332   story as her writing I thought it was quite-it was compelling y'know and the-
333   the story had its weaknesses and erm y'know the plot it wasn't maybe er that
334   sophisticated a plot there wasn't-there weren't like lots of intrigues and stuff
335   but I-I wanted to follow y'know what happened to everyone an-um (.)
336 M: yeh I agree with <Louise> that it's er it was above my expectati[ons
337 L: [yeh better
338   than I thought it was gonna be
339 M: I thought it was a good book (.)that we agreed to-to read but I s'pose there's
340   a lot of different type of books why did you choose this one have you got
341   others that you've asked other people to read (.)what are you trying to find
342   out
343 J: ((chuckles))
344 B: But is-like are you assuming that chick lit is gonna be kind of rubbishy?
345 K: [[mm hmm

346 M: [[er (.) y[es c]os if it's badly written I can[t write-read it
347 L: [[Yeh   [yeh]
348 B: [yeh yeh but in the end maybe we
349   shouldn't assume that thou[gh (.)] y'[know
350 J: [no no]
351 L: [maybe not (.) that's right (2.14)
352 R: [[Bu
353 B: [[It's just the word ch<u>ick</u> i[sn't it isn't i[t? makes you think of
354 L: [↑mm hmm]
355 M: [th-the peo[ple that would re:: (.) read
356   that sort of book yeh are not over (0.43) erm
357 B: dumb blonde s[ort (.) >@ye:[h>
358 M: [yeh (.) they [have to-to be able to read <u>pla::in</u> language (.)
359 K: [↑excu:[se me]
360 M: simple language
361 B: ((laughter points to her hair))   [>@dumb b[londes@>] ((laughter))
362 J: [mmm mmm exactly   ]
363 B: y'know assuming that chicks are not very intellige[nt and we're
364 J: [no not intelligent]
365 B: gonna read a rubbis[hy book
366 J: [absolutel[y
367 M: [I didn't expect it to have any style and she's
368   got style=
369 R: =so you've got assumptions about readership then
370 M: mm [hmm
371 J: [yes is Bridget Jones chick lit?
372 R: Yes it is
373 J: Yes an-and that's the most gripping-one of the most <u>gripping</u> things I've
374   ever ↑read it's <u>wonderful</u>, <u>won</u>derful quality, but I mean really hilarious
375 R: [[I was gonna a-yeh
376 L: [[I mean is it-yeh mmm yeh no I was wondering if it's more style or
377 L: more content that-that would make something chick lit, I mean is Jane
378   Austen chick lit? I mean I don't know or is it-or is it (.)
379 R: >@there's a debate about that@>
380 L: Oh ok
381 ((laughter))
382 R: there is a debate over that
383 ((pause))
384 R: Ye-er was there anythin that in-content wise, as in, was there anything that
385   gripped you that you didn't think was going to grip you (2.31) y'know
386   you've talked about you were quite surprised about (.) y'know the marriage
387   breaking up=
388 M: =I like her reaction to finding out that the mother who's by
389   herself with the two or three kids and she thinks is a perfect model and then
390   she finds out that she had an affair I thought that was >@funny and that she
391   was@> quite happy to admit on having a-it's just the d-<omitted> I don't
392   know, erm the difference between::[
393 J: [contrast mmm
394 M: the contras[t yeh er with both li-er reactions, both attitudes to
395 J: [mm[m
396 K: [yeh]
326

397 M: life that's interesting=

398 K: =yeh you see t-you saw her making assumptions about

399 (.) about other people and kinda stereotyping people [and

400 L: [she's was quite

401 conventional (.) actually=

402 M: =[[yeh

403 B: [[yes yes she was yes I was a bit surprised at (.) at

404 that

405 K: and then it y'know it showed her to be wrong like (.) and then with er also

406 her friend with the perfect marriage whose husband's having an affair as

407 we[ll that's er another er] kind of example of erm

408 M: [yeh that's true mmm]

409 KL: ↑mm hmm (.) I don't know what was-I can't remember now her reaction (.)

410 oh her reaction to Naomi's reaction (2.22) um

411 M: Forgot what the name is now

412 J: It's round about ((clears throat))it is page [a hundred an-a hund→

413 ((laughter))

414 L: [another page citation?]

415 J: → red an-yes >@a hundred yes@> or thereabouts where is-she's having

416 B: ((chuckle))

417 J: lunch with Naomi, and Naomi describes her, I like that she says ((Jane reads

418 from the novel))the-the-they do a lot of kind of intense joking she and

419 Robert, which stops them from really talking about how they re::ally fee[l

420 B: [yeh

421 that that was probabl-yeh it is yeh]

422 J: quite interesting they-and I though]t that that was quite interesting they're

423 obviously regarded as a humorous pair who y'know happily go into all sorts

424 of society, have lots of different friends, friends together and so on and erm

425 there's a lot of laughing that hides a lot of not really engaging with real[life]

426 B: [mm]

427 J: properly (.) cos I don't think (hh) and I sound like my future daughter-in-law

428 saying this but I don't think Clara has got any idea of how to set boundaries

429 I really really

430 ((laughter))

431 J: really ↑don't she's going to school in her pyjamas with the kids and

432 ((laughter))

433 J: then, I say having them, actually having responsibility for them twenty-four-

434 seven really erm and she could have done a lot more talking (.) yeh yeh and

435 y'know just the fact that one's that interested in it now and I really thought it

436 was rubbish to start with just cos it was presented as chick lit, y'se[e (.) I

437 B: [yeh yeh-

438 cos y-yeh for that]

439 J: much prefer it to la:d] lit, if I can coin a phrase I've decide[d this last month

440 L: [is there such a

441 thing, is or so there such a thing?=

442 R: =Yes

443 J: well I think Philip Hensher, Philip Hensher and The Northern Cle[mency

444 L: [mmm

445 mm]

446 J: was] lad li[t and not wel]l structured

447 R: [Nick Hornby]

327

448 L: Nick Hornby? m[mm

449 R: [Nick Hornb[y

450 L: [I've never read him but (.)

451 R: um-er that's probably the instant name that I can think of off the top of my

452   head but Tony Parson[s, y'k]now that kind of, y'know about a boy

453 B: [mmm]

454 B: [[Yeh

455 L: [[m-hmm

456 R: y'know the film?

457 L: right

458 R: that kind of=

459 B: =mmm

460 L: Was that um (.) Hugh Grant was that?

461 B: [[yeh

462 R: [[yeh

463 L: Yeh I did see that then

464 R: Yeh

465 L: Yeh I think at the beginning you, this-this going to school in her pyjamas I

466   mean I expected her to be, er, the sort of irreverent, just oh y'know I don't

467   care what anyone thinks kind of I'm going to school in my pyjamas, and

468   everybody else is so perfect but ac-but actually I do-I do think that she was

469   quite conventional at the end, her reactions to erm hearing about the single

470   mum with the four children and the affair of the this and how-how her friend

471   was dealing with that, and I mean she-she had, sort of um her-her er

472   stereotypes about people were rigid

473 J: And perhaps there's something of that in most of us, those sorts of

474   contras[ts, er y'kno[w, th-there is real[ly I think, I]can certainly relate to

475 L: [m-hmm] [m-hmm yeh]

476 R: That's an interesting point, could you relate t-to, was there anything that you

477   could actually relate to that y'know pr- (.)there was some kind of=

478 M: =well

479   definitely=

480 J: =yeh

481 ((laughter))

482 J: If feel if I was a mu-if I was mu[m at((laughter)) a mum at home

483 M: [If you're-I'm MARRIED WITH KIDS

484 J: with two small kids absolutely

485 M: I mean I imagine if you took it to-not, it's all different ages and contexts so

486   are you going to erm make a differentiation on how people react to the book

487   on-depending on where they are in the stage of their lives

488 R: (hhhhh)

489 M: Cos obvious[ly

490 B: [yeh it would be differ-yeh

491 <4 lines of biographical material omitted>

492 B: Yeh so you could-can relate to her m[ore

493 M: [yeh I can relate to her more and

494   imagine mmm

495 R: Did you find, that in that way then, did you find it realistic or was it

496   unrealistic?

497 M: The way she dismisses a lot of er-erm her family life in fact, cos she could

498   talk to her husband to make things better and she doesn't and she just lives

499	her life and reacts to things rather than taking initiatives and her kids are like
500	y'know luggage that y'know she has to deal with rather than enjoying erm
501	their presence erm it's a bit sh-she's trying to get through life to think
502	what's there for herself, erm so she-sh-it's not realistic for her character but I
503	don't-I haven't met anybody that's got that feeling towards their children (.)
504	it's as if she got married and had two kids because that's what you d[o but
505 J:	[how do
506	you think-how do you think she feels about the children?
507 M:	Not much
508 B:	Now I don't kno::[w
509 K:	[I don't kno[w I think there were quite a few moments
510	where
511 B:	[yeh I thought she was quite
512 K:	she seemed real[ly
513 B:	[yeh I yeh I t[hought she was caring towards the children
514 K:	[I thought more of her resentment's towards her
515	husband for not seeming to care about the children b[ut she-I thought she-
516 B:	[Yeh]
517 K:	she was right, y'know, she showed a lot of like ten[dern]ess towards the kids
518 B:	[yeh]
519 K:	where he didn't show any so tha[t that maybe what annoyed her
520 B:	[no he didn't want to spend any time with
521	them did he really
522 K:	yeh
523 L:	h-uh
524 J:	She describes how she would always read the shortest possible book to
525 J:	the[m and so o]n whereas the perfect Stella would read the l[ongest book
526 M:	[mmm yeh] [now that's
527	funny]
528 J:	and w]ould really be child focused=
529 M:	=now that's something I can r[elate [o
530 B:	[>@she did
531	read to them though didn't she@>]
532 M:	example in the evening every so o]ften when she goes I want a story and oh
533	gosh well get a short one the[n and s]o and er
534 J:	[yes yes]
535 M:	So erm so y[eh
536 B:	[[yeh that's fair enough
537 L:	[[I think it's partly a device for showing that she's still (.)
538	y'know she hasn't completely given over herself ah-t and saying I'm- I'm
539	now just the perfect mother now I mean, she['s he]r she has he[r situations
540 J:	[mmm]
541 B:	[she's got her
542	o[wn yeh]
543 J:	[she's still a human being in her own right
544 L:	and she yeh she doesn't wann]a(.) yeh we-we find ourselves as parents (.) as
545	mothers y'know frequently in situations which (.) y'know in the abstract it's
546	one we wanna be there in the big picture, but in the moment we might not
547	wanna be there(.) we might not wanna do that particular thing at that time (.)
548	and in general yes we wanna be reading to our children but we might not

549	wanna read right then and there y'know and erm I think that erm (.) yeh
550	that's all I wanted to say
551	((laughter))
552 J:	There's a sort of tenderness that comes out towards Jack and the example I
553	can think of is where he's hanging on to her back and she says the top of her
554	head still smells like babyish time-I think it may be when she's on the phone
555	to Sa-sam Dunphy when he's holding on round her neck but just the smell of
556	him, the baby niceness of him still, age three, she's, oh I don't know, just
557	it's-there's an affection for the children stil[l com]es out, I s'pose that's to
558 B:	[mmm]
559 J:	show that the children are there, y'know a device to show that they exist in
560	the book, but s[h
561 L:	[I don't know if I um related to her so much but I definitely
562	related to a lot of what she said (.) more than I imagine (.) er relating to it
563	having not had children let's say or not being married so I-I can certainly
564	relate y'know a lot of the little things (.) the things she said (.) I sort of went
565	((finger click))oh [yeh ok] so ((finger click)) I felt that or something and a
566 B:	[mmm]
567 L:	lot of them are very s[pecif]ic to her situation er (.) y'know but so erm (.) but
568 B:	[mmm]
569 L:	again I think the writer's good enough that she-that she makes-she makes
570	observations and has insights tha-that a lot of people can appreciate (.) not
571	just if you're in that situation yourself so er that's erm (.) I think that's one
572	of the-that's one of the prejudices I have about chick lit actually (.) is that
573	it's very narrow and very specific (.) and it's about a condition and a
574	situation and it's not necessarily (.) broader contemplation of y'know of
575 B:	Yes
576 L:	y'know the things that great literature concerns itself with so (.) erm (.) but
577	y'know that-that's-that's a prejudice because actually our lives ↑are made up
578	of a lot of sm<u>all</u> details and little things and thoughts and conversations with
579	our friends and (.) and erm (.)it's good to see somebody who's good at
580	putting it on paper=
581 K:	=mmm
582 L:	y'know=
583 J:	=the small details, I sp-well they often are the stuff of great literature
584	as wel[l aren't they the right small deta[ils that lead you in and make you
585 L:	[yeh absolutely] [mm-hmm]
586 J:	part of i[t (.) it wa]s something I couldn't quite relate to cos I knoew I didn't
587 M:	[definitely]
588 J:	<u>know</u> most of them was all the b<u>ra</u>nd names (.) ah y'know all the-for the
589	cl<u>o</u>thing and the m<u>a</u>ke-up and everything (.) that'll make it very <u>da</u>ted
590	y'know in a hundred years time people aren't going to know what these
591	different poshest of all clothes and make-ups were all abou[t the sandal]s she
592 M:	[[ah yeh erm]
593 J:	longs for and things li[ke that a lo]t of brand names not just Vogue but lots
594 M:	[oh nah just]
595 J:	of erm all the actuall clothing I=
596 L:	=I thought it sort of makes it juicier too
597	because it's very specifc in that way you couldn't y'know it conjures a smell
598	or a look or a feeling of something[g especially if you have an association

330

599 J: [that's right especially if you've been
600   there tha[t's right
601 L: [yeh yeh yeh
602 J: yes yeh
603 R: But wh-what did it (.)even though you're saying you didn't recognise them
604   what kind of-how did you recognise that they were these brand names t[hen
605 J   [o:h
606   well-well (.) I mean I knew that she was obviously very spoilt and knew all
607   about very expensive things that erm I've >@never dreamt of@> y'know,
608   erm (clears throat)) it was just like it's like sort of name dropping, y'know
609   the fact they are the brand names there, I kind of knew they couldn't be
610   downmarket ones from the context she put them in yeh, think so erm but
611   tha[t was
612 K   [you were quite surprised when you found out that her father didn't have
613   a lot of money compared to her brothe[rs and sisters father[s weren't you(.)
614 J: [o:h]   [o:h]
615 K: because she seems very l[ike
616 J: [yes and he[r mother had introduced her to]
617 B: [her mother had ye[h (.) she'd obviously
618 M: [she didn't have-she
619 B: had been brought up like=
620 M: =like the only one who had to work
621 J: They [had all these trust funds
622 M: [remembering about things you relate to I remember one and this er's
623   gonna soun- this morning I woke up fat
624 ((laughter))
625 J: Oh that was lovely
626 ((laughter))
627 M: >@For no reason (.) Why?@> I can relate to that
628 L: [[>@Yeh yeh@>
629 B: [[>@Don't ya, definite[ly@>
630 K: [yeh]
631 M: It's little bits like that th[at were really fun[ny
632 B: [yeh]
633 L: [yeh yeh, exactly she didn't-she
634   didn't mince words (0.22)
635 R: Erm did-do you think it, (hhh)in-in terms of a novel do you think it was
636   pretty conventional in-in its style, in the way it, how did it make you feel as
637   a reader, did you think it-it put you in a certain positi[on? (.)do yo]u think it
638 L: [mmm mmm]
639 B: I didn't reall[y no no
640 J: [[mmmm n:o]]
641 L: [[n:o no]]
642 K: [[no (.) I felt that at the beg[inning she was like trying to shock
643 M: [what sorts of things]
644 K: you a bit cos she was just I dunno=
645 J: =all the sexy and poo bi[ts at the
646 B: [yeh some of the
647 J: beginning
648 B: language a[nd things yeh just in the beginning (.) but then she did sorta
649 J: [mmm]
                                              331

650 B: change didn't sh[e sh
651 K: [yeh and then at the end she draws in-draws in the reader
652   and yeh makes you feel y'know sympathy and everything and relate to her
653   but in the beginning it's like she's tryina (.) y'know isolate you a little bit
654   becos she's tryina sho[ck yo]u y'know I think, I felt like that
655 B: [mmm]
656 R: Ye-shocked yeh? Did you feel a little shocked?
657 B: Well yeh, I know what you mean, yeh becos yeh she did seem to change as
658   the book went on
659 R: So did you feel distanced then from her? No?
660 B: Not rea[lly no
661 L: [No I didn't I just felt –I felt that she became a little more vulnerable
662   I thin[k, to me
663 B: [yeh yeh she did yeh
664 M: I was wondering actually whether if the author just got a stereotype of a
665   person that would erm appeal to most woman and I was just wondering
666   about that be-because of her size, erm it says she's a size fourteen, and er is
667   that are most women of her type that size I dunno that's the question I was
668   wonderin[g
669 K: [that's the average dress size isn't it? In the U[K, fourteen yeh?
670 R: [Yeh fourteen
671 M: So yeh so she did it on pu[rpose to have er
672 L: [average, just pretty I guess I dunno=
673 M: =to yeh to
674   appeal to the widest audience I dunno=
675 R: =Who do you think she is talking to in
676   the book, who do you think she's aiming for?
677 J: Oh an audience which she'll-she'll get money for writing the book and
678   everybody will read i[t
679 R: [yeh but is it s[p-
680 J: [sorry, sorry that's-that's being a very=
681 R: =no
682   no do you think its specific, is it a particular kind of y'kno[w
683 J: [aiming well I
684   suppose she's got to be aiming at mum[mies at home who haven't got, who
685 B: [well yeh yeh people who've got
686   similar sort of situations to her yeh]
687 J: have got insecure type of jobs (.) o]r mummies trying to balance a job and a
688   home I mean, her job's very odd, but-but again she's not got the boundaries
689   y'know she's got this table all in a mess and she oh and she feeds Sam
690   Dunphy's face to the hamsters for their bedding y'know that's a real un-
691   boundaried thing isn't it you know erm and and that mixture of work and
692   home and not quite getting any of it quite righ[t
693 L: [right yeh not quite getting
694   an[y of it yeh
695 B: [yeh yeh just really chaotic
696 J: [[Actually
697 R: [[How do you feel about that, y'know that portrayal of not quite getting it
698   right, y'know bein conflicted, bei[n, how did that that make you feel=
699 B: [I've been-I think]

700 B: =I think
701   a lot of people feel like that don't they, a lot of mother[s,]working mothers
702 J: [yes]
703 B: must-would feel like th[at
704 J: [it they was a sort of a car<u>too</u>n of-of erm everything
705   running in together, but anybody that works from <u>home</u> (.) I bet they would
706   relate to it
707   spot o[n
708 M: [definitely
709 J: and probabl[y she does too (.) having kids and trying to write
710 K: [yeh finding it hard t[o (.) y'know to sp]it work and home and
711 B: [yeh yeh it's hard to get everything you
712   want
713 K: everything anyway
714 B: to try and be perfect and everything but it's real[ly h]ard to
715 K: [yeh]
716 R: Do you think you can get the same out of the book if you're not a mum, or if
717   you're not, do you think you can get the same out of it?
718 <4 lines omitted>
719 K: I dunno I did I felt that I-I sympathised with the character and everything,
720   erm but yeh so towards the end I didn't-I really didn't like her at the
721   beginning but I don't know whether that's to do, I don't know what that's to
722   do with really, I mean did everybody else, I mean I know you found her
723   irritating
724 B: Yeh yeh I-I found her really irritating in the beginning
725 R: But what irritated you?
726 B: Just-I don't know, just, she seems a bit flippan[t an]d as you say trying to
727 L: [yeh]
728 B: sort of shock you sort of (.) o[r
729 K: [it's that she's such an idiot, like when she gets
730   drunk in that interview I was just like what are you doing I mean what an
731   idi[ot
732 B: [yeh it's just wha-yeh, yeh it wasn't funny, I didn't think that was really
733   funn[y that was just stupid
734 L: [nah that wasn't funny
735 K: [no it was really just (.) stupid
736 B: really so it was just annoy]ing, yeh (.) but then as you say she did- she did
737   improve from that (2.32)
738 R: S-so in-in a way s-some of it was a little over the to[p for you
739 J: [yes it was a car<u>toon</u>, it
740   was a car[<u>toon</u>] of what it would be like if you're working from home and
741 L: [yes]
742 J: you get everything muddled up together in a great soup o[f life in a bowl
743 K: [I think I started
744   maybe liking her when she went home, well when she went to her step
745   father's didn't sh[e
746 J: [oh in so[merset]
747 B: [her dad]
748 K: [and you started know[ing about her upbring[ing]
749   B: [yeh]   [yeh]

750 K: and stuff and she started I think mellowing a little bit then and becoming a
751   little bit more relatable rather than (1.14)
752 R: So you didn't like the in your fa[ce kin[d of erm
753 K: [no]   [no] (2.54)
754 L: I mean I'm-I'm I'm trying to separate how I liked the writing and how I
755   liked her and erm and I mean I think I like the writing more than I like the
756   character although I liked erm her honesty, I liked that about her and her
757   kind of just, her-she just looked at things and-and saw things and I mean a
758   lot of that's the writer she just-she presented things in a very frank way and-
759   and I agree, I think at the beginning I a lot of it was just flippant and sort of
760   ok you're trying t[o
761 B: [yes
762 L: make this a you're trying to make this to be really irreveren[t a]nd y'know
763 B: [yes]
764 L: erm turn everything upside down and really it didn't really work I don't
765   think as far as showing something about the character, cos the character
766   really wasn't like that but it was-I thought it was funny (2.68)
767 R: So d-do you think that that was an important way in which it engaged you,
768   y'know you've got this relationship how-whatever you consider that to be
769   with the book, do you think it was the comedy, the humour that was
770   important for you for that?
771 L: Critical[ly yeh definitely I mean ta=
772 B: [[mmm]]
773 J: [[mmm]]
774 M: =yeh y'know it's central to-to the book,
775   erm and I think at the end it's quite light hearted (.) she aims to entertain I
776   think, still think (2.32)
777 R: what about this thing about honesty, do you mean that the character's honest
778   or do you mean that the writer's being honest?
779 K: the character
780 R: the character=
781 K: =mmm (0.37)
782 R: yeh do you think that the writer's saying anything other than presenting a
783   story (.) do you think there's anything deeper in it?
784 M: I think there were certain passages, yeh I think there's some deeper under
785   laying, but I read it very quickly, so I wouldn't (.) I think if I read it again I
786   probably could point out (.) but I think the weekend in Paris, I think there
787   was different layers to that weekend and it had certain quite serious times
788   (3.39)
789 J: mm-hmm
790 M: erm
791 L: And she doesn't (hhh) she sort of, I mean that's y'know if there's anything,
792   if there's anything unsatisfying it's that she sort of put things out but doesn't
793   say anything about them, I mean I felt she, y'know she said well this is this
794   way, and this is what their sex life is like, this is what her y'know her past
795   was like, and this was what (.) and (.) she doesn't say a lot (.) about erm (.)
796   what effects those things have had on other things, I mean not that she
797   should tell you what to think about them, but she at least could say well at
798   this end, y'know when she thinks about this part of her, cos obviously
799   y'know she presents her as someone who thinks that there's-there could be
800   mor[e to h]er life than there is which y'know is a very real-y'know very

801 B: [mmm]
802 L: existential th[ing] I me[an tha]t's jus-that's like that's the beginning of so
803 B: [mm]
804 J: [mmm]
805 L: muc[h and er]m but
806 J: [yes yes]   [yes any of us any of us
807 L: she doesn't erm really say well why what am I missing, what do I crave,
808   what do I want, what was-y'know what did I want when I was a y-a young
809   woman before I had children that I'm not y'know(.) there are no-there's no
810   progress[s really
811 J: [I thought she'd always wanted, hadn't she always wanted the
812   husband (.) the house (.) the children s[he did give th]-I mean the basic (.)
813 L: [yeh ya ya yeh]
814 J: no other choices, that ba[sic impression, she did giv[e °that's]
815 L: [mm-hmm mm-hmm]   [mm-hmm]
816 J: what [she°
817 L: [so maybe it's wro:ng to think that she should want-that she should be
818   shown as wanting more I mean s[h-
819 K: [I thin[k that she felt that sh]e should be
820 J: [she is very indulged]
821 K: happ[y, to m]e that's why she wasn't really going into detail because she's
822 L: [mmm]
823 K: thinking to herself well I should be happy with what I've g[ot, I've got what
824   I always wanted s[:o °I think that's why she wasn't identifying with what
825 L: [mmm]   [mmm]
826 K: she actually wante[d
827 L: [mmm
828 M: I think like this character people are never happy with what they've got
829 B: mm[m
830 J: [mmm what grass always greener on the other side mmmm y[es
831 M: [and that's
832   when >@what I can relate t[o@>
833 J: [yes and there'[s
834 M: [>@grass is always greener on
835   the other si[de@>]
836 J: [so many things that she could do to improve things without=
837 M: =cos
838   her mother, I think it's interesting that there's definitely a parallel with her
839   mother having her fourth weddin[g an]d her being her-it's her first wedding
840   and sh-she's splitting up bu obviously it's not going to stop here (.) I mean
841 B: [yeh]
842 M: the second time's not gonna be the right one, third time's probably not the
843   right, s-so she carries on not being satisfied with her life, I mean it's
844   something more important that we should look into-th-that she should look
845   into
846 J: I mean there's something conventional, I mean there's something
847   enormously conventional about what her aspirations were and what she's got
848   and then not finding it to be what she'd wanted, but the other women they
849   are very much stereotypes, aren't they, they really are and that's what's so
850   unsa[tisfying-I said it's nifty a]nd well structures but its not really erm as
851 L: [ye[p

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852 M: [but she's a stereotype]
853 J: as surprising as it could be really, y'know y'know, well I can't describe it as
854   well as you, but the inter-interrelations between people don't really evolve,
855   those other women are there to represent certain worlds=
856 L: =yeh yeh the one who
857   breaks her own bread or wha-what[s
858 J: [yes there's Stella bakes her own bread
859   and is so perf-and had the affair, and there's Nomes, poor Nomes, as
860   opposed to rich elves, poor Nomes ((laughter))whose husband was having
861   the af-Richard who went off and had the affair and there's (.) there's erm=
862 K: =the
863   s[ingle one who got pregnant=
864 B: [single one]
865 J: =yes Tam[sin
866 K: [who y'know the one night stand=
867 J: =yes
868   ye[s and] there are others too and I haven't quite got back round to them (.) I
869 B: [mmm]
870 J: I don't know what Amber was up to I can't remember Amber now but erm
871   they a[re they're representing (.) the real- the real ster]eotypes in our society
872 B: [but you remember her name >@that's good@>]
873 J: but they're not actually necess<u>arily</u> real people through and through
874 L: mmm (4.12) what did you mean when you said erm as a reader did you feel
875   something was expected of you I didn-I didn't understand what you meant
876   by that
877 R: do you feel that the way-the way in which it's written, the content of the
878   story, do yo-did you feel included in the worl[d or able to interact with that
879 L: [mmm]
880 R: world or did you feel distanced f[rom it=
881 L: [mmm]
882 J: =distanced definitely it was too posh
883   really
884 J: yeh too posh (.) it was another world-that world of fashion and clothes and,
885   and it's um very Londonish very very Londonish erm no-not very close to
886   the world that we mostly live in here
887 L: but unso<u>phisti</u>cated though, I mean even given that it was posh or- it was (.)
888   not very sophisticated I mean not very er none of the people y'know none of
889   the people were particularly artisti[c or cerebral or intellectual or
890 J: [>@no:: no or-or (.) g-g-gifted in any
891   particular way=
892 L: =na-nothing, I mean nothing was really, nobody seemed really
893   seemed really to be doing anything really interesting (.) erm yes it's y'know
894   its-er shopping and the br[and names but it was not e::r[m sophisticated at all
895 J: [mmm mmm]
896 J: [there's a lot of
897   money around but y[ou have]to ask why y'k[no]w it's not=
898 L: [yeh right]
899 K: [yeh]
900 M: =er I don't think
901   there's that much money around I mean she's from a very rich family erm

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902   but I felt it was <u>really</u> middle class and London based erm I didn't feel
903   excluded er-er I didn't feel included either e:r[m
904 R: [oh how did you feel, kind of-
905   were you like er=
906 L: =an observer
907 M: Yeh an observer which was enjoying erm (3.38) yeh I s'pose like watching
908   television in s[ome ways, °like er]watching ((inaudible)) on t[elevision
909 L: [mm-hmm mm-hmm]
910 J: [mmm mmm
911   mm[m a soap, a soap opera
912 R: [did you all kind of erm see these women as stereotypical y'know
913 L: mmm ↑mm-hmm
914 J: [[mmm
915 B: [[yeh mmm ye[h
916 K: [mmm yeh it's kinda with the assumption that everyone's got
917   the perpetually single f[rien]d, everyone's got the perfect mother friend (.)
918 L: [yeh]
919 K: everyone's got the hippyish friend and y'know it's kinda=
920 J: =and somebody's
921   bulimic somewhere behind the loo there in the corner, no, mmm
922 R: how did you feel about that th=
923 J: =the smelling of sick what? No n[o
924 ((laughter))
925 L: [oh is that, is
926   that her siste[r? I c[an't remember now yeh
927 R: [yeh]
928 J: [yeh one of the half sis[ters mmm
929 K: [yeh yeh yeh]
930 J: mmm
931 L: yeh that erm
932 R: how did you feel about that, y'know did you find (.) did you find at any
933   point that you were thinking yeh well actually I do know somebody a bit like
934   that, did they work on that level or did they work purely y'know like Jane
935   says, cartoon
936 J: they are a sort of a celeb world, they are a kind of a bit of a London celeb
937   type world that really we're not particularly (.) probably not particularly in
938   or into apart y'know the mothering thing is universal b[ut-but] the actual
939 B: [mmm]
940 J: context of that society and having the very posh place is Somerset, most of
941   us don't have somewhere quite like that, I mean so[me do]
942 B: [mmm yeh that's true yeh
943   (1.92)
944 R: so how-is that what made the novel work then for you, the fact, not the fact
945   that, y'know, forget the class, just put that to one side, it was this whole
946   issue of mothering and ex-y'know (.) the-the thing about mothering was that
947   what?
948 L: [[na-ha no I'd g[ive
949 K: [[mm-hmm
950 M: [the key thing that made it work for me is the style (.) I think
951   that's the key thing that made it work (2.19)
952 R: what was it-what is it about the style that made it-made it work for you
                                337

953 M: well its-I thought it was cleverly written (.) and the certain way erm that she
954   uses erm erm vocabulary that I didn't know
955 ((laughter))
956 L: yes yeh it's very conversation[al
957 R: [pard-very?
958 L: it's conversational (.) yeh style um yeh it is
959 M: and yeh I don't think she looks down on us (.) she doesn't look down on the
960   reader either wh[ich is y'know quite nice erm
961 L: [mmm mm-hmm mm-hmm yeh it's not condesc[ending
962 M: [yeh and she
963   doesn't take herself seriously erm
964 J: do[esn't she?
965 L: [but she presents when she presented the bulimic erm sister (.) I mean er
966   yes er very (.) y'know I've been-had some-some people very close to me go
967   through some things not that thing specifically (.) and er there's there's no (.)
968   it's just-it's kind of a c-cartoon almost a carica[ture not eve]n-not even a
969 B: [yeh it's not]
970 L: caricature necessarily but just a-just a one dimensional just a sketch and
971   there's nothing that reflects that-that that you know you might say erm (.)to
972   me there's nothing that I could say well (.) that I could relate to that
973   particular thing or that psychologically y'know or emotionally that it's j[ust
974   B: [it
975   was glossed over a bit]
976 L: fact y'know that's the] fact she's bulimic just labels she's bulimic (.) she's
977   on her fourth husband (.)she's this(.) she's been cheated on by her husband
978   she's-and there's no dimensionality to anybody and erm I think I did ex<u>pect</u>
979   it and-and as I-as I read the book I expected it (.) I didn't y'know expect it
980   more I just accepted that erm and said well she's dealing with this
981   dimension, albeit one dimensional, she's dealing with it in a very witty way
982   and I'm enjoying it so I read it but it- I did-I did think it was one
983   dimensional (.) a lot of the people were (3.92)
984 R: mmm well er c-coming back to the humour, what w-was it about it what was
985   it what did you find really funny or did-was it kind of er=
986 B: =I didn't find it
987   funny at all no
988 ((laughter))
989 R: did you not?
990 ((laughter))
991 B: no no it was <u>amusing</u>, I mean it was <u>amusing</u> but I've read much >@funnier
992   books than that I didn't find it@>, I didn't laugh, y'know it was just
993   amusing[g >@but not wickedly fu[nny n[o@>
994 L: [mm-hmm]
995 M: [the only way for somebody to find
996   it funny is for somebody to relate to-to what she's saying I think and
997   thinking oh yeh I get-I understand that happen[ed to me in my life
998 B: [I could relate to some things
999   in it, I mean I know I'm <u>older</u> than her but I've <u>been</u> there y'know it's not
1000   that long ago
1001 ((laughter)
1002 B: well it was quite a long time ago
1003 ((laughter))

1004 L: not that far f[or your memory
1005 J: [dear little children yes=
1006 B: =but I do remember it yeh (.) no I mean,
1007   I (.) yeh I just think it was amusing
1008 R: yeh
1009 B: but not funny (.) not-I wouldn't have laughed at it
1010 R: did anybody d[o-did anybody do any any out loud d[i-did you=
1011 B: [it didn't strike me as]   [na-ah
1012 J: =yeh I did a
1013   tiny out lou[d laugh] yesterday w[hen I was read]ing it
1014 K: [ye[h
1015 L: [yeh]
1016 M: [three times I-I]
1017 J: but I can't rem[ember why or when, what about y'know=
1018 M: [probably]
1019 R: = yeh did you?
1020 M: yeh probably about three times ye[h, I]'ll have to read it again to t-t-to
1021 R: [yeh]
1022 M: t-t-t[o tell you t-to
1023 R: [oh yeh (.) but you did actually do the=
1024 J: =mm[m yeh
1025 L: [yeh I did=
1026 M: =yeh which I don't
1027   often (.) lau[gh (.) at anything
1028 J: [no very serious perso[n (.) it was really re]ally funny but I don't
1029 L: [it was, it was-it was]
1030 J: know what it w[as
1031 L   [erm gossipy, y'know, it was, it was almost-almost like er
1032   the delight you take in (.) I don't know I-I did laugh not deep belly laugh
1033   like oh y'know that's so but-but ↑yeh it's just amusing y'know it was-her
1034   turns of phrase and then being-and then a lot of the times what was funny
1035   was her saying something that y'know I've thought or felt and maybe never
1036   sai[d but and ah ((finger click)) you think yeh y'know
1037 B: [[yeh yeh I see what she means there and yeh=
1038 K: [[mmm]
1039 L: =exactl[y yeh
1040 B: [mmm
1041 R: is this where the honesty comes from then do you thin[k in the writing (.)
1042 L: [mm-hmm yeh I
1043 R: these things]that aren't very often
1044 L: think so erm]
1045 L: mm-hmm (2.70) mmm I think like yeh things that are (3.72)
1046 M: I s'pose they've written something that you think and most people think but
1047   you would never have it written down yeh maybe that's one of her her good
1048   points (.) I think I must read it again=
1049 L: =yeh that's right I think that's sorta
1050   sum-she's said a lot of things that are are-[re tabo:o almost in some ways,
1051   not serious[sly taboo
1052 M: [you think yeh, think SILLY of thinking it yourself and you
1053 M: think yo[u're the] only one to think it and then actual-she she
1054 L: [yeh silly]

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1055 M: writes it down and you think a:h (2.75)
1056 R: a:h if I put a paper-a brown paper bag over the cover and I gave you that
1057   novel to read would you know that it was chick lit (2.06) ((group
1058   nodding))Yeh?
1059 K: [[yeh yeh I think so
1060 J: [[yeh
1061 M: [[yeh
1062 B: [[yeh yeh but the cover is off putting is[n't it
1063 K: [yeh but it-it would be good to not
1064   have the preconception before you start readin[g it because y'know as soon
1065 B: [yeh]
1066 K: as you see that the cover you know=
1067 B: =it looks rubbishy somehow doesn't it it
1068   l[ooks
1069 M: [but [but
1070 K: [yeh so so y-y'know you kind of start reading it with that kind of
1071   mind set whereas it would be better if you could just start reading it with not
1072   having any kind of impression y'kn[ow not
1073 L: [yeh yeh definitely=
1074 B: =yeh yeh it's i[t
1075 M: [can
1076   you attempt to define chick lit then?
1077 R: (3.48) ((clears throat)) mmm yeh I'll do that in a bit
1078 ((laughter))
1079 J: You'd certainly-you'd want to go round reading it wrapped in a brown cover
1080   anyway you don't want anyone to know you're actually reading it
1081 ((laughter)) 3.49
1082 R: What do you think of tha[t, though what do you think to this
1083 L: [yeh but even without the cover, y'know before
1084   you're out of the first paragraph y'know when she says in the second
1085   sentence she says something like if I catch my reflection in shop windows I
1086   tend to scream with horror I mean that-that just says chick lit does[n't i]t, I
1087 B: [yeh]
1088 L: mean that's, or at the end of that paragraph when she says some hateful
1089   eating disorderly twig that wafts around in Prada smelling of sick I mean
1090   that's jus:[t t]hat's
1091 K: [yeh]
1092 L: really (.) I don't know just right there that para-that first paragraph, y-you
1093   would know even if it were a sombre cover of a storm and y'know like
1094   you'd be fool[ed
1095 B: [[yeh
1096 K: [[yeh
1097 <4 lines omitted>
1098 M: but she-she's a journalist isn't she?
1099 R: yeh
1100 M: yes so she's not a writer and maybe that's why i-in her book there are certain
1101   column-if I can say colum-er maybe er er excellent and some others that are
1102   not so good and maybe er that's er so that's er er (1.69)
1103 L: Yeh I-I liked it I mean y'know the first thing I thought was of she's it's-it's
1104   she's ironic y'know I mean there are s-so many books start, she's-she's

1105	saying well, erm she's describing something about the way she's going to
1106	tell her story, the way things are going to be told
1107 R:	yeh did that interest you=
1108 L	=y[eh yeh it did it did (.) yeh I liked
1109 K:	[did you read it in public=
1110 J:	=only only if I could
1111	cover it up y'know yes=
1112 K:	=yeh I know I took it to work and I was lik[e
1113 J:	[yes yes
1114	exactly exactly
1115 R:	did it alter your expectations of th-y'know the way a
1116	narrativee wor[ks?
1117 B:	[SORRY er sorry say that-what was that er the way it starts?
1118 R:	cos er Louise just said that erm the opening page in which the narrator says
1119	y'know this is the way I'm going to tell you my story did that-did that have
1120	like the effect of oh well this is different, is it different to how you expect a
1121	narrative to-y'know a book-a novel to start, how you y'know you introduce
1122	a character and=
1123 L:	=I didn't really have any expectations t[o tell you the truth
1124 M:	[no I didn't have any
1125 L:	before I start]ed this I didn't-I didn't know what I was, d[idn't k]now what it
1126 M:	expectations]
1127 K:	[mmm]
1128 L;	was gonna be like=
1129 J:	=and she says what she does is compassion I mean kind of-
1130	I'm very unsure about her honesty, I mean there's one thing is to be honest
1131	and another is to be truthful and I mean she's quite clear later on as she talks
1132	about Tamsin and one minute she's jealous of Tamsin but then she feels
1133	terribly smug because she's married and has two children and Tamsin hasn't
1134	s[he ma]kes it quite clear I suppose that's honesty but it does make it clear
1135 B:	[mmm]
1136 J:	that she feels erm she actually feels like she's quite a nasty person real[ly,
1137 L:	[that's
1138	frank yeh]
1139 J:	and erm but] at the beginning there she says that compassion is what she
1140	does I'm not sure that compassion is really what she does at al[l
1141 B:	[no:=
1142 J:	=y'know
1143	it's difficult to do compassion, ve[ry difficult we kno[w tha]t but (1.6)
1144 B:	[mmm] [mmm]
1145 R:	so how do you think that works then, y'know this-the way the female
1146	character y'know cos she's the central character, how does-how did that
1147	make you feel y'know was she what you (.) was she the kind of character
1148	that you thought yeh I quite like this or (.) th-the way in which sh-she's
1149	made, y'know she's made up
1150 K:	So many of the things at the beginning made me dislike her like I've just
1151	found a bit saying like you probably wanna know how I got my man I do
1152	feel quite pleased with myself sometimes actually I look at my friend
1153	Tamsin 34 single and desperate and I feel a warm glow of intense smuggery,
1154	like I just really hate t[hat it']s a horr[ible thing to say and]it was all littered
1155 J:	[mmm]

1156 B: [yeh yeh, yeh it is yeh]
1157 K: with stuff like that at the beginning and I really didn't like it y'know that's
1158   just an example=
1159 J: =yeh that's right there's a lot more around the Tamsin bit (.)
1160   w[here she appeared=
1161 L: =I don't remember the compassion part but maybe
1162   what=
1163 J: =no in that first bit you-in the first paragraph she says what she does is
1164   compassion
1165 L: I guess what I-I read that, what I meant-what I read ((clears throat)) what I
1166   thought when I read that was what she was saying is that she's a caretaker,
1167   that she takes care of peop[le er I don't]I don't think it was about
1168 J: [mmm mmm]
1169 L: ((clears throat)) deep-dee[p compassion but more that she tends to be the
1170 M: [yeh yeh she's er]
1171 L: person who takes care everybody[y and er
1172 J: [yep she has a different interpretation of
1173   the word compassion, cou[ld well be, yes] could well be yep (2.19) [because
1174 L: [yeh, I think so bu[t
1175 J: [because it's a powerful word
1176   and it's a word that means a lot more than caretaking isn't it y'know it's
1177   downgrading it if we just turn it in[to c]aretaking which I think she
1178 L: [yeh]
1179 J: does do, chaotically, but she does y'kn[ow
1180 L: [taking care of people you mean=
1181 J: =well
1182   kids, y'know the world sh[e does
1183 L: [mmm her frien[ds
1184 J: [and of course her friends are
1185   terribly fond of her they-they seem to like her y'know she has lots of friends
1186   and she-she's someone who does engage with all the people that she meets
1187   in a kind of cheerful gossipy way that is engaging (.) it is the world over
1188 M: yeh (3.30)
1189 R: so obviously er no-one likes the kind of cover design and er
1190 ((laughter))
1191 R: d-you- what do you think that says to you as a potential book buyer
1192 K: it looks like-it looks like the cover of a book that I'd have read when I was
1193   about twelve[e y']know that *Angus Thongs And Full Frontal Snogging*
1194 B: [yeh]
1195 K: which was one of my favourite books when I was a teenager
1196 B: yeh it does look like a teenage sort of book
1197 B: doesn't i[t
1198 K: [do you know that book then ye[h
1199 M: [no I do[n't=
1200 R: [yes I d[o yeh
1201 J: [what's it called?
1202 K: *Angus Thongs And Full Frontal Snogging*
1203 M: aah
1204 R: it's teen chick lit
1205 J: missed i[t yes
1206 K: [yeh (.) yeh so it just reminds me of that yeh
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1207 R: yeh (1.45) so what (.) would you-would you if you saw that on a shelf for
1208   example you're gonna buy your frozen peas and you've got to go past the
1209   display in tesco's, if you go to tesco's for example, would it-and y'know
1210   (.)you thought I need a book, I need a book woul[d you
1211 J: [absolutely not a[bsolutely
1212 B: [n[o
1213 L: [no I wouldn't
1214   even check it out from a library no=
1215 J: =no no[t at all no
1216 L: [I might read it incidentally if it
1217   were lying around somewhere where I was, and sort of in the environment or
1218   something bu[t
1219 J: [and there was nothing els[e to read and
1220 L: [but I wouldn't erm based on the
1221   cover, based on the cover y'know y'know if I saw another-y'know if had-if I
1222   saw another book of <u>hers</u> I might pick it up and look through it and say
1223   mmm might I like this, but actual-I mean this cover doesn't really do it
1224   justice, I mean it's not really what it's <u>about</u> (.) well I guess it sort of is but
1225   (.)

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