

Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May: A Feminist Pragmatic Analysis of Prime Minister's Questions

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Abstract

This study takes a combined feminist post-structural discourse analysis (Baxter, 2003) and Feminist Pragmatic Analysis (Christie, 2000) approach to investigating the discursive constructions of gender identities and authority by women Prime Ministers. Based on data collected from Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) sessions during the premierships of Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May, this analysis explores how Thatcher and May conform to, adapt, or resist their institutionally prescribed placements within these discourses. I find that both Thatcher and May discursively construct moments of power for themselves via a combination of stereotypically feminine and masculine interactional styles, including the use of rapport management strategies (Spencer-Oatey, 2008) and patronising behaviours. A secondary analysis of newspaper articles reporting on their performances explores how their use of these gendered linguistic behaviours informs representations of their abilities as Prime Minister, and how the standards of femininity by which they are judged have evolved over time. I find that both Thatcher and May were described using role trap discourses (Kanter, 1993) to evaluate their performances in relation to existing gender role stereotypes, and both women were negatively evaluated for a perceived lack of stereotypical feminine behaviours.

1.0 Introduction

There are 650 seats in the modern House of Commons of the United Kingdom. Between the passing of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 and 2023, there had only ever been 564 women elected to the House of Commons (Buchanan, 2024). In over a century since women were first legally allowed to stand as Members of Parliament, there were not enough women elected to fill every seat. In the same time frame, 4,752 male MPs were elected to Parliament (Buchanan, 2024). The composition of the House of Commons historically has been overwhelmingly male.

Throughout the past two decades, the number of women elected at each general election has continued to rise, and the latest (2024) general election resulted in the highest ever number of sitting women MPs, accounting for 40% of the House of Commons (Kelly, 2025). However, just because women MPs are reaching numerical equality does not mean that they may participate equally inside the Chamber, or are represented equally outside of it. Through centuries of habitual use, the discursive norms that have become normalised as professional norms inside the House of Commons continue to be associated with “male-oriented patterns of behaviour” (Walsh, 2001: 1). Furthermore, House of Commons discourses are characterised by a high degree of contestation and verbal aggression that is “culturally coded as masculine” and “not well accepted from women” (Lovenduski, 2012: 322).

There exists a problem, therefore, in that women MPs are denied access to the same interactional repertoire as their male contemporaries (Shaw, 2000: 416). Yet, women MPs who do not attempt to engage with the discursive norms of the House of Commons risk being “judged negatively against the masculinised norm” (Childs, 2004: 9). Cameron (2020: 32) refers to this phenomenon as the “likeability-competence dilemma”: women in a masculine community, such as the House of Commons, are trapped between displaying the same level of competence as men and being judged as unlikeable, or they may concede to being likeable but have their competence and authority questioned.

This PhD study explores the impact of this double bind on two women Prime Ministers of the UK, Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May. In particular, this study seeks to answer three research questions, which I will introduce one at a time in the next section.

1.1 Research Questions

- 1) How do women Prime Ministers navigate the 'double bind' between political authority and femininity?

The interactional styles stereotypically associated with femininity place an emphasis on politeness, deference, and collaboration (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 574). Thus, it can be difficult to construct an 'authentic' feminine gender identity from a position of authority without seeming incompetent. The position of women Prime Ministers is further complicated by the fact that political debate has been normalised as a masculine index. Therefore, for a woman to appear as an effective political leader is to betray preconceived notions of gender essentialism and risk suffering negative evaluations from colleagues and constituents. Using the examples of Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May in Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) appearances, this study explores the ways in which women Prime Ministers conform to and deviate from both political and gendered speech norms in order to discursively navigate gendered identities and powerful positions.

- 2) How do the interactional behaviours of women Prime Ministers affect the way they are represented in newspapers?

The ways in which Thatcher and May engage in PMQs debates is only one metric by which gender-based access to discursive norms should be measured. As Cameron and Shaw (2016: 134) determined, the behaviours of politicians is "more strongly gendered in reception than it was in production". If a woman Prime Minister fully complies with the discursive norms of the House of Commons, but is judged to be unlikeable as a result, this cannot be considered indicative of gender-based equality. It is necessary to consider the ways in which Thatcher and May are evaluated in conjunction with their communicative behaviours in order to examine the full impact of the aforementioned double bind. Newspapers were chosen as a source of data for this study given the influence that news publications have over the distribution of knowledge (van Dijk, 1996: 97; Smirnova, 2009: 79). Therein lies another advantage of choosing PMQs as a locutionary event to explore the behaviours of Thatcher and May; according to former Speaker of the House, John Bercow

(2012: 6), PMQs is the “shop window of the House of Commons” and dominates media coverage of Parliamentary proceedings. The PMQs performances of Thatcher and May are likely to be reported upon in newspapers, and the framing of these events forms the basis upon which readers will develop their own evaluations and opinions.

- 3) Have the standards of femininities by which women Prime Ministers are evaluated evolved over time?

As McElhinny (1998: 322) argues: “it seems clear that who we think can do certain jobs changes more rapidly than expectations about how these jobs should be done”. Hence why the double bind facing women politicians still persists; the presence of women in the House of Commons does not instantly eliminate historical and cultural associations between political discourses and masculinity. Yet, the increased presence of women should theoretically serve to slowly and progressively normalise the involvement of women in political discourse events (Norris and Lovenduski, 2001: 2). As such, it is worth noting that there was a span of 40 years between Thatcher’s election as Prime Minister in 1979 and May resigning as Prime Minister in 2019. Within that time frame, the composition of the House of Commons changed significantly. When Thatcher was elected in 1979, she was one of only 19 women in Parliament. When May was assumed office in 2016, she was one of 192 women Members. This constitutes an increase from 3% to 30%, thus raising the possibility that the ways in which women politicians are perceived and evaluated could have evolved, both inside and outside the Chamber. The final objective of this study is to examine variations between the ways Thatcher and May are represented in newspapers, to explore the possibility that attitudes towards women Prime Ministers have changed over time.

1.2 Thesis Structure

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 of this thesis provides a review of existing literature. This begins with a discussion of some of the theoretical frameworks applied to this study: social constructions of gender and the theory of communities of practice. It then

introduces the key frameworks of analysis adopted by this study: feminist post-structural discourse analysis and feminist pragmatic analysis. The remaining sections of Chapter 2 provide research context, respectively reviewing existing language and gender research in the areas of professional identities, political discourses, and media representations of women.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for this study. It describes the collection of PMQs and newspapers data, and how this data was prepared for analysis. There is an emphasis on my use of corpus linguistic methods to select data for analysis, as therein lies much of the methodological innovation for this study. Rather than adopt a conventional approach to corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis, this study uses corpus linguistic tools to analyse newspaper data, which then informed the collection of PMQs data.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are analyses chapters, each focusing on a different area for investigation. Chapter 4 explores the approaches Thatcher and May take to rapport management in PMQs, with Section 4.1 examining rapport-enhancing behaviours and Section 4.2 examining rapport-challenging behaviours. Chapter 5 focuses entirely on Thatcher and May's use of patronising behaviours in PMQs. Chapter 6 analyses the representation of Thatcher and May in newspapers, paying particular attention to the use of gender stereotypes and role trap discourses such as those theorised by Kanter (1993).

Chapter 7 provides a discussion of these analyses in relation to wider research and my research questions. Chapter 8 draws some final conclusions and discusses the impact of this study.

2.0 Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of existing research in fields relating to this study. The first four sections detail analytical approaches and frameworks that this study adopts. Section 2.1 explores social constructivist approaches to gender identity and their uses in the field of language and gender. Section 2.2 considers the community of practice (CofP) framework as a method of analysing the influence of interactional setting on the interpretation of negotiated identities. Section 2.3 covers critical discourse analysis approaches, and my reasons for choosing a feminist post-structural discourse analysis (FPDA) approach for this study. Section 2.4 discusses feminist pragmatic analysis (FPA) and explains the ways in which I have expanded Christie's (2000) original model.

The final three sections of this chapter cover research in the field of language and gender within professional and institutional contexts. Section 2.5 explores the construction of professional identities by women managers, with an emphasis on the importance of relational practice (RP). Section 2.6 discusses language, gender, and political discourses, including within the House of Commons as a CofP. Section 2.7 considers media representations of women politicians and how they are routinely influenced by gender role stereotypes. Finally, Section 2.8 combines existing research on Margaret Thatcher, Theresa May, and other women global leaders.

2.1 Constructions of Gender

This study takes a dynamic, social constructivist approach to gender identities, adopting the perspective that gender is socially constructed rather than an innate characteristic. Sunderland and Litosseliti (2008: 4) argue that gender is "not fixed but something interpreted", highlighting the significance of interaction in the construction of gender. Researchers have viewed gender as an action, whereby 'doing' gender is the execution of socially and culturally guided activities (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Christie, 2000; Baxter, 2006).

Butler's (1990: 34) model of gender performativity summarises this concept, as they argue that "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; [...] gender identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results". Butler's (1990) performativity is inspired by poststructuralist and phenomenological philosophies, citing Simone de Beauvoir's (1953: 273) assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman". By adopting this perspective, Butler (1990: 152) views gender as something almost aspirational, a "kind of becoming" rather than a static condition. A performative approach to gender allows gender identities to be viewed as fragmented and transient, the achievement of successfully negotiated positions within interaction.

Gender identities can be considered to be achieved through the "stylized repetition of acts through time" (Butler, 1988: 520). These acts are done "in accord with certain sanctions and proscriptions", suggesting that the interpretation of these acts is reliant on socially prescribed understandings of gendered norms and ideological expectations (Butler, 1988: 525). Language may be seen as one of these acts, allowing linguistic behaviours to be a contributing factor to the performance of gender. Using the performativity model, language can be placed on a scale of masculinity-femininity as it is "produced within an ideological system that regulates the norms and conventions for 'appropriate' gendered behaviour" (Mills and Mullany, 2011: 41).

Cameron (1997: 50) argues that performativity treats people as "active producers rather than passive reproducers of gendered behaviour", allowing men and women to engage willingly in "acts of transgression, subversion and resistance" against gendered norms. For the same reason, Walsh (2001: 16) has criticised performativity as an "untenable" framework, accusing Butler of overemphasising the value of agency and the "constitutive nature of discourse while ignoring material constraints" and other sociocultural influences. However, performativity should not be conflated with the premise that gender identity is an unhindered choice. Butler (1993: ix) discredits the analogy of a person selecting their gender like a garment from a closet, arguing that a subject who "decides *on* its gender, is clearly not its gender from the start and fails to realize that its existence is already decided *by* gender." While they maintain that gender is a site for critical agency, Butler (2024) reiterates the importance of appreciating the influence of normative behaviours:

If norms can be said to form us, that is only because some proximate, embodied, and involuntary relation to impress is already at work. Norms act upon a sensibility and susceptibility at the same time that they give it form; they lead us to feel in certain ways, and those feelings can enter into our thinking even as we might well end up thinking about them, asking, “Why do we feel this way rather than that?””

(Butler, 2024: 30)

Butler (1988: 528) also acknowledges that “culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism”, suggesting that subversive gender acts, while possible, are liable to incite social discord. This has significant ramifications when considering historical perceptions of hegemonic masculinity and femininity; specifically, the relationship between femininity and subordination. Consider, for example, West et al.’s (1997) arguments:

Our thesis is that gender is accomplished *in* discourse. As many feminist researchers have shown, that which we think of as ‘womanly’ or ‘manly’ behaviour is not dictated by biology, but rather is socially constructed. And a fundamental domain in which gender is constructed is language use. Social constructions of gender are not neutral, however; they are implicated in the institutionalised power relations of societies. In known contemporary societies, power relations are asymmetrical, such that women’s interests are systematically subordinated to men’s.

(West et al., 1997: 119-20)

West et al. (1997: 135) argue that women’s use of language is informed by this asymmetrical power relation. Coates (2004: 6) summarises a history of variationist studies into language and gender, arguing that women’s language has been defined as “weak and unassertive”, and used for “perpetuating male dominance and female oppression”. An early example of this is found in Lakoff’s (1973: 48) argument that women are socialised to use ‘superpolite’ language that ensures they are “systematically denied access to power”. Lakoff (1973: 48) also proposed a double bind for women, where they must either conform to expected standards of femininity and be discredited as “unable to take part in a serious discussion” or transgress gender norms and be “ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine”. Lakoff (1973) relied mainly on anecdotal evidence to make these claims, but Carli (1990) reported a similar double bind when observing discussions in mixed gender focus groups. The women in her study used more ‘tentative’ language than the men,

including tag questions, hedging, and disclaimers, and when participants were asked to rate their perceptions of these discussions, Carli (1990: 949) found that women who used this tentative language were rated as more likable, but less competent.

There exist, therefore, pervasive beliefs about how language *should* be used by men and women, often typified by access to power and assertive language, and speakers may experience negative evaluations for deviating from these expectations. Holmes and Stubbe (2003) compiled a list to summarise some of these stereotypes:

Table 2.1: Widely cited features of “feminine” and “masculine” interactional style

Feminine	Masculine
Indirect	Direct
Conciliatory	Confrontational
Facilitative	Competitive
Collaborative	Autonomous
Minor contribution (in public)	Dominates (public) talking time
Supportive feedback	Aggressive interruptions
Person/process oriented	Task/outcome oriented
Affectively oriented	Referentially oriented

(Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 574)

Such a list is not meant to be comprehensive, and Holmes and Stubbe (2003: 574) acknowledge that simplifying and dichotomising interactional styles is “clearly misleading”. However, it forms a convenient starting point for researchers “to see deeply entrenched societal stereotypes and norms in action” (Mills and Mullany, 2011: 53). Using a social constructivist approach, researchers do not use these behaviours to differentiate between men and women, but to explore how the use of behaviours such as these contributes to the performance of stereotypical masculinity or femininity.

When considering the contributions of interactional style to the construction of gender, it is also beneficial to consider Ochs’s (1992) framework of gender indexicality. Ochs (1992) argued that language could index gender, either directly or indirectly. Direct indexicality often refers to lexical items indicating gendered referents, such as personal pronouns (Ochs, 1992: 343). Indirect indexicality occurs when language is not overtly coded with a gender, but “helps to constitute the image of gender” (Ochs, 1992: 343).

The behaviours cited in Table 2, as examples of stereotypical interactional style, can be said to indirectly index stereotypical masculinity or femininity. This indexical approach has been employed in social constructivist studies such as Holmes (2006) and Mullany (2007), exploring gender and leadership in professional workplaces. However, it should be noted that indexicality may also be used to explore non-hegemonic gender identities; for example, Barrett's (1997) discussion of 'bar queen speech' from gay men and drag queens in gay bars, Bucholtz's (1999) examination of nerd girls in high school, and Jones's (2012) study of a lesbian hiking group. It is essential, therefore, to consider gendered performances in direct relation to the norms that influence them. These norms are highly contextual, and researchers such as Mills (2003a: 5) have advocated for the importance of exploring language and gender at the local level, such as within a community of practice, as defined in the next section. This allows for an exploration of how identities are constructed at the level of discourse as it is performed within a gendered environment.

2.2 Communities of Practice

The community of practice (CofP) framework was developed by Lave and Wenger (1991: 29) to explore the acquisition of "knowledge and skills" that allow "newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community". Membership to such a community is not assured on the basis of proximity or predetermined social categories, it must be negotiated and maintained through practice (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999: 179; Davies, 2005: 557). Wenger (1998: 73) claims that the type of practice that defines a CofP has three crucial dimensions:

1. mutual engagement
2. a joint enterprise
3. a shared repertoire

Mutual engagement requires interactions between members, and therefore requires that members have access to those interactions. Inclusion in interaction is of greater importance than geographical proximity (Wenger, 1998: 74). Mutual engagement in these interactions contributes to the negotiation of a joint enterprise: the enterprise is not joint

because it is experienced uniformly by all participants, but because it is the “collective product” of all those involved (Wenger, 1998: 79). In turn, this gives rise to a shared repertoire: a joint understanding of “resources for negotiating meaning” (Wenger, 1998: 82). These resources include the discursive practices by which members both “create meaningful statements about the world” and express “their forms of membership and their identities as members” (Wenger, 1998: 83).

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1999: 186) expand on this, suggesting that the CofP framework is a convenient model for exploring identity since “individuals make sense of themselves and others” through their engagement in a joint enterprise. Bucholtz (1999: 210) agrees that “identities are rooted in actions”, and by recognising that members are “oriented to the same practice, though not necessarily in the same way,” the CofP framework allows for the flexible nature of identity.

Davies (2005: 560) argues that the CofP framework revolves around “the importance of doing” with a particular emphasis on “doing things in a way which reinforce membership in that community of practice”. The practices that define a CofP carry a meaning that members “negotiate with one another”, allowing individuals to continuously assure their membership by participating in the socially agreed upon practice (Wenger, 1998: 73). However, Wenger (1998: 54) also argues that “negotiating meaning is not constructing it from scratch”: the meaning of a practice is “not pre-existing”, it is constructed and dynamic, “but neither is it simply made up”, it is based on context and previous experience. This concept has been compared to Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of habitus by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1999: 189), who argue that the styles prevalent in a CofP are “likely to have become second nature”, and Bucholtz (1999: 205), who claimed that the instinct to act in a certain way is “inculcated in each individual through implicit and explicit socialization”.

Thus, the shared repertoire that partially defines a CofP includes a set of social norms and styles of speaking that are perpetually negotiated and enforced by the CofP membership. Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999: 174) describe this as “the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence”, whereby speakers learn the particular styles of a CofP. However, neither this language acquisition nor CofP membership should be considered in absolute terms. The degree to which speakers participate in a practice is proportional to “the extent

to which they belong” in a CofP (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999: 175). To distinguish between degrees of membership, Wenger has identified four types of participation:

- full participant, effectively an “insider”
- full non-participant, effectively an “outsider”
- peripheral participant, whose participation is “enabled by non-participation”
- marginal participant, whose participation is “restricted by non-participation”

(Wenger, 1998: 167)

A full participant is considered a core member of a CofP, someone who maintains their membership “through participation in community practices” (Davies, 2005: 565). For peripheral participants, non-participation “is seen as an opportunity for learning”, but for marginal participants it is seen as “a barrier to full participation” (Davies, 2005: 565).

Bergvall (1999: 279) argues that peripherality leads to greater “diversity”, arising from membership in “a number of overlapping social communities of practice”. Likewise, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1999: 189) suggest that the peripheral status of CofP members may be used to “seek or avoid diversity, conflicts, or contradictions” between multiple communities.

While peripheral participants may either choose to progress inward and become core members or remain peripheral, marginal participants are denied that choice, so “membership is not simply about practice, it is also about acceptance” (Davies, 2005: 567). Davies (2005: 571) argues that there must be a “process of gate-keeping” that differentiates marginality from “legitimate” peripheral participation, thereby managing access to full participation. This process, in turn, demands “some form of hierarchy”, where membership is reliant on “being accepted by those who have status” (Davies, 2005: 571-3).

Davies (2005: 574-6) also argues that, within a CofP, the use of “alternative practices is subject to group acceptance or rejection” and the presence of this potential barrier to participation is symptomatic of “an internal structure and hierarchy” that hasn’t yet been adequately allowed for in the current CofP model. Eckert and Wenger (2005: 582) responded by emphasising the “important distinction between hierarchy and acceptance”: the term

'hierarchy' implies a formal structure of power and it would be an "oversimplification" to presume a uniform power structure exists across all communities of practice.

However, Moore (2006: 612) argues the importance of remembering "the reality of the inequities of status which exist within social communities". Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992: 483) consider one of these inequities in terms of "privileging": once the practices of the core members have become accepted as shared norms, those members become privileged. The privileged embody their own norms, "towards which everyone else orients", affording the privileged a position of dominance (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 483). Moore (2006) also explores this concept of dominance by elaborating upon Eckert's (1996) exploration of sociolinguistic iconicity. If an individual adopts a particular style and is seen as having "prototypical status as a CofP member", it follows that such an individual might play a "more dominant role within the CofP", with other community members attempting to replicate their style to enforce their own status as core members (Moore, 2006: 617). Based upon her observations of communities of practice in an English high school, Moore (2006: 633) determined that, even in the event that a speaker is privileged and afforded status as a sociolinguistic icon, this is the result of a "complex negotiation of practices which are not only shared, but jointly constructed". Power within a CofP is negotiated and communally agreed upon based upon social norms.

Even if the concept of a formal structure of power being present in all communities of practice can be disputed, there remains the issue of acceptance. Participants may still be marginalised due to sociolinguistic incompetence, where they lack the appropriate style that is required for membership, or it may be they are simply denied access to legitimate participation. As Eckert and Wenger (2005: 583) argue, "legitimacy in any community of practice involves not just having access to knowledge necessary for "getting it right", but being at the table at which "what is right" is continually negotiated". Thus, legitimacy is constructed by those members who already have "access to meaning and to meaning-making rights" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1999: 473). As previously noted, the negotiation of meaning may, at least in part, be dependent on recognised conventions and what is already familiar. As a result, the denial of access to legitimate participation may be the result of factors external to the community of practice, such as sex and gender identity.

If, as Bergvall (1999: 283) advocates, communities of practice are considered “against the backdrop of strong social stereotypes and ascriptions about gender”, the possibility of gender-role stereotypes and sex-based discrimination must also be taken into account.

Given that the social norms of the House of Commons as a CofP were exclusively negotiated by men, and House of Commons membership continues to be dominated by men, these norms have become normalised as indexes of masculinity (Shaw, 2000: 402; Walsh, 2001: 1; Wilson and Irwin, 2015: 38). The joint enterprise of the House of Commons can therefore be considered, in very broad terms, a way of ‘doing’ politics and of ‘doing’ masculinity, subjecting women within this community to the kind of double bind identified by Lakoff (1973: 48): they either risk negative evaluation for performing more of a hegemonic masculine identity or they reject the shared repertoire of the community, bringing into question their political and professional competence. If this marginalisation of women is institutionalised by the CofP, this may indicate that constructions of feminine gender identities have not been legitimised by the CofP. The rejection of feminine speech styles as an equally valid way of doing politics may be indicative of gender-role stereotypes that serve to exclude women from political communities of practice.

Using the CofP approach in this study allows for a more thorough exploration of the role of agency in the construction of gender identities and community membership. The CofP framework allows for individuals to be defined in terms of non-participation in the community as well as their participation, so the identity of women politicians is not an absolute state of being, but rather a reflection of the extent of their engagement in the social norms of parliamentary behaviour at any given time.

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis Approaches

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) facilitates “the explicitly political agenda of raising awareness about the ideological frameworks informing language choice, and the way that subjects may be constructed, represented and positioned by discourse” (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 44). CDA researchers routinely consider ‘discourse’ as it is conceived by Foucault (1972: 49), as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”.

Fairclough (1992: 12) has therefore described discourse as “shaped by relations of power and ideology”, whereas Sunderland (2004: 6) argued that discourse can be seen as “*carrying* ideology”. A CDA approach to research examines the relationship between language use and the ideologies and social practices which govern that use. In particular, CDA can be an effective tool for exploring how roles and identities are negotiated in conversation, rather than participants fulfilling roles assigned to them prior to the interaction.

Lazar (2007) has advocated for the need for a specifically feminist approach to discourse analysis, intended to investigate the interplay of gender and power in discourse. The ultimate goal of this feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) is “social emancipation and transformation”, achieved through exploring the role of discourse in “sustaining (hierarchically) gendered social arrangements” (Lazar, 2007: 141). FCDA relies on the interpretation of gender as a factor in hegemonic power dynamics: women are routinely relegated to a subordinate position by virtue of their sex (Lazar, 2007: 146). Therefore, FCDA is a method of exploring how gendered norms systemically contribute to unequal access to discursive options, generating relations of power which “privilege men as a social group, and disadvantage, exclude, and disempower women as a social group” (Lazar, 2007: 145).

Given that this framework operates under the presumption that social interactions are gendered in accordance with a patriarchal hierarchy, Lazar (2007: 146) concedes that practical applications of FCDA “cannot [...] pretend to adopt a neutral stance”. Lazar (2007: 150) asserts that interactional performances of gender create “hierarchal differences”, meaning that to ‘do’ gender is also to ‘do’ dominance/subordination. However, in her work on feminist post-structural discourse analysis (FPDA), Baxter (2003) emphasises the importance of agency in negotiating power dynamics. Baxter (2003: 31) argues that, rather than speakers being subject to institutionally prescribed placements within discourse, speakers may use their positioning to adapt or resist these discourses. As a result, power dynamics within discourse are “continuously fluctuating” and create moments of power and powerlessness for all speakers (Baxter, 2003: 44). Under this framework, it is not presumed that women will assume a powerless position, but rather may occupy a less privileged position within a combination of discourses (Baxter, 2003: 8). This perspective challenges the

idea that women are “uniformly disempowered”, instead suggesting that discursive agency is entirely context specific and easier for some speakers than others (Baxter, 2003: 99).

One of the aims of this study is to explore how women Prime Ministers discursively create positions of power and powerlessness in relation to socially constructed gendered identities. It is for this reason I have chosen FPDA as the preferred framework of discourse analysis for my exploration of gender and authority in PMQs: to explore linguistic choices as both a cause of and reaction to shifting power relations.

2.4 Feminist Pragmatic Analysis

Verschueren (1999: 2) argues that the “traditional components” of linguistic phenomena, including linguistic sound (phonology), linguistic meaning (semantics), and linguistic structure (syntax), cannot on their own account for the full range of communicative functions that manifest in naturally occurring conversation. Pragmatics is not an additional component in meaning-making, but a perspective that links the use of those language resources to “human life in general” (Verschueren (1999: 7). He argues that pragmatic research is not simply a question of how language resources are used, but how language functions in the lives of human beings (Verschueren, 1999: 8). Christie (2000: 74), in developing feminist pragmatic analysis (FPA), aimed to consider “the way in which the functioning of language interacts with, arises from, or is constitutive of gender”.

My use of FPA, as was Christie’s, is to consider the strategic use of language resources to shape meaning not just as it is literally conveyed but also as it is interpreted. Since FPA combines the pragmatic perspective with social constructivist theories of gender, gender identities are perceived to be an effect of language as it is interpreted rather than a fixed factor in determining linguistic behaviour (Christie, 2000: 34). The interpretation of meaning as it is triggered by language use allows for the negotiation of identity to be considered “in very context-specific ways, at the level of what individuals bring to interactions” (Christie, 2000: 193). As Cameron (1998: 452) argues: “men and women make their own interactions, but not under conditions of their own choosing”. By acknowledging that particular assumptions about language use and gender are likely to influence interpretation, FPA can

be used to examine “the relationship between socio-culturally situated language use and language users”, and by extension, the positioning of speakers within discourse (Christie, 2000: 191).

It should be noted that my use of the term “strategic” stems from the sociolinguistic use as it is explained by Tannen (1994: 47): linguistic strategies are simply “a way of speaking”. The specific language resources used are not necessarily a conscious choice, but nor should they be considered a strictly unconscious choice. It may be presumed that language resources are employed for a specific communicative goal and that, if questioned, speakers would be able to justify their choices (Tannen, 1994: 47; Christie, 2000: 82). This subliminal choice should not be considered as the negation of linguistic agency: since a multitude of linguistic strategies may achieve the same communicative goal, the choice of one strategy over another may reveal speakers as “agents who are actively using available linguistic resources for specific ends” (Christie, 2000: 158). Through FPA, the ways in which speakers employ linguistic strategies to navigate their social position through discursive means can be explored.

Christie (2000: 2) acknowledges that the concepts of pragmatics and feminism are both complex and changing phenomena, “the boundaries of which are constantly being renegotiated”. In light of recent developments in the field of pragmatics, as well as the field of pragmatics and gender, I have expanded Christie’s original model of FPA. My analysis takes a pragmatic approach to presupposition, incorporates Neo-Gricean theories of implicature, and as well as Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory of politeness, I include Spencer-Oatey’s (2008) concept of rapport management and Culpeper’s (2011) impoliteness.

2.4.1 Presupposition and Implicature

Both presupposition and implicature are ways of conveying meaning beyond that which is explicitly stated, yet the two phenomena remain distinct. In her model of FPA, Christie (2000: 131-2) argues that presupposition derives from the conventional meaning of language items, whereas implicature are generated based upon expectations of standard conversational behaviour.

Presupposition is often considered in terms of truth conditions, being “very generally defined as that which the speaker assumes to be true as opposed to what he asserts to be true” (Kempson, 1975: 54). Huang (2011: 401) expands this definition, stating that this assumed truth is one which is “taken for granted” and therefore does not need to be stated, but does need to be accepted as a precondition for the main proposition of an utterance. Both Kempson (1975) and Huang (2011) illustrate this concept by drawing upon Russell’s (1905) example of a denoting phrase: *The king of France is bald*. In order to consider the veracity of whether or not the king of France is bald, one must first believe that there *is* a king of France. This proposition was not explicitly asserted in the sentence *The king of France is bald*, but can be said to be presupposed.

Crucially, presuppositions remain true even when the sentence is negated (Atlas, 2006: 30). Consider the following example:

- (a) The king of France is bald
 >> There is a king of France

- (b) The king of France is **not** bald
 >> There is a king of France

In either case, the presupposed element remains the same.

Levinson (2000: 111) argues that presuppositions are “attached to their lexical or syntactic triggers”; presuppositions are triggered by the use of certain lexical items or linguistic constructions. In the above example, “the king of France” is a definite noun phrase which triggers the presupposition that such an entity exists (Yule, 1996: 27). Huang (2011: 402) identifies other presupposition triggers, such as cleft sentences, temporal clauses, change of state predicates, and factive predicates, each of which may be tested under negation.

However, researchers such as Saeed (2003: 101) have argued that this “automatic relationship” between language resources and conventional meaning is merely one way of approaching presupposition. Saeed (2003: 109) refers to this “truth-relations approach” as semantic presupposition, but also describes a pragmatic approach to presupposition, which takes interactional context into account. A semantic approach to presupposition may result

in ‘failure’ if the triggered presupposition is not universally known to be true, as is the case for Russell’s (1905) famous example, *The king of France is bald*. Given that there is no king of France, the presupposition *There is a king of France* is known to be incorrect, so the sentence *The king of France is bald* is liable to result in a “communication error” if it were used in conversation (Saeed, 2003: 105). By adopting a pragmatic approach to presupposition, cases of presuppositional failure such as *The king of France is bald* may be explained: the presupposition *There is a king of France* is not a quantifiable truth condition, but a statement of what the speaker believes to be true (Saeed, 2003: 109).

Polyzou (2015: 127) expands upon this argument, referring to the “taken-for-granted-ness” of presuppositions: they are not just a statement of belief, but a belief “which *ought* to be shared”. Polyzou (2015: 127) argues that such assumptions are not always marked by presupposition triggers and cannot always be identified by negation, and so advocates for a broader definition of presupposition, “in which case all shared knowledge necessary for discourse comprehension is presupposed.” Adopting this approach helps to avoid the “narrow TC [truth condition] definition of presupposition and look more broadly at the ideologies as social systems of belief triggered in discourse” (Polyzou, 2015: 127).

For this study, I have adopted more of a pragmatic approach to presupposition, as described by Saeed (2003) and Polyzou (2015). The examples of presupposition in my analysis are identified as examples of discourse carrying a belief, and this belief must be accepted as true before further analysis of implicature or im/politeness strategies (as defined in the next sections) can be performed.

Grice’s (1989: 25) theory of implicature is also a means of distinguishing an implied meaning from the “conventional meaning of the words” of an utterance. Whereas presuppositions are ‘background’ propositions encoded within an utterance, implicature require inferential work to interpret, and can drastically change the meaning of an utterance.

Grice (1989) identified two main types of implicature, conventional and conversational, both generated in distinct ways. Conventional implicatures are triggered based upon the conventional meaning of the words used, with Grice (1989: 25) providing the following example:

(c) He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave.

Through the conjunction “therefore”, it is implicated that his bravery is a consequence of his being an Englishman, even though this causal relationship was not explicitly stated (Grice, 1989: 25). Grice’s (1989: 46) examination of conventional implicatures was brief in comparison to that of conversational implicatures, and he admitted that the concept of conventional implicatures require further examination “before any free use of it, for explanatory purposes, can be indulged in”.

Levinson (1983: 128) acknowledges attempts to reduce conventional implicatures to “matters of entailment, conversational implicature or presupposition”. Kempson (1975: 219) determined that the generation of implicature is a matter of linguistic performance as opposed to competence, and so it is possible to conclude that “the set of conventional implicatures does not contain any members at all.” Likewise, Bach (1999: 328) refers to conventional implicature as “a myth”, arguing that locutions that may be said to generate a conventional implicature are instead vehicles for performing second-order speech acts. However, Levinson (1983: 128) disagrees, arguing that “a very large number of deictic expressions” may be said to have “conventional implicatures as a central meaning component”. Levinson (1983: 128) argues that these deictic items are often used in the generation of conversational implicature, but such meanings are encoded by way of conventional implicature, and so a distinction between the two should be recognised.

Conversational implicatures, by comparison, are triggered upon a deviation from the expected standards of conversational contribution (Grice, 1989: 26). Grice (1989: 26) attempted to define a prescribed set of rules for these expected contributions, labelled the Cooperative Principle based on the premise that communication is typically a cooperative effort between interactants who have a mutual desire to understand each other. Grice’s rules, referred to as maxims, fall under four main categories:

Quantity: –

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true –

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Relation: Be relevant.

Manner: Be perspicuous –

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

(Grice, 1989: 26-7)

Strict adherence with all these maxims would theoretically result in highly efficient communication; flouting one or more of these maxims generates a conversational implicature. This model has been criticised for the assumption that interactional participants have an equal desire to be cooperative and share communicative goals, and that their attitudes towards these maxims are not influenced by socio-cultural factors (e.g. Fairclough, 1989; Harris, 1995). Sarangi and Slembrouck (1992: 132) consider the impact of asymmetrical power relations on cooperative behaviour and determine that it is the more relatively powerful participant's "definition of what's true which gains the upper hand". They cite instances of people requesting help from bureaucrats, social workers, and police officers, and suggested that communicative conflicts arose due to the more powerful speakers declining to do the inferential work required to access implicatures generated by the less powerful participant.

For this reason, I am adopting Horn's (2004; 2010) neo-Gricean approach to implicature. The maxim of Quality is retained as "unreducible", but the rest of Grice's maxims are reduced into the Q-principle, "say as much as you can (given the R-Principle)", and the R-principle, "say no more than you must (given the Q-Principle)" (Horn, 2004: 13). Implicatures are still generated based upon whether expected contributions to conversation were made, but there is not the presumption that these contributions were intended to be cooperative in the Gricean sense. Interactions are not interpreted in relation to efficiency, but the impact of implicatures on alternative interactional goals, such as navigating interpersonal relationships or negotiating power dynamics, may be examined.

Ochs (1992) also found links between power and willingness to do inferential work in a study of motherhood in Samoan and American communities. Ochs (1992: 349) argues that American mothers will make “quite a bit of communicative accommodation” to attempt “conversation-like interactions” with infant children. This desire to verbally communicate requires adapting their own speech to make it accessible to young children, and also a lot of inferential work to interpret their child’s attempts at verbal communication. In contrast, Samoan mothers were not found to make accommodations when speaking to young children (Ochs, 1992: 350). Ochs (1992: 355) proposed that Samoan mothers “are typically the highest status caregivers present” and so their refusal to do the inferential work required to interpret implicatures is an index of this status.

In a comparative study of the use of implicature from men and women in familial settings, Rundquist (1992: 445) determined that men in her study flouted Gricean maxims and generated implicature with greater frequency than the women. She argued that these implicatures served as “attention-getting strategies” and were a means of doing power by asserting control over a conversation (Rundquist, 1992: 446). Thus, she concluded that implicatures were more of a “hierarchical way of viewing conversation” than “a way to connect with others” (Rundquist, 1992: 446).

The proposed correlation between implicatures and power dynamics has important implications for the study of gendered styles of leadership. Given that the discursive norms of male-dominated work spaces have “become naturalized as simply professional practices”, women in these environments face contradictory expectations between being professional and appearing to conform to expectations of gender essentialism (Talbot, 2010: 196). Authority in these contexts is normally performed through direct language, but as this is seen to index masculinity, women leaders may be negatively evaluated for adopting the same discursive style (Carli, 1999: 86). Carli (1999: 87) argues that women leaders are denied access to this kind of legitimate power, but it is considered more acceptable for women leaders to exert a relationship-based style of “referent power”, where power stems from being liked. This results in situations where the use of implicature as a linguistic strategy for avoiding conflict becomes a more ‘feminised’ way of doing authority.

An example of this is found in Troemel-Ploetz's (1994) study of women managers in workplace settings. She found that women managers would flout maxims of quantity and manner to be more indirect with their communication, a behaviour which she called "camouflaging a dominant speech act" (Troemel-Ploetz, 1994: 200). She provides the example of a woman manager instructing her male subordinate to attend a meeting by saying, "I invite you to go, but feel free to leave at any time" (Troemel-Ploetz, 1994: 201). The most efficient method of communicating this would have been an order, "*you have to go*", but this meaning is implicated rather than conventionally stated. Troemel-Ploetz (1994: 203) argues that the camouflage of this order as an invitation "seemingly leaves more options for the addressee", but the addition "feel free to leave at any time" presupposes that the addressee will be attending and implicates that the invitation was not genuine. Troemel-Ploetz (1994: 204) also notes that this invitation was accompanied by "more cushioning", namely logical reasoning and explanations as to why attendance is necessary, to position the addressee "more like an equal than a subordinate".

Macaulay (2001) and Small et al. (2007) also observed the use of implicature and indirection by women in workplace environments, determining that women may encounter resistance to the use of direct behaviours. Section 2.5 contains a more thorough examination of language, gender, and professional identities, but the above examples have been included here to demonstrate the possible uses of implicature and indirection in negotiating power. The uses of implicature and indirection in navigating interpersonal relationships is explored further in the next section, covering linguistic politeness.

2.4.2 Politeness

The conversational maxims included in Grice's (1989: 28) Cooperative Principle presume two conditions: firstly, that speakers will be "rational", and secondly, that the purpose of conversation is a "maximally effective exchange of information". Brown and Levinson (1987: 55) consider why, if speakers are rational, they would express themselves through implicature generated by an apparently irrational use of language. They argue that a possible

motive is politeness, and that their proposed Politeness Theory is a tool for “investigating the quality of social relations in any society” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 57).

Brown and Levinson’s (1987) model of politeness is premised on conceptualising speakers in relation to two properties: rationality and face. They define rationality as a “precisely definable mode of reasoning from ends to the means that will achieve those ends”, thereby agreeing with Grice’s suggestions that rational speakers employ specific linguistic strategies as a means of achieving communicative ends (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 58). Their conceptualisation of face is derived from the work of Goffman (1967: 5), who defines face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself”. Face is a construct, a hypothetical extension of the self to which a person typically feels an emotional attachment (Goffman, 1967: 6). Rational speakers, according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 61), will assume reciprocal cooperation in maintaining face during interactions, since participants experience “mutual vulnerability of face.” One method of maintaining face is through the use of politeness strategies.

To explain how face may be conversationally maintained, Brown and Levinson (1987) conceptualise face as two primary desires:

Negative face: the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others.

Positive face: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others.

(Brown and Levinson, 1987: 62)

Certain types of interaction may threaten the face wants of the speaker and/or addressee, leading to illocutionary acts which Brown and Levinson (1987: 65) refer to as face-threatening acts (FTAs). They propose that FTAs may be either on record or off record. Off record FTAs are communicated by deliberately inviting conversational implicatures, affording the speaker a degree of deniability (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 213). On record FTAs are performed when participants are aware a threat to face wants was intentionally communicated. An on record FTA may be done baldly, meaning it was done in “the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 69). Alternatively, an on record FTA may be modified by redressive action, defined as “attempts

to counteract the potential face damage of the FTA” by indicating in some way that the face threat was not intentional or desired (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 69-70).

Redressive action takes the form of politeness strategies oriented towards protecting either positive face wants or negative face wants. Positive politeness strategies correlate with the need for “positive self-image” and the avoidance of conveying a negative evaluation (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 70). Negative politeness strategies attempt to satisfy the desire for “self-determination” and the desire for minimal interference with freedom of action (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 70).

The use of linguistic politeness is commonly accepted as an index of femininity (Lakoff, 1973; Cameron, 2006; Holmes, 2006). Lakoff’s (1973: 53) observations of “women’s language” predates both Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory and social constructivist attitudes towards gender identity, yet she argued that women are socialised into using politeness strategies such as hedges and tag questions in order to conform to culturally prescribed sanctions of femininity. Later politeness studies, such as Brown’s (1980) exploration of politeness in a Mayan community and Holmes’s (1995) observations of speech communities in New Zealand, provide further evidence for the idea that women use more polite language than men. While these studies treated sex as a fixed biological characteristic, they reveal a correlation between gender and politeness that helps reveal how consideration for the face needs of others could be interpreted as an index of femininity. Cameron (1997: 57) argued that it is not the use of politeness strategies in and of themselves that constitutes a feminine performance, but the use of linguistic strategies to create an “egalitarian” interaction.

This observation represents a crucial argument for gender and politeness research. Politeness has been associated with femininity since women’s interactional styles are stereotypically believed to be “more cooperative, more person-oriented” (Cameron, 1992: 72). However, Brown and Levinson’s (1987) conceptualisation of politeness theory focuses solely on politeness as a method of face-saving rather than a resource for navigating interpersonal relationships. For this reason, in conjunction with politeness, my pragmatic analysis also incorporates Spencer-Oatey’s (2008) theory of rapport management (see Section 2.4.3).

Another reason I am not exclusively adopting Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness is that it is predicated upon a "bias towards 'concern for other'" (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2008: 111). Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) presume a mutual agreement between interlocutors to protect face wants, but this is not always the case in the context of parliamentary debates. Considering interactions in terms of rapport management as well as politeness allows for a more nuanced understanding of how rapport between interlocutors may be enhanced or challenged independently of attitudes towards face wants.

2.4.3 Rapport Management

Spencer-Oatey (2008: 13) argues that Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory "overemphasised the notion of individual freedom and autonomy" and "ignored the interpersonal or social perspective". In response, she proposed a model of rapport management to conceptualise "the management of harmony-disharmony among people" which encompasses the management of three interconnected components: face, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 13).

Spencer-Oatey's (2008) use of face is also based on Goffman (1967). She argues that face relates to "a person's sense of identity or self-concept", but that this includes a sense of self as an individual, self as a group member, and self in relationship to others (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 14). As such, the desire for positive evaluation extends beyond the person as an individual to a community the person claims or seeks membership of. This concept of collective face-sensitivity is significant within political contexts, where politicians not only claim membership of but claim to be representative of political parties (see section 2.6.1 for more on the importance of facework in political discourses).

Sociality rights and obligations relate to "behavioural expectations" specific to an interaction (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 15). Specifically, Spencer-Oatey (2008: 16) proposed two fundamental types of sociality rights: equity and association.

Equity rights relate to an entitlement to "personal consideration from others" and a desire to be "treated fairly" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 16). Equity can be broadly considered in

relation to two scales: *cost – benefit* (the extent to which a person is exploited against the benefit of complying) and *autonomy – imposition* (the extent to which “people control us or impose on us”) (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 16).

Association rights relate to an entitlement to “social involvement with others”, with consideration to the type of existing relationship between interlocutors (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 16). Association relates to a scale of *interactional involvement – detachment* (the extent to which we associate/dissociate from others), so that interlocutors feel they are receiving “an appropriate amount of conversational interaction”, being neither ignored nor overwhelmed by conversation (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 16). Additionally, association relates to *affective involvement – detachment*, “the extent to which we share concerns, feelings and interests” in a bid to create solidarity/intimacy (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 16).

Finally, interactional goals are the specific goals speakers have when they interact with others, which may include relational goals and transactional goals (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 17). Interactional goals influence rapport between interlocutors because “any failure to achieve them can cause frustration and annoyance” (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 17).

Spencer-Oatey (2008: 17) argues that rapport between interlocutors can be threatened in these three primary ways: face-threatening behaviour, rights-threatening behaviour, and goals-threatening behaviour. This model is distinct to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness as it allows for interpersonal relationships to be affected even without the performance of FTAs. Additionally, Brown and Levinson (1987) consider FTAs primarily in relation to speech acts, whereas Spencer-Oatey (2008: 19) argues that acknowledging sociality rights and interactional goals influences the impact of certain speech acts on face wants. For example, Brown and Levinson (1987) consider orders and requests to be an inherent threat to the addressee’s negative face wants, but Spencer-Oatey (2008: 19) argues that in some situations “we may feel pleased or even honoured” to be asked for help, as it is a sign of “acceptance as a close friend”. Alternatively, Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that compliments can be face-enhancing speech acts as they obviously express approval of the addressee, yet Spencer-Oatey (2008: 20) argues that a compliment may indicate “a more intimate relationship” than the addressee is comfortable with. In such a situation, rapport

may be damaged because the addressee feels their sociality rights, specifically the right to non-association, have been threatened.

Another component of Spencer-Oatey's (2008) model of rapport management is the acknowledgement that speakers will not consistently or uniformly have the same attitudes towards rapport. As such, she proposes that speakers adopt one of four types of rapport orientation:

1. Rapport enhancement orientation: a desire to strengthen or enhance harmonious relations between the interlocutors;
2. Rapport maintenance orientation: a desire to maintain or protect harmonious relations between the interlocutors;
3. Rapport neglect orientation: a lack of concern or interest in the quality of relations between the interlocutors (perhaps because of a focus on self);
4. Rapport challenge orientation: a desire to challenge or impair harmonious relations between the interlocutors.

(Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 32).

Within the field of language and gender, there is an advantage to distinguishing between politeness and rapport management. Particularly within workplace settings, rapport enhancement strategies, characterised by affective involvement, have been seen as a way for women leaders to exert influence within a community (Litosseliti, 2003: 133; Mills, 2003b: 74). Mullany (2011: 66) has advocated for the integration of a rapport management framework into the CofP approach, with the intention of exploring the relationship between gender identities and workplace culture. I have adopted a similar approach to this study, aiming to explore how rapport management techniques influence the construction of identities within the House of Commons as a Community of Practice.

2.4.4 Impoliteness

Brown and Levinson (1987: 97) considered impoliteness to be synonymous with rudeness and the result of a when a speaker "doesn't care about maintaining face". Bousfield (2008) also conceptualises impoliteness in relation to face wants, determining that it is "the broad opposite of politeness":

... rather than seeking to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs), impoliteness constitutes the communication of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening acts (FTAs) which are purposefully delivered: (i) unmitigated, in contexts where mitigation is required, and/or, (ii) with deliberate *aggression*, that is, with the face threat exacerbated, 'boosted', or maximised in some way to heighten the face damage inflicted.

(Bousfield, 2008: 71-2).

Culpeper (2005: 37) argues that impoliteness is distinct from bald on record face-threat, preferring the term “face-attack” in acknowledgement of the fact that impoliteness is not simply a lack of redressive action. He determined that impoliteness occurs when a speaker “communicates face-attack intentionally”, the hearer interprets “behaviour as intentionally face-attacking”, or both (Culpeper, 2005: 38). He later revised this definition to remove intentionality, stating instead that “impoliteness is a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts” (Culpeper, 2011: 23). Likewise, Mills (2003a: 122) has argued that impoliteness must be viewed as “an assessment of someone’s behaviour rather than a quality intrinsic to an utterance”. While Culpeper (2011: 135) has proposed a list of conventionalised impoliteness formulae, including insults, criticisms, and negative expressions, the list is not intended to be exhaustive and formulae will not be universally interpreted as impolite. If, as Bousfield (2010: 114) asserts, we are “socialised into understanding and constructing and projecting meaning”, then interpretations of impoliteness are dependent on social norms and the norms of a community of practice.

Mills (2009: 1059) suggests that, at any one time, there will be a range of different “notions of appropriateness circulating” within a CofP. Beliefs about what constitutes appropriate behaviour, even within the same CofP, may vary dependent on socially conditioned understandings of gender and identity. Stereotypically gendered behaviour norms become a factor in interpreting appropriateness, and therefore impoliteness (Mills, 2005: 264). An example of this can be found in Pizziconi and Christie’s (2017) study of impoliteness from an indexical perspective. They considered the use of swearwords in a workplace setting, and determined that this behaviour is justified when “ratified by an aspect of social identity (i.e. the speaker is male and working class)”, but women’s use of swearwords in the same situations was often found to be “inauthentic” and “unjustified” (Pizziconi and Christie, 2017: 164).

Another example can be found in Sung's (2012) observations of men and women's behaviours in a board-room setting. Sung (2012: 294) determined that men and women demonstrated "similarly confrontational behaviour", which was considered "appropriate" for the CofP, but only women were criticised for being "inappropriate and impolite". This conclusion reflects findings that conventional impoliteness, even when institutionally sanctioned by the CofP, may be more strongly associated with normatively masculine styles of leadership and are considered inappropriate for women (Mills, 2005: 272; Holmes, 2006: 142; Mullany, 2007: 86).

It should also be acknowledged that impoliteness is not an absolute quality, but should be considered on a "continuum" (Kienpointner, 2008: 244). Culpeper (2011: 98) relates types of impoliteness, as differentiated by second-order, metalinguistic labels, to scales of "gravity" and "symbolic violence" depending upon the reactions they tend to evoke. Verbally abusive behaviours are deemed to be high-gravity behaviours with a high degree of symbolic violence, since they are likely to result in great offence taken (Culpeper, 2011: 98). In contrast, patronising behaviours were identified as low gravity, with a low symbolic violence, as they seem to involve "minor face-related offences which might well have been overlooked" (Culpeper, 2011: 95).

Also on this scale of politeness-impoliteness is mock impoliteness, a non-genuine instance of impoliteness manifesting when "conventionalised impoliteness formula mismatches the context" (Culpeper, 2011: 207). Mock impoliteness is often thought of as 'banter' and is recognised as a factor in creating and reinforcing in-group solidarity (Leech, 1983: 144; Culpeper, 2011: 209; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012: 1099). Slugoski and Turnbull (1988: 104) theorise that a crucial factor in differentiating impoliteness from mock impoliteness is a reciprocated intimacy, which they refer to as the "Affect factor". When there is a high degree of Affect, "insults are more likely to be interpreted as banter" (Culpeper, 2011: 209). Dynel (2008: 258) also suggests that banter demonstrates "acceptance by the group" and proves "in-group membership". In particular, banter has been associated with the performance of a hegemonic masculinity (Gregory, 2009: 327; Matulewicz, 2016: 128). Hein and O'Donohoe (2014: 1309) describe banter as a "'winning'

style of masculinity”, suggesting that banter can be a way of doing impoliteness that is not only accepted but acclaimed within male-dominated communities of practice.

Similarly, im/politeness mismatches can be used to mock politeness, where conventionally polite utterances generate impolite implicature (Leech, 1983: 144; Culpeper, 2011: 155). Such behaviours may be given metalinguistic labels such as patronising, condescending, or sarcastic, and Culpeper (2011: 194) argues that these behaviours are more likely to be interpreted as impolite when accompanied by asymmetrical positions of power. These interpretations of impoliteness stem from speakers discursively positioning themselves as more competent than their addressee (Taylor, 2021: 582).

However, the use of mock politeness has also been associated with the performance of stereotypical masculinity. In a study of married couples, Buss (1989: 745) found that women were more likely to feel condescended to than men. Katz et al. (2004: 187) found that the perceived gender of a speaker influenced the interpretation of utterances, with the same comments “rated as more sarcastic when made by a male than when made by a female”. They argued that these interpretations were a possible result of participants applying their “stored “knowledge” (stereotypes) of men and women” (Katz et al., 2004: 187).

Taylor (2017) also explored participants’ reactions to mock politeness, including how their evaluations of the utterance varied based on the perceived gender of the speaker. Taylor (2017) provided participants with short texts describing the behaviour of a speaker where either the word *bitchy* or the word *sarcastic* had been removed and asked participants to suggest a label to fill in the blank. When the word *sarcastic* had been removed, participants were more likely to suggest “sarcastic” as a substitute if they believed the speaker to be male (Taylor, 2017: 439). When the word *bitchy* had been removed, participants suggested the labels “rude”, “bitchy”, and “sarcastic” as substitutes with nearly equal frequency if they believed the speaker to be female, but the top three suggested labels for male speakers were “rude”, “random”, and “sarcastic”, and “bitchy” was never suggested (Taylor, 2017: 437). As a result, Taylor (2017: 440) concluded that “females are being judged more unfavourably than males” for the same behaviours. This further serves to prove that implicational impoliteness indexes a masculine identity, and a woman utilising these behaviours is more likely to be negatively evaluated.

In this study, I aim to examine how impoliteness, both conventional and implicational, functions in Prime Minister's Questions. Within the House of Commons as a CofP, "systematic impoliteness, in the form of utterances which are intentionally designed to be face-threatening, is not only sanctioned but rewarded", so the position of speakers within the community is negotiated based upon their compliance with these impolite norms (Harris, 2001: 466). Mock impoliteness has previously been deemed a demonstration of in-group membership; I argue that within the context of Prime Minister's Questions, mock politeness may serve a similar function. The use of patronising or condescending behaviours identifies a target for ridicule and invites backbench MPs to participate in the interaction in the form of collective interruptions (barracking). This constitutes an act of solidarity as Members are united in their opposition to the target. As a sanctioned use of impoliteness, mockingly polite behaviours are not only a way of negotiating powerful positions but also establishing in-group membership.

2.5 Language, Gender, and Professional Identities

Holmes and Stubbe (2015: 53) determine that, in a workplace setting, people face the dual goals of "getting things done efficiently while constructing and maintaining collegial relationships". These objectives may be respectively labelled as transactional and interpersonal when considered in isolation, yet there is significant overlap since "good workplace relationships facilitate many aspects of work" (Holmes and Stubbe, 2015: 53). As such, workplace leaders have been observed utilising both stereotypically masculine behaviours, such as directives and assertiveness, and stereotypically feminine behaviours, such as more collaborative and affectively-oriented behaviours (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 594; Marra et al., 2006: 257; Mullany, 2007: 167).

However, Holmes et al. (2017: 6-7) argue that "masculine discourse styles have been institutionalised as ways of speaking with authority", and so styles that "have indexical value for leadership" are also aligned with a performance of stereotypical masculinity. As a result, Marra et al. (2006: 256-7) argue that women leaders face the added "challenge of combining "doing leadership" with "doing gender"", attempting to avoid evaluations that they are

either “too masculine or not authoritative enough”. This double bind has also been identified by Holmes (2006: 184) and Mullany (2007: 175), who both observed instances of women leaders being negatively evaluated for a supposed non-conformity with stereotypical perceptions of women’s interactional styles.

The double bind faced by women leaders is summarised by Cameron (2007):

The problem is not that men and women have different communication styles, but that whatever style women use, they are liable to be judged by different standards. Women are obliged to walk what Janet Holmes [2006: 35] calls a ‘tightrope of impression management’, continually demonstrating their professional competence while also making clear that they have not lost their femininity – that they are not, for example, aggressive or uncaring.

(Cameron, 2007: 141)

Section 2.5.1 explores how women leaders have been found to navigate the apparently contradictory requirements to do authority and do femininity through the use of relational practice. Section 2.5.2 specifically covers the use of humour as relational practice and how this indexes power and gender. In Section 2.5.3 I introduce the glass cliff model, examining how women leaders may be subject to additional scrutiny as they are disproportionately represented in supposedly ‘precarious’ leadership positions.

2.5.1 Relational Practice

Fletcher’s (1999: 31) concept of relational practice (RP) is premised on relational theory, which suggests a model of “adult growth and achievement” based on “connection, interdependence, and collectivity”. Fletcher (1999: 31-2) argues that because this model is characterised by “the preeminence of connection”, relational activity is often assigned to women and is viewed as “women’s work”. One of the primary types of RP Fletcher (1999: 48) identified is *creating team*: “creating and sustaining group life in the service of project goals”. This type of practice involves “attending” to the needs of the individual and the collective, both through “practices that acknowledged others’ unique preferences, problems, feelings, and circumstances” and fostering “collaboration and cooperation” (Fletcher, 2005: 99-100).

This use of RP has been strongly associated with linguistic politeness, since attendance to the other and the collective can be conceptualised in relation to face wants and sociality rights, particularly the desire for positive self-image and the entitlement to affective interactional involvement (e.g. Holmes and Marra, 2004; Holmes, 2006; Mullany, 2006). Cameron (2006: 71) argues that women who utilise politeness strategies in this manner are often erroneously considered to be “seeking connection or good social relations *rather than* status”, but RP has been found to be an effective strategy for doing leadership. One example of RP commonly explored in women’s leadership research is small talk.

Fletcher (2017: 85) claims that small talk is an important tool to “oil the wheels of collegiality” within the workplace. This assertion is supported by Holmes and Stubbe (2015: 100), who argue that small talk enables people “to pay appropriate attention to the positive face needs of their colleagues” and, even in small doses, “serves as an acceptable, formulaic nod towards collegiality”. They also determined that small talk can be used to mitigate power by reducing social distance between interlocutors, therefore the management of small talk is a way in which “superiors constitute their organisational control” (Holmes and Stubbe, 2015: 107).

Mullany (2006; 2007) has examined small talk as a way of indexing feminine identities within workplaces CofPs. Small talk is often trivialised for its predominant use in social rather than transactional interactions and has been associated with femininity for similar reasons (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 579). Yet, Mullany (2006: 72) observed women managers using this “stigmatized, stereotypical form of feminized discourse” in efforts to “strategically and effectively” foster solidarity and perform in-group membership. As such, within these CofPs, small talk has been sanctioned as a distinctly feminised way of doing power. However, Mullany (2007: 204) also determined that this did not insulate women from being negatively evaluated on the basis of also incorporating stereotypically masculine strategies. As such, the “persistence of gender ideologies and stereotypes” continues to place women at a “distinct disadvantage in the professional workplace” (Mullany, 2007: 204).

2.5.2 Humour

Humour has also repeatedly been identified as an effective form of RP by scholars such as Holmes and Marra (2004), Schnurr (2008), and Holmes and Schnurr (2014). Schnurr and Omar (2021: 198) determine that humour in a workplace setting serves various functions, such as “motivating the team, solving conflicts and managing disagreements, creating group cohesiveness, and making criticisms more palatable”. As such, humour “is particularly useful for the performance of leadership” as it can be an exercise of authority and RP, “often at the same time” (Schnurr and Omar, 2021: 198).

Mullany (2007) has identified four analytical categories of humour:

- Humour to create/maintain solidarity and collegiality
- Repressive humour
- Subversive humour
- Rivalrous humour

(Mullany, 2007: 90)

These categories can be broadly mapped onto stereotypically gendered interactional styles: humour to create solidarity and repressive humour reflect a collaborative style associated with a stereotypically feminine style, and subversive and rivalrous humour reflect a more challenging and competitive style of interaction associated with more stereotypically masculine identities (Holmes, 2006: 117; Mullany, 2007: 90). However, these associations are not absolute, and a CofP approach helps identify these linguistic strategies as gendered indexes. For example, Holmes (2006: 117) provides the example of “teasing humour” as a type of rivalrous humour used by teenage girls to perform “conventionally feminine, peace-making functions”. An understanding of how socially prescribed understandings of gendered behaviour interacts with the norms of a CofP is therefore important in interpreting interactional functions.

Holmes and Stubbe (2003) compared the use of humour by women managers in stereotypically “feminine” and “masculine” workplace CofPs. They argued that a strongly gendered workplace culture does not result in the absolute adoption of a singularly gendered interactional style, but rather that the women in their study “blend”

communication strategies in ways more “appropriate to the norms of their workgroup” (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 588). In the “feminine” workplace, one woman was observed using humour in a “collaborative and mutually supportive” way, to “reassert the solidarity of the group after a meeting in which she has needed at times to be assertive” (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 587). This reflects the findings of Holmes and Schnurr (2014: 171), who determined that humour can be used to “do femininity” by “playing down status differences” in interactions where a more overtly authoritative display would index a more stereotypically masculine style.

In the “masculine” workplace, one woman used a more aggressive and “competitive” humour to “develop and maintain her credibility with her male subordinates” (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 589). This is an example of repressive humour, where power may be “exercised through consent” (Mullany, 2004: 20). This type of jocular humour aimed at subordinates is a way of enacting institutional power, but minimising status differences has a mitigating effect face-threatening and face-attacking implicatures. In a study of chair-people in workplace meetings, Mullany (2004: 34) found that repressive humour as a mitigating strategy was “favoured by female chairs”, but there were no instances of male chairs performing this behaviour.

This is not to suggest that repressive humour is the only sanctioned way for women to do leadership in a male-dominated environment. Holmes and Schnurr (2005) observed one woman manager contesting the masculinised norms of her workplace CofP by using self-deprecating humour to perform collegiality. This specifically involved negative self-evaluations on the basis of her gender identity, but trivialising her own competency in a humorous way contributed to a “friendly and positive working atmosphere” so this woman manager could act “without fearing she will lose respect or status” within the CofP (Holmes and Schnurr, 2005: 143). Stereotypically feminine uses of humour can therefore be used to uphold community norms or “challenge predominantly masculine norms”, dependent on the CofP (Schnurr, 2008: 314).

Repressive humour may be characterised by the unequal power relationships between superiors and their subordinates. It disguises face-threatening speech acts such as criticisms and orders, but it is significant that even without this redressive action, these acts would not

necessarily be considered impolite: a superior providing feedback or setting tasks would not be considered inappropriate for a workplace CofP interaction. In contrast, subversive and rivalrous humour both correlate with utterances aimed at someone of an equal or superior status, allowing “risky opinions to be expressed” that may otherwise have caused more offence (Mullany, 2007: 89). It also reveals the “dark side” of humour which contradicts previous assumptions that humour performs affiliative functions (Schnurr, 2009: 55). This use of humour works as a distancing strategy, but still mitigates offence, since humour has a “softening effect on even the most corrosive comment” (Holmes and Schnurr, 2005: 130).

This use of humour bears similarities with implicational impoliteness such as mock im/politeness. Despite research linking banter to collegiality, Mills (2003a: 124) questions insincerity as a characteristic of mock impoliteness, instead arguing that implicational impoliteness allows for “someone to utter something close to their true feelings in an exaggerated form” while still, at least on a surface level, posing as “non-serious”.

Implicational impoliteness as a form of rivalrous humour is readily apparent within the House of Commons, where “joking and sarcastic comments” are a celebrated form of “wit and verbal eloquence” meant to “reinforce in-group solidarity and inter-group dissent” simultaneously (Ilie, 2017: 319). Shaw (2020: 92) agrees that these behaviours “assert a high level of competence and confidence” yet are also shown to “reinforce fraternal networks”. Shaw (2020: 92) suggested that women MPs were more reluctant to perform these behaviours, and so are excluded from these discourses, constructing “women as peripheral members of the CoP”.

One of the aims of this study is to explore the ways in which women political leaders engage with the norms of the House of Commons as a CofP. RP techniques have been considered a way of maintaining a feminine performance and doing power, yet within the House of Commons this behaviour is more indexical of a stereotypically masculine performance. By identifying uses of rivalrous humour, this study explores how women political leaders negotiate gender identities and in-group power dynamics within the House of Commons.

2.5.3 The Glass Cliff

Women's under-representation in leadership positions is rarely disputed in literature. Kanter (1993: 68) argued that one possible explanation is a kind of homosocial reproduction, whereby managers are inclined to select candidates with similar demographic characteristics as themselves for leadership positions. The concept of there being an "invisible barrier" restricting women's professional advancement was popularised by a 1986 article in the *Wall Street Journal* describing this obstacle as a "glass ceiling" (Eagly and Carli, 2007: 4). While some research indicates that the number of women promoted to executive positions is rising despite the continued questioning of the effectiveness of women leaders (e.g. Dreher, 2003; Caceres-Rodrigues, 2011), Ryan and Haslam (2005) proposed that women are over-represented in leadership positions in times of crisis. Their study of FTSE 100 companies found that women were more likely to be appointed to board positions during periods where companies were experiencing poor financial performance, and proposed that this phenomena was evidence of a metaphorical "glass cliff" (Ryan and Haslam, 2005: 87). They argue that these positions are precarious, and that women leaders atop a glass cliff "may be differentially exposed to criticism and in greater danger of being apportioned blame for negative outcomes that were set in train well before they assumed their new roles" (Ryan and Haslam, 2005: 87).

This conclusion is corroborated by Mulcahy and Linehan (2014: 435) in their study of all companies reporting a loss on the UK stock exchange in the years 2004-2006: companies experiencing the biggest losses were likely to have a greater percentage of women board members. Mulcahy and Linehan's (2014: 436) study did not focus solely on new appointments, but determined that female representation could be increased "through diminished male presence". They found evidence of "men fleeing organizations they perceive to be too risky", whereas incumbent women directors remained in their precarious positions due to a lack of other employment options (Mulcahy and Linehan, 2014: 436).

Ryan and Haslam (2007) proposed several other explanations for glass cliff appointments. Aside from a manifestation of hostile sexism, they proposed it could also be a result of the kind of ingroup favouritism described by Kanter (1993). If decision makers are predominantly male, and they appoint fellow ingroup members to the most preferred jobs,

Ryan and Haslam (2007: 559) argue that leaves “women as expendable” and more likely to be assigned “leadership positions that are of dubious value and have an uncertain future.” Ryan et al. (2007: 190) argue that, in addition to women being scapegoated by decision makers, glass cliff appointments may also be the result of women accepting precarious leadership positions due to a lack of better opportunities. Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010: 449) found that women may be favoured candidates for glass cliff positions since, in times of crisis, “the stereotypically male ideal of leadership does not fit” and so women become the default option. This conclusion is dependent on there being a perceived variation in the leadership styles of men and women, where women are not preferred leaders in times of crisis due to their individual value, but simply because they are *not* men. Sabharwal (2015: 419) also cites perceptions of stereotypical interactional styles as a reason why women may face glass cliffs, particularly in male dominated industries. In her study of glass cliff appointments in Senior Executive Service positions, Sabharwal (2015: 419) found that women on a glass cliff in a male dominated environment did not receive the same level of support as men in a comparable position and cites a lack of influence and empowerment as contributing factors to women metaphorically falling off the cliff.

The glass cliff phenomenon exposes associations between women, leadership, and risk. Ryan and Haslam (2005) argue that while women in glass cliff positions may be subject to intense scrutiny, the existence of the glass cliff itself is rarely acknowledged. Should women fall off the cliff, they may be “singled out for blame and humiliation” without reference to the instability of the position they inherited (Ryan and Haslam, 2005: 88). For this reason, I argue it is important to consider the glass cliff metaphor when considering perceptions of Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May, who may both be considered glass cliff appointees.

Thatcher became party leader during a period of turmoil for the Conservative Party after appeals were made for the previous leader, Edward Heath, to resign. When the February 1974 general election resulted in a hung parliament, incumbent Prime Minister Heath had failed to secure a coalition with the Liberals, so Labour leader Harold Wilson had consequently become Prime Minister of a minority government. A second general election in October 1974 saw the Conservative Party lose even more seats, so Harold Wilson became Prime Minister of a majority government. Following these two losses, a Conservative Party

leadership election was held in 1975 and Thatcher became Conservative party leader. She then became Prime Minister at the following general election in May 1979 during a period of national turmoil, with high levels of unemployment and economic recession, and closely following Labour's 'winter of discontent' characterised by widespread strikes and industrial action. Ryan and Haslam (2005: 88) acknowledge Thatcher as an example of a woman politician atop a glass cliff, but do not explore the influence of the glass cliff on the experience of women political leaders, instead suggesting this as an avenue for future research.

Theresa May can also be considered a glass cliff appointee (Szucko, 2022). She became Conservative Party leader and Prime Minister after winning the 2016 leadership election, triggered by the resignation of David Cameron. Cameron resigned after the EU membership referendum resulted in a vote in favour of leaving the EU, a process referred to as 'Brexit'. May's position was undeniably precarious given the controversial result of the referendum, its influence on UK-EU relations, and the political polarization of the country, the government, and also the Conservative Party.

One of the objectives of this study is to explore the ways in which Thatcher and May are perceived, but the glass cliff model allows for the possibility that evaluations of Thatcher and May may be influenced by the precariousness of their positions. This study adopts the glass cliff model in order to more thoroughly analyse how Thatcher and May are perceived not only as women leaders, but women leaders in times of crisis.

2.6 Linguistic Practices in House of Commons Discourses

Debates in the House of Commons are characteristically highly antagonistic. Lovenduski (2014: 147-8) describes chamber debate as a "declamatory, adversarial style" reliant on "demagoguery, ruthlessness and aggression" which, crucially, are qualities which "have long been culturally accepted in men but not women". PMQs is of particular importance amongst parliamentary proceedings, as it is regarded as "a very public test of leadership" (Reid, 2014: 47). Participating in this adversarial style in PMQs is not only one method of MPs engaging with the shared repertoire of the House as a CofP, there is also added significance for party

leaders who find themselves in a “rhetorical contest in which character is on trial” (Reid, 2014: 48). Engaging with this shared repertoire becomes an indication of competence and a symbol of prestige (Ilie, 2010a: 60).

However, parliamentary debates, including PMQs, are subject to the rules of conduct outlined in Erskine May’s treatise on the law, privileges, proceedings and usage of Parliament (2019). This treatise is a source of constitutional conventions and is regularly cited by the Speaker of the House when chairing debates. Of particular import to the study of language in the House of Commons, the Speaker is expected to intervene in the case of “abusive and insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder” (Erskine May, 2019: 21.21) and to disallow defamatory accusations made against another MP, including allegations of false motives, misrepresentation of the language of another, and accusations of lying (Erskine May, 2019: 21.24).

As such, Members are expected to be confrontational, yet their language use is regulated by conventions protecting the positive face needs of other Members. De Ayala (2001: 150) describes this as a “parliamentary institutionalised hypocrisy” whereby Members are obliged to deliberately obscure their most severely face-threatening behaviours so as to maintain the appearance of civility. As a result, “politeness is given priority over clarity”: Members may still make face-threatening utterances, but are less likely to be reprimanded if the face-threat is implicated or heavily redressed (de Ayala, 2001: 161).

This creates a contradictory set of circumstances: Members are held to a standard of “respectful and parliamentary language” (Erskine May, 2019: 21.21) yet also display Community of Practice membership by demonstrating a more aggressive interactional style. This apparently paradoxical use of politeness has become “discourse-integrated” and normalised as simply a way of doing politics (Ilie, 2006: 193). Yet, it remains problematic for women MPs who continue to be subject to beliefs about how they “*should* perform occupational roles differently” (Walsh, 2001: 204). Complying with the polite linguistic standards of debate as they are written in Erskine May relegates women to peripheral members of the CofP, but engaging with the confrontational norms of debate leaves women vulnerable to negative evaluations for a perceived lack of femininity.

In the remainder of this section I will explore in more detail the importance of facework in political settings, the links between adversity and masculinity in House of Commons discourses, and the significance of critical mass theory to this study.

2.6.1 The Importance of Face

Given the competitive nature of political discourses, facework is an “integral communicative skill for any politician” (Bull, 2008: 343). Bull and Fetzer (2010: 164) identify three interrelated categories politicians must consider: “personal face, the face of the political party, and the face of significant others”.

It is imperative for politicians to protect their individual face needs, since their “political survival ultimately depends on the approval” of their constituents (Bull and Fetzer, 2010: 161). This places an emphasis on positive face, the desire for a positive self-image, since politicians must at least be liked and/or respected enough to win enough votes to be elected. A significant loss of face may result in politicians losing credibility amongst voters, or they may come to be “regarded as a liability” by the party they represent and be unable to stand as a member of that party at the next election (Bull and Fetzer, 2010: 161). In this way, the loss of face for an MP may be considered as a loss of face for their political party as a collective. Conversely, MPs are aligned with the policies and reputation of the party they represent, so criticisms or actions resulting in a loss of face for the party may also result in a loss of personal face. As such, politicians endeavour to protect face wants on both a personal and party level.

Similarly, politicians must be concerned with the face of significant others. This includes political allies whom a politician may wish to support because their face needs overlap in some way, either through party membership or a shared political endeavour (Bull, 2008: 338). Alternatively, ‘significant others’ may refer to political opponents, whom politicians will feel no obligation to support, or may actively be trying to discredit (Bull, 2008: 338). This relates to the adversarial nature of political discourses, where an advantage may be gained by weakening the position of an opponent. Therefore, Harris (2001: 466) notes that, in the

House of Commons, the best method the Leader of the Opposition has for enhancing their own face is to threaten that of the Prime Minister.

However, it should be noted that intentionally face-saving or -damaging interactions may have unintended consequences. For example, equivocation is a strategy frequently employed in interviews to avoid giving a face-damaging response, but Bull (2008: 339) acknowledges that a reliance on evasion may also be face-damaging as it gives politicians “an unenviable reputation for such slipperiness”. Watts (2003: 247) argues that redressing an on-record FTA may also be evaluated negatively, since “often, all it does is highlight the face-threat itself”. Similarly, bald on-record FTAs may also have a face-damaging effect on the speaker: Utych’s (2018: 91) study of negative affective language in political campaigns found that participants associated accusations with the attacker as well as with the target, leading to “more negative evaluations of both candidates”. In the specific example of misconduct, Utych (2018: 92) found that participants reported a more negative evaluation of the politician making the accusation than the one who stood accused.

Within the House of Commons, certain accusations or impolite behaviours may also result in an MP being reprimanded by the Speaker of the House for unparliamentary behaviour, resulting in a further loss of face. Harris (2001: 459) proposes several strategies for avoiding reproach from the Speaker, including avoiding positive accusations, such as “telling lies”, in favour of negative constructions, such as “cannot even tell the truth”. Another strategy is to perform FTAs off-record through the use of implicature, which also affords Members deniability if confronted with the impolite nature of their behaviour (Chilton, 1990: 221; Obeng, 1997: 72; Wilson, 2001: 400).

Harris (2001) also identifies negative politeness strategies, such as third person forms of address, intended to demonstrate deference and distancing. However, she also argues that such behaviours have become “established interactional conventions” and standards of im/politeness cannot be judged as they would be in other conversational settings (Harris, 2001: 469). Christie (2002) and Watts (2003: 232) arrive at similar conclusions, arguing that expressions that might otherwise be recognised as linguistic politeness are perhaps more accurately examples of “politic behaviour”. Murphy (2014: 101-2) discredits Harris’s (2001: 469) conclusions that Brown and Levinson’s conceptualisation of politeness strategies are

“largely absent” from PMQs, and that examples of politeness are merely politic, arguing instead that the application of politeness strategies was dependent on the relationship between speakers. Murphy (2014: 102) determined that “loyal” government MPs were unlikely to ask questions featuring impoliteness during PMQs, but that did not entirely prevent communicative conflicts; the Prime Minister did, albeit infrequently, have to perform FTAs in their answers to their own MPs, but they did so with mitigation. I would argue this is an example of the face of the political party being protected: disagreement amongst party members damages the face of the party as it demonstrates disunity, but a demonstration of politeness beyond the required levels of deference indicates cohesion amongst members.

These findings establish facework as an essential component of House of Commons discourses. Members may benefit from damaging the face needs of the Opposition, but follow established behavioural patterns to avoid damaging their own face. Furthermore, interactions between party members may be influenced by a need to protect the collective face of their party. The next section discusses the ramifications of these standards of behaviour on the ability of women MPs to engage with the discursive norms of the House of Commons as a CofP.

2.6.2 Adversity and Masculinity in Political Debate

The House of Commons is regarded as a masculinist community of practice, which Talbot (2010: 186) partially attributes to the exclusion of women from political domains for centuries while the conventional norms of the community were being established. Furthermore, the characteristic adversarial and competitive interactional styles are stereotypically recognised as masculine indexes in any context (see Section 2.1). Lovenduski (2014: 135) argues that PMQs in particular serves as a ritualised setting which privileges a traditional kind of masculinity, thereby symbolically signifying “that politicians are men who have repertoires of behaviour that are not available to women”. If women MPs were to participate in these masculinised discursive norms, they may find themselves negatively evaluated for behaviour that is “incongruent with gendered communicative norms relating to how women *should* speak” (Shaw, 2020: 12). However, to not engage with the norms of

the community of practice would relegate speakers to an outsider status. Lakoff (1973: 48) describes this situation as a double bind, wherein women find themselves subject to criticism regardless of their choice of linguistic behaviour and the resulting gender performance.

This double bind is not unique to the House of Commons, as it is perfectly illustrated in Fracchiolla's (2011) study of the first woman candidate to proceed to the second round of a French presidential election. In a televised debate, the woman candidate, "SR", was more direct with her FTAs than the remaining male candidate, "NS". Fracchiolla (2011: 2486) argues this was a strategic use of politeness from NS, to frame SR as acting inappropriately. She concludes that, since "SR cannot deny being a woman, NS's best strategy of attack consists of reminding the audience that she is one" (Fracchiolla, 2011: 2487). Even though SR was entirely compliant with the norms of political leadership debate, NS redefined her behaviours as unsuitable due to a perceived transgression of socially prescribed gender norms.

Stopfner (2018) has also identified references to gender as a method of undermining the contributions of women politicians in different global parliaments. In a study of heckling in the Canadian House of Commons, the French Assemblée Nationale, and the Austrian National Council, Stopfner (2018) found that when women politicians were interrupted, making overt references to her gender is used as a strategy to frame her contributions as insignificant. The examples of heckling in Stopfner's (2018: 628) study relied on traditional gender role stereotypes, including derogatory references to marriage and motherhood, sexualising speakers by wolf-whistling, and mocking their contributions as unnecessary chatter by "imitating chicken sounds". The assignment of these gendered characteristics combined with the literal silencing of women politicians invites the conclusion that the "female speaker does not need to be heard in parliament" (Stopfner, 2018: 631).

Stopfner (2018: 626) also lists examples of women politicians being mocked for the tone and pitch of their voice and cites Burkhardt's (1992) observations of the same behaviour in the German Bundestag. Wilson and Irwin (2015: 23) discuss how Thatcher was advised to lower the pitch of her voice in order to sound less "shrill" in a pre-emptive attempt to avoid similar criticism. They argue that this was one of the ways in which Thatcher indexed a

masculine gender identity, with another being the discursive style she adopted during PMQs. They analysed a small number of questions from throughout her premiership and determined that Thatcher skilfully employed standard political tactics “with no evidence of anything that might be described as female discursive strategies” (Wilson and Irwin, 2015: 35). Thatcher was demonstrating a knowledge of the “shared repertoire” of the House of Commons, leading Wilson and Irwin (2015: 38) to conclude that Thatcher was not hiding her gender as much as disguising it in an attempt to establish her membership in the CofP.

Wilson and Irwin’s (2015) argument is premised on only five examples, and relates solely to Thatcher’s performance as Prime Minister. Childs (2004) conducted interviews with women MPs elected in the 1997 general election, to collect opinions on the ways in which all MPs engage in House of Commons debates. Approximately two-thirds of the women in Childs’s (2004: 5) study believed that women MPs behaved differently to men, citing a greater emphasis on collaboration between MPs and empathy for constituents. One interviewee revealed she had been criticised by one of the whips for not doing “enough barracking and shouting”, while another complained that the less aggressive style adopted by many of these women was “judged negatively against the masculinised norm” (Childs, 2004: 9).

These findings present these women MPs as more compliant with the rules of debate as prescribed by Erskine May, as opposed to the behavioural norms within the House of Commons as a CofP. Christie (2002: 4.3) also found links between a “lack of transgressional behaviour” and the construction of feminine identities by women MPs. Christie (2002: 4.3) found that women MPs demonstrated a greater concern for the transactional norms of parliamentary discourse, and made a disproportionate number of apologies for “putative” offences that were not actually transgressive in the context of parliamentary debate. She argues this behaviour is not entirely agentive and may be related to “ascribed aspects of gender”, and the expectation that women would be more sensitive to the speaking rights of others (Christie, 2002: 4.3).

Ilie (2013: 502) concurs that disorderly and disruptive parliamentary behaviours “tend to exhibit gender-related asymmetries in parliamentary power balance”. Examples of this disorderly behaviour include interruptions and barracking; while not expressly forbidden by

Erskine May (2019: 21.37), shouting is always deemed “out of order or discourteous” and barracking is only sanctioned at the end of an utterance where it “offers no interruption of the speech”. Interruptions, therefore, may either be legal or illegal, but tend to take the form of a speech act, demonstrating either approval or support of a speaker or utterance, or challenges, accusations, or contradictions (Ilie, 2010b: 909). In this way, interruptions are a way of doing facework, supporting or contesting the face of a party or significant other. In the case of collective interruptions, members are united, either in support of an ally or in opposition of a rival, creating a team-building effect similar to that of RP and humour in other professional workplaces (see section 2.5).

Shaw (2000: 405) argues that interruptions, both legal and illegal, are also a way for speakers to do power in debate, by forcibly gaining the floor. Of all the legal interventions observed in her study, only 21% were performed by women MPs (Shaw, 2000: 412). Illegal interventions are a more effective way of demonstrating opposition or dissent, but only 10% of individual illegal interventions were performed by women (Shaw, 2000: 412). This research shows that the women MPs in this study demonstrated a greater concern for following the rules of the House, including not taking uninvited speaking turns. As a result, by not intervening as much, these women had restricted access to control of the floor. Additionally, it was only on very rare occasions that the Speaker of the House would reprimand an MP for speaking out of turn (Shaw, 2000: 414). This means that illegal interventions have been normalised and accepted as a way to gain power in debates, yet predominantly men were shown to take advantage of this (Shaw, 2000: 416). Shaw (2006: 97) suggests that this difference in behaviour might stem from women being seen as ‘interlopers’ due to their minority status, and so refrain from “rule-breaking or norm-challenging practices” in an attempt to be “beyond reproach” with regard to the formal rules of parliamentary procedure.

Interviews with women MPs also found that many women identify collective interventions as “a male activity” and are not comfortable participating (Shaw, 2000: 408). Shaw (2013: 84) drew similar conclusions in her later research into gender in the devolved assemblies, institutions constructed with “egalitarian ideals as a priority”. In interviews with Members from each devolved assembly, Shaw (2013: 88-9) found that participation in

collective interventions was still a controversial topic. Several women Members of Scottish Parliament referred to barracking as “unladylike behaviour”, but a female Member of the Legislative Assembly in Northern Ireland said it was important to participate in collective intervention because “you have to find your voice in these male-dominated assemblies”. These mixed responses reveal that women in the devolved assemblies are still subject to the double bind that affects MPs in Westminster, where women who feel unable to participate are constructed as “peripheral members of the institution” (Shaw, 2013: 83).

Shaw (2013: 91) defines the conditions that relate to the double bind affecting women MPs: “if they behave adversarially they are seen as unfeminine, yet if they are not combative they are seen as ineffectual”. Cameron and Shaw (2016) explore this premise further in their study of the debates preceding the 2015 UK General Election. These debates featured the heads of all major parties: David Cameron (Conservative), Nick Clegg (Liberal Democrat), Ed Miliband (Labour), Nicola Sturgeon (Scottish National Party), Leanne Wood (Plaid Cymru), and Natalie Bennett (Green Party).

In their analysis of the first debate, Cameron and Shaw determined that all male candidates had the most speaking time when measured in minutes, but Sturgeon had the second highest number of speaking turns (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 35). In the second debate, where the incumbent party leaders, Cameron and Clegg, were absent, the remaining male candidates had the highest number of speaking turns but Sturgeon had the second longest speaking time (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 41). In both debates, the other two women candidates, Bennett and Wood, spoke for significantly less time and had significantly fewer turns (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 34-42). In each debate, all three women were allocated the fewest turns, but Sturgeon interrupted the most out of any candidate and took a large percentage of uninvited turns, while Wood and Bennett interrupted the least (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 40-4).

These findings lead Cameron and Shaw (2016: 44) to conclude that access to the floor was not equally distributed, but it must be acknowledged that these results differ significantly from the similar conclusions of Shaw (2000; 2006; 2013). There are fundamental differences between a televised election debate and a debate in the House of Commons, including additional factors which determine access to the floor. In the context of the

election debates, Cameron and Shaw (2016: 55) argue that access to the floor depends on party representation. Sturgeon represents more of a significant threat to the chance of forming a majority government, so she was more engaged in the debate. Wood and Bennett were not realistic threats, so their “adversarial interventions” were taken less seriously (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 55). It could be interpreted that their relative lack of contention during the debate was not an index of gender, but relates to their significance in a hierarchy of political parties. Cameron and Shaw (2016: 75) thus conclude that the minimal variation between the behaviours of men and women is not enough to substantiate the previously held beliefs designating women as “interlopers” in political communities of practice. This is also evidence against the theory that the presence of women would have a “civilising” effect on interactional behaviours, as the participation of women did not lessen the degree of contestation prevalent in these debates (Shaw, 2013: 87; Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 2).

The studies presented in this section appear to illustrate two contradictory impressions of the behaviour of women in the House of Commons: one wherein women refrain from aggressive or rule-breaking behaviours (Christie, 2002; Childs, 2004; Shaw, 2000; 2006; 2013) and another where women demonstrate comparable behaviours to those of their male contemporaries (Wilson and Irwin, 2015; Cameron and Shaw, 2016). It is significant that the latter two studies focused on party leaders, including Thatcher during her time as Prime Minister. The reason for this distinction lies beyond the scope of this study, but it is possible that women party leaders have an added pressure to conform to confrontational discursive norms, since the accusation of being ineffectual would threaten not only their personal face but the face of the party they represent. If there is a correlation between authority as it is ascribed by a political hierarchy and construction of in-group identities, this becomes salient to this study of Thatcher and May. One of the aims of this study is to explore how Thatcher and May negotiate both gender and authority at the level of discourse, so the findings of this study need to take into account the status afforded to Thatcher and May by their positions as Prime Minister.

2.6.3 Critical Mass

It is widely accepted that political discourses “remain peculiarly gendered” and therefore women politicians “cannot quite adopt the masculinized style” of political behaviours without suffering a form of negative evaluation (Childs, 2004: 11). However, some researchers have debated the value of critical mass theory, the concept that increased numbers of women within an organisation inevitably influences the ways in which they may interact with the norms of that workplace. Norris and Lovenduski summarise this theory:

When a group remains a distinct minority within a larger society, its members will seek to adapt to their surroundings, conforming to the predominant rules of the game... But once the group reaches a certain size, critical mass theory suggests that there will be a qualitative change in the nature of group interactions, as the minority starts to assert itself and thereby transform the institutional culture, norms and values.

(Norris and Lovenduski, 2001: 2-3)

Existing research into women politicians and critical mass theory explores the links between descriptive and substantive representation of women in parliamentary settings: whether a greater number of women in parliament will increase visibility for ‘women’s issues’ and lead to legislative changes (Mansbridge, 2005: 625; Chaney, 2012: 441). However, a common criticism of critical mass theory is that there is no numerically quantifiable threshold for critical mass, and even if one were to exist, it would presume a linear correlation between women’s membership in political institutions and their ability to engage in debates (Dahlerup, 1988: 290; Childs, 2006: 522; Childs and Krook, 2009: 126). Instead, theorists argue that critical mass must be considered in conjunction with critical actors, those “who act individually or collectively to bring about women-friendly policy change” (Childs and Krook, 2009: 127). As such, research into critical acts focuses on the content of women’s contributions as much as its style.

Norris and Lovenduski (2001) conducted a survey of parliamentary candidates and MPs standing in the 2001 UK general election, attempting to discern whether women and men politicians differed in terms of their political attitudes and values. They argued that women politicians “do bring a different set of values to issues affecting women’s equality”, creating the potential for legislative change which would “make more than simply a symbolic difference” (Norris and Lovenduski, 2001: 7). These more-than-symbolic differences were

observed by Catalano (2009) in a study of parliamentary sessions of the 2005-2007 British House of Commons. Catalano (2009: 65) determined that women MPs participated disproportionately in debates relating to health care and were found to be “voicing concerns for women in particular”.

Chaney (2006; 2012) found similar results in studies of the UK devolved Parliaments and Assemblies. During a study of the plenary debates during the first term of the National Assembly for Wales, Chaney (2006: 699) determined that women parliamentarians were more likely to make contributions relating to “‘women’s issues’ and equality topics”, such as childcare, domestic violence, and equal pay. In a similar study of the Scottish Parliament, Chaney (2012: 450-1) found that women MSPs were more likely than men MSPs to participate in debates, propose motions, and submit written questions on topics related to women’s issues.

Notably, the above four studies had comparatively short research periods: a single election, a single year, or a single parliamentary term. By contrast, Bates and Sealey (2019) considered contributions from backbench Labour and Conservative MPs during Prime Minister’s Questions between 1979 and 2010. This time period is significant because it covers the general election of 1997, after which the number of elected women MPs doubled. Bates and Sealey (2019: 249) quantified questions from backbenchers containing the word “women” or relating to the semantic domain “PEOPLE: FEMALE” and found that the increase in questions on these topics was proportionate to the increase of women MPs, rather than curvilinear. These findings indicate that an increase in the relative number of women in Parliament did not lead to an increase in the substantive representation of women, contrary to critical mass theory.

Blaxill and Beelen (2016) compared speeches made in Parliament by women and men MPs between 1945 and 2014 and arrived at a similar conclusion. They determined that the increased numbers of women in government “absolved women MPs of the obligation to act as ‘token women’ and thus as spokeswomen for their sex” (Blaxill and Beelen, 2016: 424). Prior to 1997, women MPs were more likely to give speeches about women and topics stereotypically considered ‘women’s issues’, such as childcare, health, and education (Blaxill and Beelen, 2016: 431). This mirrors the findings of Chaney (2006; 2012) and Catalano

(2009). However, Blaxill and Beelen (2016: 443) also determined that after the 1997 general election the number of speeches being made about these topics, from both men and women MPs, decreased, as did the number of speeches mentioning women in any context. They determined that, rather than there being a marked divergence in the contributions of men and women, “the more similar their vocabulary has become” (Blaxill and Beelen 2016: 438).

Despite the fact that these findings seem to suggest that the increased presence of women has allowed women MPs greater access to the same interactional behaviours as men MPs, Blaxill and Beelen also observed a substantial variation in levels of participation between men and women. Prior to 1997, the percentage of speeches made by women was typically slightly lower than the percentage of MPs who were women (Blaxill and Beelen, 2016: 440). After the influx of women MPs in 1997, this gap widens and the percentage of speeches from women drops much lower than the percentage of women MPs in Commons (Blaxill and Beelen, 2016: 440).

The problem remains, therefore, that if increased political influence is reliant on participation in debates, then access to those debates, including the discursive norms of those debates, is essential (Shaw, 2013: 81). Dahlerup (2006: 519) argues that the concept of critical mass remains important in this regard, since there is a correlation between the relative number of women and “their ability to become effective in their work”. Currently, women politicians have to “fight for their basic rights as women parliamentarians”, but a greater number of women would draw attention to “issues like stigmatization, exclusion, incumbency, and role models”, allowing these issues to be combatted (Dahlerup, 2006: 519).

In a study of women political representatives in Scandinavian countries, Dahlerup (1988: 290) argued that a greater number of women resulted in the incorporation of “women’s culture” into politics, and manifestations of this included a “less tough style of debating”. This conclusion corroborates “the long-held assumption that women will make a civilising difference by bringing a consensual style to political forums”, but more recent findings challenge this assumption (Shaw, 2013: 87). Childs (2004: 14) interviewed Labour women MPs elected for the first time in the 1997 UK general election and determined that many of those participating in her study believed that women MPs “are less combative and

aggressive, more collaborative and speak in a different language compared to men.” This did not, however, result in changes in attitudes towards acceptable debating styles, and participants said they felt that their “style of politics was considered less legitimate and less effective”, leading Childs (2004: 14) to conclude that increased numbers of women MPs had not resulted in a “feminised style of politics, as the concept of critical mass suggests”.

Bates et al. (2014) also contest the theory that the increased presence of women in Parliament would lessen the degree to which political debate relies on aggression and antagonism. Their study analyses the first five hours of PMQs for every prime minister between Margaret Thatcher and David Cameron. Over this thirty-year span, Bates et al. (2014: 271) concluded that women MPs were proportionally almost as likely to ask a question during PMQs, but half as likely to ask an unanswerable question. This would suggest a near equal level of participation, just not participation on equal grounds; unanswerable questions are “designed deliberately to provoke discomfort”, so the avoidance of such questions suggests an unwillingness to engage with the combative norms PMQs is known for (Bates et al., 2014: 263). The more tenured an MP, the more likely they will ask an unanswerable question, meaning that a large number of women were found to demonstrate behaviours that suggest inexperience (Bates et al., 2014: 271).

However, the increased presence of women did not equate to the increase of collaborative behaviours. The number of interruptions per session increased significantly, as did the number of times the Speaker of the House needed to call the House to order per session (Bates et al., 2014: 264). This increase in conflict during PMQs happened “precisely at the time when there is a sharp increase in female representation” within the Chamber (Bates et al., 2014: 274). There is evidence, therefore, suggesting that greater numbers of women MPs “could actually galvanise male resistance to women’s disruptive presence” (Shaw, 2020: 17).

I argue that critical mass theory holds significance for this study, given the drastically different proportions of women MPs between the premierships of Thatcher and May. When Thatcher was elected in 1979, she was one of only 19 women in Parliament. When May was elected in 2016, she was one of 192 women. This is an increase from 3% to 30% of all MPs from those respective Parliaments. While existing literature suggests this increase has not

lead to a feminised style of politics, there is evidence emerging that women MPs are losing their 'token' status and this greater descriptive representation of women has altered the ways in which women MPs engage in debates. One of the aims of this study is to examine the ways in which Thatcher and May engage with the discursive norms of PMQs, and while this is not a comparative study, it should be taken into account that the vastly different demographic compositions of their parliaments may influence what is considered to be an appropriate interactional style.

2.7 Media Representation of Women Politicians

Walsh (2001: 2) theorised a “metadiscursive gap” between the ways in which “gender is practised” by women and “the stereotypical standards by which their linguistic behaviour is judged”. She argued that the media plays a significant role of mediating the perception of women’s behaviours and in “(re)producing normative gender ideologies” (Walsh, 2001: 2). Braden (1996: 197) concurs, arguing that women politicians may be disadvantaged by the media’s ability to “influence voters’ decisions” through the way they contextualise and present the behaviours of women.

There appears to be a trend amongst journalists to present women politicians first and foremost as women, with their actions framed in relation to preconceived expectations about how they *should* act. Ponton (2010: 211) argues that the role of the media in preserving ideas regarding ‘acceptable’ feminine identities “constrain[s] the range of possible identities” women can construct for themselves. Ponton (2010) also argues that women politicians may intentionally adopt a performance to gain public approval, citing the example of Margaret Thatcher following her election to Conservative Party leader. In an “acute example of skilful image creation”, Thatcher complied with the “housewife stereotype” when interviewed, thereby adopting “the least threatening guise in which a woman could have arrived at the threshold of political power in Britain in 1975” (Ponton, 2010: 215). Similarly, Panagopoulos (2004: 148) found that women running for Congress in 1997 were less likely to “present themselves to voters as “tough” or as “fighters”” to comply with an expected feminine performance, and Jones (2016: 637) found that Hilary Clinton

altered her speech style during her 2007-2008 presidential campaign so as to “soften” her image and improve her likability among voters by presenting herself in a way that was more akin to the expectations of her gender”.

Whether women politicians intentionally conform to gender role stereotypes or not, they are presented in the media in relation to these stereotypes. In Section 2.7.1 I present Cameron and Shaw’s (2016) concept of a ‘different voice’ as an example of one of these stereotypes relying on the assumption that men and women do politics differently. In Section 2.7.2 I explore the use of stereotypes in evaluating women politicians more widely, including the depiction of specific ‘roles’ that are deemed acceptable for women to adopt.

2.7.1 A ‘Different Voice’ Ideology

Women politicians are frequently perceived differently to men, with their actions being interpreted in relation to gender role stereotypes. Cameron and Shaw (2016: 2) explain these expectations using the concept of a ‘different voice’: the belief that women politicians adopt a specific style of interaction that “eschews aggression and point-scoring in favour of cooperation and consensus, making politics more civilised, more modern, and more human”. Even though the research of Cameron and Shaw (2016) discredits the existence of a different voice (see Section 2.6.3), it nevertheless influences the reception of women politicians by the media.

Lakoff (2005: 175) adopts a similar theory, discussing the importance of “Niceness”, loosely defined as “interpersonal positive politeness”. Widely regarded as a feminine index, Lakoff (2005) argues that Niceness has different degrees of significance for men and women. Women politicians are “viewed through a filter of Niceness” but, while it is still preferable for men to be Nice, Niceness is secondary to a male politician’s “major job of being tough” (Lakoff, 2005: 180). Even though Niceness is becoming an increasingly beneficial quality to display during elections, men may still “be perceived as non-Nice and still (indeed, all the more) be seen as masculine” (Lakoff, 2005: 183). For women, however, a lack of Niceness, a betrayal of gender norms, is “always risky and often fatal” (Lakoff, 2005: 183).

This corresponds to Cameron and Shaw's description of a different voice. Any instances where women utilise aspects of a 'different voice', including the distinct demonstration of interpersonal skills, are considered unremarkable because this is considered "natural", whereas men "are given extra credit for showing any interpersonal skills at all" (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 16). It is not only acceptable, it is commended and ultimately beneficial for male politicians to adopt certain feminine behaviours, but women are trapped in a double bind of either appearing too feminine or not feminine enough.

This concept is illustrated by the findings of Nau and Stewart (2018). Nau and Stewart (2018: 127) explore how the use of verbal aggression by politicians is perceived and the degree to which it is considered "gender appropriate behaviour" for women. They determined that the use of verbal aggression was likely to decrease a politician's perceived credibility (knowledge and likability) but it did not significantly affect the degree to which a participant agreed with a politician's message (Nau and Stewart, 2018: 136-7). Even when no specific verbal attacks were evident, women politicians were perceived as more aggressive and less suitable than men (Nau and Stewart, 2018: 138). This relates to the suggestions of Lakoff (2005) and Cameron and Shaw (2016), demonstrating that men may be rendered less likable by the use of verbal aggression, but it does not damage the perception of their competency or their ability to gain approval for their political stance. Women, however, are judged more severely, leading Nau and Stewart (2018: 138) to conclude that they may be seen as less suitable "by default".

In their analysis of media coverage of the 2015 UK general election, Cameron and Shaw (2016: 81) found that women featured less prominently in newspaper coverage of the election, but this is not by itself evidence of a gender bias. More attention was given to the male leaders of the most significant parties as these men stood the greatest chance of becoming prime minister. They found that Nicola Sturgeon was often evaluated positively based on her performance in the debates, but was negatively evaluated based on the threat she, as the leader of the SNP, faced to the possibility of a Labour or Conservative majority government (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 88). Cameron and Shaw (2016: 89) consider this political threat an attributing factor in the amount of "overtly (and on occasion, grotesquely) sexist" coverage Sturgeon received. They argue that the sexist criticism Sturgeon received

was not primarily motivated by her gender but was a targeted response to diminish her political standing. In this way, sexist commentary is a method of attacking women who specifically defy societal gendered norms.

Cameron and Shaw (2016: 93) also observed a pattern of journalists tending “to construct a rhetorical opposition between ‘the women’ and ‘the men’, in which ‘the women’ are clearly marked as the positive term”. This narrative serves to portray female party leaders as a “fresh, modern alternative” to the existing, and overwhelmingly male, government traditions (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 94). This idea relies on the notion of a ‘different voice’ for women politicians, the idea that the participation of women will have a civilising effect, for which Cameron and Shaw found no evidence. This represents what Harmer (2016) describes as “the limited framework that the British press have for understanding the role of women in politics”. Harmer (2016: 263-4) argues that this is a continuation of the “long established tradition of trivialising the political significance of women”, where little consideration is afforded to the contradictory expectations that women should be both “traditionally feminine” and “strong and decisive actors in a highly masculine working environment”. This is an example of the kind of double bind previously explored by Lakoff (1973: 48), where women are held to paradoxical expectations that leave speakers disadvantaged and “systemically denied access to power”.

The party leaders in Cameron and Shaw’s (2016: 97) study were also grouped by gender specifically based on their verbal behaviour, with contrasts drawn between “the men’s arguing and shouting with women’s supportiveness, men’s bullying with women’s fairness, and men’s posturing with women’s straightforwardness”. Despite this “more consensual style” being “cited with approval” by many newspapers, there was also evidence of a “preference for adversarial speech” which, again, indicates a double bind for women (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 98-9). For example, Leanne Wood received criticism for being too passive and “meek” and not challenging her opponents as much as the norms of political debate would dictate (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 99). In contrast, Natalie Bennett was criticised for being needlessly aggressive and “losing her temper”: in response to an occasion where Bennett spoke over Ed Miliband and Nigel Farage to claim her speaking turn,

Bennett was described as “over-emotional and out of control” (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 99).

The respective treatment of Wood and Bennett by the media is not unique. Just as Wood was presented as too passive to be effective, Crowley and Childs (2003: 345) argue that the new women MPs elected in the 1997 general election received a “special venom” from journalists for a perceived lack of rebellious behaviour in Parliament. They proposed that the “dominant explanation” for this lack of rebellion, and one proposed by the women MPs themselves, was that the new women MPs just “do politics differently” (Crowley and Childs, 2003: 365). In this instance, a different voice ideology is informing the depiction of women MPs as “feeble” as they are unable to match the behaviours of their male contemporaries (Crowley and Childs, 2003: 365). In contrast, Gidengil and Everitt (2000; 2003) found that news coverage of the 1993 and 1997 Canadian federal elections misrepresented women candidates by disproportionately reporting on their aggressive behaviours, emphasising deviations from stereotypical expectations of gendered speech styles.

As such, even though Cameron and Shaw (2016) discredit the idea of women having a ‘different voice’ in debate contexts, the concept of a different voice is still apparent in commentary published in response to women politicians. Even if there are only small variations between the behaviours of men and women in politics, the prevailing belief that there is a difference “reinforces the existing, narrow definition of ‘acceptable’ female behaviour” (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 134). In this way, “the verbal behaviour of male and female politicians [is] more strongly gendered in reception than it was in production”, due to a tendency for newspaper journalists to exaggerate the significance of any differences in speech styles (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 109-10). This type of content also provides a commentary on the interplay of gender and power, demonstrating that women are disadvantaged in the public domain and subject to contradicting standards of behaviour.

2.7.2 The Use of Stereotypes in Evaluating Women Politicians

Van Zoonen (2006: 291) argues that a reliance on gender role stereotypes when representing women in the media strongly affects the ways in which women politicians are evaluated, since conventional understandings of femininity incorporate notions which are “not easily transposed to the political field”. Van Zoonen (2006: 298) makes specific reference to the merging of public and private lives, arguing that when the private lives of male politicians are reported upon it serves as a reminder that they are “complete human beings combining caring and working responsibilities”. Reports of the private lives of women, however, only serve as “a continuous reminder of women’s odd choice of public mission instead of private fulfilment” and draws attention to their “nonstandard gender choices” (van Zoonen, 2006: 299).

Cameron and Shaw (2016: 89) also discuss this “personalization of politics”, whereby coverage of political leaders focuses on more apolitical topics, such as lifestyle and fashion choices. During the 2015 UK general election, both male and female party leaders were subject to scrutiny based on their appearance, but Cameron and Shaw (2016) argue that the implications of this commentary are markedly different for men and women. A prominent and repeated fascination with women’s appearances “reinforces a pre-existing gender inequality”, perpetuating gender norms and encouraging assumptions about gender and authority (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 92). For men, authority is seen as “natural and desirable”, but for women it is “unnatural, undesirable, and de-sexing” (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 92). By focusing on aspects of women’s appearance, the foremost quality of female candidates being evaluated is their femininity, and their status as political leaders is secondary.

Williams (2021: 415) argues that there has been an increase in this “personalised and sensationalised” representation of politicians in the media, resulting in an increase of explicitly gender-based coverage. In a comparative analysis of media representation of Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May in the weeks following their appointment as Prime Minister, Williams (2021: 414) expected Thatcher to receive more gendered coverage “as a trailblazer becoming the first woman in a highly masculine role.” Yet, Williams (2021: 414) determined that May received more gender-based news coverage focusing more frequently

and more thoroughly on her “gender, femininity and appearance.” The increasingly blurred boundaries between public and private lives has had a greater impact on women leaders since a new fascination with their private lives accentuates “any subversive gender choices that might otherwise have remained hidden” (Williams, 2021: 415).

As well as depicting women in terms of conformity with/resistance to stereotypically gendered behaviour, the media often uses gender stereotypes more broadly to succinctly categorise a woman’s personality and identity. Cameron and Shaw (2016: 103) suggest that women may be considered in these absolute terms due to the media’s heavy dependence on “forms of cultural shorthand that readers can be expected to understand immediately”. This explanation can be used to justify why women are often reduced to sometimes contradictory, sometimes defamatory stereotypes, “because of a lack of more positive options that have the same familiarity” (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 103). Atkins and Gaffney (2020: 295) define these “‘recognised’ personae” as “archetypal cultural figures” which carry an almost mythological significance given that they are interpreted as variations of characters which already exist in the public consciousness. As these stereotypical persona are used more widely, they are more easily recognised, thus inspiring further use; Koller (2004a: 4) describes this phenomena as discourse and cognition reinforcing each other “in a cyclical fashion”.

Atkins and Gaffney (2020: 295) argue that the pervasive use of stereotypes to describe women politicians results in a “restricted performative freedom of movement”, whereby they are expected to ‘fit’ into one of a limited number of personas. What Atkins and Gaffney (2020) refer to as ‘personas’ may also be considered in terms of Kanter’s (1993) framework of ‘role encapsulation’. These roles, also referred to as role traps, represent “historically established archetypes of female power” through which “female authority is made culturally intelligible” (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 100). Kanter (1993: 233) conceptualised these role traps based on the premise that the women occupying these roles would be outsiders in male-dominated communities, and so these roles “preserve familiar forms of interaction” that the male majority “could respond to and understand”. As such, Kanter’s (1993) role trap framework legitimises the female exercise of authority but is also premised on the idea that this authority is divergent from masculinised norms. Considering individual women in terms

of role trap discourses has an 'othering' effect, singling out the subject specifically as a *woman*, not just a leader, and ensuring that she is evaluated in relation to her gender as opposed to her objective merit.

Kanter's (1993: 233) first role trap is that of the 'Mother', denoting "nurturant-maternal" figures presumed to be "sympathetic, good listeners and easy to talk to". This role epitomises traditional authority within a domestic or private sphere, with power being derived more from "socio-emotional" skills than professional competence (Baxter, 2018: 29). As such, the Mother is valued more for the emotional service they provide, and deviation from this role, including demonstrating more critical, task-oriented behaviours, is likely to diminish her authority (Kanter, 1993: 234).

Both Cameron and Shaw (2016: 100) and Baxter (2018: 29) define the second role, the Seductress, as using her sexuality to gain influence over men. However, Kanter (1993: 234) defines the Seductress as a "perception": the Seductress need not be knowingly behaving seductively, but merely needs to be perceived as desirable and available. Should the Seductress revel in male attention, she "risks the debasement of a whore", but if she allies herself to a single male colleague she is relegated to the position of a "prize" that has been won (Kanter, 1993: 234-5). In either case, "her perceived sexuality blotted out all other characteristics" (Kanter, 1993: 235).

The third role is the Pet, an infantilising label suggesting an endearing level of innocence and naivety (Kanter, 1993: 235). Cameron and Shaw (2016: 100) describe the Pet as possessing an "unthreatening femininity" which inspires men to feel protective of her. It is considered surprising when the Pet matches the competence of her male colleagues, which often prevents the Pet from reaching her full power or potential (Kanter, 1993: 235).

The final role is the Iron Maiden, the most "stereotypically masculinised" of Kanter's archetypes, with these women being described as aggressive, tough, and having a "presumed lack of femininity, warmth or sexuality" (Baxter, 2018: 26). Kanter (1993: 236) theorised that, by virtue of the stark contrast with hegemonic femininity, Iron Maidens may be "stereotyped as tougher than they are" and "trapped in a more militant stance" than they would desire for themselves. Kanter (1993: 236) argues that this perception may be

alienating, and whereas the Seductress and the Pet inspire protective instincts in others, the Iron Maiden “faced abandonment” due to a lack of sympathy.

Baxter (2018: 32) also proposes an archetype of her own: the Queen Bee, a woman who “has worked hard to achieve a very senior position in her company yet is reluctant to help other women to reach equivalent seniority”. Baxter (2018: 48) used these archetypes to analyse media representations of Theresa May, concluding that the use of these archetypes did not necessarily result in May being depicted as “*unsuitable* for leadership”, but rather as a “*monstrous* version of what a leader is expected to be”. Specifically, Iron Maiden discourses were used to construct May’s actions as “excessive, unnatural, and frightening when conducted by a woman Prime Minister”, suggesting that examples of female authority are seen as deviant behaviours (Baxter, 2018: 48). Cameron (2020: 30) also argues that a common representational strategy for undermining the authority of women politicians is to present them as “monstrous tyrants”: not necessarily unsuitable, but distinctly unlikeable.

Baxter (2012: 88-9) argued that role traps are not only positions to which women leaders are relegated by others but may also be discursive resources which women leaders use to “perform leadership effectively” in male-dominated environments. This is not necessarily a conscious choice but may be indicative of roles which are considered acceptable for women in a given context. For example, Ponton (2010: 215) argues that, after being appointed Conservative Party leader, Thatcher contributed to her representation as a glorified housewife as this was deemed non-threatening, but throughout her premiership she was able to discursively negotiate a new identity for herself, that of the Iron Lady. Atkins and Gaffney (2020: 298) argue that May was also able to place herself in a role to validate her authority at the start of her premiership: by presenting herself as the “archetypal healer” she communicated the idea that “she alone could heal the wounds inflicted by a bitter referendum campaign”. This self-presentation not only reflects the nurturing labour undertaken by Kanter’s (1993) Mother role trap, it also reflects the precariousness of her position atop the glass cliff.

Whether women politicians deliberately contribute to their positioning within role trap discourses or not, the reproduction of these discourses within the media corroborates the argument that the use of gender stereotypes by journalists is predicated on the need for

something familiar, not necessarily something accurate. As these stereotypes are perpetuated and normalised, they restrict the discursive agency of women leaders since they are obliged to either maintain that role for themselves or attempt to establish another. Role trap discourses are also an effective tool to criticise and ridicule women leaders, reducing them to mere caricatures of themselves.

I argue that the use of role trap discourses complies with Cameron's (2020: 33) definition of misogyny: not just an expression of hatred, but "policing women's behaviour in accordance with patriarchal norms". It also resonates strongly with Mills and Mullany's (2011) discussion of sexism:

Butler (1997: 4) argues that 'To be injured by speech is to suffer a loss of context, that is, not to know where you are. Indeed, it may be that what is unanticipated about the injurious speech act is what constitutes its injury, the sense of putting its addressee out of control.' Sexism, therefore, 'puts you out of control' in the sense that you are being defined and not defining yourself. However, it is clear that, although the unexpectedness of sexist comments is crucial, we would take issue with Butler that this means that the addressee 'does not know where you are'. In a sense, this is the problem, that you know *precisely* the position to which you are being relegated, but this position is not one that you would choose for yourself.

(Mills and Mullany, 2011: 146)

When newspapers use role trap discourses to describe Thatcher or May, they are relegated to positions they have not chosen for themselves, and these positions are gendered by default. I expect this concept to be reflected in my results, where I aim to explore the influence of Thatcher and May's behaviours during PMQs on the choice of role trap discourses used to describe them.

2.8 Thatcher and May as Women Global Leaders

Much of the literature on political discourses reviewed thus far has focused on women politicians in a UK context; this section considers existing research on Thatcher and May in relation to their position as women political leaders on a global scale.

Ross (2017: 81) argues that the increasing number of women running for and winning political positions globally has not yet decreased the novelty of women occupying such positions, and women political candidates “continue to be framed as radical and daring” in media publications. This concept is reflected widely across literature: Higgins and McKay (2016: 287) found that Nicola Sturgeon (Scotland) was subject to questions over whether she was “man enough” to hold office; Wiliarty (2010: 140) argued that the combination of Angela Merkel’s (Germany) “easternness” and “femaleness” meant she was portrayed as “unpredictable”; and Piscopo (2010: 197-8) found that Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (Argentina) was subject to criticisms based on “her marriage rather than her career”, with journalists questioning whether she represented “her husband or herself”.

To combat this pervasive bias, women candidates may “attempt to downplay their feminine attributes” to increase credibility, but Ross (2017: 84) claims this may have a detrimental effect. She cites the examples of Angela Merkel, Helen Clark (New Zealand), and Julia Gillard (Australia), who were each regarded with “considerable suspicion by journalists” for supposedly eschewing “the archetypal feminine career script of motherhood” (Ross, 2017: 84).

Appleby (2021) also determined that Julia Gillard was criticised for a supposed lack of feminine attributes. Gillard was accused of “failing to meet public expectations that she be a ‘flag bearer for women’” and instead “proved to be ‘just another politician’” (Appleby, 2021: 473). It seems that just being a politician was not enough, Gillard was criticised for not acting in ways expected of a *woman* politician.

In stark contrast, Chałupnik et al. (2024) found that Jacinda Ardern (New Zealand) was positively evaluated for matching expectations of a woman in the political sphere. Shortly after her appointment as Prime Minister, Ardern was praised for overcoming the “obstacles” presented by her youth, gender, and newcomer status, and presented as “tenacious by virtue of her ability to ‘balance’ these dimensions of her identity” (Chałupnik et al., 2024: 14). When she resigned, citing, amongst other reasons, a desire to spend more time with her family, this was also evaluated positively, framed as a “return to the natural, biological order of things that she had been suppressing” (Chałupnik et al., 2024: 15). While Ardern was commended for her performance as a woman politician, this approval was still dependent

on her identity as a woman as well as a politician, serving to perpetuate gender role stereotypes.

It seems, therefore, that women seeking the highest levels of political office are “framed within and measured against a masculine script” (Ross, 2017: 84). Ross (2017: 83) exaggerates this argument, claiming that successful women candidates are often “seen as token men” upon assuming office. Margaret Thatcher is celebrated as a “good example of this gender-bending propensity”, but other women global leaders are not esteemed in the same way; Ross (2017: 83) provides the example of Helen Clark, whose premiership of New Zealand was “characterised as aggressively masterful, but not in a positive way”. By the end of her premiership, Clark was not only portrayed by the media as a “willing and enthusiastic political pugilist, eager to enter the battle”, but this perceived aggression was exaggerated to the point of framing her leadership style as “menacing and dangerous” (Trimble and Treiberg, 2010: 130). By contrast, Thatcher is remembered as “the political icon of her time – both nationally and internationally”, with her Iron Lady moniker “reinterpreted as a mark of respect rather than of criticism” (Charteris-Black, 2011: 165).

Thatcher’s adoption of the nickname, ‘The Iron Lady’, was significant, as it signified Thatcher constructing a political persona for herself. Charteris-Black (2011: 166) claims that Thatcher was the first British politician to appreciate the importance of managing their political image, and in doing so she “deliberately” tried to associate herself with “characteristics that are conventionally attached to men: authority, courage, firmness, determination and the will to succeed.”

While conceding that Thatcher’s leadership was characterised by “confrontation and argument rather than a consensual style of leadership”, Purvis (2013: 1016) claims that Thatcher’s femininity was also “partly the key to her success”. Specifically, Thatcher was said to resemble “authoritative women such as nannies and distant mothers” whom male Conservative MPs would find it “difficult to challenge” (Purvis, 2013: 1016). Similarly, Williams (2021: 409) argued that, early in her premiership, Thatcher would cultivate a “housewifely” image, constructing a “hyper-feminine persona as a mother and wife to counter her masculine displays of power and strength as a Tory leader”. Worthy et al. (2023: 301) refer to this ability to balance multiple personas as “role switching”, and cite it as one of

the reasons for Thatcher's success and enduring legacy. Thatcher was able to successfully adapt her persona as circumstances required, and so could "move from strength to strength" and "break through many of the binds that faced her", and that have faced many global women leaders since (Worthy et al., 2023: 301).

Charteris-Black (2011: 169) and Nunn (2002: 13) both argue that these personas were largely inspired by conflict. Nunn (2002: 14) claims that these "narratives of conflict", which Thatcher was subject to and a willing participant in, were "intimately bound up with Thatcher's gender". Charteris-Black (2011: 169) expands upon this, determining that Thatcher's frequent employment of the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS CONFLICT allowed her to "construct herself as the heroine who struggled against an imagined enemy".

Worthy et al. (2023: 292) claim that this is a behaviour shared with Theresa May: both women "presented themselves as 'heroic outsiders' in response to the challenge of being a woman in a masculine office". They claim that it is difficult to accurately compare Thatcher and May, but such comparisons not entirely unjustified: there are ways in which May emulates Thatcher due to "an inevitable falling into a powerful and irresistible archetype and narrative" (Worthy et al., 2023: 291). Thatcher "created a model for how to subvert masculine rules", which Worthy et al. (2023: 299) describe as both "feminine dominance" and "rudeness". Thatcher was advantaged by "the sheer strangeness" of being "a woman in charge", whereas May, who "also sought to disrupt and overturn rules", did not benefit from the same novelty (Worthy et al., 2023: 300).

Shaw (2020: 180) argues that comparisons between Thatcher and May not only "reflect the paucity of women in authoritative roles", but also unfairly "ignore significant differences between the two women". Notably, within PMQs, May failed to deliver the "devastating" responses that Thatcher was known for (Shaw, 2020: 180). This is not to say that May did not conform to the combative norms of PMQs, merely that she performed contestation differently. Shaw (2020: 185) examined and quantified the use of adversarial language in PMQs exchanges between Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn, concluding that, while their behaviours were similar, "May used slightly more adversarial linguistic features than Corbyn overall".

This result is interesting given that neither May nor Corbyn are “*typical*” performers in the context of PMQs: May because she is a woman Prime Minister and Corbyn because he had declared intentions to “eschew the ‘masculinised’ interactional norms” of PMQs and “attempt to make them more consensual” (Shaw, 2020: 184). One of the ways he did this was by using his allotted questions to voice concerns and queries from members of the public (Shaw, 2020: 187). However, Shaw (2020: 187-8) noted that Corbyn’s “questions from the electorate” technique often served as “‘cover’ for combative questions”, therefore having a “constraining” effect on May by limiting her “options for an adversarial response”. One of the ways Shaw (2020: 190) observed May responding to these questions is by being evasive and adopting a “faux-explanatory style” in order to “reduce Corbyn’s questions to simple requests for information”. While this allows May to avoid engaging with adversarial content in Corbyn’s questions, it seemingly inspired criticism of her PMQs sessions as “boring” (Shaw, 2020: 190).

On occasions when May did respond to Corbyn with adversarial language, this also attracted criticism. Such adversarial responses would “gain May positive applause from her own party”, but they tended to be highly rehearsed and meant that May’s “enactment of authority seems utterly strained and unconvincing” (Shaw, 2020: 191). Therein lies what Worthy et al. (2023: 301) identified as one of the crucial differences between Thatcher and May’s leadership styles: while they may have had similar approaches to leadership, their performance of it was very different. Thatcher’s longevity compared to May was partly because her “performance was simply stronger”: her communication and role switching skills allowing her to “at least weaken the binds traditionally facing women leaders” (Worthy et al., 2023: 301). May was “not as successful in negotiating” these binds, reverting to wooden and awkward performances, and inspiring comparisons with the ‘Maybot’: a robotic version of May only capable of providing set answers (Worthy et al., 2023: 299; Shaw, 2020: 180).

Despite Thatcher’s apparent success in both a debate context and in constructing public personas for herself, Purvis (2013: 1018) claims that Thatcher’s premiership was, for many other women, “a regressive force”, due to her unwillingness to advocate for or to progress the careers of other women politicians. Wilson and Irwin (2015: 26) describe Thatcher as

adopting a more gender-neutral approach, whereby she was “a politician first and a woman second”, and question whether any perceived adoption of masculine norms was not a gendered choice, but “simply because these are what are associated with leadership”. Therefore, when considering the legacy of Margaret Thatcher on subsequent women leaders, Wilson and Irwin (2015: 39) question whether it is fair to expect the double bind facing women politicians to have been affected by the actions of one woman, especially “one woman who, for various reasons, was unlikely to try” to improve conditions for women politicians. However, intentional or not, Thatcher’s legacy, and the legacy of all women global leaders, remains significant, given the visibility that comes from being a leader on the global stage, and the potential this has to normalise the presence of women in political spaces (Williams, 2021: 399).

While it is not the aim of this study to compare the PMQs performances of Thatcher and May, either to each other or to other women global leaders, it is still necessary to consider their performances within this context, given the possibility for perceptions of May, in particular, to have been influenced by the performances of women leaders who came before her.

2.9 Conclusions

This chapter aimed to provide research context for this study. I have outlined the social constructivist and CofP approaches to the study of identity which, combined with my joint FPDA and FPA perspective, becomes an effective method of exploring how identities are negotiated at the level of discourse rather than indexed via individual language resources.

I have reviewed existing research in the field of language and gender, exploring how linguistic strategies such as RP are used to distract from authority, allowing women leaders to conform with the conventions established by a masculine CofP without compromising a perceived feminine performance. A review of research specifically on the topic of language, gender, and political discourses has revealed how the standards of behaviour expected from PMQs are influenced by the institutional norms of the House of Commons as a CofP. These norms can be associated with gendered behaviours based upon the majority demographic of

the members of the community of practice. Therefore, if women entering the House of Commons adopt the discursive styles that are in line with institutional norms, their behaviour may be perceived as masculine due to the male-dominated working environment. Shaw (2000: 402) argues that, “because men have invented” the norms of interaction in the House of Commons, not only have these behaviours become normalised as masculine indexes, these behaviours have also become “institutionalised as ways of speaking with authority”, meaning that women must adopt these masculine norms in order to be seen as powerful. This creates a double standard, wherein women who demonstrate normatively male behaviours are “judged as both unfeminine and unlikeable” and so are denied equal access to discourses of power (Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 16). This conclusion is instrumental in the formation of my research questions: the first aim of this study is to explore how women Prime Ministers attempt to overcome this double standard and navigate the relationship between authority and gender identity within PMQs.

The second aim of this study is to explore how the linguistic behaviours of women Prime Ministers are evaluated in the media, in relation to a perceived gender identity. Previous research has suggested that women political leaders are depicted in relation to gender role stereotypes which position them as unnatural and “monstrous” exaggerations of leadership (e.g. Baxter, 2018; Cameron, 2020). By considering results for Thatcher in conjunction with results for May, I will address the third aim of this study, exploring the possibility that the standards by which women Prime Ministers are judged have changed over time, and whether this coincides with any changes in the behaviours demonstrated within PMQs.

I discuss the methods through which I will achieve these research aims in Chapter 3.

3.0 Methodology

In Chapter 1 of this thesis I introduced my research questions and the aims of this study. This Chapter discusses the methods by which I will achieve those aims. To investigate the performance of gender identity and authority by women political leaders, I explore the use of communicative behaviours by Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May in PMQs appearances. To investigate how these behaviours were perceived, I explore the portrayals of these women in UK newspapers. As such, this study requires two separate datasets, PMQs and newspapers, and to ensure I achieve synergy between these two datasets I adopt corpus linguistic methods to inform my data selection process.

In the first Section of this Chapter, I justify my use of a case study approach and the selection of Thatcher and May as the focus of this project. The following Section reveals how I collected my newspaper data. In Section 3.3 I explain my use of corpus linguistic methods to select newspaper data for analysis, and the final sections explain how this informs my selection of PMQs data.

3.1 Case Study Approach

At the time of data collection for this study, there had only been two women appointed to the position of Prime Minister of the UK, Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) and Theresa May (2016-2019), warranting particular attention to these two premierships. Since interpretations of ‘appropriate’ gendered behaviour are premised upon previous exposure to performances of that behaviour (see Section 2.1), Thatcher and May are uniquely positioned, as the first two women Prime Ministers of the UK, to influence opinions of how women Prime Ministers are thought to behave. However, such a small sample is not intended to be representative, or to insinuate that the experiences of these two women Prime Ministers are universal, but merely to illustrate *examples* of leadership styles of women Prime Ministers and how these are perceived. Nor is it my intention to compare the leadership styles of Thatcher and May for the purposes of evaluation, since such judgements would implicitly invalidate the less effective style, contributing to the idea that there is an archetypal style of gendered leadership and deviance from it is disadvantageous. My aim is

to present the multiple ways in which Thatcher and May do political leadership, with variations in style being equally legitimate.

PMQs was chosen as a source of data for this case study because the procedures and conventions of PMQs remain largely unchanged between the terms of Thatcher and May. Across both premierships, PMQs follows a question and answer format, with all speakers governed by the rules of Erskine May and the conventions of parliamentary discourse, providing opportunity to see the extent to which Thatcher and May comply with the rules as written or mirror the rule-breaking behaviours of insiders of the CofP (see Section 2.6). PMQs is also expected to reveal instances of their authority as Prime Minister being validated and challenged, thereby providing opportunity to analyse how Thatcher and May cooperatively negotiate power dynamics within debate. The Speaker of the House, as moderator of these debates, is expected to call upon Members from alternating sides of the House to ensure near equal distribution of floor time, allowing for observation of how the collective face needs of political parties influence Thatcher and May's approaches to rapport management.

PMQs not only provides the opportunity to analyse the linguistic behaviours of Thatcher and May within a debate context, but the outcomes of these debates are widely reported upon in UK news publications, so there is the constant possibility that every speaker will be held accountable for their behaviour by their constituents. An analysis of reported behaviour in newspapers allows for an exploration of the extent to which their debate performance was a detriment to their public image and, ultimately, their perceived suitability as a Prime Minister. Due to their absolute authority over media discourses, journalists, editors, and other such "media elites" therefore have "direct and persuasive access to the 'minds' of the readers" and exercise a great amount of power (van Dijk, 1996: 97). Smirnova (2009: 79) also argues that, given the informative and persuasive functions of newspaper discourses, the result is the "regulation of the addressee's behaviour and thinking". Given the influence newspapers have over the distribution of knowledge, the ways in which events and speakers are framed in newspapers impacts the perceptions the reader will have of those events and speakers. As such, an exploration of the evaluations of Thatcher and May printed in

newspapers indicates the likely ways in which readers of those newspapers will perceive them.

Newspaper representation is therefore significant for its ability to create, perpetuate, or subvert assumptions about stereotypical gendered behaviour. The descriptions of each speaker in newspapers create and sustain relationships between the concepts of gender identity and competency. Comparing the ways in which Thatcher was evaluated to the ways in which May was evaluated reveals if there have been any changes in the ways in which women Prime Ministers are evaluated, which in turn reveals changes in attitudes towards women political leaders.

It is worth noting that there has been a third women Prime Minister of the UK, Liz Truss, in office for 49 days across September and October 2022. In this time, she attended 3 PMQs sessions. Since I have chosen PMQs as a source of data for this study, it was not viable to include Truss due to a lack of usable data.

In comparison, Thatcher attended 694 PMQs sessions across her eleven-year premiership. May attended 96 PMQs sessions across three years. This provides too much data for a qualitative critical discourse analysis, so my first method of narrowing down my research period was to limit my data collection to the first and final years of each premiership. This allows me to compare both behaviours and newspaper representations between the start and end of their premierships, helping reveal how opinions of Thatcher and May changed throughout their time in office.

This still left me with four years to select data from. Baker (2012a: 247) argues that a common criticism of discourse analysis is that researchers often “‘cherry-pick’ data which appear to prove a preconceived point”, so to avoid this I adopted a corpus-based approach to selecting data. I started by building four corpora comprised of newspaper data from each of my chosen years, then used corpus linguistic methods to identify recurring topics and significant events from each year. Having identified these significant events, I found corresponding PMQs sessions referencing these events and selected these interactions for critical discourse analysis.

I made the decision to start with newspapers and find corresponding PMQs sessions as opposed to starting with PMQs and finding corresponding newspaper articles for two primary reasons. The first was ease: collecting newspaper data from online archives made it easy to collect and conduct corpus analysis on a large number of newspaper articles before narrowing down my research period even more. Given my decision to manually transcribe half of my PMQs data (see Section 3.4), starting by collecting PMQs data would have required making decisions about my selected data before conducting a corpus analysis, or else commit to the labour-intensive process of transcribing superfluous data which would inevitably be disregarded.

Secondly, the language used in PMQs does not always correspond with the language used to describe PMQs events in newspapers. This fact is illustrated by some of the data presented in my analysis chapters. For example, the word “Brexit” appeared frequently in my newspaper corpora from May’s premiership, leading me to deduce that this topic would be discussed at PMQs. However, many of the PMQs interactions that I have identified as relating to the topic of Brexit do not contain the word “Brexit” in either the question or answer. It is only through a qualitative reading of PMQs that I was able to discern how questions related to the topics which my newspaper corpora indicated would be salient. Continuing with the example of Brexit, phrases used in PMQs to refer to Brexit include “no deal”, “leaving the EU”, and “the European Union issue”. Had I started with a corpus analysis of PMQs data, it would have required more inferential work to determine how each of these tokens relate to each other. I then would have needed to consolidate my understanding of the topic into a convenient search term in order to collect newspaper data from an online archive, given that the sheer volume of newspaper articles published within my research period made manually coding each one for relevance an impossibility. This means that, had I started with PMQs, I would have needed to reduce a complex topic into a single word or phrase. By starting with newspaper data, I was able to expand a single word into a complex topic.

3.2 Data Collection: Newspapers

I collected newspaper data from the Nexis newspaper archive, an online database allowing for the quick and accurate compilation of news corpora (Marchi, 2022: 576). This archive has previously been used as a source of data in studies of discursive representations of gender identities in the UK press (e.g. Baker, 2012b in a study of representations of “metrosexuality” in British press, and Cameron and Shaw, 2016 in a study of party leaders in the 2015 UK general election). I limited my search to print versions of UK national newspapers, grouping duplicates to minimise repeat results.

To gather results pertaining to Thatcher’s performance in PMQs, I searched for newspaper articles that contained the word “Thatcher” and either the phrase “Prime Minister’s Questions” or “Question Time”. For Thatcher’s final year in office, 28/11/1989 – 28/11/1990, my search yielded 572 results from five different publications: *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, and *The Independent*. I read each file to confirm that they referenced Margaret Thatcher and not another instance of the word “Thatcher”, and to remove duplicate articles. Sometimes the same article appeared under two different titles or appeared multiple times if it appeared in multiple editions, such as the Scottish or Irish edition of a national title. These duplicates were removed, leaving a new total of 543 articles.

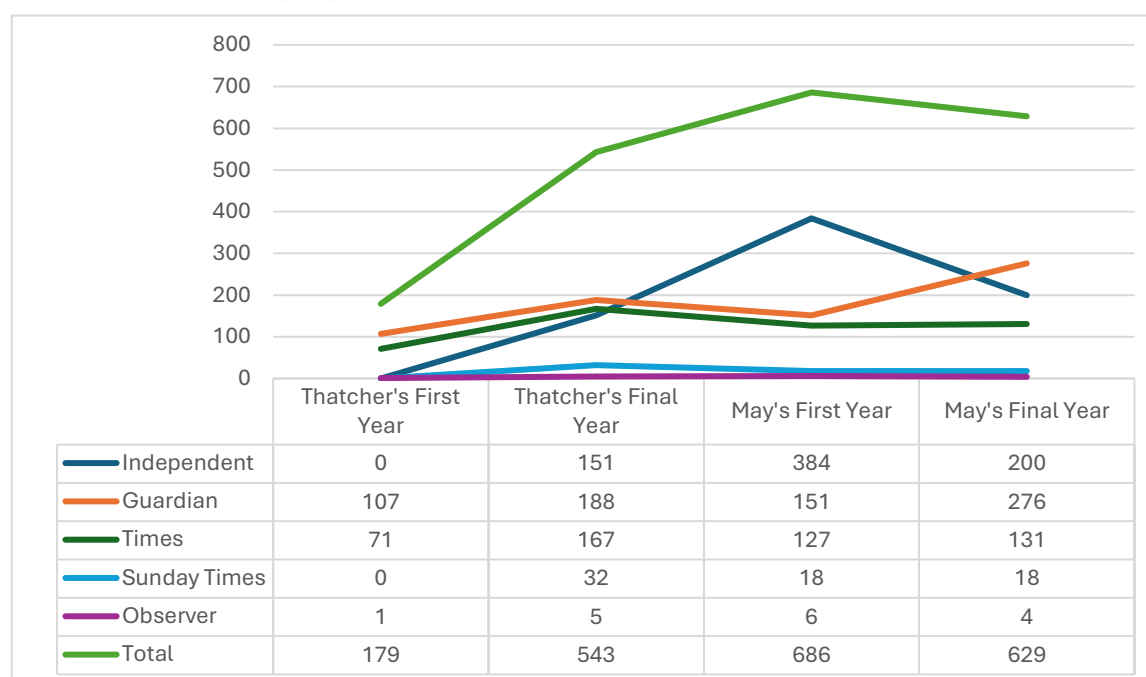
For consistency, I only collected data from these five publications for my other three newspaper datasets. Results from Nexis do not date back to Thatcher’s first year, 04/05/1979 – 04/05/1980, so results were obtained using the same search terms in the Guardian digital newspaper archive and the Times digital archive. This provides results from *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, and *The Times*. *The Independent* did not publish their first edition until October 1986, so there were no results from this publication for Thatcher’s first year. My search uncovered 196 initial results. However, the Guardian digital archive does not recognise “OR” as a Boolean operator so I had to run two different searches, “Thatcher AND Prime Minister’s Questions” and “Thatcher AND Question Time”. Articles that mention both “Prime Minister’s Questions” and “Question Time” appeared in both searches, so I read through them and disregarded articles that appeared for a second time. The final total was 179 newspaper articles.

To collect newspaper articles relating to May's performance in PMQs, I limited my search in the Nexis archive to only show results from *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, and *The Independent*. *The Independent* stopped releasing printed editions in 2016, so even though I continued to only use printed editions where possible, all results from *The Independent* were articles published online.

Given that the word "May" has several potential homonyms, it was necessary to specify "Theresa May" or "Mrs May" in my search terms. I also removed "Question Time" as a search term, given that, in the Theresa May datasets, it was more likely to refer to the televised BBC topical debate show than PMQs. Instead, I searched for articles that included the phrase "Prime Minister's Questions" or its popular acronym, "PMQs". For May's first year, 13/07/2016 – 13/07/2017, I originally received 945 results, which was reduced to 686 after disregarding duplicate results. For May's final year, 24/07/2018 – 24/07/2019, my search brought back 837 articles. After removing duplicates, I was left with 629.

Fig 3.1 shows the distribution of newspaper articles per publication per year:

Fig 3.1 Newspapers per publication



As Sunday papers, *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* consistently brought back far fewer results. Results from May's first year contained a disproportionate amount of articles

from *The Independent*, which was taken into account when conducting keyword analysis for that corpus (Section 3.3.2.3).

3.3 Corpus Linguistic Methods

Corpus linguistic (CL) analysis utilises computer software to quickly and accurately reveal linguistic patterns and frequency information in large amounts of text (Baker and McEnery, 2015: 2). This electronic method provides an objective overview of data, independent of pre-conceived notions held by the researcher, therefore revealing results that “may run counter to intuition” and may broaden understandings of how language is used across a large dataset (Baker, 2006: 2). Rayson (2008: 520) has referred to CL approaches as an application of “the scientific method” due to a high standard of falsifiability, completeness, simplicity, and objectivity. As such, the systematic nature of CL approaches has been celebrated for the robustness and validity of results (Baker et al., 2008: 277; Lukač, 2011: 191; Rheindorf, 2019: 40).

CL methods are often combined with critical discourse analysis approaches, leading to corpus-assisted CDA studies. As Baker et al. (2008: 296) argue, CL approaches focus solely on what is “explicitly written” and cannot account for implicational meaning, so the addition of CDA approaches allows CL findings to be interpreted as discourses rather than isolated language resources. This combination of approaches adds a systematic rigour to the qualitative interpretation of quantified results and allows qualitative findings to be quantified in a measure of salience (Lin, 2014: 226; Rheindorf, 2019: 40).

CL methods have been applied to the study of language and gender to explore both linguistic variation (e.g. McEnery et al.’s 2000 work on use of swearing and abuse by gender) and representation of gender identities (e.g. Holmes and Sigley’s 2001 exploration of how gendered terms such as *women/men*, *girls/boys* are used). Baker (2014: 6) advocates for the inclusion of CL as a “supplementary approach” to studies of language and gender, but I hesitate to identify this project as a corpus-assisted CDA study. I utilise CL methods to ensure a systematic and empirical foundation for the selection of data, but not to investigate either representation of gender or linguistic behaviours and the performance of gender. I use CL

tools such as keywords lists, collocation, and concordance lines to identify salient events discussed in newspapers in relation to the appearance of Thatcher or May at PMQs, with the intention of then collecting data from PMQs sessions where Thatcher and May discuss those same events. This ensures that I am considering representations of Thatcher and May in conjunction with the exact linguistic performances that inspired those representations. Limiting data based on its relevance to a single topic from each year also narrows down my dataset to a manageable size for an in-depth qualitative analysis without the need for subjective judgements about the inclusion of data.

3.3.1 Preparing Data for Corpus Analysis

My newspaper data had to be prepared to ensure compatibility with my chosen corpus software, AntConc (Anthony, 2019). Results collected from *The Guardian* and *The Times* online archives were available as .pdf files showing a photocopy of the relevant page, but due to the poor quality of the image, .pdf to text converters were not sufficiently accurate in creating text files for each article. I typed out each article manually to ensure transcriptions were accurate.

Results from the Nexis archive were downloaded as individual word documents, which I was able to convert into .txt files. Nexis data also included a significant amount of paratextual information for each article, including publication name and date, copyright information, word counts, page ranges, and section headings. I deleted all of this metadata, ensuring that only the headline and main body of each article contributed to my corpus analysis (Brookes and Wright, 2020: 117).

Token counts for each year, after the removal of metadata, are shown in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1: Token counts per year

Year	Token Count
Thatcher's First Year	89,349
Thatcher's Final Year	381,998
May's First Year	527,223
May's Final Year	1,225,479

3.3.2 Keyness, Collocation, and Concordance

The first objective of my corpus analysis was to identify keywords, which I then observed in contextual use by examining collocates and concordances (Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008: 7).

Corpus software generates keyword lists by carrying out statistical tests that generate the likelihood that a word appears by chance (Baker, 2006: 125). Words that are statistically unlikely to have appeared by chance are assigned a positive keyness value; this value can be considered a measure of “saliency” and can be used to identify “lexical items that could warrant further examination” (Baker, 2006: 125). Scott (2015: 236) identifies three main types of keywords: proper nouns, grammatical words more indicative of style, and lexical words relating to the text’s “aboutness”. This final category holds the most value for this study, since these ‘aboutness’ words will help reveal the main concepts and topics discussed within each corpus (Gabrielatos, 2018: 1). While Culpeper and Demmen (2015: 93) argue that ‘aboutness’ keywords are those that are easiest to predict, Baker (2004: 357) asserts that keyness reveals frequency information that is “unlikely to be matched by researcher intuition”. Picking my ‘aboutness’ words from a list of keywords provides an empirical basis for the topics I have chosen for further study.

A crucial stage in identifying keywords is a comparison to a reference corpus, as this will reveal the “outstandingness” of a given word (Scott, 1997: 236). I chose the British National Corpus (BNC) of written words as a reference corpus for this study, due to it being “more or less representative of general British English” (Baker, 2006: 97). The written BNC is comprised of over 85 million word tokens, collected from multiple genres over a span of three years, so any words that appear in my corpora with comparatively greater frequency could be considered significant and specifically relevant to the premierships of Thatcher and May. The version of BNC used in this study was completed in 1994; I chose this edition as it reflects a mid-point between the earliest (1979) and latest (2019) data in my corpora. Had I chosen the latest version of the BNC (2014), this would more closely reflect language use for the May corpora but risks being less representative of language use for the Thatcher corpora.

It is for similar reasons I chose the BNC over a more specialist corpus. The written BNC is sourced from journals, periodicals, and books as well as newspapers, but when compared to examples of corpora consisting entirely of newspapers, I still deemed the written BNC more representative of my dataset. I found that newspaper corpora, such as the News on the Web Corpus or the SiBol Corpus of English broadsheet newspapers, presented additional complications. Not only did the problem of the year these corpora were compiled remain, but both consist of international English-language publications, and so do not represent specifically British English, as the BNC does.

Keyness is measured using two different metrics: effect-size, comparing the normative frequency of a word between corpora, and statistical significance, the chance that the observed frequency difference is not random (Gabrielatos, 2018: 230). As a measure of statistical significance, log-likelihood reveals how “surprising” a given word or phrase is, even when it appears only once in the corpus (Kilgariff, 2001: 105). The lowest possible threshold ($p < 0.0001$) was set to return fewer keywords (Baker, 2006: 126; Culpeper and Demmen, 2015: 98).

Gabrielatos (2018: 231) argues that statistical significance metrics are not a sufficient measure of keyness, given that results may be skewed by the compared corpora being of uneven size. However, effect-size metrics, with the exception of Difference Coefficient, cannot account for tokens which have zero frequency in the reference corpus (Gabrielatos, 2018: 237). Using the Difference Coefficient, keyness is measured on a scale of 1 to -1, with these absolute values indicating a token only exists in one of the compared corpora. This was a significant complication for this study, where neologisms such as “Brexit” were expected to appear in my Theresa May corpora but would not be evident in the BNC.

This problem is perfectly illustrated by my corpus of newspaper articles from May’s first year. When a keyword list is generated using the Difference Coefficient as an effect-size measure to account for neologisms, all words which did not appear in the BNC were given the same value and shared the same top keyness rank. As such, the token “Brexit” was ranked the same as the token “bleugggh”, an onomatopoeic word which appeared in only one article, and so cannot be said to indicate the content of the corpus as a whole. This proved to be an inefficient way of finding my ‘aboutness’ keywords.

Measures of association, such as the Dice Coefficient, can also be used to measure effect-size by simply comparing the frequency of tokens within each corpus. This method places more value on tokens which appear with greater frequency in my study corpus, and so the highest ranked keywords were largely grammatical words. However, the highest ranked 'aboutness' keywords were largely the same as those ranked highest when ordered by statistical significance, with some minor variation in the order of ranking. For this reason, my keyness rankings were based on statistical significance over effect-size: the 'aboutness' keywords remained the same, but a larger number of grammatical words were excluded from the list.

Collocation is used in this study to gain a greater understanding of how my keywords relate to each other and to the 'aboutness' of the corpus as a whole. I again used log-likelihood as a measure of statistical significance to investigate collocation: whether tokens co-occur with an above-chance frequency (Baker et al., 2008: 278; Baker and McEnery, 2015: 2). Collocates are identified based upon their co-occurrence within the span of a set number of words; for this study, the range was five words either side of my keyword (Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008: 11; Hunston, 2010: 164). Clusters/N-grams are specific collocates that appear sequentially, and may also be useful for understanding how keywords are used within the corpus (Baker et al, 2008: 298; Scott, 2010: 148).

Concordance analysis reveals a token or cluster in its immediate co-text (Baker et al, 2008: 279; Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008: 15). Concordance lines display all instances of the searched-for item within the corpus, with a few words either side to reveal the original textual environment in which it occurred (Evison, 2010: 122). Creating concordance lines for very frequent words "can make it difficult to observe patterns reliably" because there are too many results, but this search can be narrowed by searching for collocates and clusters instead of a single keyword (Hunston, 2010: 162). Concordance is therefore a more qualitative form of analysis, used to identify patterns of language use within context, to avoid "erroneously combining words that may appear similar at face value" (Baker, 2004: 353).

For my four corpora, I use these CL methods to identify topics and events from each year which may be judged to be salient based on their statistically significant frequency and a high level of ‘aboutness’.

3.3.2.1 Thatcher’s First Year

For my corpus of newspaper articles from Thatcher’s first year in office, the highest ranked keywords predictably included proper nouns such as “Thatcher” and “Callaghan” and titles such as “Prime”, “Minister”, and “MPs”. These results were to be expected, since every article within the corpus referenced Thatcher and PMQs at least once. As such, they are a poor indicator of ‘aboutness’: they do not reveal anything specific about the content of the corpus other than the intentional focus on Thatcher and PMQs.

Table 3.2: Original keyword list for Thatcher’s First Year

Rank	Keyword	Frequency
1	Thatcher	653
2	Mr	1120
3	Mrs	639
4	Callaghan	157
5	Prime	295
6	Government	486
7	Minister	339
8	MPs	168
9	Steel	180
10	Yesterday	258

From the above list, the word “yesterday” is also not helpful, since it serves a grammatical function, such as an adverbial in the example, “... *discussed at Question Time yesterday*...” The only word out of the original top 10 keywords I deemed to be a sufficient indication of ‘aboutness’ was “steel”, since it represents a topic discussed in relation to PMQs that could feasibly also have been discussed at PMQs.

I therefore created a new list of top 10 ‘aboutness’ keywords by disregarding proper nouns, pre/post-nominal titles, grammatical words, reporting verbs, and generic ‘government’ words which may be expected to be used in relation to PMQs but do not

reveal anything specific that warrants further investigation, such as “Government”, “Commons”, or “question”. This new top 10 list is shown in Table 3.3:

Table 3.3: ‘Aboutness’ keyword list for Thatcher’s First Year

Rank	Keyword	Frequency
9	Steel	180
16	EEC	99
20	Strike	113
23	Olympic	69
24	Budget	150
28	Bill	118
33	Rhodesia	37
35	Picketing	32
39	Olympics	35
43	Athletes	34

This new list reveals connections between ‘aboutness’ keywords, indicating the emergence of “principle themes” within the corpus (McEnery et al., 2015: 242). The most obvious example would be the appearance of both “Olympic” and “Olympics”, and how these share connotations with the word “athletes”. However, closer examination revealed that these three words exclusively appeared in the same 17 articles, so even though they may be grouped together as emblematic of a single topic, this topic was not the most salient in the corpus.

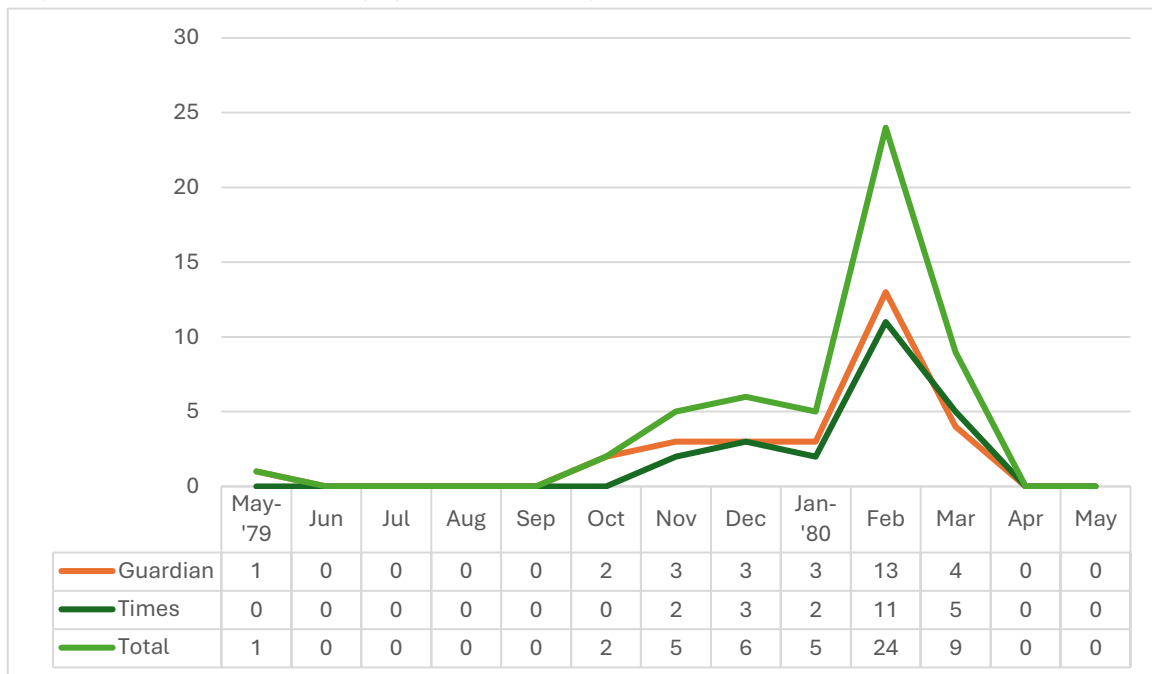
Further investigation of the word “steel” revealed a second prominent topic amongst these key words: “strike” was ranked the second most significant collocate of “steel”, and “steel strike” was the most frequent cluster. Concordance analysis of the word “steel” also revealed a relationship to both “strike” and “picketing”:

Table 3.4: Example ‘steel’ concordance lines

... the national steel strike to private sector steel companies, figured in question time exchanges to...
... picket yesterday outside the private Sheffield steel firm, Hadfields, was “intimidating and...
... reasons for hostile picketing in the steel industry? Will the Government grasp the nettle...
... that the Government ought to settle the steel strike and so remove the cause of...

I was therefore able to determine that a salient topic that appeared with significant frequency within the dataset was the industrial action within the steel industry, and made the decision to base the next step of my data selection process around references to this dispute. I isolated every article which mentioned the word “steel” and produced a timeline of when they were published:

Fig 3.2: Distribution of newspapers mentioning 'steel' in Thatcher's First Year



The majority of articles mentioning “steel” were published in February 1980. Two of these articles were discounted because they did not relate to disputes in the steel industry, but made reference to David Steel, Leader of the Liberal Party, and questions he had raised at PMQs. This left 22 articles selected for qualitative analysis, and my PMQs data for Thatcher’s first year was collected from every PMQs session in February 1980.

3.3.2.2 Thatcher’s Final Year

Following the same method, I produced a list of ‘aboutness’ keywords for Thatcher’s final year in office:

Table 3.5: 'Aboutness' keywords for Thatcher's Final Year

Rank	Keyword	Frequency
8	Poll	656
13	Pounds	645
14	Tax	882
18	Ridley	238
30	Inflation	274
37	Ambulance	172
41	Election	331
44	Rover	150
46	Charge	311
49	Rates	293

It became apparent that there were also connections between keywords on this list. On 601 occasions, the word "poll" appeared as part of the phrase, "poll tax", making this the number one ranked collocate and cluster. The poll tax was a colloquial term for Thatcher's proposed community charge; the word "charge" also appeared as a top 10 'aboutness' keyword, with "community" being the highest ranked collocate and "community charge" being the highest ranked cluster, appearing 199 times throughout the corpus.

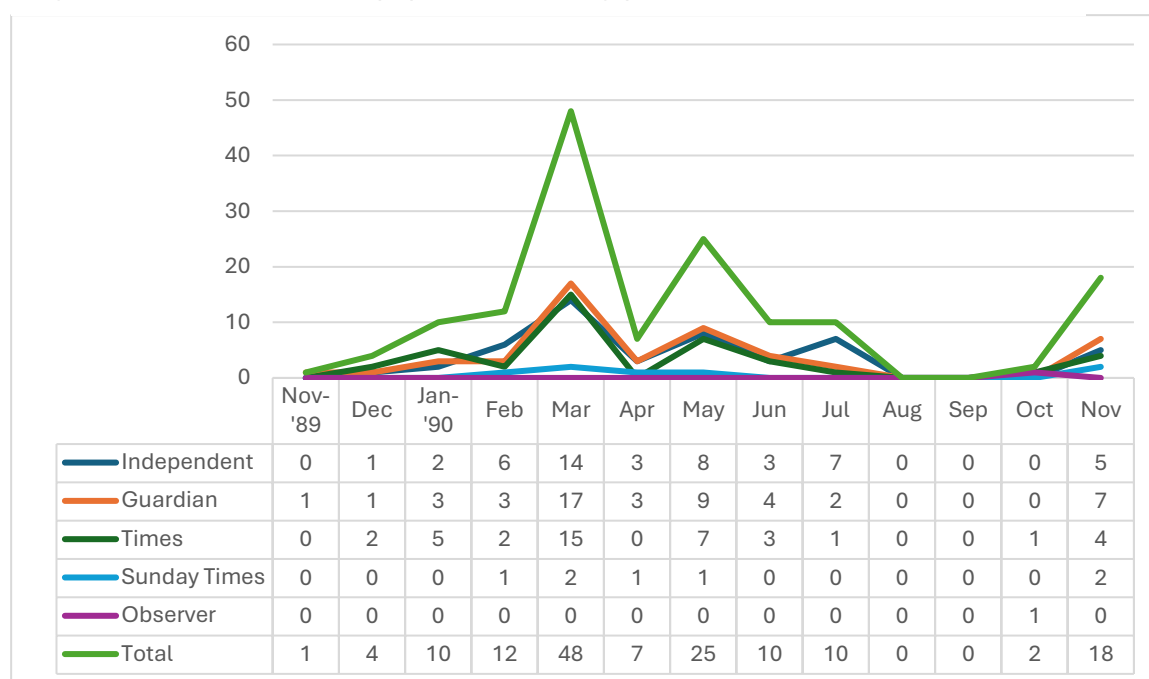
Concordance lines also revealed an association between these words and the word "rates", as this was used to reference the system of domestic rates the community charge was replacing:

Table 3.6: Example 'rates' concordance lines

... 'Community charge is a much fairer charge than rates, and a far fairer charge than the alternative...
... Thatcher: Can he not understand that domestic rates have been abolished? The enemy is not community charge...
... be infinitely better than going back to the rates." Mr Kinnock: "Her honest approach on poll tax...
... unacceptable" increase of 35 per cent in domestic rates. When poll tax bills were finally set, the...

I therefore identified the poll tax as a salient topic for this year. A timeline of publications revealed an increase in mentions of the poll tax in March 1990:

Fig 3.3: Distribution of newspapers mentioning 'poll tax' in Thatcher's Final Year



I isolated these 48 articles for qualitative analysis and collected PMQs data from sessions held in March 1990.

3.3.2.3 May's First Year

The top 10 'aboutness' keywords for May's first year in office are shown in Table 3.7:

Table 3.7: 'Aboutness' keywords for May's First Year

Rank	Keyword	Frequency
2	Brexit	1489
4	EU	1016
14	NHS	645
17	Referendum	515
18	Election	805
32	Leadership	414
51	Deal	486
59	Austerity	127
62	Negotiations	236
70	Immigration	149

Over half the articles in this corpus were from *The Independent*, so to ensure that this was not skewing results I removed all articles from *The Independent* from the corpus and produced a new keyword list from the remaining 302 files:

Table 3.8: ‘Aboutness’ keywords for May’s First Year (without files from The Independent)

Rank	Keyword	Frequency
2	Brexit	726
4	EU	439
12	NHS	343
14	Referendum	256
25	Election	318
28	Leadership	232
64	Austerity	67
67	Immigration	81
69	Deal	222
81	Negotiations	105

The keywords remain the same, albeit with some variation in keyness rank, so I returned to the full corpus to conduct collocation and concordance analysis. The word “Brexit” appeared in 369 articles, over half the files in the dataset. This topic was not narrowed down through collocation analysis; the top ranked collocates were determiners and prepositions, “the”, “a”, “to”, and “of”. The highest ranked collocate indicating ‘aboutness’ was “hard”, and “hard Brexit” was the fourth most frequent cluster for “Brexit”. However, the phrase “hard Brexit” was only used on 83 occasions across 47 files, so I was not convinced this topic was more salient than other ‘aboutness’ keywords.

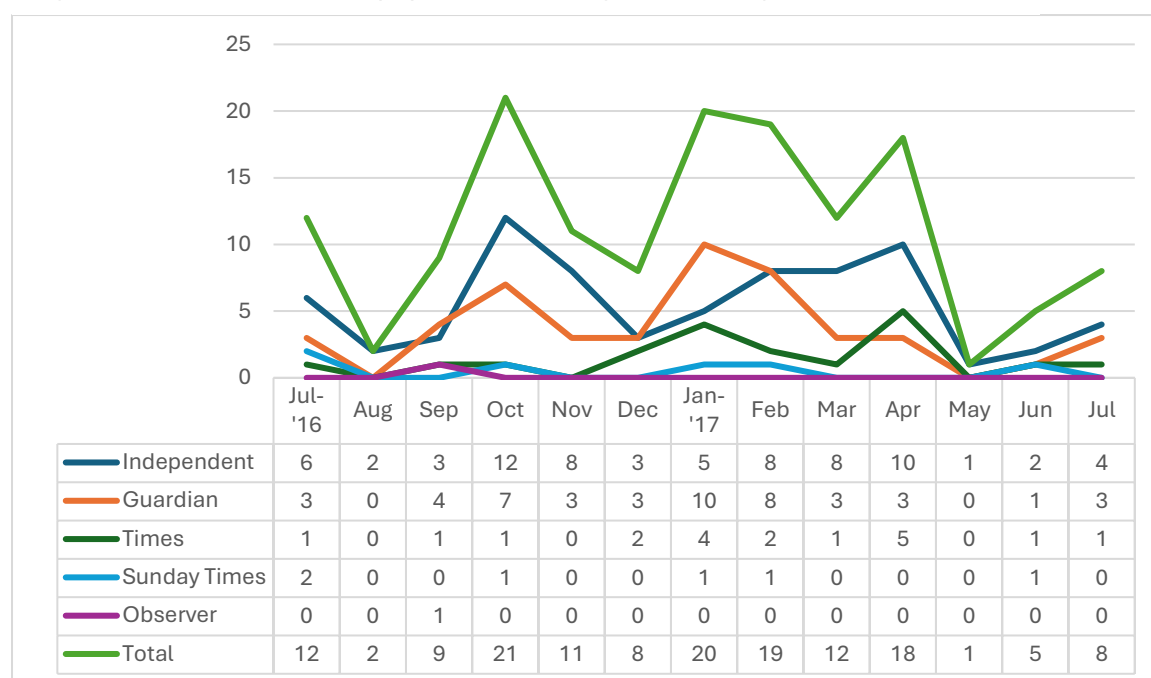
Collocations of the word “NHS” included “funding” and “crisis”, a theme which was reflected in concordance lines:

Table 3.9: Example ‘NHS’ concordance lines

... in to tackle the growing problems in the NHS – accusing Ms May of being “in denial”. And...
... and do what it takes to pull our NHS and social care system back from the brink...
... failure to find any money for either the NHS or social care in the autumn statement. Many...
... not the answer to the crisis facing the NHS. They are hopelessly divided, have no credible...

I therefore chose the so-called ‘NHS crisis’ as the topic informing my data selection for May’s first year. Articles mentioning “NHS” were more evenly distributed across the year, but the greatest frequency were published in October 2016:

Fig 3.4: Distribution of newspapers mentioning 'NHS' in May's First Year



I isolated the 21 articles from October 2016 which mentioned the NHS, and collected PMQs data from the same month.

3.3.2.4 May’s Final Year

‘Aboutness’ keywords for May’s final year were largely dominated by Brexit:

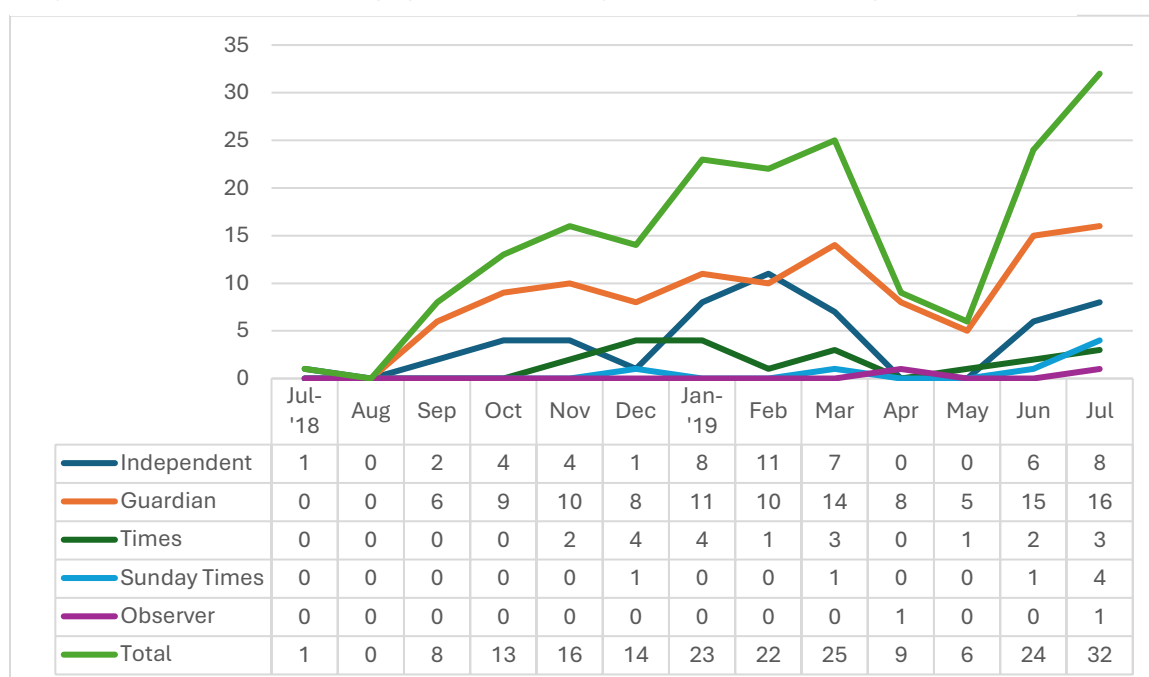
Table 3.10: ‘Aboutness’ keywords for May’s Final Year

Rank	Keyword	Frequency
1	Brexit	7606
2	EU	3818
3	Deal	6593
20	Backstop	938
21	Referendum	1362
34	Withdrawal	993
36	Amendment	775
41	Agreement	1427

43	Leadership	969
52	Customs	702

The word “Brexit” appeared 7606 times across 521 articles. After the word “the”, the second highest ranked collocate of “Brexit” was “deal”, with “Brexit deal” and “deal Brexit” being the most frequent clusters. Concordance lines overwhelmingly revealed the cluster “deal Brexit” being used in the phrase “no deal Brexit”, with this phrase appearing 981 times across 197 articles. Based on this frequency, I chose the concept of a no deal Brexit as the basis for my data collection for this year.

Fig 3.5: Distribution of newspapers mentioning 'no deal Brexit' in May's Final Year



There was a greater frequency of articles mentioning “no deal Brexit” published in July 2019 compared to any other month, but I found that these articles mentioned incoming Prime Minister Boris Johnson more than Theresa May. I based this hypothesis on the headlines of these articles: Johnson was referenced by name in 18 out of 32 headlines, whereas May was referenced by name 8 times. To confirm that these articles focused more on Johnson than May, I ran a corpus analysis on just these 32 files, and found that Johnson was mentioned more frequently and had higher keyness than May:

Table 3.11: References to Johnson and May in articles mentioning “no deal Brexit” in July 2019

Word	Frequency Rank	Frequency	Keyness Rank
Johnson	13	718	1
May	18	570	19
Boris	42	335	3
Theresa	74	160	8

For this reason, I chose to select data from the month with the second highest frequency of published articles, March 2019. I isolated these 25 articles for qualitative analysis, and collected PMQs data from this month.

3.4 Data Collection: PMQs

Based on the results of my CL analysis, I chose to collect data from every PMQs session in February 1980, March 1990, October 2016, and March 2019. I had the option to collect this data from the UK Parliament’s Hansard archive, as other researchers investigating language in the House of Commons have (e.g. Christie, 2002; Bates et al., 2014). However, the Hansard website describes the Official Record as “substantially verbatim”: it has been “edited to remove repetitions and obvious mistakes”. Slembrouck (1992: 104) argues that the distinguishing feature of the Hansard report is its “writtenness”, filtering out “‘disfluency’ and other properties of spokenness” including informal and ungrammatical utterances. Slembrouck (1992: 113) also concludes that interruptions are often misrepresented and do not accurately reflect “struggles over floor-holding” during debates. Shaw (2018: 105) questions the suitability of Hansard as a source of data for analysis of parliamentary discourses on the basis of these omissions, with Reid (2014: 50) also arguing that the Hansard reports make “no attempt to capture the turbulent and aural atmosphere which everyone associates with PMQs”.

It would therefore be preferable to create a dataset from my own transcriptions of proceedings, but PMQs was not broadcast until 1989, near to the end of Thatcher’s final term, making this an impossibility. To compromise, PMQs sessions from the first year of each premiership were collected from Hansard, and PMQs sessions from the final year of each premiership were transcribed from video footage available in the C-Span video library, an online archive of government debate content.

3.4.1 Collecting Data from Hansard

To find PMQs sessions in the Hansard archive, I was able to limit my search results to debates from the House of Commons that took place in either February 1980 or October 2016. PMQs are part of a series of debates entitled “Oral Answers to Questions”, which occur daily when parliament is in session. PMQs took place on Tuesdays and Thursdays during Thatcher’s premiership and Wednesdays during May’s premiership, so I only viewed the debates that took place on these days. PMQs is the final segment of Oral Answers to Questions, and is identifiable by the section heading “Prime Minister” and the opening sentence, “*The Prime Minister was asked—*”. I copied all data from this point onwards for use in my analysis. Table 3.12 shows an overview of data collected:

Table 3.12: Overview of Hansard data

Year	Month	Number of PMQs sessions	Total Length		Number of Questions
			Lines	Tokens	
Thatcher’s First Year	February 1980	8	1,583	17,353	157
May’s First Year	October 2016	3	1,629	19,881	96

3.4.2 Collecting data from C-Span

C-Span is an American network that televises and catalogues congressional and parliamentary debates and proceedings, including PMQs. Their series on Prime Minister’s Questions contains recorded footage of every broadcast PMQs session, starting with the first recorded sessions in October 1989. I filtered the series of videos by date to reveal only sessions from March 1990 or March 2019. I manually transcribed this footage using a broad transcription system adapted from Jefferson (2004) (see Appendix 1).

When transcribing barracking and collective interruptions, I have identified them based on the function they fulfil. When an interruption signifies agreement or support of an utterance or speaker, this noise was labelled as a ((CHEER)). When an interruption signified

disagreement with an utterance or speaker, this noise was labelled as a ((PROTEST)). Exceptions to this generalisation include ((LAUGHTER)) and ((HEAR HEAR)), since these both serve distinct purposes. A cry of “*hear hear*” is sanctioned by long parliamentary usage, and not considered to be an illegal interruption so long as it is reserved for the end of an utterance (Erskine May, 2019: 21.37). Laughter is distinct in that it may either show support for a speaker, indicating the successful use of humour, or it may serve a mocking function, whereby Members signal disagreement with a speaker by positioning them as unintentionally funny.

To identify the source of these interruptions, I have labelled them as either ((Conservative)) or ((Opposition)). This is not to suggest that a ((Conservative CHEER)) originates from all Conservative Members, or exclusively Conservative Members, merely that the source of the interruption seems to be emanating from the side of the Chamber occupied by the Prime Minister. Similarly, an ((Opposition CHEER)) is one that originates from the Opposition benches. A source is not identified in instances where interruptions seem to stem uniformly from across the Chamber, such as when Members cry ((HEAR HEAR)) in support of a bipartisan issue.

Speakers are identified by surname where possible, but some interruptions were made by unidentifiable backbenchers. In these cases, the speaker is listed as “MP”, further identified as either Conservative or Opposition if it was possible to determine which side of the Chamber they were sat on. The Speaker of the House is always referred to as SPEAKER, to avoid confusion with any other Member.

Unlike in Hansard, I have not included demographic information such as constituency or political affiliation in my transcriptions. Where relevant, these details are included in an introductory paragraph to the extracts in my analysis. A full list of the MPs whose contributions are included in this analysis is available in Appendix 2, including details such as party membership, constituency, and Government postings.

An overview of data from my own transcriptions is shown in Table 3.13:

Table 3.13: Overview of C-Span data

Year	Month	Number of PMQs sessions	Total Length			Number of Questions
			Time (hr:min:sec)	Lines	Tokens	
Thatcher's Final Year	March 1990	9	02:20:04	2,624	22,574	165
May's Final Year	March 2019	4	03:10:37	3,741	34,870	134

3.5 Data Selection: PMQs

Having collected PMQs data from my chosen months for each year, I manually coded every question for its relevance to my chosen 'aboutness' keywords that were apparent in my newspaper corpora. If a question or answer referenced the event corresponding to my keywords, I selected that question/answer pairing for qualitative analysis. Definitions for these events, and the frequency of questions, are shown in Table 3.14:

Table 3.14: Overview of data selected for qualitative analysis

Year	Month	Keyword	Corresponding Event	Frequency of Newspaper Articles	Frequency of Questions within PMQs
Thatcher's First Year	February 1980	Steel	Widespread strikes in the steel industry, and the proposed Employment Bill relating to picketing outside the workplace, secondary strikes, and trade union memberships.	22	38

Thatcher's Final Year	March 1990	Poll Tax	The introduction of the Community Charge, also referred to as the Poll Tax.	48	44
May's First Year	October 2016	NHS	Fears surrounding a so- called NHS 'crisis', largely due to funding and staff shortages.	21	18
May's Final Year	March 2019	No Deal Brexit	Fears surrounding the likelihood or consequences of Britain leaving the European Union without a withdrawal agreement in place.	25	20

Having selected both newspaper and PMQs data, my qualitative analysis utilises a combination of the FPDA and FPA approaches defined in Section 2.3 and Section 2.4 of this thesis. Additionally, newspaper data is categorised based on the presence of role trap discourses, such as those described by Kanter (1993) and used in the analysis of representations of women politicians by Cameron and Shaw (2016) and Baxter (2018).

A full list of newspaper articles selected for qualitative analysis can be found in Appendix 3.

3.6 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methods I have adopted to best investigate the research questions for this study. Corpus linguistic methods were used to inform the selection of newspaper and PMQs data, which was analysed qualitatively using a combination of FPDA (see Section 2.3) and FPA (see Section 2.4).

Despite starting with a corpus of over 2000 newspaper articles and collecting transcripts for 24 PMQs sessions, my method of selecting data as it relates to certain topics means that

the amount of data selected for in-depth qualitative analysis is a small sample of the total data collected. Any conclusions drawn from my analysis can be said to reflect this data sample, but cannot be guaranteed to be representative of behaviour in PMQs or representation in newspapers more generally. However, focusing on a small sample complements my case study approach. To reiterate a point raised earlier in this chapter: my analysis is intended to produce *examples* of leadership as it is performed in PMQs and how it is perceived in newspapers. My method ensures that I can draw meaningful links between the behaviours of Thatcher and May in PMQs and the way it is discussed in newspapers on these specific occasions.

The following PMQs results chapters focus on two primary areas of analysis: the ways in which Thatcher and May manage rapport through the use of im/politeness (Chapter 4), and the ways they negotiate authority through the use of patronising language (Chapter 5). The aim of these chapters is to explore how Thatcher and May construct gendered identities and/or powerful identities in PMQs.

Chapter 6 presents results from my qualitative analysis of my newspaper data, with an emphasis on the use of role trap discourses to represent Thatcher and May in relation to preconceived understandings of gender role stereotypes.

4.0 Rapport Management: Navigating interpersonal relationships

This chapter aims to explore the ways in which Thatcher and May manage rapport and interpersonal relationships, including the degrees to which they engage with the aggressive norms of PMQs, and how these demonstrations impact their construction of gender identity. To do this, I have categorised questions to the Prime Minister according to Bates et al.'s (2014) definitions of standard, helpful, and unanswerable questions. Table 4.1 shows the frequency of each type of question present for each year in the dataset.

Table 4.1: Frequency of types of question

Type of Question	Definition (taken from Bates et al., 2014: 263)	Frequency			
		Thatcher's First Year	Thatcher's Final Year	May's First Year	May's Final Year
Standard	A question which is straightforward to answer	7	1	7	3
Helpful	A question which acts as a prompt to allow the PM to set out the government position/policy and/or attack the Opposition	12	15	0	0
Unanswerable	A question which either appears to be designed deliberately to provoke discomfort and/or evasion, or contains and/or is premised on incorrect information	19	28	11	17
Total		38	44	18	20

Helpful questions characteristically provide opportunities to either create solidarity between Government MPs and enhance rapport, or to criticise the Opposition and challenge rapport. Unanswerable questions characteristically contain rapport-challenging behaviours, and so Prime Ministers are expected to reciprocate to protect their own face needs. As such, these classifications provide a useful foundation for analysing how Thatcher

or May have adopted a rapport orientation expected based upon the nature of the interaction.

4.1 Maintaining or Enhancing Rapport

This section focuses on Thatcher and May's attempts to maintain or enhance rapport with their audience, as shown in their responses to helpful and standard questions.

There were no examples of Theresa May being asked helpful questions in my dataset, so her approaches to rapport management are considered in terms of reciprocated politeness present in standard questions.

4.1.1 "Grateful for his silence": Thatcher responding to helpful questions

In my dataset from the first year of her premiership, Thatcher routinely made choices to maintain or enhance her rapport with audiences both inside and outside the Chamber. These choices were noticeable in her answers to helpful questions, where she seemingly rejected opportunities to adopt a rapport challenge orientation. These questions served as an invitation for Thatcher to criticise the Opposition, but she apparently chose not to. Of the 38 questions included in my dataset, 12 of them were helpful questions. On 11 of these occasions, she chose to prioritise enhancing rapport with constituents and communities outside the Chamber, often neglecting to even mention the Opposition. Examples of this include when Thatcher was asked to comment on steel workers crossing the picket lines outside steel plants, as seen in Extract 1 below:

Extract 1

Mr Tony Marlow (Conservative) references Sheerness and Longbridge, two privately owned steel plants which remained open despite protesters on strike from the British Steel Corporation picketing outside.

PMQs 21/02/1980 Lines 112 - 122

112 Mr. Marlow

113 Will my right hon. Friend have time today to arrange a meeting between the Leader of the
114 Opposition and the workers from Sheerness and Longbridge so that he has the opportunity
115 of learning about aspects of industrial and economic matters of which he has no knowledge
116 at present?

117 The Prime Minister

118 The demonstrations at Sheerness showed very much that workers today are interested in
119 the right to work and the right to go to work unhindered. They are to be congratulated as is
120 their management. Congratulations should also go to the police for the excellent way in
121 which they carried out their duties which are both to protect the right to work and also the
122 right to picket peacefully.

Marlow makes an on-record attack on Callaghan, claiming that he has “no knowledge” of the “industrial and economic matters” dictating whether workers choose to go on strike or not (line 115). This provides Thatcher with the opportunity to elaborate and further denigrate Callaghan’s intelligence, understanding, and ability to empathise with constituents. However, Thatcher makes no reference to Callaghan in her reply. Instead, she chooses to focus on the people involved in the demonstrations at Sheerness Steelworks, offering her congratulations to employees who continue to work, their management, and the police officers attempting to keep demonstrations under control (lines 119 – 120). The verb “congratulated” (line 119) and its nominalisation “congratulations” (line 120) show Thatcher’s exaggerated approval, simultaneously satisfying the positive face needs of these individuals and demonstrating a degree of interactional involvement and assumed intimacy, whereby Thatcher is associating herself with these communities (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 20).

Satisfying their association rights shows that Thatcher is attempting to enhance or at least maintain her current level of rapport with these communities.

Thatcher also emphasises that that police were on site to protect both the workers and strikers who were there to “picket peacefully”, revealing an effort to respect the positions of workers on both sides of this conflict (line 122). This stance mirrors her policy of non-involvement in strike resolution but still shows consideration for the desires and interests of the workers on strike. This demonstrates a degree of affective involvement whereby Thatcher is validating the efforts of workers on strike, even if she is not directly aligning herself with them (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 16). While she is not enhancing her rapport with this community of strikers, she is also not neglecting it.

The same can be inferred about her rapport management orientation with respect to Callaghan and the Opposition. By not mentioning Callaghan in her answer, despite him being directly referenced in the question, Thatcher is apparently neither defending nor criticising him, neither enhancing nor challenging her rapport with him. Given that it is in the nature of PMQs to be confrontational, Thatcher is noticeably deviating from conventions established within this community of practice (Lovenduski, 2012: 336-7). Thatcher’s more conciliatory approach, based on her decision to not assume a rapport challenge orientation at any point, is reminiscent of the kind of relational practice that Fletcher (2005: 87) argues is seen as “women’s work”. The act of ostensibly satisfying sociality rights in an effort to maintain interpersonal relationships requires “giving preeminence to connection”, which reflects a culturally feminine discursive style but rejects the “systematic impoliteness” that is a highly valued element of PMQs (Fletcher, 2005: 86; Harris, 2001: 466). However, this use of evasion is not to be equated with powerlessness: Thatcher recontextualises the interaction to allow for her preferred use of rapport management strategies. This choice is an exercise of her autonomy and a discursive display of her authority within PMQs.

There was one occasion where Thatcher did mention Callaghan by name in response to a helpful question, but chose not to be overtly critical:

Extract 2

Mr Fergus Montgomery (Conservative) references the disruptive demonstrations held by striking steel workers outside two private steel plants, Hadfields and Sheerness, which remained open. Uniformed police officers were present at both plants, leading to violent altercations between police and protesters outside the Hadfields steelworks.

PMQs 21/02/1980 lines 20 - 28

20 Mr. Montgomery

21 Does my right hon. Friend think that it would be helpful if the Leader of the Opposition
22 stated clearly where his Party stands on the picketing that took place at Hadfield's last week
23 and at Sheerness yesterday?

24 Does she agree that all that we have had from the right hon. Gentleman so far has been a
25 deafening silence on a vital issue?

26 The Prime Minister

27 I trust that the Leader of the Opposition will condemn everything except that which is
28 permitted by the law, namely, peaceful picketing.

Montgomery argues that Callaghan has been neglecting his responsibilities as Leader of the Opposition by offering “deafening silence” on the topic of the steel strikes, instead of contributing something productive to the discussion (line 25). This provides Thatcher with an opportunity to comment on Callaghan’s incompetence and to assert that her Government has been superior at managing the situation, but Thatcher chooses not to be so combative. Her use of the auxiliary verb “will” acknowledges that Callaghan has not yet

commented on the strikes, but presumes that he will and that his stance will be in accordance with British law (line 27). This does not contain a threat to Callaghan's positive face needs, but does convey an off-record threat to his negative face needs by denying him an alternative course of action. This demonstrates a lack of consideration for his autonomy, but Culpeper (2011: 96) argues that such behaviours are comparatively less offensive and carry a lower degree of symbolic violence than on-record verbal aggression. By not explicitly criticising Callaghan, Thatcher is not directly challenging their rapport. While this may not directly index a feminine performance, it does suggest a rejection of the masculinised behaviours that are considered normal within PMQs (Lovenduski, 2012: 322).

Thatcher also presents an epistemic stance through her use of the cognitive verb "trust" (line 27). She reveals what she believes will be Callaghan's position, but acknowledges that it is not a guarantee. The word "trust" also evokes an emotional response; it positions Thatcher as a trusting person and Callaghan as a trustworthy person. This negates the need for Thatcher to issue an imperative: if Callaghan were to do anything other than "condemn everything except that which is permitted by law", as Thatcher hopes he will (lines 27-8), he risks damaging his own face by revealing himself to be untrustworthy. As such, Thatcher manages to discursively create a moment of power for herself while still revealing herself to be trusting and person-oriented, in accordance with a stereotypically feminine performance (Holmes, 2006: 6).

There was only one occasion where Thatcher responded to a helpful question with an offensive answer likely to cause a loss of face for Callaghan and therefore challenge their rapport:

Extract 3

Mr Patrick Cormack (Conservative) is referencing a previous question posed to Thatcher, wherein she was asked to offer sympathy to the police officers injured in the protests outside the Hadfields steel plant and condemn violence as part of the strikes.

PMQs 14/02/1980 lines 179 – 186

179 Mr. Cormack

180 Does my right hon. Friend accept that the splendid answer that she gave to my hon. Friend,
181 the Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Blackburn) would have greater national effect if it were
182 publicly backed by the Leader of the Opposition?

183 Hon. Members

184 Who is he?

185 The Prime Minister

186 There are times when I am grateful for his silence.

In his question, Cormack suggests it would have great “national effect” if Callaghan were to publicly support Thatcher’s stance on the steel strikes (line 181). Thatcher subverts expectations by disagreeing and suggesting that it is more beneficial for Callaghan to remain silent. Thatcher uses a positive construction, “grateful for his silence”, to generate the implicature that Callaghan’s contributions are ineffective, to the point of being a nuisance (line 186). Given that “abusive and insulting language” is disallowed by the Erskine May treatise on parliamentary practice (2019: 21.21), the choice to go off-record with this FTA allows Thatcher to criticise Callaghan while still behaving fully within the confines of Parliamentary procedure. This reflects Shaw’s (2000: 416) findings from her analysis of House of Commons debates, that women MPs refrained from “rule-breaking activities” in a rejection of masculine practices. However, the use of implicature also contributes to the

humorous elements of her reply. Holmes (2006: 117) identifies contestive humour, that which contains an impolite or challenging proposition such as this, as “typical of a more masculine style”, making this an example of Thatcher successfully navigating the pragmatic requirements of parliamentary discourse and constructing a more masculine identity for herself.

An explicit rapport challenge orientation in response to a helpful question such as this is anomalous in the dataset from Thatcher’s first year in office, but became much more frequent in the dataset from her final year. Out of the 44 questions in my dataset for that year, 15 were helpful questions, and 8 of Thatcher’s answers to helpful questions contained a bald, on-record attack on the Opposition that was likely to challenge her rapport with Opposition Members.

In Extract 4 below, Thatcher is invited to criticise the actions of Opposition Members:

Extract 4

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Conservative) questions Thatcher about the anti-Poll Tax protests that have been occurring throughout the country. He also references the Members of the Labor Party who publicly announced their refusal to pay their own Poll Tax, in protest of its implementation.

PMQs 08/03/1990 lines 181 – 211

- 181 MITCHELL: Will my right honourable Friend utterly condemn the disgraceful and
182 dangerous scenes that we have witnessed in various council chambers across
183 [the country in recent days,]

184 [((loud Conservative HEAR HEAR))]

185 MITCHELL: orchestrated by various Left-wing groups –

186 CONSERVATIVE MP: Absolutely!

187 MITCHELL: – and encouraged by those members of the party
188 Opposite who decline to obey the law by threatening to withhold payment of
189 their community charge?

190 ((Conservative CHEERS))

191 MITCHELL: Will my –

192 SPEAKER: = Question,
193 please.

194 [[[quiet LAUGHTER]]]

195 MITCHELL: [Will – will my] right honourable Friend invite –

196 SPEAKER: = Order. [One question,
197 please. It's not fair on others.]

198 [[[PROTESTS]]]

199 THATCHER: Yes, Mr Speaker, I utterly condemn the violent scenes which seem to have
200 been organised by the Militant tendency. They are precisely the same kind of
201 violence we have seen before at Grunwick, in the coal strike, and at Wapping,
202 and they're the negation of democracy. We also condemn anyone,
203 particularly, you would think, an honourable Member of this House, who
204 chooses to disobey the law by refusing to pay his [community charge. That is
205 totally wrong]

206 [[[Conservative HEAR HEAR
207 and Opposition PROTESTS]]]

208 THATCHER: and it means that honourable Members Opposite only obey
 209 the law only if they make it and not when another Government does. That is
 210 [anti-democratic.]

211 [[((Conservative HEAR HEAR))]]

Mitchell accuses Labour MPs of encouraging civil disobedience throughout the country, providing Thatcher with an opportunity to claim that these Members have been damaging the national interest. She is asked to condemn these violent protests, to which she immediately replies in the affirmative, “yes” (line 199). The lack of hedging or redressive action creates an unapologetically direct approach to confrontation, creating a stronger association with a more stereotypically masculine gender performance (Holmes, 2006: 6). Her use of the phrase “utterly condemn” repeats the language used in the question, creating the impression of unanimity between herself and her MPs and enhancing her rapport with them (line 181 and line 199). This is further emphasised by her switching from the singular first person pronoun “I” in line 199 to the plural first person pronoun “we” in line 202. This creates solidarity amongst her Party by explicating that they are united in their disapproval of Opposition Members inciting rebellion. Government MPs clearly support this stance, as shown by the supportive interventions of “Hear Hear” on line 206 and line 2011. This suggests that Thatcher is successful in her attempts to maintain rapport with Members of her own Party.

Thatcher uses the bald, on-record insults, “totally wrong” (line 205) and “anti-democratic” (line 210) to threaten the collective face of the Labour Party and challenge her rapport with them. However, it is significant that these attacks on the Labour Party only occur after she starts using the plural pronoun “we”. As such, she softens the disagreement and avoids taking personal responsibility for these insults, and is managing rapport not just on behalf of herself but the entire Conservative Party (Rees-Miller, 2000: 1094). The inclusion of such a direct challenge highlights a difference from her linguistic behaviours

from her first year in office apparent in this dataset, but still demonstrates a reluctance to appear personally disagreeable.

Another variation between Thatcher's first and final year in office observed within the data was her willingness to directly challenge the Leader of the Opposition. Extracts 1 – 3 contained questions from her first year specifically asking Thatcher about the Leader of the Opposition, but she only directly challenged her rapport with him once. Extract 5 below shows Thatcher using a helpful question as an opportunity to criticise the Leader of the Opposition, even though he was not specifically mentioned in the question:

Extract 5

Mrs Maureen Hicks (Conservative) asks Thatcher to condemn the Labour MPs who had announced their refusal to pay their Poll Tax.

PMQs 22/03/1990 lines 136 – 155

136 HICKS: = Would my right honourable Friend agree when – that
137 when the law makers Opposite [become law breakers and stick to the points
138 of their community charge campaign, where next Monday they're inviting
139 leading highly paid pop stars into the Palace of Westminster,]

140 [((quiet Opposition PROTESTS))]

141 HICKS: to encourage
142 people not to pay the community charge and to break the law, does she not
143 think this is a [disgusting and highly irresponsible example to set the young
144 people whom we represent?]

145 [((Opposition PROTESTS and Conservative CHEERS))]

146 THATCHER: I agree with my honourable Friend. It is totally and utterly wrong to break the
147 law, and very wrong to encourage by example young people to break the law.

disagreement that strongly indicates a rapport challenge orientation (Rees-Miller, 2000: 1095; Culpeper, 2011: 135).

Thatcher's willingness to accept opportunities presented by helpful questions shows a distinct change in behaviour from that observed in the first year of her premiership. She took advantage of these opportunities to openly challenge Kinnock and the Opposition, despite this giving the appearance of her intentionally damaging interpersonal relationships. This shows a progression towards the aggressive discourse strategies deemed appropriate by the community of practice, but are more closely aligned with masculine gender performances.

4.1.2 "Most of us want a good deal": May and reciprocal im/politeness

Given that there were no examples of Theresa May being asked helpful questions in my dataset, I have analysed her answers in terms of reciprocal im/politeness.

Culpeper's (2011: 23) definition of impoliteness refers to it as being "sustained by expectations": interactions are perceived as impolite when they deviate from behaviour deemed appropriate for a given context. Since there is the expectation of contestation within PMQs, there is a higher threshold for what is deemed inappropriately impolite. This relates to Bull and Wells' (2012: 34) assertion that impoliteness and face-threatening behaviours are an accepted component of parliamentary discourses and have little impact on the personal relationships between Members of Parliament.

However, degrees of impoliteness and verbal aggression are not constant with PMQs. Prime Ministers may be asked helpful or straight questions, containing minimal or redressed face-threatening behaviours, and to respond to such questions with a disproportionate degree of impoliteness would be unexpected and more likely to be considered inappropriate. Culpeper and Tantucci (2021: 150) refer to this as im/politeness reciprocity, the pressure put upon interactants to "match the perceived or anticipated im/politeness of other participants."

Across the datasets from both her first and final years, May appeared to follow this convention of im/politeness reciprocity. She did not make unprovoked attacks against Opposition Members and, when Members showed consideration for her face needs, she responded by showing consideration for theirs. This shows a desire to at least maintain, if not enhance, her rapport with other Members of the House.

During my dataset of questions from May's first year, there were no examples of helpful questions referring to the Opposition, but there were 7 questions containing polite requests for action. These questions are inherently face-threatening since they threaten May's negative face needs since they infringe upon her right to autonomous action, but they also had at least the potential to serve as helpful questions if May had plans to act or already acted in a way that would enhance her positive self-image.

Extract 6 reveals an example of May using one of these questions to enhance her own face needs and build rapport with others:

Extract 6

PMQs 12/10/2016 Lines 235 – 250

- 235 Daniel Kawczynski
- 236 (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con)
- 237 Q5. We have empowered local doctors to take real leadership over important
- 238 reconfiguration proposals. In Shropshire, 300 doctors, surgeons and clinicians have been
- 239 working on a vital reconfiguration of A&E services in Shropshire and in Wales. When they
- 240 make their decision on that later this month, it is very important that the Government back
- 241 them and provide the capital funding required for this vital change to enhance patient
- 242 safety.
- 243 The Prime Minister

244 My hon. Friend raises an important point. The configuration of services in his constituency
245 and others is obviously a significant issue across the House. I am pleased to say that we are
246 now seeing more people being treated in A&E. We will look at the proposals. The point
247 about how this is being done is that local people should be able to have their voice heard
248 and the decisions taken should reflect the needs in a particular local area. We all want to
249 see that. A&E services are vital, and I pay tribute to all those who work in A&E in hospitals
250 across the country.

Kawczynski's question is not framed as a question. Rather than explicitly asking for the Government to fund proposals for A&E services in his constituency, Kawczynski merely states that it is "very important" that they do (line 240). By framing his question as a general rule, he is minimising the threat to May's negative face needs by allowing her to offer Government support instead of it being requested (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 206).

May starts her reply by saying that Kawczynski has raised "an important point" (line 244). This appeals to Kawczynski's positive face needs by claiming common ground and approving of his interests, but this demonstration of solidarity also serves to enhance May's rapport with him. She also builds solidarity with other Members by stating that the delivery of A&E services is considered a significant issue by Members "across the House" (line 245). By acknowledging the opinions of other Members, May is establishing an in-group of like-minded individuals, and by claiming they are united by their desire to provide better services for their constituents, May is appealing to their positive face needs by positioning them as considerate and attentive. May repeats the inclusive pronoun "we" in line 248 when she says "we all want to see" A&E services successfully managing themselves at a local level. She claims this is important as it allows local officials to have their "voice heard" (line 247), thereby demonstrating consideration for their autonomy-based equity rights, the right to not be imposed upon (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 16). Such consideration for the independence of others implies a more collaborative approach to leadership, and a closer alignment with more stereotypically feminine leadership styles (Holmes, 2006: 6).

May does not, however, promise to provide the funding and support necessary for this to happen. She merely promises, “we will look at the proposals” (line 246). May’s use of the plural pronoun “we” over the singular pronoun “I” distances her from any decisions made regarding the outcome of these proposals, protecting her positive face needs by avoiding responsibility for any negative outcomes. She distracts from this lack of commitment by having it immediately follow a celebratory assertion that this is already an improvement in the delivery of A&E services. Her use of the performative verb phrase “I am pleased to say” on line 245 allows her to affiliate herself with this good news, enhancing her positive face needs by creating an association between herself and these improved NHS services. She also associates herself with NHS services with another performative verb phrase, “I pay tribute” (line 249). By explicitly celebrating A&E staff across the UK, May is validating the positive face needs of this community and endearing herself to them and all other who share this opinion.

May did not commit to any particular course of action, but through her use of circumlocution, she turned this question into an opportunity to enhance her rapport with others. Similar behaviour is apparent in Extract 7:

Extract 7

PMQs 19/10/2016 Lines 446 – 458

446 Mr Jamie Reed

447 (Copeland) (Lab)

448 Q12. Local clinicians are absolutely clear that the removal of 24-hour consultant-led
449 maternity services from the West Cumberland hospital in Whitehaven will cost lives.
450 Ultimately, this is a decision that the Government will have to make. Will the Prime Minister
451 please commit today to visit my constituency to see what the effect of the decision will be
452 on west Cumbrian families, women and children?

453 The Prime Minister

454 I recognise that this is not the first time that the hon. Gentleman has raised concerns about
455 West Cumberland hospital. The point of how we are approaching this is that decisions are
456 taken at and generated from the local level. It is the local area that will be looking at the
457 services that people need, and at ensuring that they can be provided and are safe for his
458 constituents and those in other parts of Cumbria.

Reed asks May to make a specific commitment to visiting his constituency, and places an emphasis on the “families, women and children” that will be affected by her decisions (line 452). For May to refuse is to risk appearing to reject these domestic values traditionally associated with femininity, and therefore reject a more feminine identity for herself.

As in Extract 6, May uses circumlocution to distract from answering the question and draw focus to her attempts to manage rapport. She starts her answer with another performative verb phrase, “I recognise”, demonstrating awareness of their previous interactions and showing an interest in Reed’s concerns and opinions (line 454). This helps to satisfy Reed’s right to association, illustrating that the ideas being discussed here are a part of a wider series of interactions (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 16). By showing that she has remembered Reed’s concerns, she is demonstrating that they are a priority for her as well, in a display of empathy reminiscent of Fletcher’s (2001) conceptualisation of relational practice.

May also repeats another argument seen in Extract 6, that decisions regarding NHS services should be made at the “local level” (line 456). This is in direct contradiction with Reed’s assertion that the removal of services from his local hospital is a decision “that the Government will have to make” (line 450). The face-threatening aspects of May’s disagreement are mitigated by her over explanation; she flouts the Gricean maxim of quantity, using more words than necessary, to explain “the point” of how her Government are approaching the running of NHS services (line 455). This changes this speech act from an

assertive, a statement of fact about how decisions are made, into something more indirectly expressive: May is expressing her opinion that a visit to his constituency is not necessary without needing to explicitly state this. This over explanation may also indicate an apologetic expression, whereby May is justifying her stance that a visit is unnecessary and redressing the rapport-threatening qualities of her disagreement (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 19).

By arguing that it is the “local area” that is responsible for providing relevant health care services, May is emphasising their agency and right to self-determination (line 456). She argues that this ensures “safe” practices for Reed’s constituents and all other areas where services are self-regulating, justifying her non-involvement by suggesting that she is concerned for the wellbeing of members of the public seeking NHS services (line 457). This display of empathy indicates an affectively-oriented approach to leadership, helping to contribute to a more feminine identity (Holmes, 2006: 6).

In Extracts 6 and 7, May used circumlocution and rapport management techniques to distract from not providing answers to questions. In Extract 8, May does provide a specific answer to Hollobone’s question, but still turns her answer to an opportunity to enhance her own positive face needs:

Extract 8

PMQs 12/10/2016 Lines 292 – 306

292 Mr Philip Hollobone

293 (Kettering) (Con)

294 Q8. Doctors and nurses at Kettering general hospital are treating a record number of
295 patients with increasingly world-class treatments, yet despite being located in an area of
296 rapid population and housing growth, owing to an historical anomaly the local clinical
297 commissioning groups are among the most relatively underfunded in the whole country.
298 What can my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister do to help address the situation?

299 The Prime Minister

300 As my hon. Friend says, we want to ensure that patients experience the same high-quality
301 care regardless of where they live and wherever they are. That is why, as I understand it, the
302 funding for my hon. Friend's local clinical commissioning group is being corrected to reflect
303 more accurately the local health need. An investment of more than £757 million will be
304 going into his local area, which shows the Government's intention to ensure that we see a
305 health service that is working for everyone across the country, but we can do that only with
306 the economy to back up the NHS.

Hollobone asks May to address the lack of funding available for hospitals in his constituency. He uses the dynamic modal verb "can" in line 298 to question what May has the ability to do, as opposed to using a more face-threatening verb like "will" to imply that there is a greater necessity and obligation for May to intervene. Hollobone also asserts that May's intervention could "help" the situation, appealing to May's positive face needs by positioning her as a benefactor (line 298).

May asserts that the lack of funding to Hollobone's constituency is being "corrected", a verb choice which implies that a mistake has previously been made (line 302). She uses the modal hedge "as I understand it" in line 301 to add uncertainty to this statement, allowing her to distance herself from and avoid responsibility for this supposed mistake, redressing the threat to her own face needs while still satisfying Hollobone (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 164). May goes on to confirm that £757 million will be invested into health services in Hollobone's local area, providing a direct answer to Hollobone's question of what action May is taking to address the lack of support (line 303). Yet, this was not the entirety of May's answer, this answer was embedded in between strategies to enhance her rapport with both Hollobone and auditors outside the Chamber.

May begins her answer with a show of deference, saying "As my hon. Friend says" (line 300). This phrase verbalises her agreement and allows May to show compliance with

Hollobone's request, satisfying his positive face need for his desires to be respected (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 178). She also uses the inclusive plural pronoun "we" in "we want to ensure..." to build solidarity between herself, Hollobone, and other members across the House, validating their roles in this shared ideal of providing high quality care to everyone (line 300). This indicates a collaborative approach to politics, traditionally more associated with feminine speech styles (Hill, 2005: 23).

May explicates that she wants the "same" high quality healthcare provided across the UK, presupposing that the NHS does, at least in some areas, already provide high quality care (line 300). This appeals to the positive face needs of NHS care providers, implying that these individuals are to be appreciated for their efforts. May's concern for the face needs of those outside the Chamber is mirrored in her assertion of the Government's intention to "ensure" quality health care is available to "everyone across the country" (lines 304-5). This allows May to position herself and the Government as sympathetic to the needs of the public and align herself with them, enhancing rapport and endearing herself to voters.

In each of the above extracts, May responded to questions with a degree of politeness proportional to that contained within the question. She was not subject to overtly impolite behaviours, and if her answer resulted in a disagreement then she used strategies to lessen the resulting damage to her rapport with the questioner. This pattern of reciprocal politeness appears to continue in May's final year in office. The questions from my dataset from this year all relate to the concept of a no-deal Brexit and the possibility of the UK leaving the EU without a Withdrawal Agreement in place. Opinions regarding this outcome were divided across the House and across the Conservative Party, so any time May was asked to express an opinion, she risked distancing herself from other Members. The following extracts all contain examples of Conservative MPs asking May to consider a course of action that does not align with the official Government stance on Brexit, forcing May to either damage her own face needs by agreeing or damage their rapport by disagreeing. To combat this, May uses a combination of politeness and rapport enhancing strategies to mitigate disagreement and minimise dissension within her Party.

Extract 9

As of March 2019, the deadline for leaving the EU was 29th March 2019. The House had not agreed upon a Withdrawal Agreement. The Government had previously presented a deal to the House in January 2019, and it had been rejected. Another deal was presented on 12th March, the day before this question, and that was also rejected. In response, the House was scheduled to vote upon the possibility of leaving the EU without a Withdrawal Agreement in place. The motion up for debate specified that leaving without a deal is the default position under UK and EU law. Mr Shailesh Vara (Conservative) questions May about the financial ramifications of leaving without a deal.

PMQs 13/03/2019 Lines 423 – 434

423 VARA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Given that no-deal Brexit is the Government's default
424 position, will the Prime Minister kindly inform the House that she will instruct
425 the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make available whatever funds are
426 required to ensure that the country is as best prepared as possible in the
427 event that we do leave on a no-deal basis?

428 [[[Conservative PROTESTS]]]

429 MAY: [Might I say to my honourable –]

430 SPEAKER: [Prime Minister.]

431 MAY: – I say to my right
432 honourable Friend, obviously we continue to be working to leave in an
433 orderly fashion with a deal, but we have made funding available. That funding
434 is being used to ensure that we have preparations for a no deal.

May was very publicly engaged in negotiating a Withdrawal Agreement, had already had two of her proposed deals rejected by the House, and was advocating the expedited negotiation of a new deal. Vara's timely reminder that a no-deal Brexit is the Government's "default position" serves as an off-record threat to May's positive face, since it undermines May's efforts to secure a deal (423-4). This phrasing is, however, a quote from the motion up for debate later that afternoon, so Vara avoids some of the responsibility for this face threat. He continues his question with exaggerated approval, requesting that May "kindly" communicate her intention to make accommodations for the event of a no-deal Brexit (line 424). The use of the prepositional phrase "in the event" creates a conditional clause, acknowledging that a no-deal Brexit remains a hypothetical scenario and allowing for the possibility that it might not happen because the House might agree to ratify May's deal (lines 426-7).

May does not directly contradict Vara, choosing instead to concede that leaving without a Withdrawal Agreement is a possibility and confirming that there are "preparations" in place for such an eventuality (line 434). Such an answer is damaging to May's own face since she is accepting that her efforts to secure a deal may fail, and also risks alienating other Members who are against a no-deal Brexit. To combat this, May stresses that she will "continue" to work on a Brexit deal, and uses the emphasiser "obviously" to reinforce the truth value of this proposition (line 432). This protects her own face needs, suggesting that her commitment to a Brexit deal is a self-evident truth that doesn't need to be questioned, but this commitment risks damaging her rapport with Members who are in favour of a no-deal Brexit. May uses the plural pronoun "we" (line 432) to imply that she has support in this endeavour, and this pluralisation builds solidarity amongst her supporters by including them in the activity, but it also redresses the face threat caused by any disagreements by implying that she is not the sole perpetrator (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 190). Since committing to a single course of action risks damaging her rapport with one of the factions within the House, May's lack of commitment suggests an attempt to maintain rapport with Members across the House.

May's answer in Extract 9 is an example of evasion without the use of equivocation or circumlocution: she answers in the affirmative, funding has been made available, while still

distancing herself from this outcome. Extracts 10 and 11 below depict May using these more conventional evasive techniques to avoid verbalising her disagreement or explicitly taking a stance in opposition to the Member asking her a question:

Extract 10

In the afternoon following this PMQs session, the House was scheduled to vote upon the possibility of leaving the EU without a Withdrawal Agreement. One of the amendments up for debate was amendment (f), also referred to as the Malthouse Compromise, which would allow for the UK to leave without a Withdrawal Agreement in place but under a carefully managed set of conditions. Mr Peter Bone (Conservative) notes in his question that this amendment had support amongst Members who were advocates for the UK leaving the EU on the agreed upon date of 29th March, even if a Withdrawal Agreement had not yet been ratified.

PMQs 13/03/2019 Lines 356 – 393

356 BONE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think the whole House could unite in agreeing that
357 the Prime Minister's put an enormous amount of hard work and energy
358 [in trying to resolve the European Union issue,]

359 [((Conservative HEAR HEAR))]

360 BONE: and we certainly wish her
361 well and get better soon. [Has]

362 [((quiet Conservative HEAR HEAR))]

363 BONE: the Prime Minister had an opportunity to
364 look at amendment (f) on the Order Paper today, proposed by my right
365 honourable Friend from Ashford, the former Deputy Prime Minister, signed
366 by many Conservative remainder MPs and Conservative leaver MPs, by the
367 leader of the DUP and Members of the Labour party? I believe if that, Mr

368 Speaker, would unite the Conservative Benches [and would the Prime
369 Minister – and – and attract support]

370 [((Conservative PROTESTS))]

371 BONE: from the Opposition Benches. Prime
372 Minister, have you had an opportunity to consider whether you could be able
373 to support that amendment?

374 MAY: Can I [say to my honourable Friend that]

375 SPEAKER: [Prime Minister.]

376 MAY: I'm grateful to my right honourable
377 and honourable Friends for the spirit in which they've sought to broker a
378 compromise in this House. The amendment has four propositions within it.
379 The first is that we should publish our day-one tariff schedules. We've done
380 so this morning. The second, that we should seek to extend the article 50
381 process. We remain committed to giving the House the opportunity to debate
382 and vote on this tomorrow. The third, that we should unilaterally guarantee
383 the rights of EU citizens resident in the UK. I'm pleased to confirm – reconfirm
384 that we have done this. And the fourth is to seek to negotiate an
385 implementation period in return for a financial payment but without the
386 withdrawal agreement that we've agreed. The EU have made it clear that
387 there will be no agreement without a withdrawal agreement, and that
388 includes what's – we've already negotiated on citizens' rights, a financial
389 settlement and a Northern Ireland protocol. The – the plan that exists, that
390 has been agreed is, obviously, the deal that was put to the House and
391 rejected by the House last night. But as I say, the EU have made clear that
392 they would not accept elements of the – of what is in the current withdrawal
393 agreement without them being in a withdrawal agreement.

As with Vara in Extract 9, Bone is asking May to consider an alternative to her Brexit deal in the form of supporting an amendment which would allow for a no-deal Brexit (lines 372-3). He also states that her support for the amendment might serve to “unite the Conservative benches”: the change of state verb “unite” triggers the presupposition that currently there is discord within the Conservative Party, thereby indirectly attacking May’s competency as leader of the Conservative Party (line 368). Bone redresses these face threats by demonstrating exaggerated approval and sympathy for May, commenting on the “enormous amount of hard work and energy” (line 357) May has dedicated to negotiating a Brexit deal, and wishing she “get better soon” (line 361) from her current illness. Even though his question is threatening to May’s face needs, his complimenting May demonstrates a sincere desire that her positive face needs be enhanced (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 103).

May responds by immediately expressing her gratitude to Members for their willingness to compromise (lines 377-8). Showing deference in this way reveals an attempt to enhance her rapport with Members of the House and indicates a collaborative style of leadership where she appreciates the contributions of all Members. This reflects the kind of empathy and empowerment that Fletcher (2001: 31) identified as key characteristics in the performance of relational practice and are considered to be contributors to a more feminine performance (Holmes and Marra, 2004: 394; Holmes and Schnurr, 2006: 38).

May does not directly express a stance for or against amendment (f) but provides a lengthy answer commenting on each of the four propositions within it. After explaining each of the first three propositions, May explains how the Government has already demonstrated support for each one: “we’ve done so” (line 379-80), “we remain committed” (line 381), “I’m pleased to reconfirm that we have done this” (lines 383-4). By stating that the Government has already achieved three out of the four propositions, May is aligning herself and the Government with supporters of amendment (f) by implying that they all share the same goals. However, the fourth proposition of amendment (f) proposes arrangements for a no-deal Brexit. For May to align herself with this proposition would be damaging to her own face needs, and risks damaging her rapport with opponents of a no-deal Brexit. May avoids expressing a personal opinion on this proposition by explaining that the arrangements

proposed would be impossible to implement without the consent of the EU, and by revealing that “the EU have made clear that they would not accept” it (lines 391-2).

This answer is an example of May equivocating: she never reveals whether she does or does not support the amendment as a whole. By not directly supporting the amendment, her answer causes interactional conflict and threatens the face needs of Bone and all those aligned with him. May is able to mitigate this affect with the length of her answer: by discussing each proposition in turn, she can provide a series of excuses as to why the amendment does not actually need her support. In the case of the first three propositions, it is because the Government has already made reasonable adjustments. In the case of the final proposition, it is because the European Union has rejected it. In each case, May is giving reasons to justify her lack of support, redressing the face threat associated with her refusal to back the amendment (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 128).

Similar behaviours are apparent in Extract 11:

Extract 11

A vote was held on 13th March to decide if the UK could leave the EU without a Withdrawal Agreement in place. A motion categorically rejecting leaving without a deal was passed by a narrow margin, 312 – 308 votes (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 656 cols. 451-55, 13 March 2019). On 14th March, Parliament voted to decide whether the UK should seek an extension to Article 50, and this motion was approved by a significant margin, 412 – 202 votes (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 656 cols. 647-51, 14 March 2019). This extension was expressly “for the purpose of passing the necessary EU exit legislation” (*Hansard* HC Deb. vol. 656 cols. 647-51, 14 March 2019). The House was, therefore, committed to negotiating and agreeing upon a Withdrawal Agreement. Mr John Baron (Conservative) asks May to consider leaving without a deal, anyway.

PMQs 27/03/2019 Lines 713 – 731

713 BARON: Most of us want a good deal – would prefer a good deal to no deal at all, but
714 may I urge the Prime Minister to ignore the dire forecasts should we leave on

715 WTO terms? It is the same people who predicted doom and gloom in 2016 if
716 we voted to leave. Since then, we've had record low unemployment, record
717 high investment [and record manufacturing output.]

718 [((quiet Opposition PROTESTS))]

719 BARON: They were wrong then.

720 They're wrong now. And by doing so, we would – could be leaving as per the
721 legal default position of article 50, which is without a deal.

722 SPEAKER: Prime Minister.

723 MAY: = Can I say to my honourable Friend, he – he references
724 leaving on WTO terms. Of course, what I want to be able to do, and what I
725 think is right and what the Government considers right for the United
726 Kingdom, is for us to be able to negotiate trade agreements with countries
727 around the world that give us a – a better – a better operation with those
728 countries, rather than just the WTO basis. But also to be able to negotiate
729 that good trade deal with the European Union. That's what we want to see, a
730 good trade deal with our nearest trading neighbours, and opportunities for
731 good free trade agreements around the rest of the world.

Baron's question relates to leaving the EU without a Withdrawal Agreement. Given that, the day before, a vote had revealed that approximately half the House was categorically against this action, for May to align herself with this outcome would be to distance herself from all those who voted against it. Baron accentuates this divide with his use of pronouns, literally creating an 'us vs them' style of rhetoric in his repeated assertion that "they were wrong then. They're wrong now" (lines 719-20). This is a bald, on-record threat against the positive face needs of an out-group of Members against a no-deal Brexit. It is not, however, necessarily a threat against May: by asking for her support, Baron is inviting May to join their in-group, effectively enhancing their rapport. Baron enhances the positive face needs

of this in-group, making it seem more appealing, by claiming responsibility for low unemployment figures and high manufacturing outputs, both of which would have a positive impact on the British economy and the quality of life of the British public (lines 716-7).

This has the potential to be a helpful question, providing May with an opportunity to further enhance the positive face of her Government by listing their other successes since the Brexit referendum, and outline the Government's current Brexit strategy. However, since her Brexit strategy contradicted Baron's desire to leave without a Withdrawal Agreement, her answer is threatening to Baron's positive face needs. To minimise the resulting damage to their rapport, May starts by repeating a phrase from Baron's question, to show that her answer will be relevant to the concerns "he references" (line 723). By incorporating Baron into her answer, May is offering him a level of interactional involvement broadly comparable to that extended to her when Baron attempted to position the pair of them as members of the same in-group. May is aligning herself with Baron and his interactional goals.

However, she does subsequently perform disagreement, suggesting that adhering to terms dictated by the World Trade Organisation might not be the optimal outcome for the UK. May uses a combination of desiderative and cognitive verbs with the phrases "I want" and "I think", hedging the epistemic stance that the Government will continue to negotiate their own trade agreements, and not rely upon existing international agreements implemented by the WTO (lines 724-5). She also specifies that her desire is for the Government to "be able to" negotiate for itself, placing an emphasis on her advocacy for independence and autonomy (line 726). This creates the impression that she is protecting the negative face needs of the Government and the country as a whole, including the negative face needs of Members such as Baron.

She also appears to reject Baron's 'us vs them' rhetoric, opting instead for inclusive pronouns such as "us", "we", and "our" (lines 727; 729; 730). May's use of pronouns creates an alignment between herself and the House, and the country as a whole. She switches from saying "I want" in line 724 to "we want" in line 729, framing her own perspective as

being beneficial for the Government and the country. By making this a shared perspective, May is creating solidarity between herself and her audience, and enhancing their rapport. Rather than focus her answer on the ways in which she disagrees with Baron, she has turned this into an opportunity to display her empathetic and collaborative approach to leadership, indexing a more feminine identity for herself (Holmes, 2006: 6).

4.2 Challenging Rapport

Bates et al. (2014: 276) observed that, since the introduction of the modern PMQs format in 1961, there has been a change in the kinds of questions being put to the Prime Minister at PMQs. They determined that Prime Ministers are being asked fewer questions for the simple purpose of seeking information regarding their activities, and more questions can be considered “helpful” or “unanswerable” and used for the “purposes of political point scoring” (Bates et al, 2014: 276). The previous section of this analysis focused on helpful and standard questions, which Thatcher and May used to enhance their rapport with an audience both inside and outside the Chamber. This section is devoted to what Bates et al. (2014: 263) referred to as unanswerable questions, defined as “a question which either appears to be designed deliberately to provoke discomfort and/or evasion, or contains and/or is premised on incorrect information.” These questions are analysed in relation to their negative impact on rapport management. These questions, by design, threaten rapport with the Prime Minister, often containing face-threatening behaviours in the form of insult or ridicule, or impolite behaviours such as face-threatening presuppositions. Culpeper (2011: 135) refers to this latter category as “unpalatable questions”, and within the context of PMQs, where the Prime Minister is obliged to provide an answer, these unpalatable questions have the added effect of encouraging the Prime Minister to provide an answer damaging to their own face.

There is evidence of both Thatcher and May responding to these questions with rapport-challenging behaviours of their own. These answers frequently included bald, on-record FTAs, but another common tactic for damaging rapport with minimal use of on-record FTAs or impoliteness was through the use of humour, sarcasm, and patronising

behaviours. These behaviours are so prevalent they are apparent in nearly half the exchanges in my dataset. I will explore these in greater detail in the next chapter, as these behaviours warrant a separate analysis. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the use of face-threatening behaviours with the effect of damaging rapport, without patronising elements.

4.2.1 “Is the Iron Maiden chicken?”: Thatcher responding to unanswerable questions

In my dataset from her first year in office, Thatcher was frequently asked questions containing rapport-challenging behaviours. Of the total 38 questions, 19 of them included insulting or impolite behaviours. Momentarily excluding patronising answers, on only one occasion did Thatcher respond with an on-record attack of her own. The remainder of the time, Thatcher performed disagreement, but without either an excess of redressive action or insulting behaviours.

Extract 12 contains an example of Thatcher responding to a personalised negative expression:

Extract 12

***World in Action*, a news programme on ITV, ran a segment on the British Steel Corporation and the ongoing strikes in the steel industry. This programme revealed details about negotiations between the Government and BSC, including a claim that the BSC had given the Government an advanced warning of their intent to strike unless a pay rise was offered to steel workers. Mr Barry Jones (Labour) proposes to Thatcher that the strikes could have been prevented, if not were deliberately caused, by a Member of her Cabinet.**

PMQs 05/02/1980 lines 9 – 21

10 Does the Prime Minister agree that last night's television programme on documents
11 published by BSC indicate that the Secretary of State for Industry deliberately provoked the
12 national steel strike, blocked a 14 per cent. pay rise and insisted on 52,000 steel
13 redundancies? Will the right hon. Lady assert herself against the reactionary and totally
14 wrong policies of her right hon. Friend? Is the Iron Maiden chicken, or will she sack her right
15 hon. Friend and stop the brutal butchery of working-class communities?

16 The Prime Minister

17 I totally reject the hon. Gentleman's ridiculous and disgraceful allegations against my right
18 hon. Friend. Some months ago my right hon Friend, in conjunction with the industry, fixed a
19 cash limit for next year of some £450 million, which the taxpayer will find. Already we have
20 a high level of tax in this country, and I think that it is as high as the taxpayer finds
21 acceptable. We are not prepared to find more for operating losses.

Jones refers to Thatcher as “the Iron Maiden” in line 14, a nickname relating to Thatcher’s unrelenting leadership style, and one Thatcher herself was quick to acknowledge as accurate in a speech to the Conservative Association in her own constituency (Thatcher, 1976). By invoking Thatcher’s reputation for tenacity and then immediately juxtaposing it with the possibility of her being “chicken”, Jones is effectively taunting Thatcher, simultaneously attacking both her positive and negative face needs (line 14). He is both accusing her of cowardice and placing impediments on the actions she can take in response to this question. Jones’s question contains the presupposed belief that not “sacking” one of her Cabinet Ministers will make her a “chicken”, a belief he imposes on Thatcher through the contrast marker “or”: either Thatcher must dismiss her Industry Secretary or concede to being “chicken” (line 14).

Jones was accusing the Minister in question, Keith Joseph, of “deliberately” (line 11) provoking the steel strikes and committing a “brutal butchery of working-class communities”

(line 15). These accusations were not aimed at Thatcher herself, but since Joseph was serving as a Member of her Cabinet, his positive face needs were closely aligned with hers. To save face, Thatcher makes her disagreement with Jones explicit by choosing the performative verb “reject” and emphasising her stance with the amplifier “totally” (line 17). Thatcher evaluates Jones’s allegations as “ridiculous and disgraceful”, thus performing an on-record attack on Jones’s positive face needs by presenting his actions as undesirable (line 17). The strength of her disagreement and her directness in expressing it resembles Baxter’s (2012: 88) theory that women leaders may knowingly choose linguistic resources in order to better align with preestablished identities. When Jones asked if Thatcher was an Iron Maiden or a chicken, Thatcher responded with behaviours more likely to induce a perception of her as an Iron Maiden.

Thatcher further defends Joseph by claiming he had been working “in conjunction with the industry” (line 18). This positions Joseph as cooperative and agreeable, in direct contradiction with Jones’s positioning of Joseph as a butcher attacking working class communities. Thatcher is performing an off-record disagreement, contradicting Jones through implicature, minimising the appearance of verbal conflict. She also carries on to give reasons for her actions, leading Jones to “see the reasonableness” of her inability to agree with him (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 128). Thatcher argues that Joseph was incapable of meeting the budget requested by the BSC, since it would require higher taxation and this would be unacceptable to the taxpayers (line 20). Thatcher explicitly aligns herself with Joseph by using the first person plural pronoun “we”, stating that “we are not prepared” to risk a detrimental effect on the taxpayers in order to fund the BSC’s operating losses (line 21). By aligning herself and Joseph with the desires of the taxpayers, Thatcher is implying that the conflict between herself and Jones also extends to the taxpayers and Jones, vilifying him from the perspective of his constituents.

Thatcher demonstrates a rapport challenge orientation, where she is apparently prioritising saving hers and Joseph’s face needs over maintaining rapport with Jones. This is largely achieved through off-record strategies, but she is shown to directly challenge her rapport with Jones with the insulting accusation regarding his “ridiculous and disgraceful” actions (line 17). It is significant that Thatcher directly challenged Jones in this way in

response to him making accusations against a Member of her Cabinet, as well as against her. On other occasions, such as those shown in Extracts 13 and 14 below, Thatcher did not explicitly challenge her rapport with the questioning Member, despite the rapport-challenging nature of their questions. The fact that Thatcher was more explicit about her orientation when another Member was being threatened may indicate that Thatcher was prioritising defending the face needs of her allied colleagues over maintaining harmonious relations with her opposition. This does signify a person-oriented approach to leadership, albeit one with limitations on the persons to whom this affective involvement extends. Thatcher's demonstration of loyalty to her colleagues contributes to a feminine gender performance, even if this use of verbal aggression correlates with the masculinised norms of practice within PMQs (Lovenduski, 2012: 322).

Extract 13 shows an example of Thatcher assuming a less explicit rapport-challenge orientation:

Extract 13

Mr Michael Foot (Deputy Leader of the Labour Party) is referring to the Government's policy of non-intervention in the steel strikes, and claims that Thatcher is personally responsible.

PMQs 05/02/1980 lines 70 – 79

- 70 Mr. Foot
- 71 Is the right hon. Lady aware that a deep sense of desperation is spreading throughout the
- 72 country, for which she is responsible? When will she come to the House and say that she will
- 73 take some action to stop the spread of paralysis throughout the country?

- 74 The Prime Minister

75 I am aware of a sense of desperation. There is a great sense of desperation when a whole
76 people provide a whole industry with the latest and best equipment so that it may become
77 the best and most efficient steel producer in the world, and those who work in the industry
78 do not take the opportunity to use it but go on strike to demand more from the taxpayer—
79 the taxpayer who, in the same world, has to make a profit.

The word “when” in line 72 is an example of a presupposition trigger identified by Levinson (1983: 184), who argues that such WH-questions introduce presuppositions by virtue of the fact that the WH-question words may be replaced by some other quantifiable variable. This example triggers the presupposition that “at a specific point in the future, she will come to the House and say...”. Therefore, by asking “when” and not “if” she will address the House, Foot is presupposing that Thatcher will agree with him. However, agreement would damage Thatcher’s face needs. Foot makes a bald, on-record attack on Thatcher, claiming she categorically “is” responsible for the desperation felt across the country (line 72). His repeated use of the verb “will” serves a deontic modal function, suggesting she has a strong obligation to intervene (line 72). These behaviours challenge his rapport with Thatcher, as he attacks both her positive and negative face needs and undermines her authority by calling her leadership ineffective.

In her answer, Thatcher recontextualises the threat. She acknowledges that there is a sense of desperation, ostensibly agreeing with Foot, but her use of the indefinite article “a” allows her to deny that it is the same desperation to which Foot was referring, therefore allowing her to deny responsibility without explicitly contradicting Foot (line 75). Thatcher does not address Foot’s allegation that she is responsible, but instead attributes the growing sense of desperation to steel workers who continue to strike. Thatcher does not reference either herself or the Government in her answer, distancing herself from the issue, in line with her policy of non-intervention. She is sympathetic towards taxpayers whom she suggests are the ones most penalised by the ongoing strikes. She describes the situation in hyperbolic terms, stating that it is the taxpayers who have provided the “latest and best equipment” to make Britain the “best and most efficient steel producer in the world”,

positioning strikers as ungrateful and unreasonable as they “demand more” (lines 76-8). Thatcher is implicitly disagreeing with Foot, suggesting that she is neglecting their rapport, but she does not directly challenge him. However, her positioning of the strikers suggests that she is challenging her rapport with them as a community.

Extract 14 contains another example of Thatcher neglecting rapport with her interlocutor, but while redressing any apparent communicative conflict:

Extract 14

The chairman of the British Steel Corporation was due to end his term in office in September 1980. Thatcher’s Government had begun the process of appointing a successor. In his previous question, Mr James Callaghan (Leader of the Opposition, Labour) had argued that searching for a successor was akin to “telling the workers that their chairman will be sacked in a short while” and risked destabilising strike negotiations (PMQs, 19/02/1980, Lines 147-8). He also referenced the Government decision to reduce the amount of steel produced by the BSC to an amount “regarded as too low by many people who should know” (PMQs, 19/02/1980, Line 142). In this extract, Callaghan asks Thatcher to take responsibility for these perceived failings.

PMQs 19/02/1980 lines 162 – 177

- 162 Mr. Callaghan
- 163 But surely the chairman’s position is undermined if these stories are allowed to leak from
- 164 Government sources. It seems that the chairman is to be replaced in the middle of the
- 165 negotiations that he is conducting. Has the Prime Minister any idea from which of her
- 166 Ministers this story came? On the first question, The Prime Minister has a direct
- 167 responsibility for the size of the industry. It is a strategic industry, and investment cannot be
- 168 left to the test of market profitability in our country. Surely the Government should satisfy
- 169 themselves about the future size of the industry?

170 The Prime Minister

171 I shall take the right hon. Gentleman's questions in order. There is no question of
172 undermining the authority of Sir Charles Villiers as chairman of the British Steel Corporation.
173 I express my confidence in him, and I hope that he and the steel unions will get together to
174 sort out this strike. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the size of the steel industry. The
175 size of an industry is determined by what it can sell and the quality and delivery dates of its
176 products. Other steel industries on the Continent that have gone through difficult times
177 have steadily come through to profitability. I believe that ours can do the same.

Callaghan appears to be assuming a rapport challenge orientation, suggesting that Thatcher's authority is being undermined by her own Ministers and that she is failing her "direct responsibility" to ensure that the BSC continues producing an appropriate amount of steel (lines 166-7). His use of the intensifier "surely" and the deontic modal verb "should" make his final question seem mockingly polite, forming an unpalatable question which forces Thatcher into a communicative conflict (line 168).

Thatcher's answer contains a series of simple sentences, conforming to Horn's (2004) neo-Gricean principle, *Say no more than you must*. By explicating that she will take Callaghan's questions "in order", Thatcher is generating the implicature that Callaghan's contribution contained more than one question, in violation of Parliamentary procedures (line 171). Thatcher is able to indirectly position Callaghan as defiant of the rules without directly challenging him for his rule-breaking behaviours.

Thatcher claims there is "no question" that the chairman of the BSC is incapable of managing strike negotiations, a semantically strong expression showing unmitigated disagreement with Callaghan (line 171). She uses the performative verb phrase "I express my confidence" to articulate her stance, leaving no chance for her meaning to be misinterpreted (line 173). Yet, she does not make any personalised negative assertions against Callaghan, so any accusations that he is incorrect or spreading misinformation are left off-record.

Thatcher uses the desiderative verb “hope” to express a desire that the strikes be resolved by a meeting between the BSC Chairman and the steel unions (line 173). She does not mention her own contributions, generating the implicature that her involvement is not necessary and reinforcing her policy of non-intervention in the strikes. This use of the verb “hope” along with her choice of the cognitive verb “believe” in line 177 indicates a modal stance, whereby Thatcher is creating uncertainty about the future by conceding that her evaluations are subjective (Myers, 2010: 100). However, it also indicates an affective stance, revealing that Thatcher has a positive outlook on the future and is aligned with both the prospects of an end to the strikes and a profitable UK steel industry.

By choosing the verbs “hope” and “believe” Thatcher is validating her leadership style, implying that there is no need for Government involvement because the best course of action is already being pursued. Since the purpose of Callaghan’s question was to undermine Thatcher and question the efficacy of her Government, Thatcher’s affirmation of her position interferes with Callaghan’s interactional goals. By choosing to protect her own face needs at the expense of contradicting Callaghan, Thatcher appears to be adopting a rapport neglect orientation.

In the above three examples, Thatcher is shown to neglect rapport with her interlocutors, with the greatest challenge to their rapport being her disagreement with them. While this disagreement may be face-threatening, it is predominantly a result of Thatcher’s desire to protect her own face needs or those of her political allies. Thatcher does not appear to assume a rapport challenge orientation at any point, as evidenced by the lack of face-threatening behaviour in the form of personalised negative expressions or insults. This pattern is broadly comparable to her behaviours demonstrated in response to helpful questions, as explored in Section 4.1.1. As previously discussed, in the first year of her premiership, Thatcher was offered opportunities by supportive MPs to comment upon the Opposition in a way that would have been both face-threatening and rapport-challenging, but did not take advantage of these opportunities. The above examples suggest that Thatcher also refrained from on-record face-threatening and rapport-challenging behaviours even when they would have been in response to similar behaviours directed at her. She does not demonstrate a total rejection of the combative norms of PMQs discourses (consider, for

example, her commentary on Jones's "ridiculous and disgraceful allegations" in Extract 12), but there is a noticeable difference between the severity of face threat contained in questions compared to that in Thatcher's answers.

The dataset from Thatcher's final year reveals different behaviour, with Thatcher directly challenging her rapport with the Opposition with greater frequency. Of the questions in my dataset from her final year, 28 questions contained insulting or impolite behaviours directed at Thatcher. On 19 of those occasions, Thatcher responded by making an attack on the Opposition, demonstrating a tendency to reply to face-threatening behaviour with face-threatening behaviour, regardless of its impact on her rapport with her interlocutors. This also mirrors her behaviours in response to helpful questions, showing that, by the final year of her premiership, Thatcher was both taking and creating opportunities in which she could challenge her rapport with the Opposition.

The following two extracts show Thatcher responding to rapport-challenging behaviour with openly rapport-challenging behaviours as a form of defensive counterargument.

Extract 15

Mr Roy Hughes (Labour) is comparing the incoming poll tax to the previous system of Domestic Rates, a tax paid by the occupier of a property. In her answer, Thatcher references Labour's proposed alternative to both methods: a combination of a local income tax, paid by eligible individuals based on their income, and a roof tax, paid by occupiers based on the value of their property.

PMQs 08/03/1990 lines 158 – 175

158	HUGHES:	= Has the Prime Minister's attention been called to the cost
159		of collecting poll tax compared with rates? For example, in Wales, the cost
160		will rocket from nine million to over twenty five million. And all this additional
161		bureaucracy, new equipment and even new buildings will have to be paid for
162		by the charge-payer. In these circumstances, is it not sheer hypocrisy on the

163 part of her Government to lecture our local authorities on financial
 164 [stringency and cost cutting?]

165 [((loud Opposition HEAR HEAR))]

166 THATCHER: Mr Speaker, if one – if – if more people are paying community charge than
 167 were paying rates, and that is part of the object of the exercise because
 168 seventeen million people were not paying rates. Many of them will be paying
 169 community charge. It will cost more to collect it, [but nothing like as much to
 170 collect]

171 [((quiet Opposition
 172 PROTESTS))]

173 THATCHER: as it would to collect both a roof tax and a local [income tax.]

174 [((loud Conservative
 175 CHEERS))]

In the above extract, Hughes criticises the poll tax based on the financial burden it will place on the Government. He claims that charges to the Government will “rocket”, a hyperbolic metaphor to emphasise the detrimental impact of Thatcher’s new policy (line 160). He also claims that these increased costs are an act of “sheer hypocrisy” on the part of Thatcher’s Government (line 162). The intensifier “sheer” carries semantic connotations of transparency and blatancy, thereby implying that if Thatcher does not see the hypocrisy of the situation she must either be inattentive to the impact of her actions or wilfully ignorant of them. Either way, this is an attack on Thatcher’s positive face needs, positioning her as an irresponsible leader.

Thatcher responds by directly engaging with Hughes’s FTA. She does not contradict him, instead conceding that it “will cost more to collect” (line 169) the poll tax, but that this is

“part of the object of the exercise” (line 167) since it means that more taxes are being collected than previously. This argument only partially protects Thatcher’s face needs: while she is justifying her actions, she is also still admitting that her poll tax plan will incur new charges to the Government. To further save face, Thatcher compares her proposed plan with that of the Labour party, “both a roof tax and a local income tax” (line 173). She does not need to explicate that this is Labour’s plan, since all Members in the room would already have been aware. As such, neglecting to reference the Labour Party or any Opposition Members by name does little to redress the face-threat against them. Namely, Thatcher claims that her poll tax plan is more cost effective than Labour’s tax plan, thereby protecting her own face needs as a direct effect of threatening the face needs of her Opposition. She asserts that the Conservative plan will cost “nothing like as much” as the Labour plan, using hyperbole in a manner which reflects that used by Hughes in his question (line 169).

As such, the behaviour in Thatcher’s answer mirrors that in Hughes’s question, and it appears to have been received in a similar way. When Hughes challenged Thatcher, it was met with loud supportive barracking from the Opposition (line 165). When Thatcher responded by attacking the Labour Party, it was met with loud supportive barracking from the Conservative benches (lines 174-5). These reactions help normalise Thatcher’s behaviour, demonstrating that her use of combative speech styles is not only valid and accepted, but encouraged and celebrated.

Extract 16 below contains another example of Thatcher being challenged over the poll tax:

Extract 16

The poll tax was paid by every tax payer at a rate set by their local government council. Mr Neil Kinnock (Leader of the Opposition, Labour) tries to absolve local Labour councils of responsibility for the poll tax.

PMQs 20/03/1990 Lines 66 – 90

66 KINNOCK: Mr Speaker, the right honourable Lady doesn't listen to anyone. For if she
67 did, she may have heard her fellow Conservative, Councillor Steve Parnaby,
68 the chairman of the finance committee of Beverley council, who said the poll
69 tax has got nothing to do at all with Labour councils. And the poll tax is, in his
70 words, "not right", "not fair", and the Government "has got it completely
71 wrong." Isn't that absolutely true everywhere?

72 ((loud Opposition CHEERS))

73 THATCHER: Mr Speaker, people in Humberside and many other Socialist Labour author –
74 Labour authorities – [Labour authorities are paying far more because they live
75 in a Labour authority than they would if they lived in a Conservative one.]

76 [((Opposition PROTESTS))]

77 THATCHER: For example, Conservative Barnet, at three hundred and thirty eight
78 community charge, compared with next-door Labour Haringey, five hundred
79 and seventy three. [Conservative Kingswood]

80 [((quiet Conservative HEAR HEAR))]

81 THATCHER: three hundred and ninety five
82 community charge, compared with next-door Bristol four hundred and
83 ninety.

84 [((quiet Conservative HEAR HEAR and quiet Opposition PROTESTS))]

85 SPEAKER: [Order.]

86 THATCHER: [Conservative
87 Westminster,] one hundred and ninety five, compared with next-door Labour

88 Camden five hundred and thirty four pounds. The lesson is it always costs you
89 more to live in a Labour authority.

90 ((Conservative CHEERS))

Kinnock criticises Thatcher directly, claiming that she “doesn’t listen to anyone” (line 66). His choice of the negative construction “does not listen”, as opposed to the positive construction “does ignore”, reflects trends observed by Harris (2001: 459), whereby Members may express intentionally face-threatening propositions without breaking regulations regarding insulting language. This critique of Thatcher’s leadership style also has an impact on Thatcher’s gender performance, given the perceived links between collaboration and women leaders (Holmes, 2006: 6). By alleging that Thatcher is inconsiderate of the advice and opinions of others, even other Members of her Party, Kinnock is drawing attention to a supposed violation of gender norms.

Kinnock claims that the poll tax is “nothing to do at all” with Labour, placing the blame for any dissent entirely on Thatcher and the Conservative Party (line 69). He continues to discuss this claim in hyperbolic terms, stating that this is the case “everywhere” and using the emphasiser “absolutely” to reiterate the truth of this condition (line 71). His criticism of the poll tax also references quotes from a Conservative Councillor, who referred to the tax as “not right” and “not fair” (line 70). Given how closely aligned Thatcher is with the poll tax, this judgement is an attack on Thatcher’s positive face needs, but attributing this opinion to one of Thatcher’s “fellow” Conservatives constitutes an attack on the Conservative Party as a whole (line 67). By emphasising this difference of opinion amongst members, Kinnock is implying that the Conservative Party is divided amongst itself and is therefore positioning the Conservative Government as unsuitable for leadership. Thatcher in particular is positioned not only as unsuitable but as unsuccessful, given that she does not have the support of her own Party.

As also seen in Example 15, Thatcher once again replies without directly contradicting the claims made against her in the question. Thatcher's method of saving her own face, and that of the Conservative Party, is to make unfavourable comparisons between councils within Conservative and Labour constituencies. She provides three examples where local Labour authorities charge residents more in poll tax than their closest neighbouring Conservative authority, violating the Neo-Gricean principle, *Say no more than you must* (Horn, 2004). One example may have performed disagreement, but three generates the implicature that the Labour Party is obviously and undeniably culpable for high rates of poll tax, and Kinnock's judgement on the topic cannot be trusted. By repeatedly juxtaposing Conservative with Labour councils, Thatcher is creating an implicit competition between the two, and by explicating that it is more favourable to live under a Conservative authority, she is declaring an implicit victory over the Labour Party. Thatcher is discursively creating a moment of authority for herself and for the Conservative Party through the act of attacking the Labour Party and challenging her rapport with them.

Thatcher summarises her argument by referring to it as a "lesson", thereby positioning herself as a teacher, a more knowledgeable figure educating an audience with lesser knowledge. This semantic choice also positions Thatcher as an authority figure, and supports the interpretation that Thatcher used the repetition in her answer to intentionally portray herself as an educator. This interpretation reflects Baxter's (2012: 88) re-imagining of Kanter's (1993) role traps as discursive resources. Thatcher did not perform an on-record disagreement with Kinnock, instead framing her answer as a teaching moment, creating a more acceptable role for herself than that of the disagreeable and argumentative woman leader.

4.2.2 "He has nothing to offer this country": May responding to unanswerable questions

May appears to continue following a pattern of reciprocal im/politeness: when questions containing rapport-challenging behaviour are directed at her, she responds with rapport-challenging behaviour of her own. Of the 18 questions in my dataset from the first year of May's premiership, 11 of them either contained on-record face-threatening

behaviour or an unpalatable presupposition. On 8 of these occasions, May replied with a bald, on-record attack on the Opposition.

The following two extracts both relate to concerns regarding NHS budget cuts. The Government had an opportunity to announce an increase to the NHS budget as part of their forthcoming Autumn Statement, which was due to be released on 23rd November 2016. On each occasion, May denies that her Government's proposed budgets are damaging to the NHS, and asserts that her Government's policies are more beneficial for the NHS than Labour's proposed alternatives.

Extract 17

PMQs 12/10/2016 Lines 251 – 262

251 Meg Hillier

252 (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op)

253 Q2. The Public Accounts Committee and the Comptroller and Auditor General have both
254 warned that the NHS budget is not sustainable. When will the Prime Minister's Government
255 wake up to the reality of growing demand, avoid the political rhetoric and set a sustainable
256 NHS budget for this year and the future?

257 The Prime Minister

258 The Government took a very simple approach. We asked the NHS itself to propose its five-
259 year plan for the NHS. We asked it how much money it required. It said £8 billion; we are
260 giving it £10 billion, which is more than the NHS said. Funding in the NHS is at record levels.
261 The only place where money for the NHS is being cut is under a Labour Administration in
262 Wales.

Hillier argues that the current financial situation of the NHS is “not sustainable” and uses this as the basis for her request that May intervene and set a new NHS budget (line 254). Her use of the change of state predicate “wake up” indicates that the implementation of these changes is a future condition, triggering the presupposition that, at least so far, May has been neglecting her responsibilities towards the NHS (line 255). This threat is aggravated by Hillier’s specific choice of the phrase “wake up” over a factive verb such as “recognise” or “accept”, since the “wake up” metaphor carries connotations of laziness or carelessness. Hillier also requests that May “avoid the political rhetoric”, the specificity of which generates the implied accusation that May has, on previous occasions, provided vague and non-committal commentary on this topic (line 255). These off-record attacks threaten May’s positive face needs, and suggest that Hillier is actively challenging her rapport with May.

While Hillier’s question related to future events, May answers in the past tense, implying that actions already undertaken should be sufficient and no other response is necessary. In this way, she performs disagreement without the need to explicitly contradict Hillier. May counters the accusation that her NHS budget is not sustainable with the assertion that her Government is providing “record levels” (line 260) of funding for the NHS, demonstrating exaggerated approval for the Government in an attempt to enhance their positive face needs (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 104). This choice reflects the observations of Harris (2001: 467), that when presented with a face-threatening question, the best method of face-saving is for the Prime Minister to “shift the agenda onto the positive achievements of the Government.”

May starts her answer by outlining the approach of “the Government” and then proceeds to repeatedly use the plural pronoun “we”, suggesting that this is an exclusive “we” referring to May and her Cabinet but discounting any Opposition Members (line 258). This exclusion creates an implicit comparison; by detailing steps the Government has taken, May is generating the implicature that the Opposition is doing less to create a sustainable future for the NHS than she is. She then makes this FTA explicit with the accusation that the “only” instance of the NHS budget being cut is as a result of representatives of the Labour Party (line 261). This on-record attack on Labour suggests that May has assumed a rapport

challenge orientation in an attempt to deliberately damage her rapport with the Opposition. Since her answer serves to both enhance the positive face needs of her Government and results in a loss of face for the Opposition, May is able to discursively create a moment of power for herself.

On 3 occasions, May was not able to save face by focusing on the positive achievements of herself or the Government. Instead, she would employ evasive strategies and attack the Opposition in an attempt to recontextualise the situation, as seen in Extract 18 below:

Extract 18

PMQs 19/10/2016 Lines 299 – 314

299 Stephen Pound

300 (Ealing North) (Lab)

301 Q4. I am much obliged, Mr Speaker. Can there be a single Member of this House who does
302 not have reason to be grateful to those heroes of our high street, community pharmacists?
303 Can there be any member of the public who is not as bemused as I am that the Government
304 are proposing a 12% cut in the community pharmacy budget, potentially leading to 3,000
305 closures? Will the Prime Minister express her support for community pharmacies and have
306 another look at this divisive, corrosive and destructive proposal?

307 The Prime Minister

308 Everybody in this House recognises the role and contribution of community pharmacies up
309 and down the country, but it is also right that we look at how we are spending NHS money.
310 That is why the Government are looking carefully at this whole issue. If the hon. Gentleman
311 supports community pharmacies, perhaps he ought to have a word with the Leader of the
312 Opposition, because his right hon. Friend's policy is to nationalise the health service

313 completely, lock, stock and barrel—GP surgeries, Macmillan nurses and community
314 pharmacies.

In his question, Pound demonstrates exaggerated approval of community pharmacists, whom he refers to as “heroes of the high street” (line 302). He presupposes that this stance will be shared by other Members of the House, since his question is not whether it is true that community pharmacists are heroes, but whether there are Members of the House who do not have reason to be grateful to those heroes. As such, this proposition, *community pharmacists are heroes of our high street*, forms the kind of “background knowledge” that Polyvou (2015: 130) argues is presupposed out of necessity for “discourse comprehension”. In this example, it is necessary to accept that *community pharmacists are heroes of our high street* in order to comprehend why Pound asserts that May’s proposed budget cuts are “divisive, corrosive, and destructive”, in violation of May’s positive face needs (line 306). This presupposition restricts May’s ability to answer Pound’s question without giving a face-damaging response, thereby violating her negative face needs. If May were to attempt to protect her positive face and defend her proposal, this would include justifying the potential closure of thousands of pharmacies, subsequently refuting the presupposed proposition *community pharmacists are heroes*. This would risk damaging her rapport with anyone who holds this belief. Criticising May’s proposal and orchestrating this communicative conflict creates the impression that Pound is challenging his rapport with May.

In her answer, May equivocates, neglecting to directly comment on her specific policy. In her first sentence she uses the conjunction “but” as a marker of contrast so that she may both concede Pound’s stance that community pharmacists do deserve to be celebrated while also avoiding taking a negative stance against her own proposal (line 309). May does not address Pound’s criticisms of her budget proposal, but neither does she defend it, instead making the vague claim that the Government is “looking carefully” at the issue (line 310). As such, May minimises the loss of face caused by her answer.

Rather than defend her own proposal, May issues a challenge to Pound. Her use of the subordinating conjunction “if” creates doubt over the strength of Pound’s convictions regarding community pharmacies, thus serves as a challenge to prove his commitment to the issue (line 310). May asserts that Pound can prove himself by raising his concerns with the Leader of the Opposition instead, using the deontic modal verb “ought” to convey a strong sense of obligation (line 311). This combination of behaviours threatens Pound’s face needs, presenting him with the choice between renouncing his dedication to community pharmacies or criticising the proposals of his own Party.

May’s challenge to Pound to speak to Corbyn in defence of community pharmacies frames Labour policy as the greater threat to the NHS and more detrimental than her own policies. Her choice of the “lock, stock and barrel” metaphor has violent connotations, as if the Labour party were treating the NHS as some kind of weapon (line 313). While she did not defend her own policy, she positions it as the superior option compared to Labour, therefore using this rapport-challenging behaviour as a face-saving strategy.

These behaviours were also apparent in May’s final year in office. Of the 20 questions included in my dataset, 17 of them contained either on-record face-threatening behaviour or an unpalatable presupposition. On 14 of these occasions, May replied with rapport-challenging behaviour of her own. On 5 of these occasions, May did not engage with the face-threatening content of the question at all, instead prioritising reciprocating a rapport challenge orientation over performing any other conventional face-saving strategies. One example of this is shown in Extract 19 below:

Extract 19

The day before this session, the devolved assemblies of Scotland and Wales simultaneously debated and passed identical motions exemplifying their combined opposition to May’s Brexit deal, a rejection of leaving the EU without a Withdrawal Agreement, and a request for an extension to Article 50 (*Scottish Parliament*, S5M-16107, 05 March 2019; *Senedd Cymru*, NNDM6985, 05 March 2019). Mrs Kirsty Blackman

claim that this rejection has come “from Scotland”, creating the impression that the whole country has unified against May (line 664). This question performs a criticism of May’s Brexit deal, therefore threatening May’s positive face needs and challenging their rapport.

May does not comment on the votes of the devolved assemblies or attempt to defend her Brexit deal. The epiphora generated by the repeated phrase, “... as the United Kingdom” (lines 668-9) serves as a message enforcer, emphasising the implied meaning that the UK’s national identity is independent to its member states, and therefore the opinions of the devolved assemblies have no influence on the UK’s departure from the European Union (Dommett, 2014: 83). May’s use of the epistemic modal verb “will” conveys absolute certainty and reaffirms her stance on leaving the EU regardless of the level of support her deal has received (line 669).

May proceeds to accuse Blackman of hypocrisy, claiming that the SNP continues to pursue Scottish independence despite not having a mandate from the Scottish population. May repeats the phrase “has no mandate”, mirroring Blackman’s own use of the phrase (line 670). This parallelism emphasises the similarities between the two arguments, positioning Blackman as hypocritical for criticising May for the same conduct as her own Party (Tannen, 2007: 60). In this instance, May’s defence against Blackman’s face-threatening behaviours is to ensure that Blackman’s face needs are threatened in the same manner, establishing reciprocity but meaning that their rapport is mutually challenged.

The following two extracts show May exchanging insults with Jeremy Corbyn:

Extract 20

The House had previously held two meaningful votes regarding Brexit deals proposed by May’s Government. The deal was rejected both times. Another vote was scheduled for the afternoon following this PMQs session to decide whether the House would allow the UK to leave the EU without a Withdrawal Agreement. Mr Jeremy Corbyn (Leader of the Opposition, Labour) questions May on why she does not show more concern about the

prospect of leaving without a deal, and why she will not whip Conservative MPs into voting against it.

PMQs 13/03/2019 Lines 64 – 82

64 CORBYN: [Well, Mr Speaker, there may – there may well be other
65 votes, and her Brexit strategy is clearly in tatters.] Her deal has been twice
66 rejected and is now dead, and she’s not even asking her MPs to support her
67 on it tonight.

68 A couple of months ago, the Chancellor, who is here today, we’ll hear from
69 him later, reassured business leaders that the threat of a no-deal Brexit
70 would be taken off the table, while the Business Secretary said a no-deal
71 Brexit would be “ruinous” to the UK economy. Indeed, the Government’s own
72 forecasts suggest that no deal would knock ten per cent off the economy,
73 damaging jobs and industry. Why is the Prime Minister still ambivalent about
74 the outcome?

75 SPEAKER: Prime Minister.

76 MAY: I say to the right honourable Gentleman, I’ve been working for leaving the EU
77 with a deal. Businesses and business organisations have been clear across the
78 UK that they want MPs to back the deal.

79 ((quiet Conservative CHEER))

80 MAY: Yes, businesses worry about the uncertainty of Brexit, but there’s one thing
81 they worry about more, and that’s a Corbyn Government.

82 [(((loud Conservative CHEERS and Opposition PROTESTS)))]

Corbyn is directly critical of May's Brexit deal, referring to it as "twice rejected" and "now dead" (lines 65-6). This death metaphor has strong connotations with finality, suggesting that it would be futile to dedicate any more time debating it. He generates the implicature that even May has given up on attempting to get her deal ratified, given that she is not asking for the support of her MPs (line 66). This forms the basis of his personal criticism of May, that she is "ambivalent" about the future of negotiations (line 73). His claim that she is "still" ambivalent implies surprise that this is a continued state of being for May, despite warnings that a failure to act would result in a no-deal Brexit, the consequences of which would be disastrous (line 73).

In defence of these ambivalence claims, May argues she has "been working" on securing a Brexit deal (line 76). This use of the present perfect continuous tense implies that May has been dedicated to the same outcome for some time, in direct contradiction with Corbyn's attempts to position May as indecisive or non-committal. To further enhance her positive face needs, May argues that businesses across the UK have expressed a desire that her deal be ratified, thus positioning her deal as desirable without needing to provide any further details (lines 77-8).

May does not disagree that a no-deal Brexit is a "worry" but suggests that a "Corbyn Government" would be even more harmful to the UK economy (line 81). She refers to Corbyn by name instead of referring to a "Labour Government", making this a targeted attack on Corbyn. Positioning a Corbyn Government as the worst possible outcome results in a loss of face for Corbyn and the Labour Party but also makes May's deal seem preferable in comparison. Challenging her rapport with Corbyn was a method of enhancing her own face needs, and had the added benefit of creating a moment of solidarity for the Conservative Party, as evidenced by the loud cheering in support of her attack (line 82).

Extract 21 contains another example of May making a personalised attack on Corbyn:

Extract 21

Corbyn references the two previous occasions where the Prime Minister's Brexit deal was voted down in Parliament. In her answer, May references two upcoming votes, scheduled for the afternoon following this session and the following day, where Parliament was scheduled to vote on the possibility of leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement and the possibility of extending Article 50, respectively.

PMQs 13/03/2019 Lines 187 – 225

187 CORBYN: [The Prime Minister –]

188 [((PROTESTS))]

189 SPEAKER: [Order.]

190 CORBYN: – the Prime Minister's deal has failed. She no
191 longer has the ability to lead. This is a rudderless Government in the face of a
192 huge national crisis.

193 ((quiet Opposition CHEERS))

194 CORBYN: The honourable Member
195 for Broxbourne recognises it, saying, and I quote, the Government "is not fit
196 for purpose. We're not doing what we need to do, which is govern the
197 country properly and effectively."

198 Where the Prime Minister has so obviously failed, this House needs to listen
199 to the country, listen to unions, listen to people in work fearful for their
200 future, manufacturers and businesses, workers, and European Union citizens
201 who've made such a fantastic contribution to our society and British citizens
202 across Europe, all facing uncertainty. Jobs and industry at risk. The country in

203 crisis. She needs now to show leadership, so can the Prime Minister tell us
 204 exactly what her plan is now?

205 ((quiet Opposition CHEERS))

206 SPEAKER: Prime Minister.

207 MAY: = Can I say to the right honourable Gentleman, I continue to
 208 believe that the House today will have an opportunity to vote on no deal.
 209 They will then have an opportunity tomorrow, depending on how they voted
 210 tonight, to vote on the question of the extension of article 50. And as I said
 211 last night, there will be hard choices for this House, but this House will need
 212 to determine what its view is on the – on the way forward. As far as the
 213 Government is concerned, we want to continue to work to leave the
 214 European Union. That’s what we deliver for the people in – on the vote in the
 215 [referendum. We will continue to work]

216 [[[Opposition PROTESTS]]]

217 SPEAKER: [Order.]

218 MAY: to deliver leaving the European
 219 Union, but to deliver leaving the European Union with a good deal.

220 [[[quiet Conservative HEAR HEAR]]]

221 [And as regards the right honourable Gentleman,] he doesn’t agree with
 222 Government policy. He doesn’t even agree with Labour party [policy. He has
 223 nothing to offer this country.]

224 [[[loud
 225 Conservative CHEERS]]]

Corbyn refers to the Government as “rudderless”, a metaphor for disaster given that a rudderless ship suffers from a lack of direction and is most likely going to crash (line 191). He therefore generates the implicature that May, as the metaphorical captain of the rudderless ship, is responsible for the Government’s aimlessness and is condemning the Government to a catastrophic conclusion. This point is further sensationalised by Corbyn’s reference to a “huge national crisis” which May “no longer has the ability to lead” the country through (lines 191-2).

Corbyn makes another bald attack on May’s leadership by claiming that she has “so obviously failed” (line 198). The use of an intensifier and emphasiser in conjunction with each other has a “reinforcing effect on the truth value” of his proposition, increasing the severity of the threat to May’s positive face needs (Quirk et al, 1985: 583). He uses the deontic modal verb “needs” to convey that May has a strong obligation to show leadership, but then he uses the dynamic modal verb “can” to question whether she has the ability, further questioning May’s competency as a leader (line 203).

While Corbyn uses disaster imagery to describe the future, May discusses the various opportunities to enact change that are still left to the House. Her use of the cognitive verb phrase “I continue to believe” serves an epistemic function, implying that she considered her options and chooses to believe in the truth value of her propositions (lines 207-8). The fact that she continues to believe generates the implicature that her belief is unwavering, in contradiction with Corbyn’s previous accusations that May is ambivalent (see Extract 20). May is positioning herself as a conscientious but also determined leader, enhancing her positive face needs after they were threatened by Corbyn’s accusations.

May contradicts Corbyn by asserting that the Government is not directionless, and outlines the Government’s specific aim to “continue to work to leave the European Union” (lines 213-4). She progresses from the desiderative verb “want” (line 213) to the epistemic verb “will” (line 215), demonstrating conviction in the certainty of this outcome, and therefore certainty in her own abilities as a leader. She specifies that she is working to leave “with a good deal”, but her use of the conjunction “but” generates the conventional implicature that other, less desirable outcomes are possible, if not likely without her direction (line 219). This implication that her deal is the best possible outcome also

enhances her positive face needs after the accusations that she and her deal have “failed” (lines 190, 198).

After stating her own beliefs and aims, May attacks Corbyn’s lack of conviction, positioning herself as the more suitable leader because Corbyn does not agree with either Government policy or the policies of his own party (line 222). She summarises with the personalised negative assertion, “he has nothing to offer this country” (lines 222-3). This level of impoliteness matches Corbyn’s behaviours, and thus demonstrates that May is, on this occasion, participating in the debate with equal access to linguistic resources. The loud Conservative cheers in response to her final insult indicate that it is met with approval by her peers, suggesting that this characteristically masculine behaviour has been normalised as an acceptable part of her linguistic performance.

4.3 Summary

Chapter 4 analysed the ways in which Thatcher and May attempt to manage their rapport with audiences both inside and outside the Chamber. There were a greater number of examples in my dataset of Thatcher adopting a rapport enhancement or maintenance orientation in the first year of her premiership, even when provided opportunities to challenge the Opposition or was being challenged by another Member. These results indicate that Thatcher, in her first year, would occasionally subvert expectations by not taking advantage of helpful questions, but this non-conformity should not be equated with powerlessness. Examples from the final year of her premiership reveal Thatcher demonstrating engagement with the contestive norms of PMQs with greater frequency, as she adopted a rapport challenge orientation in response to helpful questions and as a method of face-saving when rapport-challenging behaviours were directed at her. Examples in my dataset show May taking a uniform approach to reciprocal im/politeness in both her first and final years, whereby she would mirror the level of politeness directed at her in both standard questions and unanswerable questions. Like with Thatcher, there were also examples of May adopting a rapport challenge orientation as a method of face-saving when rapport-challenging behaviours were directed at her. Thus, both Thatcher and May demonstrated an ability to engage with the behavioural norms of PMQs.

Chapter 5 analyses how Thatcher and May make specific use of patronising behaviours in response to unanswerable questions.

5.0 Patronising Language

Both Thatcher and May used patronising language when navigating power dynamics in PMQs. Patronising behaviours have been described by Atkinson and Sloan (2017: 288) as “related to the perception of helplessness or low functionality” of the addressee, creating the impression of incompetency and powerlessness. Culpeper and Hardaker (2017: 215) expand the definition of patronising to include “condescending, belittling, ridiculing and demeaning behaviours”, but further specify that there must also be a perceived “abuse of power”, whereby the speaker deviates from a previously established hierarchy. I argue that both Thatcher and May use patronising behaviours either to create or reinforce a perceived hierarchy, constructing moments of power for themselves and powerlessness for their addressees.

5.1 “Never perturbed by facts”: Thatcher’s use of patronising behaviours

In data from the first year of her premiership, there were repeated instances of Thatcher creating moments of powerlessness for Opposition Members by dismissing their contributions. On 15 out of 38 occasions, Thatcher replied to a question with a patronising or belittling response. In the following example, Thatcher’s positive face is threatened as she and her Government are accused of negligence.

Extract 22

Mr Martin O’Neill (Labour) questions Thatcher about the Government’s policy of non-involvement in the ongoing strikes by union workers from the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, resulting in the closure of many British Steel Corporation Plants and secondary pickets appearing outside private UK steel plants.

PMQs 05/02/1980 Lines 97 – 105

- 97 Mr. O'Neill
- 98 When will the Prime Minister recognise the Government's wider responsibility in the steel
- 99 dispute? Will she assure the 12,000 workers in my constituency who are employed in the

100 refractory brick industry that their jobs will not be put in jeopardy? Millions of pounds of
101 public and private money have been spent on the arm to make it profitable, while the
102 Government stand idly by.

103 The Prime Minister

104 Jobs are put in jeopardy because of a strike. The hon. Gentleman should direct his attention
105 to those who decide to go on strike, stay on strike and extend that strike.

The word “when” in line 98 is another example of a WH-question word triggering a presupposition (Levinson, 1983: 184). This example gives rise to the presupposition that “at a specific point in the future, the Prime Minister will recognise the Government’s wider responsibility...”. Therefore, O’Neill is presupposing that the Government does indeed bear responsibility for the ongoing steel dispute. This presupposition is further validated using the test of constancy under negation (Levinson, 1983; Huang, 2011; van der Sandt, 2012). When sentence (a) is derived from O’Neill’s question, it may be negated to form sentence (b). In either case, the presupposition remains the same and may be considered to be true.

(a) At a specific point in the future, the Prime Minister will recognise the Government’s wider responsibility in the steel dispute.

>> The Government has a wider responsibility in the steel dispute.

(b) At a specific point in the future, the Prime Minister will **not** recognise the Government’s wider responsibility in the steel dispute.

>> The Government has a wider responsibility in the steel dispute.

As such, O’Neill’s question serves as an accusation: he is presupposing that the Government have a responsibility to intervene in the steel disputes and that by standing “idly by” it is neglecting that responsibility (line 102). This question also serves as an appeal for intervention: by asking “when”, not “if”, Thatcher will recognise the need for intervention, O’Neill is appealing to Thatcher’s positive face wants by optimistically assuming

she would have reached this conclusion by herself and her involvement is inevitable. He also makes his appeal person-oriented by making direct reference to his constituents whose jobs he evaluates as being “in jeopardy” should the Government continue to do nothing (line 100).

Thatcher responds by baldly disagreeing and indirectly insulting O’Neill. She replies with an assertion containing an epistemic stance, arguing that the risk to jobs in the manufacturing industry is “because of a strike” and simultaneously performing two types of face-threatening behaviour (line 104). Firstly, she is refusing O’Neill’s request that she take responsibility for the ongoing steel disputes. Secondly, she is contradicting O’Neill, denying that that the Government has any responsibility to intervene in the first place. Thatcher makes her denial explicit, making little apparent effort to redress her face-threatening behaviour, suggesting that she is holding a rapport neglect orientation during this interaction (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 32). This, combined with the fact that she did not display any empathy for the uncertainty faced by O’Neill’s constituents, does not correlate with the collaborative, affectively-oriented speech styles associated with stereotypical feminine performances. Instead, it more closely relates to the confrontational and assertive speech stereotypically associated with masculine leadership styles (Holmes, 2006: 6; Baxter, 2010: 59).

As she continues, Thatcher switches to a rapport challenge orientation as she offensively questions O’Neill’s priorities (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 32). By suggesting that O’Neill “should direct his attention” elsewhere, Thatcher is implying that his attention and efforts are currently being misdirected (line 104). This generates the implicature that O’Neill has been wasting his time and the House’s time by raising it in PMQs, and so has acted incompetently and unprofessionally.

Thatcher’s position is reinforced by epiphora: the repeated “on strike” at the end of each clause in her concluding sentence (line 105). Thatcher is redirecting blame away from herself and her Government onto the strikers. This repetition not only emphasises this message but actively engages the audience and creates a sense of expectation (Fahnestock, 2011: 231; Iqbal, 2015: 7). The result of this is that listeners will be anticipating the phrase “on strike” and will start to associate the concept of striking with the topic of jobs being at

risk. Thatcher's insistence accentuates her disagreement with O'Neill and deepens the threat to his face needs. This demonstrates a greater concern for protecting her own face and the collective face of the Government, making them appear blameless at the expense of O'Neill appearing ineffectual.

The deontic modal verb "should" in line 104 creates obligation for O'Neill to direct his attentions away from Thatcher and the Government and towards the striking steel workers. "Should" implies a lesser degree of obligation than a verb like "must", so this utterance is framed as a suggestion rather than an imperative. Since it follows such a direct contradiction and bald threat to O'Neill's face needs, Thatcher's advice seems mockingly polite. This creates an im/politeness mismatch between Thatcher's apparent encouragement and her face-threatening behaviours, such as contradicting O'Neill's arguments and belittling his actions. Taylor (2021: 582) notes that such examples of mock politeness, and patronising speech in particular, are not only more strongly associated with masculinity, but also strongly associated with those in positions of power. By acting dismissively of O'Neill, Thatcher is discursively positioning herself as the more powerful participant. As she implies that O'Neill is both incorrect and ineffective, she depicts him as both helpless and powerless, positions he did not occupy before Thatcher's reply.

Similar behaviour from Thatcher is apparent later on in the same session, as shown in Extract 23. When accused of being evasive, Thatcher insults the Opposition Member by calling him less knowledgeable than herself:

Extract 23

Mr Jack Straw (Labour) references a non-answer Thatcher gave earlier in the session to Mr Michael Foot (Deputy Leader of the Labour Party). Foot had asked Thatcher, "what support did the Government give... and what intervention did they make" in response to the British Steel Corporation warning of "catastrophic effects" should unionised steel workers not be offered a satisfactory pay raise (see PMQs 05/02/1980 Lines 58 – 63).

PMQs 05/02/1980 Lines 143 – 151

143 Mr. Straw

144 Why has the Prime Minister evaded the questions that my right hon. Friend the Member for
145 Ebbw Vale (Mr. Foot) put to her? His central question was about what reply the right hon.
146 Lady gave to BSC when it predicted a catastrophe if a 2 per cent. offer was made? I repeat,
147 what reply did she make to BSC?

148 The Prime Minister

149 The hon. Gentleman cannot know about relationships between nationalised industries and
150 Prime Ministers. In a properly-run Government, the matter does not come to the Prime
151 Minister.

This is the second time in a short space of time that this question has been put to Thatcher. Straw makes it explicit that this is the case, not only because he uses the performative verb “repeat” (line 146) in his question but also because he uses metalanguage to state his view that Thatcher “evaded the questions” (line 144) on this topic when she was previously asked. This is a direct acknowledgement that Thatcher had been providing equivocal answers, most likely in an attempt to avoid giving face-damaging responses (Bull, 2008). Both Straw and Foot allege that Thatcher’s Government were forewarned of a “catastrophe” (line 146) in the steel industry, which subsequently manifested in the form of widespread striking and massive disruption to UK steel production. For Thatcher to acknowledge this warning is for her to concede that, regardless of any response made, her Government did not prevent this “catastrophe” from happening. By persistently asking Thatcher the same question, Straw is forcing Thatcher into a communicative conflict: continuing to equivocate presents a threat to Thatcher’s own face as she risks appearing non-committal or inept, but providing a direct answer poses a threat to her whole Government, revealing that they were either unable or unwilling to intervene in a way that could have prevented great damage to the national steel industry.

Thatcher responds to Straw in a way similar to O’Neill, by contradicting and dismissing his contribution. Thatcher claims he “cannot know about” (line 149) her relationship with

the British Steel Corporation. In the dynamic modal sense, “cannot” means Straw does not have the ability to know. Thatcher is making a bald, on-record threat to Straw’s positive face, explicitly stating that he does not possess the same degree of knowledge as her. The word “cannot” may also be interpreted in terms of deontic modality: Straw cannot know because he does not have the permission to know about such matters. This is an off-record FTA positioning Straw as an ‘other’, a member of an out-group, not important enough to be permitted access to such knowledge. By belittling his knowledge, competence and credibility, Thatcher is discursively positioning Straw as powerless. In contrast, Thatcher does have access to this knowledge, so she is positioned as the more powerful.

As in her answer to O’Neill, Thatcher denies any responsibility for the steel dispute, claiming it is not a matter for a Prime Minister (lines 150-1). In doing so, Thatcher contradicts Straw’s depiction of events, threatening his face needs by implying that he is incorrect in his assumptions. Furthermore, Thatcher attempts to validate this stance by claiming it is the result of a “properly-run Government” (line 150). Thatcher uses this to justify her non-answer; in the event she were able to provide Straw with an answer, it would mean the Government was not being properly run. Claiming this makes it harder for Straw or any other Member to pursue this line of questioning without threatening their own face needs. To continue to demand an answer would be to demand the Government be intentionally mismanaged, which could have detrimental effects on the rest of the country, so any Member making such a request would appear to be selfish and destructive.

Extract 24 contains another example of Thatcher using patronising behaviours to avoid giving a face-damaging response:

Extract 24

Mr Michael Foot (Deputy Leader of the Labour Party) references a question asked earlier in the session. Mr Douglas Jay (Labour) had asked Thatcher if the Government’s industrial policies were producing the results that she had intended, to which Thatcher responded that they were “certainly giving people the opportunity to earn more” (PMQs 05/02/1980 lines 164 – 172).

PMQs 05/02/1980 Lines 173 – 177

- 173 Mr. Foot
- 174 Does the right hon. Lady's reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Battersea, North
175 (Mr. Jay) mean "Yes we have done it all on purpose"?
- 176 The Prime Minister
- 177 The right hon. Gentleman must be very much kept down when his right hon. Friend is here.

Foot is questioning Thatcher on her industrial policies, including her policy of non-intervention in the on-going steel workers' strikes. He asks Thatcher to further clarify whether the results of her policies, including the strikes, were intentional. He asks Thatcher to confirm the truth condition of her Government having "done it all on purpose" (line 175). Whether Thatcher confirms or denies this statement, it is likely to result in a loss of face. Were Thatcher to agree with the statement, "yes we have done it all on purpose", this would be an admission that her Government intentionally incited the widespread industrial action causing unrest throughout the country. Were Thatcher to disagree, this would generate the implicature "no we have not done it all on purpose", still conceding that the Government is responsible for the strikes, albeit accidentally.

Thatcher avoids giving a face-damaging answer by refusing to engage with Foot's FTA at all. Instead, she comments on Foot's unusual level of participation in the debate. During this particular PMQs session, the leader of the Labour Party, James Callaghan, was absent, so Foot, as the Deputy Leader, had stepped in to serve as Leader of the Opposition. Thatcher's observation that Foot "must be very much kept down when his right hon. Friend [Callaghan] is here" serves as a reminder that Foot is not usually permitted so much floor time, and an accusation that he is enthusiastically taking advantage of this opportunity (line 177). The phrase "kept down" is a euphemistic understatement for his lack of involvement; "down" has connotations of disappointment, and "kept" is a transitive verb, implying that Foot is being kept down *by* Callaghan against his will. The intensifying phrase "very much" emphasises Foot's lack of autonomy, and the epistemic verb phrase "must be" reinforces the

truth condition of Thatcher's proposition, denying the possibility of alternative interpretations.

By asserting that Foot's engagement is normally more restrained, Thatcher is indirectly drawing attention to his position in the political hierarchy. Thatcher's dismissive answer creates the perception of powerlessness for Foot, and therefore appears patronising (Atkinson and Sloan, 2017: 288; Culpeper and Hardaker, 2017: 215). The patronising effect of Thatcher's answer is intensified by her inability to directly address her response to Foot. All questions and answers must be directed towards the Speaker, and Members cannot refer to each other by name (Erskine May, 2019: 4.23). Thatcher is obliged to show deference to Foot by referring to him as "the right hon. Gentleman", but then proceeds to patronise him, in a pattern closely resembling the conventionalised impoliteness formula for insults identified by Culpeper (2011: 135), namely, "personalized third-person negative references (in the hearing of the target)". This mismatch of deference and criticism has a mocking effect, inviting the rest of the House to see Foot as a target for ridicule (Taylor, 2021: 582).

These examples from her first year have shown Thatcher being evasive with her answers, using patronising behaviours to distract from her non-committal responses and discursively construct moments of power for herself by creating moments of powerlessness for the Opposition. In my data from her final year in office, Thatcher continued this pattern, using patronising behaviours in response to 18 out of 44 questions. This behaviour wasn't exclusively directed towards the Opposition, as shown in Extract 25:

Extract 25

Mr Dale Campbell-Savours (Labour) references a vote held the previous day regarding the implementation of the community charge in Wales. He mentions two conservative Members, both of whom had previously held positions in Thatcher's Cabinet, who abstained from voting: Nigel Lawson, former Chancellor of the Exchequer (1983 – 1989), and Michael Heseltine, former Secretary of State for Environment (1979 – 1983) and Defence (1983 – 1986).

PMQs 27/03/1990 Lines 139 – 157

139 CAMPBELL-SAVOURS: Mr Speaker, last night the former Chancellor of the Exchequer and the
140 honourable Member – the honourable Gentleman, the Member for Henley,
141 both refused to support the Prime Minister in the [Division Lobbies in a
142 Division on the poll tax,]

143 [([quiet Opposition
144 CHEERS))]

145 CAMPBELL-SAVOURS: despite the fact that only hours previously the
146 honourable Gentleman, the Member for Henley had been driven into an – a
147 loyalty oath in favour [of the Prime Minister. What does she think of those]

148 [([Opposition CHEERS and LAUGHTER))]

149 OPPOSITION MP: [Yeah, some – some loyalty!]

150 CAMPBELL-SAVOURS: two honourable Gentlemen now? Does she believe the oil-ty loath
151 was – oath was hollow? And is this the first time that the Chancellor of the
152 Exchequer has expressed a reservation [on the poll tax?]

153 [([Opposition HEAR HEAR))]

154 THATCHER: Mr Speaker, I think I must ask my right honourable Friend the Patronage
155 Secretary to have a quiet word with them and [see what that will do.]

156 [([loud Conservative
157 LAUGHTER))]

Campbell-Savours asks for Thatcher's opinion on two of her ex-Cabinet Ministers after revealing that they had "both refused to support" her in a recent vote on the poll tax (line 141). His choice of the verb "refused" suggests intent and, in light of the "loyalty oath" these Members had supposedly sworn, implies a kind of betrayal (line 147). This damages Thatcher's positive face needs by implying she is viewed unfavourably even by those

expected to support her. Campbell-Savours specifically asks Thatcher what she thinks of those two Members “now”, generating the conventional implicature that her opinion will have changed as a result of these events, and inviting her to share negative evaluations of her colleagues (line 150).

If Thatcher were to oblige, she risks further damaging her face needs by positioning herself as vindictive, or conceding that she is vulnerable for not having enough party support. Instead, Thatcher gives a patronising response, revealing that she is dismissive of the situation. Her answer starts with a combination of modal functions in the phrase “I think I must” (line 154). The cognitive verb “think” serves an epistemic function, revealing that her stance is subjective and hedging her proposition. However, the deontic modal verb “must” conveys an absolute obligation to act. The two functions don’t agree, creating the impression of insincerity.

Thatcher’s response to this implied betrayal is to announce her intentions to speak with the Patronage Secretary, the official title of the Chief Whip (lines 154-5). It is the role of the Chief Whip to ensure party Members vote in accordance with party leadership, and defying the whip may carry consequences up to and including expulsion from the party. The diminutive “quiet” in “a quiet word” (line 155) understates the severity the situation, furthering the impression of an insincere and patronising stance (Ytsma and Giles, 1997: 259). Thatcher does not articulate a desired outcome, merely wanting to “see what that will do”, positioning herself as indifferent and uninterested (line 155). This positioning protects her own face needs as it undermines the severity of Campbell-Savour’s FTA: his threat was contingent on the two ex-Cabinet Ministers being close associates of Thatcher, but by acting disinterested, Thatcher distances herself from them, thereby lessening the significance of their implied betrayal.

The threat of calling upon the Chief Whip positions Thatcher as powerful, serving as a reminder that there are consequences for defying her, but that she herself is too important to personally oversee them. This creates a moment of powerlessness not only for Campbell-Savours, but also for two Members of her own party. This would risk challenging her rapport with her own party, but the inclusion of these patronising behaviours violates Horn’s (2004) neo-Gricean principle, *Say no more than you must*, generating the implicature that Thatcher

is mocking Campbell-Savours. This display of insincerity adds a humorous element and creates an opportunity for solidarity within the Conservative Party as they unify to ridicule Campbell-Savours. This is apparent through the loud laughter that follows Thatcher's answer, suggesting that Thatcher's use of patronising behaviours to construct a moment of power for herself is met with approval (line 157).

Extract 25 shows Thatcher continuing to use evasion to avoid giving a face-damaging response, but the following extracts all show Thatcher demonstrating a greater willingness to engage with the content of the question and using this as the basis for attacks against the Opposition.

Extract 26

Mr James Callaghan (Labour) questions Thatcher about rising costs facing householders, including mortgage repayments and the new community charge, and what kind of intervention Thatcher is prepared to make.

PMQs 06/03/1990 Lines 7 – 30

7 CALLAGHAN: Is the Prime Minister aware that a recent report by the building societies and
8 the banks has stated that over half a million householders in this country are
9 more than two months in arrears with their mortgage repayments? It also
10 said that, last year, thirteen and a half thousand householders had their
11 houses taken from them because they couldn't pay the high interest rate of
12 fifteen point four per cent. In view of the fact that from next month they will
13 have the added misery and the burden of the poll tax around their necks,
14 would the Prime Minister tell the House, one, what –

15 ((Conservative
16 PROTESTS))

17 CALLAGHAN: – what financial support she is prepared to give to the
18 householders, or is she going to tell them a thing or two? Or would she do the
19 decent thing, copy [the Secretary of State for Wales, resign and go?]

20 (((Conservative PROTESTS and Opposition CHEERS)))

21 THATCHER: Mr Speaker, perhaps the honourable Gentleman will recall that we've had
22 questions before on this particular report. As sad as it is that some people are
23 finding difficulties with mortgages, in fact, the repossession rate is less than
24 one third of [one per cent of those who are paying mortgages, that ninety
25 nine per cent of those having mortgages – over ninety nine per cent]

26 (((Opposition PROTESTS)))

27 THATCHER: are well
28 able now to meet their mortgages, and that the number of people who own
29 their own homes has gone up from eleven million under Labour to fifteen
30 million under this government.

In his question to Thatcher, Callaghan is highly critical of the Government's policy to implement the poll tax, referring to it as a "misery and a burden" (line 13). As the head of Government, Thatcher is closely aligned with all Government policy, so this serves as a bald threat against her face needs. He becomes increasingly critical of Thatcher, with his question culminating in a call for her resignation. Callaghan refers to this as the "decent thing" (line 19), implying that it is not merely his preference, but a matter of morality. He also specifies that she should resign "and go" (line 19), suggesting that her resignation alone isn't sufficient, her very presence is a detriment to Parliament, so she should remove herself completely.

Thatcher responds with a patronising indirect speech act. While she is ostensibly inviting him to recall "questions before on this particular report" (line 22), the implicature generated presents as a criticism of Callaghan's lack of originality and inattention to proceedings. The "will" in "the honourable Gentleman will recall" (line 21) serves a deontic modal function, suggesting that he has a strong obligation to recall this fact, but the hedge "perhaps" (line 21) transforms this from an imperative to a suggestion. This invitation becomes an

exaggerated example of mock politeness, enhancing the off-record threat to Callaghan's positive face and resulting in him assuming a position of powerlessness.

The phrase "as sad as it is" (line 22) shows token agreement with Callaghan, but her almost immediate use of the emphasiser "in fact" (line 23) aggravates the disagreement again. By belittling the struggle faced by people who cannot pay their mortgage, Thatcher is decreasing her level of affective involvement, not just with Callaghan, but with the population they are discussing. She appears to adopt a rapport neglect orientation, refusing to offer financial support or even words of sympathy to the percentage of the British public that Callaghan claims needs her help. This could have been an opportunity for Thatcher to enhance her positive face and endear herself to voters by appearing to be sensitive to their needs, but instead she dismisses them in a violation of their association rights (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 16). Thatcher reduces those in financial difficulty to a minority, claiming that "less than one third of one per cent" of those with mortgages face repossession (line 23 – 24). This method of constructing an argument based on statistics more closely matches the stereotypical, "referentially oriented" interactional style associated with masculine performances (Holmes, 2006: 6). As she makes this argument, Opposition Members are heard protesting Thatcher's behaviour. This suggests that some of the Opposition Members present objected to Thatcher's disregard and lack of empathy.

Thatcher also claims that "the number of people who own their own homes has gone up" since her Government took over from the last Labour Government (lines 28 – 30). This threatens the face of the entire Labour party, implying that they are, as a party, deficient or inferior to her own Conservative Government. This attempts to place her and her Government in a position of superiority, and contradicts Callaghan's implied assertion that the Government would function better if Thatcher were to resign. Thatcher responded to Callaghan's FTA not only by using patronising linguistic behaviours but also by using an FTA of her own to position herself as powerful.

Thatcher's use of patronising behaviours to discursively do power is readily apparent in the following extracts, revealing a series of exchanges with the Leader of the Opposition, Neil Kinnock. Kinnock was allotted three questions per session, so his first question, shown

in Extract 27, serves to introduce the topic that he will discuss in more detail in his supplementary questions.

Extract 27

Kinnock questions Thatcher about the 18 Conservative councillors who resigned from the West Oxfordshire District Council in protest of the new Community Charge.

PMQs 01/03/1990 Lines 56 – 63

- 56 SPEAKER:
57 = Mr Neil Kinnock.
58 ((Opposition CHEERS))
59 KINNOCK: Mr Speaker, can the Prime Minister tell us, does she have any plans to make
60 an official visit to West Oxfordshire?
61 ((loud Opposition LAUGHTER))
62 THATCHER: No, Mr Speaker, I rather wish I did, to explain a thing or two.
63 [((loud Conservative LAUGHTER))]

As soon as Kinnock is invited to speak, his name alone is enough to elicit cheers from his supporters (line 57). He hasn't said anything aloud yet, but the fact that he stands in opposition to the Prime Minister is evidently deemed enough to make his contributions worthy of celebration. This is a demonstration of the combative nature of PMQs, as identified by scholars such as Bates et al (2014: 254) and Lovenduski (2012: 321). By showing support for the Leader of the Opposition, these cheers are a threat to Thatcher's positive face because they signify disagreement with her leadership and a preference for her primary opposition.

Kinnock's first question to Thatcher concerns her plans regarding an official visit to West Oxfordshire. Rather than ostensibly questioning whether such plans exist, Kinnock phrases this question as an invitation to share these plans when he says "can the Prime Minister tell us" on line 59. This is a negative politeness strategy, on the surface showing respect for

Thatcher's autonomy by appearing to give her the choice of whether or not to answer instead of demanding an answer. Phrasing the question in this way is entirely for the purposes of face-saving, since Thatcher is still obligated to provide an answer regardless of how polite Kinnock's inquiry was. The verb "can" can also be considered in terms of dynamic modality: Kinnock is questioning Thatcher's ability to share her plans, which brings into question the existence of such plans in the first place. As such, this question simultaneously serves as a challenge to the Prime Minister to prove that she has made plans, while also allowing Kinnock to maintain the appearance of satisfying Thatcher's negative face wants.

Kinnock's question of whether Thatcher intends to visit West Oxfordshire implies the existence of an event in West Oxfordshire that deserves the attention of the Prime Minister. As such, it follows that his preferred answer to this question would be for Thatcher to say yes, she will visit. However, as noted by Bates et al (2014: 276), questions in PMQs are frequently "used for the purposes of political point scoring", it is likely that Kinnock asked this question with the expectation that Thatcher would say no, as this would enable him to criticise her for her negligence.

Recognising this, Thatcher pre-emptively responds with an attack of her own. As expected, she says no, but then follows this up with, "I rather wish I did", an admission that Kinnock is correct in suggesting that a visit to West Oxfordshire is warranted (line 62). This follows the request-refusal pattern of a dispreferred response, but Thatcher immediately reveals herself to be insincere by saying the motivation for her visit would be "to explain a thing or two" (line 62). This forms an off-record attack on the local council of West Oxfordshire by implying that they are not competent enough to govern themselves and are in need of correction. Not only is she indirectly criticising the West Oxfordshire council, she is positioning herself as a higher authority who is able to fix their mistakes and is thus enhancing her own positive face.

Since Kinnock invested his time in representing the West Oxfordshire council in the House of Commons, they have become an extension of his own face, so Thatcher's attack on them is also an attack on him. As such, Thatcher has forced Kinnock to choose between using his next turn to attack her or defend the West Oxfordshire council in order to save his own face. By demonstrating an awareness that Kinnock was setting up to criticise her on his

next turn, she is revealing him to be unoriginal and predictable while she herself is capable of spontaneously taking control of the conversation in a way that benefits her.

This admission, “I rather wish I did”, could be interpreted as a patronising, mockingly apologetic response as Thatcher adopts a position of superiority and acts condescendingly. Culpeper (2011: 98) considers this kind of behaviour to have the lowest degree of symbolic violence when compared with other impolite behaviours such as verbal aggression or abuse. While her response was still face-threatening, it shows an awareness of the degree of violence that is situationally appropriate. Especially given that Kinnock has not been overtly face-threatening towards her yet, if she were to respond in a more aggressive manner she would be presenting herself as unnecessarily uncivil. Choosing an off-record attack with a low degree of symbolic violence allows her to undermine her opposition with minimal damage to her own face. Choosing to be less direct with criticism has been associated with femininity by Thimm et al (2003: 536), but specifically with feminine leadership styles by Holmes and Stubbe (2003: 594). In this instance, Thatcher is constructing a more feminine identity, but also still demonstrating her authority.

Thatcher’s attack on Kinnock is shown to be successful by the loud laughter it elicits from her supporters (line 63). Such interjections are a method for backbench MPs to participate in debates. It is not only a way for individual members to make their opinions known, but a way of enhancing the face of a political party (Bull, 2008; Bull and Fetzer, 2010). As head of the Conservatives, when Thatcher speaks, she represents the Conservative Party and this reflects on all Conservative MPs residing in the House. By laughing at the appropriate times, MPs are showing solidarity, validating Thatcher’s bid for authority, and revealing themselves to be a unified in-group.

Kinnock decides not to respond to the threat to his face, instead attacking back at Thatcher. He takes advantage of Thatcher’s concession that she wishes she could visit West Oxfordshire, as shown in lines 64-5 of Extract 28:

Extract 28

PMQs 01/03/1990 Lines 64 – 75

64 KINNOCK: Mr Speaker, I hope that that signifies a new readiness to listen on the part of
65 the Prime Minister.

66 ((Opposition CHEERS))

67 KINNOCK: Perhaps she should reconsider
68 her decision and go to West Oxfordshire and meet the Conservative
69 councillors who resigned the whip last night, explaining that they were
70 resigning, and I quote them, "in protest at the Government's local
71 government policies in general and those on housing and the community
72 charge in particular."

73 When her own councillors are blaming her Government, isn't it clear that
74 she's running out of both friends and excuses?

75 ((Opposition CHEERS))

Kinnock could not have known what Thatcher's answer was going to be, so by directly referencing it he also demonstrates an ability to respond spontaneously. Thatcher's admission of her desire to visit West Oxfordshire may have been sarcastic, but Kinnock responds as if it was literal by saying "I hope that that signifies a new readiness to listen" (line 64). The phrase "I hope" is a modal expression that apparently serves as a negative politeness strategy, whereby Kinnock is not presuming to know Thatcher's intentions. However, by giving her the benefit of the doubt, Kinnock is actually forcing Thatcher into a double bind: either she must lose face by agreeing with him and proving him correct about her, or she must disagree and lose face by admitting that she is, in fact, not ready to listen. Also, by specifying a "new" readiness to listen, Kinnock is implying that Thatcher has not been listening previously. Therefore, even if Thatcher were to admit that she was now ready to listen, this would also be to concede that she had been failing in her Prime Ministerial duties up to this point. The cheers that immediately follow this utterance show that

Kinnock's supporters appreciate not only the spontaneity of his remarks but the intelligence demonstrated by the duality of this insult.

His next utterance reveals that he did introduce the topic of West Oxfordshire with the intention of criticising Thatcher. He claims that the resignation of multiple Conservative councillors is the reason that Thatcher should reconsider her visit, but his assertion still shows consideration for Thatcher's negative face needs. In line 67, Kinnock says "Perhaps she should" reconsider. The word "should" serves here as a deontic expression of obligation, not necessity, which, when combined with the hedge "perhaps", creates a suggestion, not an imperative.

Kinnock concludes with an indirect speech act on lines 73-4. He is making an accusation that Thatcher is "running out of friends and excuses", but parliamentary procedure dictates he must phrase his statement as a question for it to be admissible in PMQs. Phrasing this accusation as a question mitigates the face-threatening aspect, as does his use of the present continuous tense in the phrase "running out". This allows for the potential for a change in circumstances; if he had used the past tense, "has run out", that would be presenting the situation in absolute terms with no hope for improvement. However, phrasing his question as a cleft sentence, starting with "isn't it clear that...", presupposes agreement and makes it harder to disagree. This presupposition can be tested under negation: whether it is clear or it is not clear, the proposition that *Thatcher is running out of both friends and excuses* remains the same.

Kinnock also enhances the threat to Thatcher's positive face through his use of the word "friends". "Friends" is a lot more personal than "party members" or "colleagues", so Kinnock is creating the impression that these councillors resigned because they found Thatcher personally disagreeable rather than because of a professional disagreement. This personalised negative assertion is not made explicit, so Kinnock avoids the kind of offensive expression that would render his question out of order (Erskine May, 2019: 22.12).

Kinnock's assertion that Thatcher is "running out of friends and excuses" is a direct accusation that she is unlikeable and increasingly desperate, but Thatcher does not comment on either of these allegations. This corroborates Harris's (2001: 467) contention

that, when trying to save face in response to face-threatening action, often “the best course of action is not to engage” at all. Thatcher instead chooses to respond with an assertion of her own competency, implicitly suggesting that she doesn’t require friends or excuses because she relies on facts:

Extract 29

PMQs 01/03/1990 Lines 76 – 94

76 THATCHER: But not explanations of the facts, [Mr Speaker. Now, the facts are –]
77 [((Conservative LAUGHTER))]
78 SPEAKER: Order.
79 THATCHER: Of course, I know that the right honourable Gentleman is never perturbed by
80 facts, [but the facts are]
81 [((quiet Conservative LAUGHTER))]
82 THATCHER: that the community charge of four hundred and
83 twelve pounds is very high and the situation is made worst of all by
84 Oxfordshire county council’s [Labour-Liberal’s gross overspending –]
85 [((quiet Opposition PROTESTS and quiet
86 Conservative HEAR HEAR))]
87 THATCHER: Their standard spending assessment, agreed by Government, was up by
88 twelve per cent, of which, of course, revenue – revenue grant is paid, but
89 they’re spending another ninety-six pounds per adult [above that increase in
90 the SSA.]
91 [((Opposition
92 PROTESTS))]
93 THATCHER: And this accounts for the larger share of the increase in community charge.
94 [((Opposition PROTESTS))]

Thatcher turns this assertion of her own competency into an opportunity to insult Kinnock, claiming that she knows he is “never perturbed by facts” (lines 79 – 80). Thatcher is talking hyperbolically, as revealed through the use of the adverb “never” and the epistemic lexical verb “know”, revealing absolute certainty in this perceived truth. This is the most on-record Thatcher is permitted to be, since she is also prevented from making overtly offensive expressions. Her phrase “never perturbed by facts” is a negative construction of “ignores facts” and, by extension, generates the implicature “is ignorant of the truth”. Thatcher is forced to go off-record with this face-threatening behaviour as a result of her compliance with the parliamentary procedures that define discourses in the House of Commons. Perhaps incidentally, going off-record with this attack adds a humorous element, but still with a highly combative intent. The use of ‘contestive’ humour such as this has been identified as a factor in male collegiality and masculine behaviours by Holmes and Schnurr (2005: 136), suggesting that Thatcher is creating more of a masculine identity for herself in this moment.

Thatcher resumes responding to Kinnock’s claim that the councillors of West Oxfordshire resigned in protest of Government policy, the community charge in particular. She denies responsibility, instead claiming that the high community charge in that area is the result of decisions made by the Oxfordshire county council and “Labour-Liberal’s gross overspending” (line 84). By re-assigning the blame elsewhere, Thatcher is able to simultaneously protect the face needs of herself and the Conservative party and threaten the face needs of the Opposition. Thatcher could have taken measures to mitigate this threat and avoid disagreement by presenting her claim as an opinion or theory, but instead she presents it as a “fact” (line 80), revealing that this is a deliberate attack on her opposition. This is further exaggerated by her use of the intensifier “very” and the hyperbolic phrase “worst of all” on line 83. As such, Thatcher uses a combination of patronising language and face-threatening behaviour to discursively position herself as powerful.

Kinnock uses his final question for this session to further insist that the resignation of Conservative councillors is a detriment to Thatcher and proof of the inadequacy of the community charge:

Extract 30

PMQs 01/03/1990 Lines 96 – 127

96 KINNOCK: Mr Speaker – Mr Speaker, I heard what the Prime Minister says. Does she
97 realise that she's merely proving the point of the Tory councillor who resigned
98 the whip last night, saying any tax that requires that much explanation must
99 be bad?

100 ((Opposition CHEERS))

101 MP: Roof tax!

102 MP: Roof tax!

103 MP: Roof tax!

104 MP: = Roof [tax!]

105 SPEAKER: [Order.]

106 MP: Roof [tax!]

107 MP: [Roof] tax!

108 MP: Roof tax!

109 MP: Roof [tax!]

110 SPEAKER: [Order.] Prime Minister.

111 THATCHER: Mr Speaker, the right honourable Gentleman always prepares his
112 supplementaries before he's heard the [previous answer. The explanation –]

113 [((loud Conservative LAUGHTER))]

114 SPEAKER: [Order.]

115 THATCHER: – the explanation – the explanation was very simple and very brief.
116 [The Labour – The Labour Oxford –]

117 [((Opposition PROTESTS))]

118 THATCHER: The Labour Oxfordshire county council

119 ((Opposition CHEERS))

120 THATCHER: is increasing its

121 spending by – by nearly three times the level of inflation. That is Labour-

122 Liberal policy. [They wanted]

123 [((Conservative CHEERS))]

124 THATCHER: to put up the Community Charge as much as

125 they could, hoping people would blame us instead of getting the blame on

126 themselves, where it should rest.

127 ((Conservative CHEERS))

Kinnock starts his final question by asserting that he has “heard what the Prime Minister says” (line 96). By announcing his attentiveness, he is validating what Spencer-Oatey (2008: 16) refers to as equity rights, or the belief that “we are entitled to personal consideration from others”. It not only enhances Thatcher’s positive face by showing that Kinnock values her contributions, but it enhances his own positive face by showing that he was respectful enough to listen and consider Thatcher’s arguments rather than instantly dismissing them. His final question is another indirect speech act: Kinnock is suggesting that Thatcher’s answers are hindering her defence of the community charge but by posing it as a question he is able to maintain the appearance of attempting to help Thatcher realise her self-incriminating mistakes. The phrase “Does she realise” (lines 96-7) also serves as a message enforcer, intensifying the impolite nature of this utterance (Culpeper, 2011: 135).

Throughout his three questions, Kinnock refrains from expressing a personal opinion on the community charge. Instead he uses reported speech from one of the resigned councillors, claiming that it is the opinion of individuals aligned with Conservative politics that the community charge “must be bad” (lines 98-9). By using reported speech, Kinnock avoids taking responsibility for this particular threat to the face needs of the Conservative party, but by emphasising the division between Members of the party he is still able to position Thatcher as vulnerable and question her suitability for leadership. His threatening behaviour prompts disorder from the backbenches, including repeated cries of “roof tax!”,

the Labour Party's proposed alternative to the community charge, momentarily disrupting the session (lines 101-9).

With order resumed on line 111, Thatcher begins her answer by surmising that Kinnock "always prepares his supplementaries before he's heard the previous answer" (line 111-2). The implicature generated by this is that Kinnock cannot adapt to the debate as it unfolds, and therefore has fewer skills as an orator. It is not only commendable when MPs appear to spontaneously generate supplementary questions, it is an expectation outlined in Erskine May (2019: 19.16): supplementary questions "must not be read". Drawing attention to Kinnock's level of preparation is an indirect accusation that he is struggling to engage with the norms of parliamentary discourse and is therefore ineffectual in his role as Leader of the Opposition. Thatcher is once again being patronising, allowing herself to be celebrated for her wit, as shown by the resulting laughter on line 113, rather than being more verbally aggressive and risk being reprimanded. Taylor (2017: 440) determined that wit was celebrated more from male speakers; women were more likely to be negatively evaluated for the same behaviours that are tolerated or admired from men. The fact that Thatcher's remarks earned the support of Members of her party suggest that they are accepting of this behaviour from Thatcher, recognising and approving of this stereotypically masculinised performance.

She continues to patronise Kinnock in line 115, claiming that her "explanation was very simple and very brief". The repeated intensifier "very" reinforces her indirect implication that her explanation should have been easy to understand, and therefore Kinnock must be at fault for not comprehending. She repeats that the high community charge in Oxfordshire is the result of "Labour-Liberal" policy (lines 121-2), thus implying it is not the fault of her Conservative Government. She makes this off-record threat explicit by stating that "the blame... should rest" (lines 125-6) on the local county council, effectively absolving herself of any responsibility for social discontent in that area and protecting the positive face of herself and the Conservative Party.

She also claims that the county council were "hoping people would blame us instead" for their unhappiness (line 125). This is an indirect threat to the positive faces of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties for two reasons. Firstly, she is accusing their members of

dishonesty. Secondly, the fact that their plan to frame Thatcher and the Conservative Party failed must mean that they were not competent enough to see it through to completion. Also, Thatcher's exclusive use of the first person plural pronoun "us" in this context has the effect of creating an us versus them rhetoric that positions Conservative MPs as an in-group being challenged by all other MPs. She is showing solidarity with other members of her party, lessening social distance and demonstrating a greater degree of affective involvement with them.

Across datasets from both her first and final years, Thatcher would use patronising behaviours in response to face-threatening behaviours in an attempt to recontextualise the threat and reassert her own authority. Particularly in the data from her first year in office, she would offer a patronising response as an evasive tactic, redirecting attention away from any threat to her own face needs. In the extracts from her final year in office, Thatcher was also shown to combine patronising behaviours with face-threatening behaviours directed towards the Opposition, to both directly and indirectly attack the Opposition and position herself as authoritative.

5.2 "Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman...": May's use of patronising behaviours

This section explores May employing similar strategies to Thatcher, combining patronising behaviours with on-record face-threatening acts to discursively position herself as powerful. Out of the 18 questions in my dataset from the first year of May's premiership, she gave 7 answers demonstrating a mismatch of im/politeness that could be identified as patronising. The questions in my dataset from this year all pertain to the state of the NHS, with a particular emphasis on a shortage of funding.

Extract 31

Mr Jeremy Corbyn (Leader of the Opposition, Labour) has used his six allotted questions to ask May about the state of the NHS. Corbyn referred to the NHS as "dramatically underfunded" (see PMQs 19/10/2016 line 69), and suggested that the resulting cuts to adult social care have led to a drop in the quality of services provided by the NHS.

PMQs 19/10/2016 lines 162 – 178

Jeremy Corbyn

162 I started by asking the Prime Minister about parity of esteem. All this Government have
163 produced is parity of failure—failing mental health patients; failing elderly people who need
164 social care; failing the 4 million on NHS waiting lists; failing the five times as many people
165 who are waiting more than four hours at A&E departments—and another winter crisis is
166 looming. The Society for Acute Medicine has it right when it says that this funding crisis and
167 the local government funding crisis are leaving the NHS “on its knees”.

168 The Prime Minister

169 What has happened in the NHS over the past six years? More patients being treated, more
170 calls to the ambulance service, more operations, more doctors, more nurses—that is what
171 has been happening in the NHS. But let us just look at the right hon. Gentleman’s party’s
172 approach to the national health service: a former shadow Health Secretary said that it
173 would be “irresponsible” to put more money into the national health service; and a former
174 leader of the Labour party wanted to “weaponise” the national health service. At every
175 election the Labour party claims that the Conservatives will cut NHS spending; after every
176 election we increase NHS spending. At every election Labour claims the Tories will privatise
177 the NHS; after every election when we have been in government we have protected the
178 NHS. There is only one party that has cut funding for the NHS: the Labour party in Wales.

Corbyn accused May’s Government of exclusively producing a “parity of failure” (line 163), a minimally redressed FTA implying that the Government is in and of itself a failure. While this is not a personal attack against May, it is a threat against the Government she is head of. Given that her face needs are closely aligned with those of the Government, there is a need for May to defend the face needs of the Government in order to protect herself (Bull and Fetzer, 2010: 160).

May starts her response with a rhetorical question, “what has happened in the NHS over the last six years?” (line 169). Given that Corbyn already provided an answer to this question by listing the perceived ways the Government has failed the NHS (lines 163 – 165), this is evidently not a sincere request for information. If Corbyn is correct, May asking about the state of the NHS for the past six years would be superfluous, so by proceeding to ask the question anyway May is generating the implicature that either Corbyn is incorrect or is misleading the House by leaving out vital details. This insincerity for the sake of “social disharmony” matches Culpeper et al.’s (2003: 1555) description of sarcasm, another form of mock politeness which may express a negative evaluation of the target while the speaker maintains deniability (Taylor, 2016: 18). Sarcasm has been recognised as an index of masculinity, as Katz et al. (2004) and Taylor (2017) reveal ‘sarcastic’ as a second-order label is more commonly used to describe male speakers than women. By using sarcasm in this way, May is adopting a masculine performance as she sets up to contradict Corbyn.

May continues her answer by listing what she believes to be the impact of her Government on the NHS, but in a manner that reflects Corbyn’s question. Corbyn’s question contained anaphora, the repeated word “failing” at the start of each clause (lines 163 – 164) to place emphasis on the perceived ways in which the Government was deficient. May’s answer also contains anaphora, with the word “more” at the start of each clause (line 169 – 170) to emphasise the perceived ways in which the Government was successful in improving conditions for the NHS. As a persuasive technique, anaphora actively engages an audience and results in a “powerful emotional effect” (Charteris-Black, 2013: 42). By using repetition in this way, Corbyn is stimulating an emotive response in listeners to encourage negative evaluations of the Government. May saves face by using the same strategy to encourage positive evaluations. By using the same technique, May is undermining Corbyn’s efforts to influence listeners and, by mitigating his chances for success, placing him in a position of comparative powerlessness.

After taking action to save hers and the Government’s collective face, May proceeds to threaten the face of the Labour Party. Just as her own face is aligned with the needs of the Conservative party, by threatening the Labour party May is also making an indirect attack on Corbyn. However, she chooses to make this attack explicit by referring to Labour as “the

right hon. Gentleman's party" (line 171). May is appearing to adopt a rapport challenge orientation as she appears to be intentionally directing her threatening behaviour towards Corbyn. She threatens the positive face of the collective Labour party by quoting high-ranking Labour Members who said they did not want to provide additional funding for the NHS (line 173) and aimed to "weaponise" the NHS (line 174). Such stances are controversial and position the Labour party as uncaring about public health care, and also make Corbyn look hypocritical for claiming that it is the Conservative Government that is a danger to the NHS. May uses direct reporting of speech to make these claims, which enhances the severity of the threat to Corbyn's face. If Corbyn were to attempt to disagree with either statement, he would also be revealing that there is disharmony within the Labour party, which would threaten the party's face.

This FTA is prefaced by the phrase "but let us just look" (line 171). The discourse marker "but", the first-person pronoun "us", and the downtoner "just" have all been identified by Rees-Miller (2000: 1094) as politeness strategies that are effective in softening disagreement, but this also leads to the im/politeness mismatch that contributes to the patronising effect of this utterance (Ytsma and Giles, 1997: 259; Taylor, 2021: 58). May is ostensibly inviting Corbyn and all other listeners to collaborate with her in evaluating Labour's stance on the NHS, but because this has face-threatening repercussions for Corbyn, inviting him to participate is a severe imposition and increases the weightiness of this FTA. Additionally, there is no opportunity for Corbyn to decline this invitation, since May has been assigned the floor and must be permitted to speak without interruption (Erskine May, 2019: 21.37). Corbyn is being discursively positioned as powerless not only by May undermining his contribution, but also because he is helpless to prevent her from doing so.

May also uses structural parallelism in her answer to compare the attitudes of the Conservative and Labour parties towards the NHS (lines 174-8). Tannen (2007: 60) argues that such parallelism "foregrounds and intensifies" both similarities and differences between repeated phrases. By repeating the phrase "at every election" to describe the actions of the Labour party and the phrase "after every election" to describe the actions of the Conservative party, May is directly contrasting the two approaches of the two parties. May claims that the Labour party forecast cuts to NHS spending (line 175) and privatisation (line

176), whereas the Conservative party is responsible for increasing NHS spending (176) and protecting the NHS (line 177). This comparison positions the Conservative party as saviours of the NHS, ensuring its continuance, while the Labour party is positioned as sceptical and untrustworthy, given that their assertions were proven wrong. This serves to enhance the positive face of the Conservative party, and threaten the positive face of the Labour party.

May repeats these behaviours in the following Extract, patronising Corbyn before attacking the Labour party as a whole:

Extract 32

PMQs 19/10/2016 Lines 95 - 108

Jeremy Corbyn

95 I agree with the Prime Minister that it is a very good thing for Members to stand up and
96 openly discuss mental health issues that they have experienced, because we need to end
97 the stigma surrounding mental health conditions throughout the country. However, NHS
98 trusts are in a financial crisis. According to NHS Providers, it seems to be the worst financial
99 crisis in NHS history: 80% of acute hospitals are now in deficit. There was a time, in 2010,
100 when the NHS was in surplus. What has happened?

101 The Prime Minister

102 Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman what has happened in relation to NHS funding. We
103 asked the NHS itself to come up with a five-year plan, and we asked the NHS itself to say
104 what extra funding was needed to deliver on that. The NHS came up with its five-year plan,
105 led by Simon Stevens as its chief executive. He said that £8 billion was needed. We are
106 giving £10 billion of extra funding to the NHS. I might also remind the right hon. Gentleman
107 that at the last election, it was not the Conservative party that was refusing to guarantee
108 funding for the NHS; it was the Labour party.

Corbyn juxtaposes the current state of the NHS, with 80% of acute hospitals “now in deficit”, with the state of the NHS in 2010, when the NHS “was in surplus” (lines 99-100). This year is significant, since it was at this general election that the Labour party lost the majority that they’d maintained for 13 years, and a Conservative leader had been Prime Minister ever since. Corbyn is implying a causal relationship between the Conservative leadership and the decline of the NHS, so his question “what has happened?” serves as an accusation that May should not only explain the deficit, but take responsibility (line 100). Given that any explanation could be interpreted as an admission of guilt, Corbyn is leading May into giving a face-damaging response.

May starts her answer with the verb phrase, “let me remind...” (line 102). The phrase “let me” is commonly used in a request for permission, or in a suggestion for a course of action. Either interpretation would position May as submissive but, given that May is obliged to provide an answer, and that her answer proves to be face-threatening to Corbyn and the Labour party, this submission appears disingenuous and patronising. By appearing to request permission to speak and then proceeding to anyway, May is effectively granting herself permission and positioning herself as authoritative.

May presents her answer as a reminder to Corbyn, implying that none of this is new information. This serves as an off-record attack on Corbyn’s face needs, suggesting that either he is forgetful or that he deliberately neglected to mention these facts in an attempt to discredit May. Either way, he is positioned as unsuitable for leadership. Through her use of the patronising phrase, “let me remind...”, May is discursively placing Corbyn in a powerless position.

The rest of her answer violates Horn’s (2004) neo-Gricean principle, *Say no more than you must*. May over-explains, creating the impression of low functionality in her audience by acting as if “extensive accommodations are necessary for understanding” (Atkinson and Sloan, 2017: 288). This includes repetition of the phrase, “we asked the NHS itself” (line 103). The second occurrence, in the phrase “we asked the NHS itself to say” could have been omitted without altering the proposition of May’s utterance; it would have been implied that the NHS was the subject of both “come up with a five year plan” and “say what extra funding was needed” (lines 103-4). The fact that May chose to explicate this phrase a

second time implies that her audience could not be trusted to infer this meaning on their own. Such repetition also allows May to articulate an argument with “syncopated insistence” (Fahnestock, 2011: 231). The phrase, “we asked the NHS itself” attributes agency to the NHS as an organisation, therefore deferring blame for their current predicament away from May’s Government and her predecessor. Thus, repeating this phrase emphasises this argument and helps protect May’s positive face needs.

Such efforts are also apparent in May’s use of short, simple sentences, “He said that £8 billion was needed. We are giving £10 billion of extra funding to the NHS” (lines 105-6). May leaves no room for misinterpretation, creating the patronising impression that her audience is unable to understand more complex sentences. In addition, the juxtaposition of the request from the NHS compared to the response from her Government invites the audience to induce that the Government is being generous with their budget allocations, in direct contradiction to Corbyn’s accusations that the current NHS funding crisis is the fault of recent Conservative Governments.

May continues her answer with the phrase, “I might also remind...” (line 106). This mirrors her patronising stance in the phrase, “let me remind...”. The epistemic modal verb “might” indicates possibility, not certainty, and hedges the following proposition. May then continues with her answer anyway, so her referring to this outcome as a mere possibility becomes mockingly polite. Whereas the phrase “let me” resembles a request for permission, the phrase “I might” indicates possibility, making it explicit that May already has permission to speak, and therefore that Corbyn is powerless to stop her. This serves as another example of May using patronising behaviours to discursively position herself as powerful.

She concludes her answer with an attack on the Labour party, arguing that, as of the last general election, they were “refusing to guarantee funding” for the NHS (line 107-8). This positions the Labour party as ignorant to the requirements of the NHS, and it positions Corbyn as hypocritical for criticising the Government’s approach to funding the NHS.

In Extracts 31 and 32, May combined patronising behaviours with on-record face-threatening behaviours to position herself as powerful and undermine the authority of the

Opposition. In Extract 33, May exclusively uses patronising behaviours to create an off-record threat to the face needs of the Opposition:

Extract 33

PMQs 26/10/2016 Lines 486 - 498

486 Luciana Berger

487 (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op)

488 The Prime Minister has just told us that record levels of spending are going into our mental
489 health services. Her Health Secretary stood at that Dispatch Box on 9 December and told us
490 that the proportion of funding going into mental health from every one of our clinical
491 commissioning groups should be increasing. Why is it, then, that 57% of CCGs in our country
492 are reducing the proportion of spend on mental health? It is yet another broken promise.
493 When will we have real equality for mental health in our country?

494 The Prime Minister

495 The fact that I set out—that we are spending record levels in the NHS on mental health—is
496 absolutely right, but I have said in response to a number of people who have questioned me
497 on this that we recognise that there is more for us to do in mental health, and I would have
498 thought that we should have cross-party support on doing just that.

Berger claims that the House was told that clinical commissioning groups, the organisations responsible for delivering NHS services at a local level, should be increasing their budgets for mental health services, and yet appeared to be reducing their budgets instead, referring to this as “yet another broken promise” (line 492). The determiner “another”, indicating plurality, combined with the emphatic adverb “yet” implies that broken promises are a regular occurrence for this Government, positioning the Government as untrustworthy. Berger asks for “real” equality for mental health services, implying that any

attempts thus far have been ‘false’, further implying failure on the part of the Government (line 493).

May does not respond to the accusation that a promise has been broken, nor does she explicitly deny that NHS spending on mental health is decreasing. Instead, she responds to the accusation of failure by insisting that NHS spending on mental health is at “record levels” (line 495). She uses the intensifier “absolutely” to emphasise the truth value of this statement, saving face by indirectly contradicting Berger’s claim that the Government is neglecting mental health services (line 496).

May claims she has previously given similar answers “in response to a number of people” (line 496). The implication is that she is repeating her answers because the Opposition is repeating their questions, creating the impression of inefficiency and a lack of coordination. By comparison, May is positioned as the more competent choice for leadership, creating a power imbalance. This devaluation of the face needs of the Opposition without the use of an explicitly face-threatening utterance suggests that May is being patronising.

She recognises that there is “more for us to do” regarding mental health services (line 497). She uses an inclusive “us”, including the Opposition in this statement, but then implies that progress in this area is limited by the Opposition’s antagonism, since she does not have their support on “doing just that” (line 498). May continues to avoid making an on-record face threat by being patronising. Within the phrase, “I would have thought”, May’s use of the epistemic modal verb “would”, showing possibility, combined with the auxiliary verb “have”, creates a hypothetical situation, generating a conditional clause as an implicature. May is suggesting that she *would* believe there was cross-party support for improving mental health services if certain unspecified conditions were met, but that she currently does not believe this to be true. Through this phrase, May is undermining the efforts of the Opposition to lobby for better NHS services, positioning them as helpless.

There are similar examples of May attempting to do power by being patronising in the final year of her premiership. Out of 20 questions, May responded with patronising behaviours on 13 occasions. Extract 34 reveals an exchange with a Conservative Member,

showing that it was not only Opposition Members that May would patronise in order to affirm her position of authority in PMQs.

Extract 34

The week prior, the House had voted in favour of seeking an extension to Article 50. In response, May wrote to the President of the European Council to request a short extension, but announced to the House she was “not prepared to delay Brexit any further than 30th June” (see PMQs 20/03/2019 Line 86). This is approximately three months after the original deadline of 29th March. Mr Kenneth Clarke (Conservative) questions May on the efficacy of such a short extension to Article 50.

PMQs 20/03/2019 Lines 703 – 737

703 CLARKE: Mr Speaker, as the Prime Minister says, this House has voted clearly to reject
704 leaving with no deal and has voted clearly to seek an extension if her
705 withdrawal agreement cannot get a majority, but this House has not yet had
706 the opportunity to debate and vote on the range of options for long-term
707 arrangements such as a customs union, regulatory alignment and so on. So,
708 would she arrange next week for indicative votes finally to be held,
709 [so we can]

710 [((quiet HEAR HEAR))]

711 CLARKE: see where the consensus – where the majority lies? Because a
712 short extension of Article 50 will be completely useless if the Government
713 goes into it with no idea of what it’s going to have the authority to negotiate
714 in the long term.

715 ((quiet HEAR HEAR))

716 MAY: Well, [can I say to my]

717 SPEAKER: [Prime Minister.]

718 MAY: right honourable – to my right honourable and
719 learned Friend, I think he will have noticed, the House has had many
720 opportunities, actually, to put forward motions [of the issues that he has –
721 yes, the House has. The House has – The House has rejected – rejected
722 alternatives]

723 [((loud Opposition
724 PROTESTS))]

725 MAY: to the Government’s deal. The House has voted against a
726 customs union. The House has voted against having a second referendum.
727 [The House has – from – from a sedentary position,]
728 [((Opposition PROTESTS))]

729 SPEAKER: [Order.]

730 MAY: somebody on the
731 Opposition Front Bench says we won’t let the House. The House has voted on
732 these issues and has rejected them. [The – the – we have been clear about
733 our – our intention to absolutely fulfil the requirement that we have to bring
734 forward an amendable motion under]

735 [((Opposition PROTESTS))]

736 MAY: section 13(4) of the Withdrawal Act,
737 and we will indeed be doing that.

In his discussion of an extension to Article 50, Clarke asserts that a short extension would be “completely useless” (line 712) unless the House is given the opportunity to hold votes on individual arrangements that must be negotiated as part of the withdrawal agreement. Given that May had already requested a short extension, she is very closely aligned with this course of action, so the suggestion that it might be rendered “completely useless” poses a threat to her positive face. There is the option for her to prevent this

outcome by allowing more indicative votes on these issues, but being pressured to do this for the sake of saving her positive face is an infringement of her autonomy, and thus a threat to her negative face.

May responds by patronising Clarke and undermining his intelligence. Her use of the phrase, “I think he will have noticed” (line 719) follows a similar structure and serves a similar function to Thatcher’s use of the phrase, “perhaps the honourable Gentleman will recall” (see Extract 26, line 21). May is drawing attention to facts of which Clarke and the House were already aware, but redressing her language to avoid ostensibly making an accusation that Clarke’s question is inconsequential and unproductive. The word “will” serves a deontic modal function, suggesting that Clarke has an obligation to notice the truth in what May is saying, but she uses the future perfect tense, “will have noticed” (line 719). This does not presuppose he has already noticed, nor does it create an imperative for him to notice in that exact moment, but it contains an implied condition that he will notice before an unspecified future time. This redresses the threat to Clarke’s negative face since, even though it still creates the expectation that he will agree with May, it allows him to do so in his own time. The threat is further redressed by May’s use of the phrase, “I think” (line 719). The cognitive verb “think” serves a non-absolute, epistemic modal function here, suggesting that this is May’s perceived version of the truth but there is still some uncertainty.

This combination of politeness strategies contributes to the patronising effect of May’s answer, since the explicit display of politeness does not correlate with the explicitly face-threatening contradictions that follow. May asserts that the House has already had the kind of opportunities that Clarke requested. The emphasiser “actually” on line 720 also serves an epistemic modal function, reinforcing the truth value of her stance and aggravating the disagreement as a result (Quirk et al., 1985: 583). May emphasises her disagreement through the repetition of “the House has rejected” on line 721 and “the House has voted” on line 725, line 726, and line 731. This use of anaphora also has a patronising effect in this context: the predictability of May’s points combined with her use of short, simple sentences creates the impression of low functionality in the listener (Atkinson and Sloan, 2017: 289).

Extract 34 also contains examples of May constructing moments of powerlessness for herself. This extract features two examples of May directly responding to barracking: “yes,

the House has” on line 721 and her quote from a sedentary Opposition Front Bench Member on line 731. Barracking as a form of protest is inherently face-threatening, so May contradicting the protesters and re-asserting her stance is a form of face-saving. However, it doesn’t necessarily position May as the more powerful speaker in these interactions. May has been assigned the floor by the Speaker of the House, yet she devotes some of her speaking time to responding to barracking, suggesting her position is so delicate it can be threatened by shouts across the Chamber. However, May specifies that this interruption comes from a “sedentary position”, referencing Members who remain seated and have not been appointed the floor by the Speaker (line 727). As such, she highlights the rule-breaking nature of this behaviour, invalidating this contribution. She also does not reveal which Member she is referring to, merely describing them as “somebody on the Opposition Front Bench” (lines 730-1). This non-specific reference makes it clear that May was not directing her answer to the offending Member, but to a broader audience. As such, May make a negative reference within the hearing of the target, in an overt display of impoliteness (Culpeper, 2011: 135). Such vagueness is unnecessary, given that everyone in the Chamber would be aware of which Member was speaking, and so May’s behaviour becomes patronising, as it implies that the Opposition would remain unaware of whom May was criticising.

Extract 34 contains a noticeably longer answer, with May fluctuating between moments of power and powerlessness. Extracts 35 and 36 below contain much shorter answers, wherein May discursively positions herself as powerful by using as few words as necessary, generating the implicature that she has confidence in her answers and does not owe the Opposition further explanation.

Extract 35

The day before, the House of Commons had a second meaningful vote on the Government’s proposed Brexit deal. It was rejected. As a result, a motion was brought forward regarding leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement. This vote on whether or not to allow a no-deal Brexit was scheduled for the afternoon of 13/03/2019, following this session of PMQs.

PMQs 13/03/2019 Lines 53 – 62

53 CORBYN: Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister has been stubbornly declaring that the only
54 choice between her – the only choice is between her deal and no deal. Last
55 night’s vote finished off her deal. Tonight, she’s not even showing the
56 leadership to whip on no deal. Just a few weeks ago, the Prime Minister
57 whipped her MPs against ruling out no deal. So how will she be voting
58 tonight?

59 ((quiet Opposition CHEER))

60 SPEAKER: Prime Minister.

61 MAY: = I’ll be voting for the motion standing in my name.

62 [(((loud Conservative LAUGHTER and loud Conservative CHEERS)))]

Corbyn claims that May has been behaving “stubbornly”, a pointed criticism of her leadership abilities (line 53). This perceived stubbornness is a result of May insisting that the only options available to the House are “her deal and no deal” (line 54). Corbyn’s complaint, therefore, is due to May’s perceived lack of a willingness to be collaborative or facilitative, traits commonly thought to index a feminine performance (Holmes, 2006: 6). He uses the negative construction, “not even showing the leadership”, as opposed to a positive accusation that May is underperforming in her role as Prime Minister. This reflects Harris’s (2001: 459) observation that negative constructions may be used during PMQs to avoid being sanctioned by the Speaker for impoliteness, even though the generated implicature may be equally face damaging. The additive subjunct “even” indicates that Corbyn’s statement is “additionally true in respect of the part focused”: deciding not to whip Conservative MPs against no deal is not presented as the sole reason why May is not showing leadership, but one example among many (Quirk et al, 1985: 604). Corbyn notes that, despite her present reluctance, May had previously decided to whip Conservative MPs into supporting her. His use of the conjunction “so” in line 57 generates the conversational

implicature that May's stance on no deal is changeable, and so by asking May how she intends to vote, Corbyn is also indirectly asking May to clarify her stance on no deal.

May presents her answer as if it were self-evident. She uses the epistemic modal verb "will" to convey with absolute certainty that she will be voting for the motion she herself tabled for debate (line 61). Referring to it as the motion in her name demonstrates an unapologetic confidence and authority associated with masculine leadership. However, it does not reveal the stance on no deal that Corbyn was indirectly asking for. May's original motion rejected leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement on 29th March, but did not reject leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement on a future date. By keeping her answer short, May is able to avoid committing to a course of action that she may regret and may have to renounce, at the cost of a loss of face.

It is unusual for answers to be this short; it is an affront to the questioner, suggesting that their contribution does not merit a more thorough explanation. Short answers usually appear dismissive, and this dismissal adds a humorous element that is appreciated by backbench MPs (consider, for example, Thatcher's replies in Extracts 24, 25, and 27). This also appears to be the case in this extract, given the loud laughter and cheering May's response elicited from the Conservative benches (line 62).

May is asked a similar question later on in the same session. Even though her response is slightly longer, she maintains a dismissive and patronising stance:

Extract 36

A vote was scheduled for the afternoon following this PMQs session to determine whether the UK should be allowed to leave the EU without a ratified withdrawal agreement. May had declared that this would be a free vote, but Mr Ian Blackford (SNP Westminster Leader) asks May to instruct Conservative MPs to vote against leaving without a withdrawal agreement in place.

PMQs 13/03/2019 Lines 288 - 301

288 BLACKFORD: Mr Speaker, in sixteen days the United Kingdom runs the risk of crashing out
289 of the European Union with a no-deal, and we know from the Government's

290 own analysis that that will crash the economy. Why doesn't the Prime
 291 Minister show some leadership today, do the right thing and whip all her MPs
 292 to take no deal off the table on the 29th of March and forever?

293 [((loud Opposition CHEERS))]

294 SPEAKER: [Prime Minister.]

295 MAY: You can only take no deal off the table by doing one of two things:
 296 [revoke article 50 – revoke article 50 which means betraying the vote of the
 297 referendum,]

298 [((Opposition PROTESTS))]

299 MAY: or agree a deal. If the right honourable Gentleman wants to
 300 take no deal off the table, he should have voted for the deal.

301 [((quiet Conservative CHEERS))]

Blackford acknowledges that leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement is merely a “risk” (line 288) and not a guarantee, but then uses the epistemic modal verb “will” to convey absolute certainty that such an event will “crash the economy” (line 290). Having presented this outcome as calamitous, Blackford implies that it is a moral imperative for May to do all in her power to prevent it. He suggests that whipping Conservative MPs to vote against no deal would be a chance for her to “show some leadership” and “do the right thing”, implying that May is currently doing neither (line 291). This accusation of incompetency and immorality threatens May’s positive face needs, and the imperative that May take action “today” threatens May’s negative face needs (line 291).

May starts her answer with the pronoun “you” (line 295). Directly addressing another Member of the House is prohibited by Parliamentary procedure, but this usage may be interpreted as an impersonal third person pronoun, as in the phrase, “one can only take...”. This affords May plausible deniability that her answer is aimed at Blackford, but is instead stating her reply as a general rule. Brown and Levinson (1987: 206) identified this behaviour

as a negative politeness strategy, but stating her reply as a general rule also allows May to present her reply as a truism, a set of conditions that are so beyond reproach they are scarcely worth mentioning. Since it evidently does require mentioning, May is positioning Blackford, and any others who associate with his question, as unintelligent time wasters. This mismatch of polite utterance with impolite implicature generates a patronising tone and discursively positions May as powerful.

She presents Blackford with two options: “betraying” the result of the European Union membership referendum (lines 296-7), or supporting a withdrawal agreement (line 299). The verb “betray” is emotionally charged and positions this option as immoral, making it impossible for Members to feasibly choose this option without losing face. Therefore, the only viable option is to support a withdrawal agreement. May concludes her answer by claiming that if Blackford personally wanted to avoid a no deal outcome, “he should have voted for the deal” (line 300). In response to the accusation that May’s inaction regarding whipping Conservative MPs exhibits a lack of leadership, May attempted to save face by absolving herself of responsibility for a no deal outcome by blaming the possibility on Members who refuse to support her. She demonstrates an unwillingness to discuss or collaborate further, a refusal to consider the feelings or opinions of other Members, and an absolute focus on the outcome of Brexit negotiations rather than the individuals involved. Her behaviour indexes a more masculine identity and appears to be somewhat habitual for May (consider Corbyn’s description of her stubbornness in Extract 35, and analysis of the *Maybot* role trap in the following chapter).

5.3 Summary

This chapter explored the use of patronising behaviours by Thatcher and May. There were examples of both Thatcher and May responding to face-threatening questions by using patronising language to discursively construct moments of power for themselves from every year in my dataset. This behaviour served three complementary purposes. Firstly, it had a face-saving effect: it allowed Thatcher and May to recontextualise their answer so as to avoid giving a face-damaging response. Secondly, it had a rapport-challenging effect: discursively positioning themselves as powerful was to the detriment of their interlocutors,

allowing them to position the questioner as subordinate without needing to make such an accusation explicit. Thirdly, it occasionally had a rapport-enhancing effect: whenever these answers took the form of aggressive or contestive humour, Government supporters would cheer or laugh in solidarity, creating an exclusive in-group of MPs who were participating in the joke. While patronising language is an established way of negotiating power dynamics, it also contributes to the construction of a hegemonic masculine identity.

Chapter 6 analyses descriptions of Thatcher and May published in newspapers, exploring how the behaviours examined in Chapters 4 and 5 might have informed perceptions of Thatcher and May as women leaders.

6.0 Depictions in Newspapers

This chapter explores the ways in which my dataset of newspaper articles contain metaphors and imagery associating Thatcher and May with Kanter's role traps. Kanter (1993) theorised that women in positions of authority are placed into stereotypical roles which inform the way these women are perceived. Cameron and Shaw (2016: 100) argue that these so-called role traps may "help to legitimise the exercise of power by a woman" but also "restrict her scope for action"; viewing women in this way simultaneously recognises and validates their bid for authority but also perpetuates gendered stereotypes about how women leaders do and should behave. Applying role trap discourses to women leaders creates a tokenised representation of feminine authority, invoking limitations on how these women are perceived. Such representations ensure that these women are perceived in relation to their gender performances, and are "not permitted the individuality of their own unique, non-stereotypical characteristics" (Kanter, 1993: 211).

Kanter's (1993) original set of role traps included the Iron Maiden, the most overtly authoritative and masculinised role trap; the Mother, whose authority stems from a responsibility to nurture those they have authority over; the Seductress, who is presumed to gain power by seducing men; and the Pet, who is presumed to have appropriated the authority of the man or men who have 'adopted' her.

The most prominent role trap evident in the newspaper data was that of the Iron Maiden, as discussed in section 6.1. There was also evidence of Thatcher and May being placed in a new kind of role, that of an undeserving Victim being mistreated by her colleagues. I have identified this as unique from any of Kanter's original role traps, but I discuss its similarities with the Pet role trap in section 6.2.

In section 6.3, I discuss the ways in which Thatcher and May were ridiculed. For Thatcher, this included the use of Seductress and Mother/School Teacher role traps. For May, this included discourses conceptualising May in ways not covered by Kanter's role traps framework. I have referred to this new role as a Dead Woman Walking, for the way these discourses presuppose May is doomed to fail.

The final section of this chapter focuses on reported speech. During Thatcher's premiership in particular, it was common for newspapers to print transcriptions of PMQs exchanges. Given that PMQs was not televised until Thatcher's final year in office, these reports were one of the only methods available for the general public to learn what had been discussed during PMQs. It is, therefore, hugely significant which questions and answers publications choose to print, since this becomes the foundation of the average reader's understanding of PMQs. Often, publications published quotations from Thatcher where she expresses support for select groups of constituents, revealing her attempts to enhance rapport with others. For May, however, publications would rarely publish direct quotes from PMQs, instead quoting Members or correspondents commenting upon the events of PMQs. As such, negative evaluations could be made explicit without being presented as a stance attributed to the publication.

6.1 "Out-boxed the man": Iron Maiden discourses

The Iron Maiden role trap is a way of depicting women leaders as commanding and domineering. Iron Maidens are seen as forceful and unrelenting and are frequently associated with violent metaphors due to an intimidating persona (Kanter, 1993: 236; Cameron and Shaw, 2016: 100; Baxter, 2018: 26). The Iron Maiden is the most masculinised of Kanter's categories, partly due to this perceived aggression and an unapologetic confidence in their own leadership abilities. This doesn't conform to the indirect and collaborative styles thought to be associated with women leaders, making Iron Maidens susceptible to critiques about their "presumed lack of femininity" (Baxter, 2012: 86).

Within my data from Thatcher's first year in office, she was often depicted as an Iron Maiden, with both literal and metaphorical descriptions of her aggression and displays of strength. Out of the 22 articles in my dataset, 7 of them contained Iron Maiden discourses. These first three examples come from one article in *The Times* and present Thatcher as using her authority to actively operate against the British Steel Corporation:

- (1) Mrs Margaret Thatcher in the Commons yesterday left MPs with few illusions about the strength of the fetters placed by the Government on the British Steel Corporation in its struggle to find the funds needed to bring to an end the strike that is now in its sixth week.

- (2) Mrs Thatcher went on to lash the steel unions for their unyielding stance.
- (3) Angrily she told the House that she would have no truck with people who received considerable subsidies from the taxpayer and then went on strike because they wanted more.

('Mrs Thatcher rules out early Bill to break steel deadlock in angry exchange with bitter MPs', *The Times*, 06 February 1980)

Thatcher is suggested to have placed “fetters” on the BSC, hindering them in their objective to end the on-going steel workers strikes (Example (1)). By suggesting that Thatcher has physically restrained the BSC, this metaphor depicts Thatcher exerting her control over others. It also serves to remind the reader that, as Prime Minister, Thatcher’s authority is not limited to the House of Commons but also extends to private sector industries. Thatcher is positioned as supremely powerful, with the shackles placed on the BSC serving as a manifestation of her control.

Example (2) compares one of Thatcher’s answers to a physical strike against the steel unions, describing it as a “lash” against them. This invokes imagery of Thatcher being aggressive, if not abusive, and mirrors the tough and sometimes “bullying” kind of authority characteristically associated with Iron Maidens (Baxter, 2012: 87; 2018: 26). The concepts of Thatcher restraining or whipping those she disagrees with contribute to metaphors of “aggression and competition” which Koller (2004a: 17) argues are associated with hegemonic masculinity.

In Example (3) Thatcher is described as “angrily” telling the House she has no tolerance for strikers demanding a percentage of taxpayer funds. This adverb conveys a less sensationalised account of events compared to the previous violent metaphors, but it still depicts Thatcher as utilising an aggressively competitive speech style. Her reported impatience and frustration with strikers suggests a lack of compassion and the lack of a person-oriented approach, features which Holmes (2006: 6) has associated with more feminine interactional styles.

In each example, Thatcher is aligned against someone: she is intentionally obstructing the BSC, she is attacking the steel unions, she is angry with striking steel workers. These are

all representations of Thatcher adopting a rapport neglect or rapport challenge orientation, where she either doesn't care about maintaining her relationship with others or she is actively trying to damage it (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 32). There are no examples of Thatcher adopting a rapport enhancement or rapport maintenance orientation, where she aligns herself with the wants and needs of others. When viewed in conjunction, these examples position Thatcher as isolated, as she distances herself from others. This correlates with the Iron Maiden role trap, since Iron Maidens are presumed to be "so independent and resilient" that they do not require the support of others, and so have no need for rapport management strategies (Baxter, 2012: 87; 2018: 26).

Thatcher is also positioned as independent in the following examples from *The Times* and *The Guardian*:

- (4) To those MPs on the Tory benches who see salvation through a quick passage of the Employment Bill, with its proposals on postal ballots and secondary picketing, the Prime Minister made clear that they should not look in that direction for a lifeline. ('Mrs Thatcher rules out early Bill to break steel deadlock in angry exchange with bitter MPs', *The Times*, 06 February 1980)
- (5) The Government is to go ahead rapidly with its original proposal to dock the state supplementary benefits made to the families of workers on strike. Mrs Thatcher made this clear in the Commons yesterday, in what looked very like a move to bounce her more hesitant Cabinet colleagues into endorsing the plan. ('Plan to dock state pay revived', *The Guardian*, 15 February 1980)

Example (4) strongly suggests that some Conservative MPs were viewing the proposed Employment Bill as a "lifeline" capable of reducing hostilities in the steel industry, but Thatcher was denying them this hope. This suggests that not only is Thatcher aligned against steel unions and striking workers, she is also an antagonist to certain MPs in her own party. This sentiment is echoed in Example (5), where Thatcher is described as attempting to "bounce her more hesitant Cabinet colleagues into endorsing" the outcome she desired. The verb "bounce" usually refers to objects that have been thrown, so the imagery of Thatcher bouncing her colleagues implies that Thatcher is violently manoeuvring them into the positions most advantageous for her. Thatcher is framed as manipulative, using her

authority to influence Cabinet decisions. In both cases, Thatcher is positioned as unrelenting and uncompromising, even amongst her supporters and closest allies.

The phrase “made clear” is repeated in both Example (4) and (5), suggesting that Thatcher is perceived as having a direct speech style that leaves no room for misinterpretation. This positions Thatcher as confidently authoritative. This type of assertive style, while typical of an Iron Maiden, is more “stereotypically associated with men”, contributing to a masculinised representation of Thatcher (Baxter, 2010: 36).

Thatcher was further presented as aggressive and assertive in *The Guardian*, where she was described as “belligerent” and “tough”:

- (6) There was no doubt about Mrs Thatcher's belligerent mood during question time yesterday after a two-hour Cabinet meeting at which the decisions on trade union law and immunities for secondary strikers were endorsed by the full Cabinet. She had some tough things to say about picketing, in the light of the violence taking place daily outside Hadfield's private steel works in Yorkshire. ('Plan to dock state pay revived', *The Guardian*, 15 February 1980)

Referring to Thatcher as “belligerent” creates the impression that she is excessively hostile during PMQs, to the detriment of her colleagues. Claiming that she had “tough things to say” hides a double meaning; this phrase can be rearranged to use “tough” as a predicative in two different ways:

- (a) Things to say which were tough
- (b) Things which were tough to say

In sentence (a), “tough” is used to modify the things which Thatcher said, implying that her statements were tough to listen to and were uncomfortably received. While this doesn't contain an explicit evaluation of Thatcher's behaviours, it does imply that they were unpopular in the Chamber. In sentence (b), it is the act of saying which is tough, and so in doing so, Thatcher herself is being tough and assertive. Other, similar reports create suggestions that Thatcher demonstrated excessive levels of aggression, motivating readers to form their own negative evaluations of her:

- (7) As opportunity after opportunity for a quick kill passed Mr Callaghan by, the Prime Minister dealt ruthlessly with the Opposition's hit men. ('Opposition's hit men fall on St Valentine's Day', *The Times*, 15 February 1980)

Example (7) describes PMQs as a metaphorical fight to the death, with Thatcher “ruthlessly” dealing with hit men sent to attack her after Callaghan failed to achieve a “quick kill”. This metaphor implies a higher degree of brutality than previous violent metaphors, and suggests dire consequences for speakers who do partake in the aggression with sufficient enthusiasm. It closely resembles Lovenduski’s (2014: 132) analogy comparing PMQs to a “gladiatorial contest between party leaders who falter at their peril”. Thatcher’s reported ruthlessness when dealing with the instigators of this violence suggests that, while Thatcher’s behaviour may be justifiable as self-defence, she still demonstrates an equal if not greater level of verbal aggression. Drawing such parallels between Thatcher’s behaviour and that of the Opposition shows that she is thought to be conforming to the norms of the Community of Practice, but also invites readers to associate Thatcher with levels of aggression that “have long been culturally accepted in men but not women” (Lovenduski, 2014: 148). Thatcher’s role within Parliament is being validated, but only because it is being associated with a more masculine gender performance.

The next three examples all refer to specific responses Thatcher made. They are all examples of the kind of humorous or patronising answers analysed in Section 5.1, where I argued they allowed Thatcher to discursively position herself as powerful. Using such contestive humour contributes to the tough persona of an Iron Maiden, but in the following reports in *The Times*, this behaviour was explicitly negatively evaluated.

- (8) "As we are both so promising, would it not be better if we both stayed here," retorted Mrs Thatcher, tossing a murderous smile at Mr Nasty. ('Opposition's hit men fall on St Valentine's Day', *The Times*, 15 February 1980)
- (9) "There are times when I am grateful for his silence", remarked Mrs Thatcher, rather unkindly. ('Opposition's hit men fall on St Valentine's Day', *The Times*, 15 February 1980)
- (10) Loftily Mrs Thatcher replied that in a properly run government that sort of matter did not come before the Prime Minister. ('Mrs Thatcher rules out early Bill to break steel deadlock in angry exchange with bitter MPs', *The Times*, 06 February 1980)

Example (8) directly quotes Thatcher’s answer to a Labour MP after he raised the possibility of Thatcher and her son emigrating as a “favour” to the British people. Thatcher recontextualised this insult by turning her answer into a sarcastic joke in a demonstration of

the kind of spontaneity and oratory skill that is normally celebrated in PMQs. However, in this instance, Thatcher's retort is accompanied by "a murderous smile", a phrase carrying the disconcerting implication that Thatcher is hiding violent intent behind a friendly façade. It implies that there is something unnatural and untrustworthy about Thatcher's Iron Maiden persona, that in her demonstration of authority there is also "a touch of madness" (Baxter, 2018: 26).

Other reports of Thatcher's patronising answers included the adverbs "unkindly" (Example (9)) and "loftily" (Example (10)). Calling Thatcher "unkind" suggests that she is thought to have gone beyond the requisite level of verbal aggression expected in PMQs, rendering her remarks offensive and inappropriate. This also draws attention to her supposed transgression of gender norms, since this kind of contestive humour is typically associated with masculinity (Hein and O'Donohoe, 2014: 1310; Taylor, 2021: 579). Calling Thatcher "lofty" implies that Thatcher's bids for authority are being perceived as arrogance, that she is acting with a superiority she hasn't earned. In this instance, her use of patronising humour has resulted in *The Times* rejecting her bid for authority. When considered together, the stances expressed in Examples (9) and (10) suggest that when Thatcher used contestive humour to do authority, she was negatively evaluated by audiences outside the Chamber.

At no point in this dataset was Thatcher explicitly positively evaluated in conjunction with Iron Maiden discourses. Thatcher's 'toughness' was exaggerated to violent extremes, creating the impression that her authority, while undeniable, is also unnatural and alienating for audiences. This reflects Kanter's (1993: 236) original observations of Iron Maidens, that they may be "regarded with suspicion" or even "face abandonment" for daring to participate on equal grounds as men in a community where "no person of her kind had previously been an equal".

In the final year of Thatcher's premiership, she was depicted as an Iron Maiden with greater frequency, with 27 out of the 48 articles in my dataset containing Iron Maiden discourses. These articles contained frequent and innovative use of metaphor to describe Thatcher; these metaphors commonly expressed violent or militaristic themes, contributing to the image of Thatcher as an Iron Maiden (Kanter, 1993). There was also the repeated use

of various sports metaphors, depicting Thatcher as an athlete. While these metaphors aren't inherently aggressive, they do reflect the competitive nature of PMQs, presenting Thatcher as tough and ambitious and further contributing to the Iron Maiden imagery. These depictions of Thatcher were often accompanied by an evaluative stance, but these stances were neither exclusively positive nor negative.

Baxter (2012: 85; 2018: 26) describes the Iron Maiden role trap as “unnaturally virilised” and the most “stereotypically masculinised” of Kanter’s four recognised feminine stereotypes. By depicting Thatcher as an Iron Maiden, she is being considered in overtly masculinised ways. These types of discourses are apparent in newspaper coverage of Thatcher’s PMQs exchanges with the Leader of the Opposition, Neil Kinnock, as shown in the following examples. My analysis of these exchanges in section 5.1 showed that Thatcher gave answers that were completely in line with the conventions of Parliamentary procedure. Her answers were not only accepted but celebrated by MPs in her party, as shown by the supportive barracking in response to her use of humour (Extracts 27, 29, and 30) and contestation towards Labour (Extract 30). However, newspaper coverage of these exchanges contained mixed evaluative stances.

One article published in *The Times* used a mix of militaristic and sports metaphors to describe these exchanges. This particular PMQs session was described as a “contest” where Thatcher and Kinnock met and “did battle over poll tax” (‘Knocked out by the short answer’, *The Times*, 02 March 1990). This description recognises the aggressive nature of PMQs and elevates it to a type of warfare. This has the effect of presenting Thatcher as masculine, since military metaphors are “best interpreted against the background of hegemonic masculinity” (Koller, 2004a: 18).

The same article addresses the brevity of Thatcher’s answers:

- (11) Mr Kinnock was expecting the reply most in character: a rant on the virtues of poll tax and the folly of Oxfordshire.
- So Mrs Thatcher's reply caught him off guard: "No. I rather wish I did: to explain a thing or two."
- So Spartan a reply was the last thing the Labour leader expected but he turned it to advantage. Was she, he asked not "running out of both friends and excuses?"

Mrs Thatcher came back with a quick volley: "But not of explanations." ('Knocked out by the short answer', *The Times*, 02 March 1990)

Thatcher's answers are considered in terms of speed and directness. Her first answer is described as "Spartan"; another military metaphor, given that the ancient city-state of Sparta is widely remembered for its militaristic values. The word "Spartan" also has connotations of simplicity and stoicism, which resemble the direct and task-oriented speech styles associated with masculinity (Holmes, 2006: 6). Thatcher's second answer is described as a "quick volley", a sports metaphor likening Thatcher to a competitive athlete. Koller's (2004a: 10) study found that sports metaphors were more commonly used to describe men, and she argues that such metaphors also have strong links to masculinity given the association between sports and aggression, dominance, and male solidarity (Koller 2004a: 13; 2004b: 113).

These qualities aren't presented as usual for Thatcher, given that her answers differ from the behaviour described as "most in character" for her: "a rant". Thus, it is established that Thatcher's use of these masculine behaviours is irregular, but this article concludes with a positive evaluation of Thatcher's competency based on these behaviours:

- (12) But in that, caught off-balance, she had not fallen the woman must be judged, if not to have won the argument, to have out-boxed the man. ('Knocked out by the short answer', *The Times*, 02 March 1990)

Thatcher and Kinnock are not named, but simply referred to via the generic noun phrases of "the woman" and "the man", accentuating the presumed gender differences between them. This further emphasises the abnormality of this situation, that Thatcher, a woman, bested Kinnock, a man, in a hypothetical boxing match. The choice of a boxing match metaphor demonstrates an awareness of both Thatcher and Kinnock discursively navigating power dynamics, likening the event to a verbal sparring match. Even though Thatcher had not necessarily "won the argument", she was deemed to have "out-boxed" Kinnock. This suggests that the content of Thatcher's arguments was less important than her ability to formulate direct and concise answers that positioned her as more authoritative than Kinnock. Overall, this depiction of Thatcher is heavily masculinised, but not disapproving.

This stance is not shared by reports published in *The Guardian* on the same day. One such article uses weather metaphors to depict Thatcher as a personified storm. It starts by describing Thatcher as a “cold front”, a mass of air which frequently precedes stormy weather (‘Gathering storm puts wind up Tory backbenches’, *The Guardian*, 02 March 1990). Typically, referring to a person as “cold” implies they are unemotional, apathetic, and distant, so using this phrase to refer to Thatcher not only suggests that she was disruptive during the session but also that she lacks the supportive and affective styles associated with feminine leadership (Holmes, 2006: 6).

Unlike in the previous example, which celebrated Thatcher’s concision, this article in *The Guardian* depicts Thatcher’s answers as long-winded and rambling:

- (13) ‘But not explanations of the facts,’ she came back. ‘The facts are . . .’ and here the Prime Minister began blustering, launching into a long statistical passage. This was received without a cheer from the benches behind her. The long-range forecast for Conservative MPs remains bleak. They sat in grim silence until, finally, she blew herself out. (‘Gathering storm puts wind up Tory backbenches’, *The Guardian*, 02 March 1990)

The weather metaphors continue, with Thatcher’s answer described as “blustering”, akin to the gusts of wind present in a storm. Comparing Thatcher to severe weather implies that she is, at best, a disturbance or, at worst, a dangerous natural disaster. This is further emphasised with the phrase, “she blew herself out”. This suggests that Thatcher is as relentless and implacable as the weather, and the only available course of action is to allow her to ‘bluster’ until she herself decides to stop.

The use of this kind of weather metaphor depicts Thatcher as aggressive and short-tempered, and therefore unsuitable for leadership. Further evidence for Thatcher’s unsuitability is provided in the form of a suggested lack of support from her party. Conservative MPs are described as sitting in “grim silence”; not only are they reported to not have vocalised their support but the adjective “grim” suggests that Thatcher was responsible for creating an uncomfortable or even bleak atmosphere. This presents a negative evaluation of Thatcher, and noticeably omits commentary on Thatcher’s more humorous answers, and the fact that this did elicit supportive barracking from her party.

Another article in *The Guardian* from the same day depicts Thatcher as unsuitable for leadership. The poll tax is likened to the Titanic, and it is implied that Thatcher, the symbolic captain of this economic policy, is doomed for failure:

- (14) The Prime Minister stood firm on the bridge. The Tory's Titanic as the poll tax was described by John Biffen months ago may be just about to hit the iceberg; but there is now nothing the Government can do. ('The wages of folly are pure gain', *The Guardian*, 02 March 1990)

The poll tax is described as the Titanic, a noun which has become synonymous with tragedy due to the sinking of the ocean liner of the same name. Specifying that it is the "Tory's" Titanic, combined with the imagery of her standing "on the bridge", suggests that Thatcher, as Prime Minister and head of the Conservative party, is the captain in this extended metaphor. Claiming that Thatcher "stood firm" as the allegorical Titanic approaches disaster presents Thatcher as obstinate, defiant, and enabling of the resulting disaster, either wilfully or through a refusal to intervene. As such, Thatcher is depicted as unsuitable for leadership, given that she had the authority and opportunity to prevent catastrophe but, through her inaction, there is "now nothing the Government can do".

This choice of metaphor presents Thatcher as masculine, since she is being compared to an existing male, historical figure. This article also contains a negative evaluation of Thatcher, since she is purported to be responsible for a tragedy on par with the sinking of the Titanic. Although no correlation is made explicit, there is an implied association here between her constructed gender identity and her suitability for leadership.

An article published in *The Independent* also portrayed Thatcher less favourably. Thatcher was described as a callous military leader, gratuitously sacrificing those under her command:

- (15) Mrs Thatcher in a military-looking blue twin-set and glittering brooch, blew her whistle and the poor bloody infantry poured over the top, clamouring cheerfully about Labour's culpability for the anti-poll tax riots and mayhem. ('Smiles all round as Tory infantry goes over the top', *The Independent*, 14 March 1990)

Thatcher is described as "military-looking", comparing her to a soldier, an "archetype of hegemonic masculinity" (Koller, 2004a: 17). She is depicted as being in a position of absolute

authority over her MPs, who are likened to a “poor bloody infantry” who go pouring “over the top” on her command. The use of the phrase “over the top” in relation to a warfare metaphor carries perilous connotations, yet MPs are described as “clamouring cheerfully” as they go, such is the extent of Thatcher’s power over them.

The obedience of Conservative MPs is explored further, with their loyalty being evidenced by their frequent barracking:

- (16) They cheered and jeered exactly on cue, if slightly mechanically. They nodded like motor-car dashboard ornaments at their leader’s every word. (‘Smiles all round as Tory infantry goes over the top’, *The Independent*, 14 March 1990)

Their support is depicted as inorganic, and therefore disingenuous. Thatcher, as the orchestrator of this behaviour, is positioned as the authoritarian ruler of a homogenous society. This reflects the “tough, uncompromising and assertive” behaviour attributed to Kanter’s Iron Maiden role trap, but also “traditionally associated with men” (Baxter, 2010: 35). Through this Iron Maiden imagery, Thatcher is portrayed as a formidable leader because of her masculine attributes (Baxter, 2010: 37). However, given that Thatcher’s followers are described as mechanical and compared to inanimate “ornaments”, it is implied that there is something unnatural about Thatcher’s leadership. This mirrors the conclusions of Cameron and Shaw (2016: 92), that authority is seen as “undesirable” in women, so to compensate they are frequently portrayed as “parodic versions of men”.

None of these articles appear to depreciate Thatcher’s authority as Prime Minister, but they each do represent her in some way as forceful, unrelenting, and ‘tough’, a mix of attributes which align with Kanter’s Iron Maiden role trap (Baxter, 2010: 35-6). Although they use different metaphors, each of these articles describe Thatcher in a way which contributes to a familiar stereotype, so the respective readerships of each of these publications may be influenced to hold a singular impression of Thatcher.

Although these depictions of Thatcher sometimes implied a degree of respect for her masculine performance, such as *The Times* declaring that Thatcher had “out-boxed” Kinnock (see Example (12) above), the masculinisation of Thatcher in examples from *The Guardian* and *The Independent* were often accompanied by pronounced negative evaluations. This

suggests an association between her supposedly transgressive gender performance and her presented status as an undesirable and intolerable Prime Minister.

Theresa May was also described in relation to Kanter's Iron Maiden role trap, albeit with comparatively less frequency than Thatcher based on the size of my datasets. In my dataset of 21 newspaper articles from May's first year in office, 8 of them contained Iron Maiden discourses. She was, at these times, positioned as authoritative, and this was predominantly evaluated positively.

One of the ways reporters depicted May as an Iron Maiden was through the use of adverbials, as in these two examples:

- (17) May's rhetoric since she arrived in office has been unrelentingly liberal. ('After her first 100 days in power, I've rated Theresa May on each of her successes and failures', *The Independent*, 20 October 2016)
- (18) May hit back forcefully, and at one point drew cheers from her MPs for mocking Labour about Corbyn's recent re-election. ('Jeremy Corbyn pushes Theresa May over 'shambolic Tory Brexit'', *The Guardian*, 12 October 2016)

The adverbs "unrelentingly" and "forcefully" in (17) and (18) here position May as aggressively authoritative. Baxter (2018: 26) argues that such depictions are coded as masculine in part because of the cultural association between aggression and masculinity, but also because of an implied lack of a more "caring and nurturing female nature". In these examples, *The Independent* and *The Guardian* are positioning May as an independent leader and are emphasizing the competitive aspects of her leadership, particularly through the use of the phrase "hit back" to describe one of May's replies. This also contributes to a masculinised representation of May since it frames her as combative and negligent of more collaborative styles associated with feminine leadership (Holmes, 2006; Baxter, 2018).

It is also significant that *The Guardian* chose to report upon May drawing "cheers from her MPs for mocking Labour". They are commenting on May's success in PMQs and suggesting that she has the support of her party, but emphasise that she achieves this via oppositional and openly hostile behaviours. Similar commentary was included in reports of subsequent PMQs sessions:

- (19) She added, to cheers from her MPs: "Only one party has cut funding to the NHS: the Labour party in Wales." ('May denies failure to act on concerns over child abuse inquiry chair', *The Guardian*, 19 October 2016)

Such combative answers are not unusual for May, as shown in my exploration of May's use of rapport-challenging behaviours in her answers (Section 4.2.2). However, publications describe how this behaviour provokes cheers from May's supporters, leading readers to infer that such aggressive behaviours are not only appropriate for a Prime Minister but are to be celebrated.

These PMQs sessions were also discussed in *The Independent*, where May's behaviour was positively evaluated:

- (20) I thought that was game, set and match to the Prime Minister. ('At PMQs, Jeremy Corbyn finally tried to hold Theresa May to account for her Brexit negotiations – and failed miserably', *The Independent*, 12 October 2016)

In this example, *The Independent* uses a sports analogy to depict May as the metaphorical winner of PMQs. Koller (2004a: 13; 2004b: 113) has argued that sports metaphors create an association with masculinity, given the association between sports and aggression, dominance, and male solidarity. Just as with Thatcher and the boxing metaphor in Example (12), this description of May suggests a transgression from gender role stereotypes but doesn't convey a negative evaluation of this performance, since this description also recognises and validates May's bids for authority within PMQs.

May's tenacity is also implied through the use of reporting verbs to describe her answers. *The Independent* ('Theresa May backs passport checks on pregnant women at hospitals in 'maternity tourism' crackdown', 12 October 2016) describes how May "insisted" and "roundly rejected", and *The Guardian* ('Jeremy Corbyn pushes Theresa May over 'shambolic Tory Brexit'', 12 October 2016) reports on how May "refused" and "mocked" with her answers. As speech acts, insistence, rejection, refusal, and mockery all indicate a position of authority. To perform insistence, rejection, or refusal, a speaker must have the power to do so effectively, thereby fulfilling one of the preparatory conditions of such speech acts (Austin, 1962: 14-5; Searle, 1969: 64). Choosing these verbs to describe May's speech is a recognition of her bid for authority, since it presumes that it is her prerogative to reject and refuse alternative suggestions and insist on one course of action.

It is also significant that all of these reporting verbs indicate some kind of face-threat. Insistence, rejection, and refusal are inherent threats to the negative face of May's interlocutors, since May is prioritising her own autonomy over that of her addressees. Mockery is a threat to positive face since it involves May devaluing personal attributes of the addressee. Even though these kinds of reporting verbs position May as authoritative, they also position her as commanding, unopen to compromise, and critical of others. As such, when publications choose these reporting verbs for May, they contribute to Iron Maiden discourses and the masculinisation of May.

One article published in *The Independent* alluded to May's competency as Prime Minister by heavily redressing criticisms of her:

(21) An unusual case of complacency on her part.

(22) In the meantime, her handling of the inquiry into historical child abuse as Home Secretary continues to trouble her and is the nearest we've seen to her starting to look a touch flaky.

('After her first 100 days in power, I've rated Theresa May on each of her successes and failures', *The Independent*, 20 October 2016)

Both these examples position May as a highly engaged and proficient leader, with complacency being an "unusual" quality for her. Example (22) references a situation which is "the nearest" May got to "starting to look a touch flaky"; this combination of hedging, understatement, and colloquialism mitigates the threat to May's positive face. Calling May "flaky" is a colloquial way of questioning her capability and adequacy, but this is mitigated by the quantifier "a touch", indicating an understated criticism. This criticism is further understated by the assertion that this is merely the "nearest" May has come to "starting" to "look" flaky, and that any 'flakiness' associated with May is a potential future outcome, not a current attribute of hers. Such exaggerated phrasing violates the Gricean maxim of quantity, stating more than is necessary, and is therefore a method of being less direct and going off-record with the face threat (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 213). Excessive and obvious redressive action distances May from the accusations against her, allowing readers to infer that this behaviour is anomalous for her and that she is otherwise a competent Prime Minister.

The Independent published other criticisms of May, ironically citing her efficiency as a flaw in her leadership style. The basis for this negative evaluation is that May is simply not entertaining enough:

- (23) It is difficult to see the point of Prime Minister's Questions at the moment. Its defenders always praise Britain's "adversarial system". There is drama in confrontation, so goes the old argument. It "gets people interested" - and for a democracy to function, people need to be interested. But its two star turns, Jeremy Corbyn and now Theresa May, are not interested in politics as theatre. They are not natural *dramatis personae*. May is not vain enough, and Corbyn can do a convincing turn in pretending not to be pompous enough. ('What is the point of Prime Minister's Questions?', *The Independent*, 13 October 2016)

Here, *The Independent* emphasises the necessity of "drama in confrontation": the confrontational traditions of PMQs create drama, which generates interest amongst the British public. This stance condones and normalises the aggressive behaviours demonstrated at PMQs, but it creates the impression that such aggression is not sincere, it is "politics as theatre". The suggestion here is that, in order to be a good Prime Minister, or any engaged Member of Parliament, one must, in the most literal sense of the word, *perform* the role. Their criticism of May is that she is "not vain enough" to convincingly portray herself as an effective Prime Minister. May's capabilities in private are not in question, and have even been complimented in other reports from *The Independent* (see Examples (20), (21), and (22)), the problem is her public persona. Vanity implies a degree of narcissism and a desire to be seen and admired, qualities that this article is suggesting May does not have. This description suggests that May is too heavily focused on doing the job of a Prime Minister, and is neglecting her *performance* as a Prime Minister, and is therefore distancing herself from viewers and voters by not allowing them any kind of familiarity with her.

The Iron Maiden rhetoric used to describe May positions her as relentlessly efficient and doggedly determined, but also as emotionally detached and impersonal. The consistent use of Iron Maiden discourses in relation to May perpetuate stereotypes about the ways in which women do and retain power and authority, but it also places a subtle emphasis on her supposed lack of feminine qualities. Using these discourses may be an acceptable way of interpreting May's masculine performances, but its pervasive use starts to suggest that these masculine characteristics are May's sole attributes. Depicting May as an Iron Maiden

suggests a lack of compassion and an aloofness that contradict expected standards of femininity and leave May vulnerable to criticism, such as that expressed in Example (23).

There were no examples in my dataset of Iron Maiden discourses relating to the final year of May's premiership. The Iron Maiden is the most obviously authoritative of Kanter's (1993) role traps, but by May's final year in office, depictions of her were more focused on her loss of control. See section 6.3 for an analysis of discourses relating to May's final year.

6.2 "A good old-fashioned massacre": Victim discourses

One of Kanter's (1993: 235) original role traps was that of a Pet, who was symbolically incorporated into a community as a "mascot" or "cheerleader" for the more powerful in-group members. The Pet's membership status is more peripheral; she is expected to "admire the male displays but not to enter them" (Kanter, 1993: 235). The Pet is not valued for her contributions, but for the fact that her very presence serves to accentuate the power held by the men who have 'adopted' her.

Evidence from my dataset does place Thatcher in a peripheral role, but she is not positioned as "cute" or "amusing" in the same way a Pet is (Baxter, 2018: 31). Instead, it is implied that her otherness makes her a target for other MPs to take advantage of. In 5 out of 22 articles from Thatcher's first year in office, Thatcher was positioned in the role of a Victim, the target of aggression from MPs in the chamber, and deserving of the readers' sympathy. The following examples portray Thatcher as the recipient of unreasonable levels of violence in the form of questions from the Opposition.

- (24) Mrs Thatcher faced rowdy cheers and jeers when she again rejected calls for Government intervention in the steel strike. ('Unions will have to pay to strike soon, says PM', *The Guardian*, 15 February 1980)
- (25) There was more than a hint of exasperation, if not desperation, in many of the replies of the Prime Minister as she battled through a torrent of angry and bitter exchanges over the steel strike, which filled almost the whole of her question time. ('Mrs Thatcher rules out early Bill to break steel deadlock in angry exchange with bitter MPs', *The Times*, 06 February 1980)

- (26) She was faced with a barrage of questions from Mr Michael Foot [...] She finally escaped by claiming that she would not be kept informed of such matters, which were properly dealt with by her Industry Secretary. ('Cabinet heads for collision on strike law', *The Guardian*, 06 February 1980)

Examples (24) – (26) frame Thatcher as being isolated from other Members. Both Examples (24) and (26) use the verb “faced” to position Thatcher in opposition to other Members in the Chamber, creating a ‘Thatcher vs Parliament’ style of rhetoric and subtly indicating Thatcher’s otherness. This suggestion of otherness is not by itself an implication that Thatcher is a peripheral member of the community, since her role as Prime Minister naturally serves to distinguish her from other Members. However, the fact that Thatcher is being framed as an other who is being victimised by the remainder of the community creates the implication that Thatcher is not participating on equal grounds.

Example (24) reports on Thatcher facing “rowdy cheers and jeers” from other MPs in the Chamber. The use of the adjective “rowdy” creates the impression of an unreasonable level of disorder and a rebellion against Thatcher. Similarly, Example (25) depicts questions as “a torrent of angry and bitter exchanges”. The use of “torrent” as a collective noun implies the incoming questions were forceful and relentless, therefore framing Thatcher as the helpless recipient of persistent anger and bitterness. This occupied “almost the whole of her question time”, leaving Thatcher feeling exasperated and desperate. This description focuses on Thatcher’s emotional response to her situation, conforming to the stereotype that women politicians are emotional, and therefore irrational (Braden, 1996: 1).

Examples (25) also refers to Thatcher as having “battled” through incoming questions, and Example (26) describes questions to Thatcher as a “barrage”. These choices have militaristic connotations reminiscent of Iron Maiden discourses, except Thatcher is no longer positioned as powerful as a result. Whereas Iron Maiden discourses depicted Thatcher as a willing participant in this kind of violence, these Victim discourses position Thatcher as reluctant to engage, and ultimately lacking in agency. Example (26) claimed that Thatcher “finally escaped” from incoming questions by giving evasive answers, suggesting that Thatcher is unable to compete with her aggressive interlocutors and therefore must excuse herself.

Example (27) also contains metaphorical references to excessive violence:

- (27) St Valentine's Day in the House of Commons yesterday, should have been the occasion for a good old-fashioned massacre. What with Sir Ian Gilmour, young Mark, steel, water workers, Red Robbo, Pink Arthur, Mr James Prior and the British Olympic Committee, most fair-minded observers would have felt a few twinges of compassion for Mrs Margaret Thatcher, as she stepped to the dispatch box to answer questions. ('Opposition's hit men fall on St Valentine's Day', *The Times*, 15 February 1980)

PMQs is compared to a "massacre", but the adjectives "good old-fashioned" suggest that such a massacre would not only be typical but desirable. This celebration of violence normalises the metaphorical assault against Thatcher, but there is also the suggestion that Thatcher is ill-equipped to handle such aggression since readers are openly invited to feel "a few twinges of compassion" for her.

These four separate articles all use violent imagery to position Thatcher as a target of aggression, which has repercussions on her perceived autonomy. Thatcher is positioned as a passive object which things happen to, and other MPs are the agentive subjects who shape Thatcher's experiences for her. Encouraging readers to feel sympathy for Thatcher implies that Thatcher requires sympathy, and by extension that she is struggling to cope with the conventions of the environment she works in. This preserves stereotypes regarding women and subservience, suggesting that Thatcher is unsuited for a leadership role in a workplace which values masculine speech styles.

Example (28) contains the only example from my dataset of Victim discourses relating to Thatcher in the final year of her premiership.

- (28) Labour MPs, delighted at the resignation of the Conservative whip by 18 councillors on Wednesday, renewed their attacks on the poll tax and the Prime Minister at question time. ('Tories are facing popular uprising says Labour', *The Times*, 02 March 1990)

As in previous examples, Thatcher is framed as the recipient of violence, with the Opposition launching "attacks" on the poll tax and her personally. The verb "renewed" implies that this is not a new circumstance, but that Thatcher is regularly the object of their aggression. Labour MPs are also described as "delighted", as if they are taking a sadistic kind of joy in Thatcher's misfortune. By comparison, Thatcher is positioned as being inappropriately abused by this gratuitous violence.

There were 48 articles in my dataset relating to Thatcher's final year in office, over twice as many as relating to her first, yet this was the sole depiction of Thatcher as a Victim. Victim discourses rely on the insinuation that the Victim is being *unfairly* victimised, so the decrease in Victim discourses may indicate a change in the way Thatcher was perceived in the media. The Victim discourses apparent in Thatcher's first year indicate subservience and either an inability or unwillingness to retaliate, placing her in a distinctly feminine role. The absence of these discourses from my dataset for Thatcher's final year may indicate that she was no longer feminised in this way. There is possibly a parallel between this change in the way Thatcher was perceived and the change I observed in her behaviours during PMQs: in her first year, Thatcher noticeably chose rapport-enhancing techniques in response to helpful questions instead of attacking the Opposition. Even when she was the recipient of overtly impolite behaviours, Thatcher did not reciprocate with comparable insults. By her final year in office, this behaviour was seen to change, and this difference possibly influenced a change in the role trap discourses used in relation to Thatcher.

There is also evidence to show that Theresa May was also positioned as the recipient of violence, and also with greater frequency during the first year of her premiership. The main way this was achieved was by establishing PMQs as a competition between May, as Prime Minister, and Jeremy Corbyn, as Leader of the Opposition, and positioning Corbyn as the winner. This kind of competition is a popular metaphor for PMQs, with researchers such as Reid (2014: 53) and Lovenduski (2012: 315) arguing that PMQs functions primarily as a contest between party leaders. Even when such contests are not considered in absolute terms, in wins and losses, there are still degrees of achievement, measuring the more successful orators against the less successful orators of the day. Thus, when Corbyn is positively evaluated for his PMQs successes, this often has the effect of positioning May as the less capable debater. Praise for Corbyn carries an indirect threat to May's positive face, since it cedes authority to him over her. Traces of these discourses appeared in 8 different articles from May's first year in office, but there were no examples of this in my dataset of articles from May's final year in office.

In Example (29), *The Times* published a suggestion that, while Corbyn does not demonstrate exemplary skill in debate, there are times when he at least demonstrates more

skill than May. They report upon the first PMQs after the Return of the House of Commons following their annual recess for Party Conference Season. During the conference recess, each political party privately hosts their own conference to satisfy their own agendas, but during the 2016 recess the Labour party also held a leadership election following a successful vote of no confidence in Corbyn and formal leadership challenges launched against him. During PMQs, May acknowledged the fragility of Corbyn's authority by congratulating him on his re-election, subtly drawing attention to the fact that there is opposition for him from Members of his own party. *The Times* described how Corbyn responded to this "taunt":

- (29) Yet for once Mr Corbyn showed a deftness, turning this taunt into an attack. "I am most grateful to the 300,000 people that voted for me," he said. "It is rather more than voted for the prime minister to become leader of her party." A palpable hit. ('Prostate saga ends with positive diagnosis for Corbyn', *The Times*, 13 October 2016)

Corbyn reportedly turned "this taunt into an attack", seizing an opportunity to specify that more people had voted for him to be Labour leader than had voted for May to be Conservative leader. This constitutes an off-record FTA against May, since it quantifies their respective popularity amongst their party members and suggests that Corbyn is more popular than May. This kind of behaviour, re-contextualising an FTA to respond with an FTA, is not unique to Corbyn; several examples of May demonstrating this behaviour are explored in Section 4.2.2 of this thesis. It is significant, then, newspapers report upon this behaviour somewhat uniformly. May was portrayed favourably for her attacks against Labour (see Examples (18) and (19) in the previous section), and here Corbyn is also being celebrated for his ability to discredit May. His comment is evaluated positively as "a palpable hit", metaphorically transforming this verbal attack into a physical one. Corbyn, as the perpetrator of this attack, is positioned as the more powerful and May, as the recipient, or Victim, of this attack, is positioned as vulnerable and powerless.

However, Corbyn is described as showing deftness "for once", implying that such quick wit is not a usual characteristic for him and so this instance of discursively positioning himself as more powerful than May is not habitual for him. It suggests that both Corbyn and May are prone to moments of both power and powerlessness, and that power for one

results in powerlessness for the other. This sentiment is further explored in their summary that it was a “reasonably good PMQs” for Corbyn:

- (30) It was a reasonably good PMQs for Mr Corbyn, who has decided to look beyond the Momentum message boards for killer lines to use. Why quote Labour supporters when the views of Tory MPs are more damaging? So we had Anna from Broxtowe and Ken from Rushcliffe (Ms Soubry and Mr Clarke) saying what a shambles Brexit is turning into and even Theresa from Maidenhead warning before the referendum that a Leave vote would risk a loss of investors. Not for the first time, the most effective opposition to the PM came from her own benches. ('Prostate saga ends with positive diagnosis for Corbyn', *The Times*, 13 October 2016)

There is another suggestion that Corbyn lacks skill and originality in debates, claiming that his normal tactic is to obtain “killer lines” from online message boards. Yet, through little effort on his part, it was a “reasonably good” session for him due to the damning contributions from Conservative MPs commenting on the ineptitude of the Government. “Theresa from Maidenhead” is a reference to May herself, suggesting that her “most effective opposition” is not only coming from “her own benches” but her own debate history, and all to Corbyn’s benefit. The power dynamics between the two of them are mutually exclusive: May’s loss is Cobyn’s gain, and vice versa.

The Independent published similar commentary, combining praise for Corbyn with criticism of May:

- (31) There is a consensus building around the idea Corbyn is getting better at Prime Minister's Questions. It is hard to avoid the fact that this rise has been timed to coincide with his former opponent having been replaced by someone 10 times less capable at it. That Ms May appears still to be somewhere in the middle of a slow-motion backpedalling U-turn-shaped pirouette on compelling companies to name and shame foreign workers, which was first a policy, then a leak, then a plan and now merely a consultation, was right there for Mr Corbyn to take the credit for, and he did so. Quite right too. ('What is the point of Prime Minister's Questions?', *The Independent*, 13 October 2016)

Corbyn is described as “getting better” at PMQs, but this is attributed to May being “less capable” at it; specifically, less capable than her predecessor, David Cameron. To say that she is less capable at “it”, in reference to PMQs, is not to say that she is a less capable Prime Minister in general, merely that she is less skilled in PMQs. This example is from the same article as Example (23), and so naturally mirrors the same idea that May might be a formidable Prime Minister, but her reputation suffers when she is unable to *perform* as one

during PMQs. They claim May “appears” to be “backpedalling” in a “U-turn”, phrases commonly associated with withdrawal after a mistake. In a similar sentiment to that expressed by *The Times* in Example (30), Corbyn’s success is suggested to at least partially be the result of May’s poor *performance* in PMQs. It is reportedly “quite right” that Corbyn take credit for May’s supposed failings, implying that any misstep on May’s part is interpreted as a concession of power to Corbyn.

It is also significant that May, in the midst of this retraction, is described as doing a “pirouette”, evoking imagery of ballet dancing. This metaphor invites readers to perceive May in relation to gender, not only due to the drastically uneven ratio of male to female ballet performers but also given that ballet embodies the traditionally feminine ideals of elegance, delicacy, and sophistication. It also creates a more explicit correlation between May and the concept of performance, likening her to a dancer performing for the entertainment of others. However, the accompanying negative evaluation of May invites readers to infer that May is not performing, not metaphorically *doing the dance* of a Prime Minister, to a satisfactory standard, nor is she perceivably meeting the standards of these feminine ideals due to her clumsy execution.

In stark contrast, this same article refers to Corbyn as a footballer, considering his moments of discursive power in terms of goals scored:

- (32) The ball clearly crossed the line. One nil. (‘What is the point of Prime Minister’s Questions?’, *The Independent*, 13 October 2016)

Comparing debate success to athleticism is not a metaphor exclusively reserved for male orators, as shown in the sports analogies used in relation to May in Example (20). However, in this instance, the masculinised depiction of Corbyn’s success combined with the feminised depiction of May’s failure forms a problematic correlation between their respective gender identities and the authority they hold during PMQs.

This contrast between Corbyn’s success at the expense of May’s failure is repeated in Examples (33) – (36), all taken from an article in *The Independent*:

- (33) Jeremy Corbyn is getting the hang of this.
- (34) This time it was better than effective because Theresa May was so unexciting and defensive.

(35) Not even the most sycophantic Tory MPs could muster a cheer for that.

(36) It was miserably unconvincing.

(‘May had no answers to Corbyn’s questions’, *The Independent*, 27 October 2016)

Again, Corbyn is described as “getting the hang” of PMQs, but this improvement is “better than effective” as a direct consequence of May’s own behaviour in PMQs (Examples (33) – (34)). May is described as “unexciting”, furthering the idea that she is being judged on the delivery of her answers as much as their content, and that her uninspiring *performance* resulted in a negative evaluation regardless of how knowledgeable or reasonable the content of her answers was.

Example (35) implies a negative evaluative stance against May by revealing the lack of support she received from Conservative MPs present in the Chamber. Bull (2008: 338) argues that MPs have “an obligation” to support the face needs of political colleagues in order to protect the face needs of the political party they collectively represent, so the report that even the most “sycophantic” Conservative MPs could not “muster a cheer” for May invites readers to infer that there is a lack of confidence in May’s leadership abilities amongst those deemed to be her most reliable supporters. This inference is made explicit in Example (36), in the assertion that May’s answers were “miserably unconvincing”. This pointed criticism is another reference to her delivery and is reminiscent of an observation explored in Example (23) in the previous section: May is “not natural *dramatis personae*.” May is not considered to be exciting or convincing because she does not entertain, so her *performance* does not inspire confidence in her competency as Prime Minister.

The above evaluations of Corbyn suggest that the moments where he obtained discursive power were frequently not orchestrated through his own skill, but rather came about as a result of May’s own poor PMQs performance. This reflects Reid’s (2014: 53) description of PMQs as a “political battle” wherein politicians compete for oratory victory, positioning interlocutors as either winners or losers. In each instance, these publications position Corbyn as the winner for one of two distinct reasons. Firstly, there is the acknowledgement that he successfully created a moment of discursive power for himself,

such as in Example (29). Alternatively, Corbyn's victory was seen as a default position following May's failure to create moments of discursive power for herself, as in Examples (30), (31), and (33). May was positioned as comparatively powerless because she notably was not receiving support from Conservative MPs, often with a suggestion that this was because her *performance* was not exciting or inspiring enough to warrant their support. Such reports create a correlation between May's suitability for leadership and her charisma and rapport management skills. May's perceived success in PMQs, or lack thereof, is a direct result of her ability to manage her positive face and endear herself to others. In the instances where May failed to do so, this was used as justification to validate Corbyn's bids for authority.

6.3 "Hard to nail down, but easy to walk over": Discourses of ridicule

Although they were used more sparingly, there were other role trap discourses that were applied to Thatcher. On one occasion in the data from her first year she was portrayed as a Seductress, and on three occasions was placed in the role of a Mother/Teacher.

In Example (37), *The Times* applied the role of Seductress to Thatcher. Kanter (1993: 234) identified the role of Seductress as "a perception" attributed to women who "may not be consciously behaving seductively", meaning that depicting Thatcher as a Seductress is not to suggest any intentional promiscuity. It does, however, place Thatcher in the role of sex object and ensures that she is evaluated in relation to her perceived desirability, and less on the merit of her professional skill. A Seductress may find themselves 'protected' by a powerful male in the community, granting her special privileges as a reward "for her femaleness" (Kanter, 1993: 235). Example (37) suggests that Thatcher's protector could be Callaghan, the Leader of the Opposition:

- (37) Could Mr James Callaghan, Leader of her Majesty's Opposition, have been the mysterious Fu Fu, who sent the message to "Gorgeous Maggie", that "We may not always see eye-to-eye, but I could not survive without you"? Perish such an ignoble thought. But certainly Mr Callaghan was behaving oddly. ('Opposition's hit men fall on St Valentine's Day', *The Times*, 15 February 1980)

This article raises the possibility that Callaghan feels he “could not survive” without “Gorgeous Maggie”, which directly assigns Thatcher value based on her perceived attractiveness. Callaghan was reportedly “behaving oddly”, by which they mean he was treating Thatcher with leniency. During this session, Callaghan was not as customarily aggressive with his questions, which Example (37) attributes to the possibility of Callaghan harbouring a secret desire for Thatcher. This implies that any success Thatcher experiences in PMQs is not a result of her own debate skills, but is due to her relationships with other powerful men in the Chamber. Placing Thatcher in the role of Seductress invites readers to infer that any power she holds is not discursive in origin or situational, but is intrinsically linked to her femininity and feminine sexuality.

Both *The Times* and *The Guardian* placed Thatcher in the role of a teacher and mother on separate occasions. Kanter’s (1993: 234) original role trap was that of the Mother, a nurturing woman valued for the emotional “service” and “support” she can offer her co-workers. Baxter (2018: 29) combines this role trap with that of a ‘School Marm’ or Teacher, who cares for her colleagues by treating them “like children rather than as mature and intelligent adults”. Both *The Times* and *The Guardian* depicted Thatcher as a Teacher who provided support and encouragement to those who impressed her:

- (38) Certainly the Prime Minister was in a mood yesterday to distribute prizes. (‘Optimism on steel detected in ministers’, *The Times*, 22 February 1980)
- (39) And she had a final pat on the back for BL workers, even over production of volume cars. (‘Optimism on steel detected in ministers’, *The Times*, 22 February 1980)
- (40) She also gave Sir Geoffrey a gold star. (‘Drama on the domestic front’, *The Guardian*, 15 February 1980)

Examples (38) – (40) report Thatcher handing out positive reinforcement in the forms of “prizes”, a “pat on the back”, and “a gold star”. It depicts her role as more processional than practical, as if her job was to react to the work of others rather than contribute anything herself. For this reason, Kanter (1993: 234) and Baxter (2018: 29) argue that the role of the Mother/Teacher is severely limiting for women trapped in it, as they do not receive recognition for their independent and critical abilities. Positioning Thatcher as a Teacher is a

tokenistic way of elevating her to a position of authority without granting her responsibility for achieved outcomes.

The Guardian also discussed Thatcher in relation to motherhood, as shown in Example (41), but this was not accompanied by positive evaluations. Comparisons were drawn between Thatcher's professional and private lives, equating Thatcher's abilities as Prime Minister to her abilities as a wife and mother. In the event of a so-called "domestic mishap", the Mother role trap is perverted to illustrate perceived maternal failings. This reflects Kanter's (1993: 234) assertion that Mothers need to present as "non-critical, accepting, "good mothers"" or else lose their authoritative status.

- (41) Most politicians are understandably reluctant to make political capital out of domestic mishap. That Mark might be a disappointment to Mother (as the rest of us are) they could understand. There but for the grace... and all that.
- On the other hand, political controversy within the Thatcher kitchen cabinet has long since entered the public domain. This column has a staff-man assigned fulltime. "Carol Quits Shock" was bad enough for the foreign fiancées policy.
- Then there was "Denis Lashes Lions Ban."
- And now this blow to trade policy. "Mark in Jap Deal." It is worse than the real Cabinet. ('Drama on the domestic front', *The Guardian*, 15 February 1980)

In Example (41), Thatcher is referred to as "Mother", and it is implied that she is disappointed in her son, Mark Thatcher. It is then suggested that "the rest of us" are also a cause of disappointment for Thatcher. The pronoun "us" can be interpreted inclusively, intimating that the role of 'disappointing child' is not reserved for Thatcher's biological children, but may also be extended to other MPs, journalists, and even readers of this newspaper. Thatcher is positioned as a Mother to all, albeit a Mother who is difficult to please. It is also suggested that "most politicians" are familiar with Thatcher's displeasure and recognise how easily they might be on the receiving end, if not "for the grace [of God]... and all that."

This article comments extensively on controversy caused by members of Thatcher's immediate family, which are referred to as her "kitchen cabinet". The phrase "kitchen cabinet" is used to refer to a group of advisors or staff who support a head of state, similar

to but distinct from the role of a Government Cabinet. In Example (41), this phrase is used to refer to Thatcher's family, suggesting that those who professionally influence her most are nothing to do with her Prime Ministerial position but are her husband and children. Her role as a wife and mother is implied to supersede her role as Prime Minister.

Controversies attributed to Thatcher's family include her daughter Carol leaving her journalism job and the abrupt end of her romantic relationship with Conservative MP Jonathan Aitken, her husband Denis criticising Government opposition to the British Lions rugby tour of South Africa, and her son Mark being offered a sponsorship deal from a Japanese textiles company. All of these events are positioned as issues of national importance, with consequences "worse" than those arising from decisions made by "the real Cabinet". As such, Thatcher's family is positioned as a detriment to her ability to successfully govern the country.

By framing Thatcher as a mother, Example (41) inextricably links Thatcher's role as Prime Minister to her role as a mother. The impact this has on her suitability for office is questioned later on in the same article:

- (42) Once again events had vindicated Mr Heath's far-sighted view of the premiership. One should not have children. Pianos are less trouble. ('Drama on the domestic front', *The Guardian*, 15 February 1980)

The "Mr Heath" in question is Edward Heath, Thatcher's predecessor as leader of the Conservative Party and an unmarried, childless man. By referring to him as "vindicated" and immediately stating the directive, "one should not have children", this example generates a conventional implicature, encouraging readers to deduce a correlation between children and unsuitability for leadership. Suggesting that it is preferable for Prime Ministers to have pianos rather than children is a hyperbolic comment more reminiscent of satire than serious political commentary, but it still carries a negative evaluative stance on motherhood and leadership. It strongly implies that Thatcher would be a better Prime Minister if she were not to have had a family. Choosing to report upon Thatcher's family life at all emphasises her position as an "unusual family member" due to her "odd choice of public mission instead of private fulfilment" (van Zoonen, 2006: 299). It invites readers to evaluate

Thatcher's competency as Prime Minister in conjunction with her non-conformity to traditional stereotypes of femininity.

In data from Thatcher's final year, ridicule was less reliant on categorising her behaviour, instead using sarcastic language to mock or belittle Thatcher's authority. The following two examples mock Thatcher for her lack of specificity during her exchanges with Kinnock. During PMQs, Thatcher had requested that Kinnock take action against Labour MPs who were refusing to pay their Community Charge and inciting public disorder, but did not specify exactly what form that action should take. Both *The Times* and *The Independent* published sarcastic commentary of this exchange, depicting Thatcher as being unreasonable:

- (43) For what was she asking Mr Kinnock to do? Enter Brixton on a pony and lead Militant agitators away to discuss the community charge over tea and biscuits? ('Hitting a full toss below the belt', *The Times*, 14 March 1990)
- (44) Whether she expected the Labour leader to suspend MPs in droves; or to don riot-gear, or to upend physically Labour MPs and collect their loose change, was unclear. ('Smiles all round as Tory infantry goes over the top', *The Independent*, 14 March 1990)

Both of these articles make farcical suggestions, such as ending the violence with "tea and biscuits" or assaulting MPs to "collect their loose change", to show the redundancy of Thatcher's comment. Such exaggeration implies that these suggestions are non-serious, thereby masking this criticism of Thatcher as an attempt at humour while still prompting a negative emotive response amongst readers (Culpeper and Hardaker, 2017: 343). This commentary undermines Thatcher by trivialising her attempts to assert authority over Kinnock.

Despite this ridicule, the same article in *The Times* did also report Thatcher's answer as "magnificently below the belt" ('Hitting a full toss below the belt', *The Times*, 14 March 1990). While the phrase "below the belt" is usually a euphemism for inappropriate and unfair behaviour, the use of the adverb "magnificently" suggests that Thatcher is being celebrated for this kind of behaviour. Although Thatcher is depicted as being unreasonable, this behaviour is glorified for its entertainment value.

There were other examples of the formality of PMQs being undermined by likening proceedings to an entertaining spectacle. This serves to undermine Thatcher's authority by suggesting that she is being evaluated on her role as an entertainer, not the head of the British government. Consider the following examples:

- (45) 'Aaaah!' they cried, and 'Behind you!' The panto season has clearly opened early this year. ('Militant Tories run riot in campaign of intimidation', *The Guardian*, 09 March 1990)
- (46) The Prime Minister looked intimidating, yesterday, in a new outfit in brown and gold spangles, framed in black piping the whole ensemble giving a somehow glistening effect, like a mermaid's tail in a village-hall pantomime. ('Poll tax debaters plum the depths, *The Times*, 07 March 1990)
- (47) Mrs Thatcher can be played by Barry Humphries as Dame Edna Everage... Yesterday's exchanges between Mrs Thatcher and Mr Kinnock already had the feel of Dame Edna meets Ben Elton. ('Cue Edna, Joan, Arnold, Marlon, Bob, Sid and Kylie', *The Guardian*, 30 March 1990)

Examples (45) and (46) above make specific references to pantomimes, insinuating that PMQs is, as an enacted performance, satirical, comical, and whimsical. This depreciation of PMQs from a serious political event to childish theatre demonstrates ridicule for Thatcher as the metaphorical titular character in this PMQs pantomime. It serves as an attack on Thatcher's positive face needs, by denying respect for her authority as Prime Minister.

Example (47) does not reference pantomime, but does compare Thatcher to a drag actor. In addition to presenting Thatcher predominantly as an entertainer, it implies that she is violating the traditional gender dichotomy. By comparing Thatcher to a man in drag, as opposed to a woman in drag, this article is considering her in relation to a purported attempt at a feminine performance. The emphasis is not on Thatcher as a female actor engaging in a masculine performance, but rather as a male actor engaging in a feminine performance, contributing to the idea that there is something unnatural about a woman being in Thatcher's position.

Satire and ridicule were also used to describe Thatcher's response to helpful questions, on the occasions when she was prompted by Conservative MPs to criticise the Opposition. In particular, publications reported upon Thatcher's responses to Tim Devlin and Andrew Mitchell after they both invited her to condemn the involvement of Labour MPs in violent

protests against the Community Charge (see Extract 4 in section 4.1.1). The helpfulness of their questions was directly referenced, with Devlin and Mitchell being described as “well-known members of the extreme Maggitant Tendency” (‘Militant Tories run riot in campaign of intimidation’, *The Guardian*, 09 March 1990). This phrase, “Maggitant Tendency”, is a pun of Militant tendency, and suggests that these two groups mirror each other on opposite ends of the political spectrum. It is therefore presented as hypocritical of Thatcher to condemn the actions of the Militant tendency as a group of far-Left extremists, when she is purported to be the namesake of far-Right extremists.

The same article in *The Guardian* used satirical exaggeration to suggest that Thatcher’s criticisms of the Militant tendency were excessive and unnecessary:

- (48) She needed no urging, offering condemnations utter, round and, for good measure, square and oblong-shaped. (‘Militant Tories run riot in campaign of intimidation’, *The Guardian*, 09 March 1990)

The fact that Thatcher is reported to have “needed no urging” creates the impression that she was eager to exploit opportunities to discredit the Labour party. This positions her as contentious and matches the assertive and aggressive qualities associated with a masculine speech style (Baxter, 2010: 61). The exaggerated reports of Thatcher’s condemnations being “for good measure, square and oblong-shaped” creates a mocking tone and implies a negative evaluative stance based on this behaviour.

Another article in *The Times* contained a positive evaluation of Thatcher, claiming that “she was knocking them all for six” during her answers throughout the session (‘Nellist’, *The Times*, 09 March 1990). The phrase “knocking them all for six” is a sports metaphor comparing Thatcher to a high scoring cricket player. While Koller (2004a: 13; 2004b: 113) argues that sports metaphors create associations with masculinity, this same article also makes a direct reference to Thatcher’s femininity by referring to her as “Mummy”:

- (49) Mummy has made up her mind; she’s not going to change it ... She told us so yesterday in no uncertain terms. (‘Nellist’, *The Times*, 09 March 1990)

This description resembles a perverted likeness of Kanter’s role trap, the ‘Mother’. Baxter (2018: 29) argues that the Mother figure usually serves as a “comforter and

sympathiser”, but this depiction of Thatcher in *The Times* foregrounds her lack of comforting and sympathetic qualities. Instead, Thatcher is depicted as strict, intransigent, and liable to impose her views onto others, as reflected in the claim that she shared her opinions “in no uncertain terms”. Combining this depiction with a direct reference to Thatcher as “Mummy” shows contempt and undermines her authority in a distinctly feminised way.

Examples of ridicule for Theresa May found within the dataset revolved around her perceived inability to retain a position of power within Parliament. This resulted in significant differences between the way May was represented in newspapers between her first and final years in office. By her final year, evaluations of May no longer implied the uncompromising authority of an Iron Maiden; instead, May was criticised for a loss of control over Government. These depictions carried the suggestion that May’s capacity to govern has deteriorated and her resignation is inevitable, if not imminent. For this reason, I have referred to this role as a Dead Woman Walking. While this role was not apparent in my data from May’s first year, out of the 25 articles in my dataset relating to May’s final year, 18 contained discourses placing May in the role of a Dead Woman Walking. Some of these evaluations of May’s competency were explicit, as in Examples (50) and (51):

- (50) But with the revised departure date looming, Theresa May's proposal looking all-but doomed and the prime minister's own position openly questioned, the next days really do appear crucial. ('The week ahead for Brexit: third time lucky for May?', *The Guardian*, 25 March 2019)
- (51) The prime minister is expected to formally announce a package of measures on workers' rights next week, as she scrambles to woo Labour MPs to support her Brexit plan [...] The new government legislation comes as the prime minister was expected to make a last-ditch attempt to win over Labour politicians in Leave-voting areas ('May accused of 'empty rhetoric' on workers' rights', *The Independent*, 04 March 2019)

Example (50) refers to May’s Brexit proposal as “all-but doomed”, conveying a certainty of failure. This attack on her competency is further intensified by the assertion that her position is being “openly questioned”. The fact that the author of this publication is questioning May’s leadership is self-evident, so the passive construction *May’s leadership is being questioned* generates the implicature that others beyond this author are also losing confidence in May.

May's authority is also undermined in Example (51). The verb "scrambles" implies a sense of struggle and desperation, suggesting that May's position as a leader is tenuous. May's efforts to unify the Chamber are referred to as a "last-ditch attempt", not only implying desperation but also finality: her actions are employed as a last resort, not the result of measured consideration. May's struggles are directly attributed to a lack of support from Labour MPs, suggesting that there is a wide-spread lack of confidence in her abilities as a leader.

Publications also used metaphor to create Dead Woman Walking discourses:

- (52) May's position began eroding quickly on Wednesday. ('When things fall apart', *The Sunday Times*, 24 March 2019)
- (53) Another day, another calamity for the government. Ministerial rebellions, confusion, cackling, pointed cheers when another spear entered Mrs May's blood-soaked hide. ('Gove's charm fails to mollify the mutineers', *The Times*, 14 March 2019)
- (54) You can't have two kings in one country. Such a situation will quickly become ungovernable. ('Everything you need to know about indicative votes', *The Independent*, 26 March 2019)

Example (52) describes May's position as "eroding", a metaphor for being weathered away by natural agents and suggesting that the degradation of her position is an inevitable phenomenon. Likewise, Example (53) creates the impression of inevitability by parodying the idiom, "another day, another dollar". By replacing the word "dollar" with "calamity", the implication is that the government daily exchanges work for disaster as if it were a salary. These disasters are likened to weapons causing physical injury to May, who is depicted as a hunted animal. Referring to her skin as a "hide" suggests that she is being hunted as a trophy and her retirement, a metaphorical skinning, will be celebrated as an achievement. This violent imagery is further exaggerated by the description of May as "blood-soaked": she is already bleeding excessively, her obvious impending death becoming a metaphor for her imminent retirement from office. The final metaphorical spear "entered" May's hide in a personified act, as if it were the subject of this clause. As such, this author avoids placing blame for May's demise; her powerlessness is framed as an innate state of being rather than the result of a rejection by her peers.

The two kings referenced in Example (54) are May and Parliament, depicting May as having equal authority to other Members. The declarative negative “can’t” leaves no room for compromise and the epistemic “will” conveys absolute certainty that May’s position will deteriorate as she is undermined by other Members. There is the assertion that this situation will become “ungovernable”. Given that May’s primary responsibility as Prime Minister is to govern, her yielding authority to Parliament is the epitome of failure, made worse by the fact that this concession was not voluntary. “King” is an inherently gendered word, making this a masculinised depiction of May, but not an approving one. This masculine role is framed as an inappropriate choice for May, since she lacks the authority to retain control over Parliament.

Another prominent metaphorical depiction of May in her final year is that of the ‘Maybot’, a characterisation of May based upon a reported robotic nature and imperceptible emotional intelligence. This title originated early in her premiership, when a reporter for *The Guardian* described Theresa May as “more robot than human” (‘Theresa struggles to take back control – from her own Maybot’, *The Guardian*, 08 November 2016). This characterisation of May was apparent in my dataset, with the following example being published in *The Guardian* in response to May being questioned about her choice to only seek a short extension to Article 50 (see Extract 34, section 5.2):

- (55) For more than two years, the prime minister has spoken Maybot, a very primitive computer language only capable of basic sentences that are more or less grammatical, but still almost totally devoid of meaning. Since she became Leader in Name Only, Lino - hard to nail down, but easy to walk over - she can't even manage that. Her binary messages into deep space are now just a long series of random noughts. She literally has nothing to offer. (‘The Maybot’s binary messages have become just a series of noughts’, *The Guardian*, 20 March 2019)

In this example, the term Maybot is used in reference to a computer language that is “almost totally devoid of meaning”. The implication here is that everything May says is of little consequence. Her competency is further questioned when she is described as “Leader in Name Only”, suggesting that she has no legitimate authority over her party or Parliament. Her newly assigned title, Lino, serves as a pun, functioning both as an acronym and a reference to linoleum flooring. Just like the flooring, May is described as “hard to nail down, but easy to walk over.” “Hard to nail down” could be a critical reference to May’s frequent

use of equivocation in her answers during that PMQs session, adding validity to the claim that May's use of language is characteristically "devoid of meaning." "Easy to walk over" is an idiomatic expression suggesting that May struggles to exercise her authority in Government, and her positive face need to be respected as the Prime Minister is habitually neglected. These challenges to her competency and credibility are summarised with the bald, on-record attack: "she literally has nothing to offer." This hyperbolic declarative statement is a personal attack on May, suggesting that she has no redeeming features either as a Prime Minister or as a person.

This use of the Maybot metaphor conveys an overwhelmingly negative evaluation of May and her performance in PMQs. This evaluation is also implicitly gendered, given the apathetic nature of robots and computers. Braden (1996: 133) and Baxter (2012: 98) argue that, while a demonstration of emotional intelligence from both men and women leaders is valued by the media, it is commonly associated with feminine leadership. Therefore, Shaw (2020: 209) argues, May's "perceived lack of emotional engagement" is portrayed as "an intolerable position for a woman" to occupy. While the Maybot metaphor may be used to express valid criticisms for May's debate performance, its use synchronously conveys a belief about May's non-adherence to gender role stereotypes, thereby establishing a tacit link between negative evaluations of May and her perceived lack of a feminine performance.

6.4 "The best turd that we've got": Evaluations as reported speech

PMQs was not recorded or broadcast until the final year of Thatcher's premiership. Therefore, it was common for newspapers to relay the events of PMQs to readers by simply publishing transcripts of select questions and answers, with little to no accompanying commentary containing an evaluative stance on Thatcher or her performance. However, a journalist's choice of which quotations get published remains significant, since this informs how readers perceive Thatcher. More so, given that this was the only exposure many readers had to Thatcher's PMQs performance. As Richardson (2007: 87) argues, "news reporting is inevitably value-laden", and the use of reported speech in itself is not enough to constitute objectivity.

Within my dataset from Thatcher's first year, there was a trend amongst these articles to heavily feature moments where Thatcher aligned herself with constituents and communities outside the Chamber. This demonstrates a rapport enhancement orientation: Thatcher is acknowledging the face needs of others and validating their need for affective involvement (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 16). Displaying this level of concern for others has traditionally been associated with a feminine performance, but Cameron (2006: 72) has argued that this behaviour is actually one way in which women speakers can claim power. Positioning Thatcher as sensitive to the needs of others contributes to a representation of stereotypical femininity, but it does not necessarily invalidate Thatcher's bids for authority.

The following examples from *The Times* and *The Guardian* both quoted Thatcher's compliments of the police forces stationed at picket lines outside steel mills. A Conservative MP had asked Thatcher to commend police officers for withstanding the "lawlessness" of the picket lines and she answered with a complimentary speech act:

- (56) Mrs Thatcher - I would be very happy indeed to convey Mr Blackburn's message to the chief constable and to the police for the excellent way they have carried out their difficult duties. Picketing of this kind puts a tremendous burden upon them and they have carried out their duties magnificently. (Conservative cheers.) ('Making unions pay for strikes: plan proceeds to link union funds with social security benefits', *The Times*, 15 February 1980)
- (57) She paid tribute to the police attempting to maintain law and order on the picket lines. They had carried out their difficult duties "magnificently," she said. ('Unions will have to pay to strike soon, says PM, *The Guardian*, 15 February 1980)

Both Examples (56) and (57) report on Thatcher expressing her appreciation for police forces. Example (56) shows Thatcher acknowledging that monitoring the picket lines is "difficult" and a "tremendous burden" but they manage "magnificently", revealing her to be showing deference for their occupation. In doing so, Thatcher is not only aligning herself with the police officers in question but also with anybody else who shares this stance. By publicising this aspect of Thatcher's behaviour, it creates an opportunity for a greater number of readers to experience Thatcher's attempts to enhance rapport and increase the likelihood of readers supporting her.

There were similar patterns surrounding Thatcher's answers congratulating steel workers who refused to go on strike, who carried on working despite picket lines outside their place of work:

- (58) Mrs Thatcher - These workers are exercising their lawful right to go about their business and continue to earn a living for themselves and their families. I congratulate them. ('Sale of BSC works to private sector 'an excellent solution', *The Times*, 13 February 1980)
- (59) To shouts of "They're black-legs" from Labour backbenches, Mrs Thatcher replied: "I think it only brings trade unions into a conflict with public opinion. These workers only wish to carry on going to work in a company which was not in dispute with its own workers. They wish to carry on, both to continue to support their own families and to honour business contracts and both of these things should be encouraged," Mrs Thatcher said. ('Thatcher backs ballot of steel strikers', *The Guardian*, 27 February 1980)
- (60) She also congratulated the Sheerness private steel workers on the Isle of Sheppey, who had ignored a union directive to strike. [...] "The private steel sector is able to make a profit and contribute to the cost of health and education and all the other things we want more of in this country," added the Prime Minister. ('Thatcher for the selling-off of BSC's ailing plants', *The Guardian*, 13 February 1980)

In Examples (58) and (59), Thatcher cites workers' desire to provide for their families as one reason for her admiration. Example (58) directly quotes Thatcher congratulating steel workers, and Example (59) quotes Thatcher as saying their commitment to work is to be "encouraged". These quotations suggest that Thatcher is taking a positive stance towards those continuing to work, thus revealing Thatcher to be considerate towards the domestic needs of others. Similarly, in Example (60), Thatcher also cites that the profits from the steel industry partially fund the "health and education" needs of the country; these have also been recognised as 'women's issues' (Blaxill and Beelen, 2016: 432). Reporting on these answers of Thatcher's allows her to build solidarity with steel workers, but also reinforces expectations about the issues women politicians commonly concern themselves with.

Thatcher was also shown to be sympathetic to the needs of strikers. She was reported to be advocating for the right of striking workers to have their say over issues such as strike pay:

- (61) In the Commons the Prime Minister said she believed workers without a pay packet or strike pay for eight weeks had a right to be consulted about their future. ('Thatcher 'nerve' over steel ballot', *The Guardian*, 27 February 1980)
- (62) The Prime Minister yesterday gave her full support to a ballot of the striking steel workers. Replying to Tory backbencher, Mr Michael Neubert (Romford), she said: "I believe that workers who have been without a pay packet for some eight weeks and without strike pay as well have a right to expect to be consulted about their wishes for the future." ('Thatcher backs ballot of steel strikers', *The Guardian*, 27 February 1980)

Neither Example (61) or (62) mentions Thatcher's policy of non-involvement in the steel strikes, so neither presents the possibility of Thatcher taking contradicting stances on the issue of the needs of strikers. These examples solely represent Thatcher giving her "full support" for the needs and rights of a community of workers who are supposedly being imposed upon by the unions meant to represent their interests. Thatcher is positioned as an affectively oriented, benevolent leader, who ostensibly demonstrates an orientation to the face needs of others, characteristics which readers will likely correlate with a feminine performance (Holmes, 2006: 75).

During May's premiership, it was less common for newspapers to publish extracts of PMQs exchanges, but it became more common for there to be interviews or quotations from MPs or political correspondents. As a result, my May datasets contained an increased frequency of explicit evaluations of May compared to Thatcher, even though there was a tendency for these stances to be contained within reported speech. This serves a dual purpose. Firstly, direct speech from a credible source adds validity to the stance (Holt, 2009: 196). Secondly, it allows the publication to distance themselves from the stance, thereby avoiding responsibility for any face-threatening behaviour expressed by the reported speech (Holt, 2009: 200). However, even if an opinion is not endorsed by a publication, there is still the possibility for the readership of that publication to be influenced by the stances printed within (van Dijk, 1996: 97; Smirnova, 2009: 79).

Out of the 21 newspaper articles included in the dataset from October 2016, 9 of them reported upon on May's assertion that her Government had provided the NHS with an extra £10 billion of funding (see Extract 32, section 5.2). This proved a controversial statement, with many MPs and Government officials publicly claiming this assertion was

misleading. This £10 billion figure was part of a five-year plan for the NHS, so the NHS England budget was not expected to rise by this amount until the 2020-21 financial year. Additionally, this funding was expected to be made possible by budget cuts to other public health services, so the actual increase in total health spending was predicted to be much smaller than May's reported £10 billion figure.

These concerns were expressed in a letter from Dr Sarah Wollaston (Conservative, Totnes, Chair of the Health and Social Care Select Committee) to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond (Conservative, Runnymede and Weybridge). This letter, co-signed by four other MPs on the Health Select Committee, requested a more "honest and open discussion about the future funding challenges" of the NHS (Wollaston, 2016). A number of newspaper articles published quotations from this letter, thereby indirectly criticising May and her Government. Even though these publications are not taking an explicit stance against May, readers are exposed to these negative evaluations and consequently may be influenced in their opinions on May's leadership.

The Guardian quoted Dr Wollaston's letter, publishing a claim that May is "incorrect" and misrepresenting the truth about the financial state of the NHS:

- (63) "The continued use of the figure of £10bn for the additional health spending up to 2020-21 is not only incorrect but risks giving a false impression that the NHS is awash with cash," Wollaston and four fellow committee members said in a letter to the chancellor. ('Theresa May denies that £10bn NHS funding pledge is misleading', *The Guardian*, 31 October 2016)

This quotation contains a negative evaluation of May's actions, but there is also redressive action to mitigate the threat to May's face needs. Wollaston depersonalises the infraction, avoiding face-threat by not referencing May as the agent of the infraction (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 194). She also claims that May merely "risks" giving a false impression of NHS finances, rather than accusing May of being deliberately deceptive. Choosing to publish quotations such as this, with evident redressive action, distances *The Guardian* from the negative evaluation expressed and provides greater plausibility that the publication is taking a neutral stance.

In other instances, where the Wollaston letter was not directly quoted, reports in *The Guardian* contained more redressive action to mitigate threats to May's face needs and her reputation:

- (64) Their letter's detailed rejection of the government's claims raises serious questions about the accuracy of May's insistence, in a newspaper interview on 17 October and again at prime minister's questions two days later, that her administration was giving NHS England boss Simon Stevens even more than he had sought in negotiations with ministers. ('Theresa May's claim on health funding not true, say MPs', *The Guardian*, 30 October 2016)

In Example (64), May is referred to by name with reference to a "detailed rejection" and the questionable accuracy of claims she made. This is a critical speech act, carrying a negative evaluation of May by positioning her assertions as inaccurate and unfavourable. This threatens May's negative face by infringing on her autonomous ability to voice her beliefs, and her positive face by revealing that her beliefs are being met with disapproval. *The Guardian* accompanies these threats with redressive action, using details provided by the Wollaston letter to explain the "reasonableness" of this negative stance (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 128). This justification serves as a phrasal downgrader, mitigating the negative impact of the criticism (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 23). By attributing their stance to the Wollaston letter, *The Guardian* is making an apparent effort in this article to not align themselves against May, therefore satisfying her equity rights, the right not to be imposed upon or treated unfairly (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 16). While they may still be inviting readers to form a negative impression of May's actions, heavily redressing their commentary shows deference for her position as Prime Minister and still recognises her bid for authority.

Not every publication showed this level of deference for May. In contrast, *The Independent* published an article showing deference for Dr Wollaston:

- (65) In a strongly worded letter to the Chancellor, Sarah Wollaston, chair of the Commons Health Select Committee, also upbraided ministers using the figure £10bn for the NHS in additional spending. ('Senior Tory urges Chancellor Philip Hammond to inject money into NHS amid social care crisis', *The Independent*, 31 October 2016)

The Wollaston letter is described as "strongly worded" and Dr Wollaston herself is said to have "upbraided ministers" for their behaviour, suggesting that she reproached them in person. Such language is reminiscent of Iron Maiden discourses, portraying Dr Wollaston as

an authority figure and validating her stance. Baxter (2018: 26) argues that the Iron Maiden role trap is characterised by “independence” and isolation, inasmuch as Iron Maidens possess unparalleled authority and do not require support from their subordinates. Therefore, portraying Dr Wollaston as an Iron Maiden is a tool for undermining May’s authority, positioning the two women as competing authority figures in opposition with each other.

The Independent also published criticism of May in the form of directly reported speech. While Examples (63) and (64) show *The Guardian* making apparent effort to redress the threat to May’s face needs caused by reported speech, Example (66) from *The Independent* contains a bald, on-record threat to May in the form of a pointed criticism:

- (66) Commenting on the letter, Jonathan Ashworth, the shadow Health Secretary, said: [...] “It’s totally disingenuous and misleading for Jeremy Hunt and Theresa May to claim they’ve given the NHS £10bn when it’s manifestly untrue - and Dr Sarah Wollaston is right to take them to task for it.” (‘Senior Tory urges Chancellor Philip Hammond to inject money into NHS amid social care crisis’, *The Independent*, 31 October 2016)

May is described as “disingenuous and misleading”, but *The Independent* distances themselves from this stance by attributing it to a frontbench Member of the Opposition, Jonathan Ashworth (Labour, Leicester South). It is unsurprising that a member of the Shadow Cabinet would condemn May’s actions, but by publishing the stance of the Opposition and not providing a corresponding quotation from a Government spokesperson, readers are not provided with the opportunity to consider opposing stances and are influenced to generate a singular impression of events.

Another technique observed in both *The Independent* and *The Guardian* is the use of passive construction and foregrounding the claims made against May rather than those making the claims:

- (67) Theresa May has been accused of plunging the NHS into the “worst financial crisis in its history” as Labour rubbishes Tory claims that the Government provided an extra £10 billion for the health service. (‘Theresa May ‘giving false impression’ about Government spending on NHS’, *The Independent*, 31 October 2016)
- (68) Theresa May’s claims that the government is putting £10bn extra into the NHS are untrue and the underfunding of the health service is so severe that it may soon trigger rationing of treatment

and hospital unit closures, a group of influential MPs have warned Philip Hammond. ('Theresa May's claim on health funding not true, say MPs', *The Guardian*, 30 October 2016)

These are the opening sentences of their respective articles, and each start with the words "Theresa May". In this way, readers are primed to associate the following negative concepts, "the worst financial crisis in [NHS] history" and "rationing of treatment and hospital unit closures" with May, rather than with the speakers who are making those claims. *The Independent*, in Example (67), uses passive voice to present May as the object but neglects to identify who the subject, the one making these claims against her, is. Similarly, in Example (68), *The Guardian* refers to "a group of influential MPs" but does not identify them by name. In both cases, readers are invited to assume that the significant, newsworthy events here are the accusations made against May and the resulting impact this has on her authority. However, both examples make it clear that the opinions expressed are from secondary sources, thereby distancing themselves from any stances taken and avoiding responsibility for the resulting face-threatening behaviour (Holt, 2009: 200).

The trend of using direct quotations to express an evaluation of May appeared to continue into her final year, as demonstrated in 11 out of 25 newspaper articles included in the dataset. Both *The Sunday Times* and *The Guardian* used reported speech to convey negative evaluations of May, directly addressing her competency as the Prime Minister:

- (69) One of those present said: "I've never seen anything like it. She has lost all authority in the party and is totally deluded about her ability to govern." ('When things fall apart', *The Sunday Times*, 24 March 2019)
- (70) Here is a column from my colleague Polly Toynbee on Theresa May's decision to announce that she will resign before the next phase of the Brexit talks [...] she has been the worst prime minister of our political lifetimes - bar none. ('All eight indicative vote options on Brexit defeated by MPs', *The Guardian*, 27 March 2019)

The source in Example (69) is quoted as saying May has "lost all authority"; the change of state verb "lost" triggers the presupposition that she did, at one point, successfully exercise authority within the Conservative party. The reported loss of this authority creates the impression of fragility, positioning May as a helpless and ineffectual leader. This stance is quite patronising, suggesting that May's bids for authority have been rejected by the

members of her party who appointed her their leader. This patronising stance is intensified by the description of May as “totally deluded”, suggesting that May lacks the self-awareness to comprehend how tenuous her claim to power is. May is positioned as completely powerless, in stark contrast to the relatively tough and uncompromising authority she was presented as having during the first year in her premiership, as implied in the depictions of her as an Iron Maiden analysed in Section 6.1.

The source in Example (70) was also severely critical of May, referring to her as “the worst prime minister of our political lifetimes – bar none”. Such pointed criticism follows conventional impoliteness formula, but the hyperbolic nature of the phrases “worst” and “bar none” enhance the threat against May’s positive face needs, suggesting that the author of this comment is intentionally being offensive towards May (Culpeper, 2011: 135). The inclusive third-person pronoun “our” invites the reader to participate in the insult, establishing solidarity amongst readers who share a negative opinion of May.

The Guardian identifies their source in Example (70) as Polly Toynbee, another *Guardian* reporter who had a history of publishing anti-Conservative rhetoric and encouraging readers to not support the Conservative party, even before May’s premiership (‘Your heart might say Clegg. But vote with your head’, *The Guardian*, 24 April 2010). While her comment takes the form of a personalised negative assertion about May, it is possibly influenced by pronounced anti-Conservative ideology. However, an article in *The Guardian* also published quotations from Conservative politicians, including members of May’s cabinet, sharing their opinions of May and her proposed Brexit deal:

- (71) Liz Truss, the chief secretary to the Treasury, told Radio 4’s PM programme this evening: I think it is still alive, I do. Ultimately, when you look at the alternatives - which are a customs union, no Brexit or no-deal - Theresa May’s deal is more attractive than those other three options.
- (72) Gove says, following the defeat of Theresa May’s deal, MPs face a number of unattractive choices. All are worse than May’s deal, he says.
- (73) The most quotable quote from an MP on Brexit in a while (forever?) came from Conservative backbencher Steve Double who said in parliament on Tuesday: This is a turd of a deal, which has now been taken away and polished, and is now a polished turd. But it might be the best turd that we’ve got.

('MPs told to pass Brexit deal by next Wednesday or face long article 50 extension', *The Guardian*, 13 March 2019)

In each example, May's Brexit deal is evaluated in relation to the alternative proposals. None of these Conservative MPs propose that May's deal is good on its own merits, only that it is the least objectionable option. Both Liz Truss and Michael Gove, as cabinet ministers, are strongly aligned with Conservative party policy, and so avoid expressing overtly negative stances against May's deal in order to protect the collective face of the Conservative party and, by extension, their own self-image (Examples (71) and (72)). As a backbench MP, Steve Double is less strongly associated with the positive face of the Conservative party, and so is less conventional in his defence of May's deal (Example (73)). While conceding that May's deal is the "best" option available, he still describes it as a "polished turd". This positions May's deal as something undesirable and May, as the architect of this deal, has failed in her capacity as Prime Minister to arrange a satisfactory plan for the country's future.

Through the use of reported speech, various newspaper articles presented May as a flawed leader of questionable competence. There was explicit opposition from political commentators to her bids for authority as the Prime Minister, and evidence that, even amongst her supporters, her authority was only begrudgingly accepted. This suggests that, despite May's attempts to discursively position herself as powerful during PMQs, she was not perceived as powerful by observers of her performance.

6.5 Summary

This chapter aimed to explore how Thatcher and May were placed into stereotypical roles by newspapers, and how these gendered roles informed evaluations of them as Prime Ministers.

There was prevalent use of Iron Maiden discourses relating to both Thatcher and May, but these were accompanied by differing evaluative stances. With the exception of one positive evaluation positioning her as a successful athlete in her final year, Thatcher was predominantly negatively evaluated in conjunction with Iron Maiden discourses. The use of

extended metaphor, such as that likening Thatcher to extreme weather (Example (13)) or apathetic military leadership (Example (15)), creates the impression that Thatcher's leadership style is disagreeable and unnatural. In stark contrast, May was predominantly positively evaluated in conjunction with Iron Maiden discourses, with references to how her behaviours were positively received by MPs inside the Chamber. The anomalous criticism of May expressed in Example (23) was not on the basis of her role as an Iron Maiden, but on the acknowledgement that this role was *performed* in a literal sense, and was therefore inauthentic. In this case, the Iron Maiden role was not provided as proof of May's unsuitability for leadership, but as a justification for disapproval of her personally.

There were examples of Thatcher and May being placed in the role of a Victim, but only in their first years in office. Victim discourses have an 'othering' effect by directly comparing the Victim with their male contemporaries, thereby questioning Thatcher and May's ability to engage with debate. Thatcher was portrayed as victimised by a collective of Opposition MPs, positioning her as isolated within the Chamber as a result of her supposed inability to withstand their verbal abuse. May's success was judged as inversely proportional to that of Jeremy Corbyn, with these supposed losses being used to justify her status as an outsider.

Ridicule for Thatcher and May was also gendered. Thatcher's authority was undermined in conjunction with depictions of her as a mother or educator, mocking her by positioning her in these feminised roles. Negative evaluations for May in her final year were less on the basis of a perceived gender performance, and more on the lack of an expected standard of femininity. She was criticised for her inability to collaborate and a lack of emotional intelligence, as is exemplified by the Maybot metaphor (Example 55). These criticisms, as well as those expressed through reported speech, position May in the role of a Dead Woman Walking. The Dead Woman Walking role is dependent on the presumption of failure, which is not inherently gendered, but in the next chapter I argue that this role is feminised when considering May's status as a glass cliff appointee. Chapter 7 makes further arguments about the principle findings of this study, and discusses its contributions to the field of language and gender in a political context.

7.0 Discussion

This chapter draws together key findings from this study and discusses them in relation to my research questions. In the first section, I discuss how Thatcher and May construct identities by considering participation in House of Commons discourses as indexical of gender. In Section 7.2, I discuss how Thatcher and May are represented in newspapers by considering how they are perceived through a gendered lens. Section 7.3 discusses my final research question, exploring whether variations in the representations of Thatcher and May in newspapers could be considered indicative of changing attitudes towards women Prime Ministers and the standards by which they are judged.

The final sections of this chapter include reflections on the design of my methodology, limitations of this study, and directions for future research.

7.1 Participation as a Gender Subversive Act

The House of Commons is widely recognised as a masculine CofP due to the characteristically confrontational and aggressive interactional styles that dominate political debates (e.g. Lovenduski, 2014; Reid, 2014). These styles were “invented” by men and institutionalised as a way of doing authority, meaning that women politicians engaging with these norms incidentally index a more masculine identity and risk being negatively evaluated (Shaw, 2000: 402). Research such as Shaw (2000; 2006; 2013), Christie (2002), and Childs (2004) argues that women’s lack of access to these discursive norms may relegate them to outsiders or marginal members of the community, but it is significant that these studies all focused on MPs. MPs are elected and held accountable by their constituents; Prime Ministers are made party leaders because they have the support of their peers. Thatcher and May would not have become Prime Ministers had they not won their respective party leadership contests, meaning that they were either already, at least to some degree, established members of the in-group. Their use of aggressive behaviours is sanctioned, legitimised, and expected by virtue of their position as Prime Minister, and their position as Prime Minister is simultaneously legitimised by their use of aggressive behaviours.

However, this does not negate the double bind faced by women politicians: their perceived competence is reliant on their continued engagement with the masculinised norms of the House of Commons, but they are not free from risk of negative evaluation on the basis of this engagement. Nor does it mean that Thatcher and May did not have to continuously negotiate power dynamics, especially within PMQs, where discursively positioning the Prime Minister as powerless is a symbol of prestige (Harris, 2001: 466). I argue, therefore, that Thatcher and May's constructions of identity are not only *negotiated* through their engagement with the norms of the CofP, but *contested* by them.

7.1.1 Gender and Authority as Contested Identities

Thatcher was unique in that she was the first woman Prime Minister of the UK to navigate the double bind between negotiating authority and indexing gender within PMQs. She was expected to be confrontational in order to assert her authority as Prime Minister, in a sanctioned display of impoliteness that affirms her membership in the CofP (Bull and Wells, 2012: 34). However, this has a significant impact on the constructions of gendered identities, since it not only relies on conformity with norms of a masculine CofP, but relies on an interactional style traditionally recognised as an index of hegemonic masculinity. Outside the Chamber, Nau and Stewart (2018: 136) determined that verbal aggression decreased a politician's likability amongst voters, and that women politicians were held to stricter standards regarding what constitutes 'aggressive' behaviour in the opinion of voters. As such, Thatcher was held to contradicting standards, whereby she needed to conform to the aggressive norms of PMQs at the risk of being deemed unfeminine and unlikable by auditors outside the Chamber.

It is impossible to determine the extent to which Thatcher herself was aware of this double bind, or how much it influenced her interactional style, but I observed some variation between the ways Thatcher adopted rapport management orientations between her first and final years in office. In her first year, when Thatcher was asked helpful questions providing her with the opportunity to criticise the Opposition she routinely neglected to even mention the Opposition, instead prioritising enhancing the positive face needs of

auditors outside the Chamber. Similarly, when Thatcher's positive face needs were challenged by the Opposition, she did not reply with bald insults of her own. This rejection of the masculinised discursive norms of the CofP does not equate to the occupation of a powerless position; on the contrary, it can be seen as a kind of discursive power whereby Thatcher recontextualises the question in a way which better suits her interactional goals.

In my analysis of Thatcher's final year, she did not seem as averse to rapport-challenging behaviours. When asked helpful questions, she would take the opportunity to criticise the Opposition. When she or the poll tax was criticised, she would reply with an 'us vs them' rhetoric actively placing her Conservative policy in opposition with Labour policy, whereby there can only be one winner. As such, she adopted a method of face-saving achieved through the simultaneous threatening of her Opposition. This contestation is a celebrated oratory skill within PMQs, reflecting a conformance with the behaviours associated with in-group membership. Hence, authority as a *contested* facet of identity: a crucial part of this construction of power is depriving your interlocutors of power. Gender is obviously a less binary contest; it is not an identity to be won or lost through this contest, but rather engagement with the contest itself which demonstrates conformity to the norms of a masculine CofP and indexes a stereotypical masculine identity.

This observed variance between Thatcher's first and final years mirrors Jones's (2016) observations of Hilary Clinton's evolving interactional style throughout her political career. Jones (2016: 626) determined that Clinton's linguistic style "grew increasingly masculine" over her years in the US Senate, to match expectations of political leaders. It is possible that Thatcher's interactional style evolved over her premiership as her presence as Prime Minister became more normalised.

May did not demonstrate a comparable variation between her first and final years in office. Across both datasets, May adopted an interactional style based on reciprocal im/politeness, whereby she mirrored the rapport orientation of her interlocutor. This demonstrates an ability to participate in the contest for authority, but only when the contest is instigated by the questioner. May was revealed to show deference to questioners who showed deference to her: consider, for example, her use of "my hon. Friend raises an

important point” in Extract 6, and “I’m grateful to my right honourable and honourable Friends” in Extract 10 (Section 4.1.2).

However, May also occupied contradictory positions when considering her interactional relationship with the Speaker of the House. The Speaker is responsible for distributing floor time in PMQs, and it is required that all questions and answers are directed to the Speaker rather than any particular Member or side of the Chamber (Erskine May, 2019: 4.23). May habitually starts her answer before being called upon by the Speaker, thereby taking her turn without being officially allocated the floor (see Extracts 9, 10, 19, and 34). This demonstrates a confidence in her own authority: May knows that she will be invited to the floor and is therefore able to take uninvited turns without reprimand.

She also habitually starts her answers with performative verbs and indirect speech acts (e.g. “might I say...”, Extract 9; “can I say...” Extracts 10, 21 and 34; “may I say...”, Extract 19). Even though May does not wait to be called to the floor by the Speaker, she ostensibly formulates her answers as a request for permission to speak, showing deference to the Speaker. This creates a contradictory power dynamic whereby she takes control of the floor but then retrospectively asks for permission to do so.

This indirection has a further redressive effect on the face-threatening content of May’s answers, resembling the findings of Holmes and Stubbe (2003: 594) and Troemel-Ploetz (1994: 202) in that women leaders were more indirect with criticisms and requests. By framing answers as a hypothetical, May was able to disguise her participation in contests for authority as a show of deference. As such, her answers contained competing stereotypically gendered interactional styles.

7.1.2 Following the Rules vs Following the Norms: The case of patronising behaviour

Conforming to the norms of the House of Commons as a CofP is also different from complying with the rules of the House of Commons as an institution. While Erskine May (2019: 21.21) forbids “abusive and insulting language” and disorderly behaviours such as

interruptions, these behaviours are not only commonplace but symbolise membership and prestige within the CofP (Harris, 2001: 466; Ilie, 2010a: 60). As Cameron (2007: 129) concludes, real insiders “have the confidence to break the rules”.

Section 4.2 of this thesis explores how Thatcher and May were both recipients of insulting language, but they both predominantly responded by drawing comparisons between the Conservative and Labour parties, criticising the Opposition at a party level rather than criticising the individual Member who insulted them. One notable exception would be May arguing that Corbyn “has nothing to offer this country” in Extract 21, but aside from this, personalised negative assertions from Thatcher or May were rare in this dataset. It was more common for Thatcher and May to choose patronising language over explicitly insulting language. Patronising language involves the use of mock politeness to generate implicational impoliteness; in choosing this, Thatcher and May are able to ostensibly meet the standards of politeness required by the rules, while still participating in the contest for authority as required by the norms of the CofP.

Culpeper (2011: 96) argues that patronising behaviours have a lower degree of symbolic violence than explicit verbal aggression, and Harris (2001: 467) determines that less symbolically violent strategies are “generally speaking more effective than overtly aggressive linguistic behaviour” as methods of threatening positive face needs in PMQs. The use of patronising behaviours in PMQs serve a similar function to the use of humour as RP; it serves as a chance for Thatcher and May to include backbenchers in the interaction, establishing unity amongst party members as they collectively mock the Opposition. Being patronising is a way for Thatcher and May to do leadership by creating solidarity amongst their party while following both the rules and norms of the House of Commons. However, unlike humour in the workplace (see Section 2.5.2), patronising humour in PMQs does not disguise power differentials, but accentuate them. Being patronising perfectly illustrates the contest for authority: Thatcher and May discursively position themselves as powerful *by* discursively positioning their interlocutors as powerless.

To summarise, being patronising is a way of being impolite that is sanctioned by parliamentary rules, constructs authority, and signifies in-group membership. However, the use of mock politeness and rivalrous humour have been associated with the performance of

stereotypical masculinity (Holmes, 2006; Taylor, 2017; 2021). By utilising this behaviour, Thatcher and May are adopting a traditionally masculine interactional style that is a key component in sustaining “fraternal networks” within the Chamber (Shaw, 2020: 92).

7.2 Perceptions Through a Gendered Lens

Representations of Thatcher and May in newspapers utilised role trap discourses to express evaluative stances, both positive and negative, but always gendered in nature. These discourses position Thatcher and May in relation to gender role stereotypes, sustaining ideologies relating to the relationship between gender and leadership. Even though these roles may be used to validate Thatcher and May’s constructions of authority, they were also used to criticise and ridicule, using gender identity as justification for their unsuitability for leadership.

7.2.1 Iron Maidens

Both Thatcher and May were positioned in relation to Iron Maiden discourses, the most obviously authoritative but uncompassionate of Kanter’s (1993) original role traps. Kanter (1993: 236) argues that Iron Maidens may be vulnerable to negative evaluation on the basis that they are “demanding equal treatment in a setting in which no person of her kind had previously been an equal”. This statement is undeniably true for Thatcher, as the first woman Prime Minister of the UK. Iron Maiden discourses were used to position Thatcher as authoritative, but were also used to implicate Thatcher was abusing that authority. Consider, for example, how Thatcher was described as manipulating her Cabinet into endorsing her plan (Example (5)), or how she was positioned as a military leader sending her followers “over the top” (Example (15)). The latter is one of the satirical examples in the dataset exemplifying Baxter’s (2012: 86) assertion that Iron Maidens may be “the butt of cruel jokes” due to a presumed lack of femininity. These Iron Maiden discourses and accompanying negative evaluations emphasise a kind of “favoured femininity”, valuing women as caregivers over dispassionate leaders (Koller, 2004a: 16).

There was an increase of Iron Maiden discourses used to describe Thatcher between the datasets from the first and final years of her premiership, apparently correlating with the observed changes throughout her premiership, as she demonstrated greater engagement with the contestive norms of the CofP. Most Examples from her final year do not position the Iron Maiden as an endearing role to occupy, but Examples (11) and (12) contained positive evaluations, praising Thatcher for her competency in debate. Even in the instance that Thatcher was complimented for her engagement with the masculine norms of the CofP, these discourses still reinforce associations between hegemonic masculinity and leadership.

Whereas Thatcher apparently grew into this role between the first and final years of her premiership, May apparently grew out of it. The Iron Maiden discourses from her first year examined in Section 6.1 were accompanied by positive evaluations, implicating respect for May on the basis of her construction of authority, even if it is a masculinised authority (e.g. Examples (18), (19), and (20)). However, these Iron Maiden discourses are characterised by a perceived lack of femininity (Baxter, 2012: 85; 2018: 26). While Thatcher was positioned using a variety of other feminising role traps (the Victim, Mother/Teacher, and Seductress), these discourses were either not apparent or utilised differently for May, and this perceived lack of femininity became a source of criticism for May. The crucial distinction between the use of Iron Maiden discourses and other role traps to represent May is not a perceived change in her gendered performance, but a perceived change in her competence based on her gendered performance. Iron Maiden discourses were predominantly used to validate the authority May demonstrated in PMQs, so during her final year when May's authority was unrecognised, there were no examples of Iron Maiden discourses in the dataset.

7.2.2 Victims

In the instance of Thatcher, Victim discourses had a distinctly feminising effect. They imply an inequality between the levels of verbal aggression between Thatcher and the Opposition; this may be a reflect instances where Thatcher chose to do authority via rapport enhancement over the conventional contestation within PMQs. These discourses position Thatcher as an outsider who does not engage with the norms of debate, and by invoking sympathy for Thatcher, imply that this positioning is a natural occurrence beyond her

control. The Victim role trap does not recognise Thatcher's contest for authority, using her gender performance as justification to deny her in-group membership status.

The use of Victim discourses in relation to May were subtly different, in that there was not the implication that May was deserving of sympathy. Her otherness was not the result of her refusal to conform to the contestive norms of the CofP, but rather a result of her attempting and failing. This is not presented as a natural result of May's gender identity, but more like an unfortunate side effect. While still not positioned as a member of the in-group, it is implied that she *could* be, if her own poor performance did not constitute a barrier to her acceptance.

7.2.3 Ridicule: Gender Performances vs *Performances*

When considering the ways in which Thatcher and May were ridiculed, it becomes beneficial to consider *performance* in its most literal sense, in that both Thatcher and May were evaluated in relation to their success as entertainers. Thatcher's PMQs were compared to comedies and pantomimes, with Thatcher herself being likened to both an actor playing a mythical creature and a drag queen (Examples (45) – (47)). These comparisons emphasise the idea that Thatcher, in performing her duties as Prime Minister, is quite literally *performing*: she is playing a character. This reinforces the idea that leadership is not a natural role for a woman to occupy, and that there is something disingenuous about it.

May was heavily criticised for her *performance* as Prime Minister, with assertions that she is "not natural *dramatis personae*" (Example (23)) and "miserably unconvincing" (Example (36)). These criticisms ultimately lead to the creation of the Maybot metaphor, establishing May as an inorganic, genderless robot (Atkins and Gaffney, 2020: 305). The Maybot metaphor not only rejects May's attempts to establish herself as authoritative, but does not recognise the construction of either a particularly masculine or feminine identity. The Maybot is a criticism of May's *performance*, and a criticism for a perceived lack of femininity.

Baxter (2012: 88) argued that knowledge of role traps may motivate women to pick linguistic resources in order to align themselves with roles they want to fulfil or avoid. It is

extremely hard to argue that May had any intentions to index gender one way or another with her choice of linguistic strategies based solely on her PMQs performances, but her Downing Street Chief of Staff, Gavin Barwell, tells an interesting story about May's private fears over indexing gender. In an interview with Laura Kuenssberg, Barwell was discussing May's resignation speech. He mentioned how May's voice cracked with emotion and she hurried away from the cameras before she started crying. He said:

She was waiting for me outside the cabinet room and she sort of, straight away, apologised for getting emotional. And it's the one time when I lost my temper with her a little bit, and I sort of said, "why are you apologising for showing some emotion? For two years, I've said to you, show more of yourself to people." And then she just said, "OK, yeah, but you wait and see. The newspapers will use those images differently because I'm a woman."

(Laura Kuenssberg: *State of Chaos*, 2023: 44:17-44:40)

If Barwell is to be believed, May's behaviour throughout her premiership was a deliberate choice, informed by an awareness of how she would be perceived by the public, and news publications in particular. May's reported comments about how newspapers treat women differently, particularly regarding displays of emotion, suggest that a knowledge of stereotypes used to depict women played a significant part in her utilisation of linguistic resources. It is perhaps unfortunate that in her efforts to reject being placed in a feminine role, she cemented her role as an agender robot, equally unsuitable for leadership. This mirrors arguments made by Cameron and Shaw (2016: 134), that linguistic resources are "more greatly gendered in reception than in production": audiences are liable to assign gender roles and use them to form opinions on likability and suitability, and although speakers may try to influence these opinions by choosing behaviours that correlate with the role they want, it is not possible to completely avoid being allocated a role of some kind.

7.2.4 Dead Women Walking

May's interactional styles in PMQs remained consistent across datasets from her first and final years, yet representations in newspapers varied wildly across datasets. In her final year, there was a complete cessation of Iron Maiden discourses, and in addition to criticisms

of May's *performance*, May was positioned as ineffectual through the use of Dead Woman Walking discourses. These discourses become gendered when considered in relation to May's position atop a glass cliff (Ryan and Haslam, 2005). Wray (2023: 298-9) argued that there is an increasing belief that politics is 'feminised' by glass cliff appointments, with May "cleaning up" the mess left by her male predecessors. May's premiership was largely defined by Brexit, but her repeated struggles to ratify a Withdrawal Agreement only increased the precariousness of her position, potentially increasing the level of scrutiny she was subject to (Ryan and Haslam, 2005). This scrutiny did not reveal May 'feminising' politics as expected, but uncovered a gender subversive *performance* antithetical to the expected performance of a woman atop the glass cliff (Atkins and Gaffney, 2020: 306).

Dead Woman Walking discourses relate to the precariousness of May's position, and her perceived lack of reaction to it, as much as to her gender performance and *performance* in PMQs. Her precarious position meant that her participation in the contest for authority went unvalidated, and newspapers further undermined her authority by publishing quotations from MPs criticising her. Perhaps most significantly were quotations from Conservative MPs supporting May by default, referring to her Brexit deal as the least worst option (Examples (71) – (73)). Her inability to maintain the confidence of her own party contributes to the perceived lack of a feminine interactional style, as she fails to cultivate a collaborative and person-oriented approach to leadership (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003: 574).

These discourses position May as unsuitable for leadership because they carry the expectation of failure, entirely due to her precarious position on the glass cliff. Thatcher was also a glass cliff appointee, but Dead Woman Walking discourses were less apparent in representations of Thatcher. This is possibly down to the length of her premiership, and her varying constructions of leadership within that time. Her approach to rapport management in the first year of her premiership, as explored in this analysis, was more reflective of a feminine interactional style, and possibly more closely mirrored the expected behaviours of a woman atop the glass cliff. Her progression towards a more masculine discursive identity was more gradual, developing in conjunction with the decreasing novelty of her glass cliff appointment (Ponton, 2010: 215; Worthy et al., 2023: 299). The challenges surrounding the poll tax which Thatcher encountered in her final year were entirely of her own making, and

nothing to do with the glass cliff she started her premiership on. By virtue of the fact that she maintained her position as Prime Minister for 11 years, and Leader of the Conservative Party for 15 years, Thatcher is undoubtedly a glass cliff success story.

7.3 Thatcher's Legacy as a Critical Actor

There were noticeable changes between the ways that Thatcher and May were represented in my newspaper datasets. For example, Iron Maiden discourses were used as a device to express negative evaluations of Thatcher, but this was less apparent for May. In their first years, Thatcher was placed in the role of a Victim, who naturally could not compete with the ferocity of her male colleagues, whereas it was implied that May *should* have been able to compete but failed. Finally, May was positioned as a Dead Woman Walking, as if her failure to lead and resignation were predetermined, but these discourses were not apparent in the Thatcher datasets. Before attempting to draw any conclusions regarding the causes and impact of this variation, it may help to conceptualise Thatcher as a critical actor.

Research into critical mass has been preoccupied with the substantive representation of women, hypothesising that an increase of women within Parliament will advance the rights of women in the general public. Childs and Krook (2009: 127) argued that critical actors are as significant as critical mass in this regard: a large number of women in Parliament is less significant than a single woman politician actively campaigning for policy change.

I argue that Thatcher can be regarded as a kind of critical actor. Whether or not Thatcher improved the substantive representation of women by advocating for feminist policy change is debatable – and far outside the scope of this study. However, due to the longevity of Thatcher's premiership and the unavoidable visibility that comes from being a global leader, Thatcher inevitably normalised a woman occupying this position. Her behaviours were hugely influential, being the sole example of women's Prime Ministerial leadership in the UK. It is impossible to determine whether Thatcher herself considered this a responsibility, but it seems that she neither rejected associations with gender role stereotypes, nor considered them a salient factor. In a BBC interview on the day she became

Conservative Party leader, she admitted to getting emotional by her win, and described how “tears sprang to one’s eyes” (Thatcher, 1975). When she was asked whether she expected to encounter difficulties just because she was a woman, she replied, “no, I don’t think so. I don’t see that it’s any different being a leader of the opposition from being a shadow minister” (Thatcher, 1975).

Even towards the end of her premiership, when Thatcher had firmly cemented a reputation for herself as the Iron Lady, she did not appear to view her sex as an obstacle to participation in parliamentary discourses, but nor did she position herself as genderless. She was quoted in *The Daily Mail* in 1989:

One tends, particularly with the kind of atmosphere in the House of Commons at Question time, when you are always attacked, to defend yourself. Most women defend themselves. It is the female of the species. It is the tigress and the lioness in you which tends to defend when attacked.

(Cited in Wilson and Irwin, 2015: 37)

In acknowledging her own status as a woman, Thatcher was not conforming to masculinised norms in a rejection of femininity, but establishing new norms whereby it was acceptable for a woman to engage with politics in the way that she did. The extent to which Thatcher’s performance has been accepted is best viewed as a kind of legacy of her premiership: there are noticeable changes over time. In my analysis of Iron Maiden discourses relating to Thatcher in the first year of her premiership, she was not evaluated positively. By her final year in office, there was a mix of positive and negative evaluative stances revealed through Iron Maiden discourses. In the years since, Thatcher has been remembered as a kind of role model, not necessarily for her politics, but for succeeding “against all the odds, in a man’s world” (Purvis, 2013: 1016). Cherie Booth (2011), wife of former Prime Minister Tony Blair, acknowledged that Thatcher managed to “break that glass ceiling” in a time when “there were still more MPs called ‘John’ than there were women MPs.” Both former Conservative and Labour MPs have cited Thatcher as having an influence on their political careers; in an appearance on BBC Radio 4’s *Today* programme, Caroline Flint (Labour, Don Valley, 1997-2019) said that Thatcher “certainly influenced my political life when she won the general election in 1979. That was the year as a teenager I joined the Labour party” (*Today*, 11/02/2025, 2:53:42-2:53:49). Laura Sandys (Conservative, South

Thanet, 2010-2015) claimed that Thatcher was a “feminist matriarch”, responsible for assigning women “a new level of political importance and one that has not been lost by subsequent leaders” (‘Margaret Thatcher: a feminist icon?’, *The Guardian*, 05 January 2012).

Thatcher can, therefore, be at least partly accredited with changing the position of women within the political realm. Over her eleven year premiership, Thatcher normalised the presence of a woman as Prime Minister, and, as the first, Thatcher became the standard by which later woman Prime Ministers would be judged, as evidenced by the media’s treatment of Theresa May. Results from this study suggest that May’s positioning as an Iron Maiden in the first year of her premiership was evaluated positively, as she successfully performed a type of authority normalised by Thatcher and deemed appropriate for a woman Prime Minister. When Thatcher was placed in the role of a Victim, these discourses implicated that readers should feel sympathy for her as a woman being unfairly abused by her male colleagues; she was relegated to a subservient position. When May was evaluated in relation to Corbyn, there was no comparable power imbalance. On the contrary, Corbyn was celebrated for his aggression towards May, and she was considered able to withstand it due to their positioning as discursive equals.

It seems, therefore, that Thatcher and May were held to differing standards and their engagement with a masculine CofP was evaluated very differently. This does not, however, equate to a complete disregard for the need to preserve the illusion of gender essentialism: negative evaluations of May became increasingly frequent as she was judged to be failing to meet expected standards of femininity. In my data from the final year of her premiership, she was not perceived as an Iron Maiden, the archetype of feminine authority, because she was not perceived as feminine. The parallel rise of the Maybot metaphor and Dead Woman Walking discourses position May as unsuitable for leadership, not so much on the basis of a perceived masculine performance, but on the perceived lack of stereotypical feminine indexes. Whereas Thatcher did not attempt to disguise her gender and engaged with politics as, in her own words, a “tigress”, there is evidence to suggest that May attempted to avoid or obscure behaviours which may be interpreted as an index of stereotypical femininity (consider, for example, the quote from her Chief of Staff discussed in Section 7.2.3, alleging that she avoided showing emotion for fear it would inspire sexist commentary).

Thatcher was responsible for establishing new norms for how women Prime Ministers were represented. While the enormity of this task should not be underestimated, there is some benefit to be had from this novelty (Worthy et al., 2023: 302). May, in comparison, faced hostility for being unexceptional: she was evaluated in relation to preconceived expectations of how a woman in her position should act (Worthy et al., 2023: 302). When May prioritised her performance as Prime Minister over her performance as a woman Prime Minister, it left her vulnerable to criticisms over a confusing and ineffectual *performance* (see Section 7.2.3). Even though the standards by which women Prime Ministers are judged are evolving, possibly due to the influence of Thatcher herself, it seems clear that constructions of gendered identities remains instrumental in the evaluation of women Prime Ministers.

7.4 Methodological Innovations and Reflections

This section evaluates the methodological design of this study and how these methods constitute an original contribution to the field of language and gender.

7.4.1 Using Corpus Linguistic Methods to Select Data Across Multiple Datasets

It is not innovative to adopt a corpus-assisted approach to large datasets, but this study is not corpus-assisted in the conventional sense; I used a corpus linguistic analysis of one dataset to inform the selection of data from another, separate dataset, to ensure cohesion across all my selected data. It provided an empirical foundation for data selection that was neither random nor reliant on my own subjective judgement. This eliminated researcher bias for events and interactions that I deemed to be salient, narrowing down each dataset to a manageable size which the *data itself* indicated would be salient.

There is still some debate to be had over whether saliency equates to representativeness. For example, out of all the data collected from Thatcher's final year in office, my qualitative analysis focused solely on data relating in some way to the implementation of the community charge. PMQs interactions revealed Thatcher aggressively defending this policy choice, and a significant frequency of the newspaper articles analysed contained Iron Maiden discourses in their representations of Thatcher. I cannot guarantee

that, had another topic been chosen, results would not have shown Thatcher behaving and being represented very differently. On the contrary, it would be irresponsible to assume that all depictions of Thatcher would be homogeneous or that she never altered her communicative style in PMQs. Especially when all my analysed data for this year came from the same month: I cannot provide data to prove that opinions of Thatcher were not wildly different in either the preceding or following months.

However, I argue that my findings remain significant. I found that Thatcher was routinely evaluated in relation to gender role stereotypes and represented using overtly gendered discourses. It is less important whether this sexist commentary is representative, it matters that it *happened at all*. Given the persuasive power of the media and its power over the distribution of knowledge, this kind of commentary, even for a short period, has the ability to regulate opinions of Thatcher held by readers (van Dijk, 1996: 97). This method does not detract from the impact of this study.

This approach could easily be adapted for future research in the field of language and gender or studies with data from multiple sources or different locutionary events. It ensures synergy across datasets and provides an empirical basis for data selection when the datasets are too large to organise by hand.

7.4.2 Combining FPDA with FPA

As Christie (2000: 2) argues, “current assumptions about language use and language users that underlie both pragmatics and feminist research are in many ways compatible, and that there are benefits for both in recognising the common ground they share”. My justification for choosing a feminist post-structural discourse analysis (FPDA) approach was to investigate the intersection of genders and authorities in discourse, but this analysis was so closely informed by my pragmatic analysis that it was hard to distinguish between the two approaches. Especially when combined with a CofP approach, whereby meaning and identities are constructed and negotiated at the level of discourse. I concur with Christie (2000): the pragmatic perspective can be extremely beneficial for interpreting interactional

styles which may be considered indexical of gender identities, independent of whether those speakers occupied positions of relative power or powerlessness.

I expanded Christie's (2000) original model of feminist pragmatic analysis to also incorporate models of impoliteness (Culpeper, 2011) and rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). This was beneficial given the highly combative nature of House of Commons discourses: impolite and rapport-challenging behaviours are not only behavioural norms which index membership of the House of Commons as a CofP, but also contribute to the manufacture of "fraternal networks", masculinised in-groups within the Chamber (Shaw, 2020: 92). Consider examples from Thatcher's first year as Prime Minister: her abnormal responses to helpful questions did not discursively position her as powerless, but did indicate a rejection of masculine norms of practice. This behaviour is possibly linked to the Victim discourses used to describe her at the time, which effectively positioned her as an outsider within the Chamber.

I would also advocate for the continued inclusion of Brown and Levinson's (1987) conceptualisation of politeness. Harris (2001) and Christie (2002) both argued this model is less beneficial for the analysis of political discourses, but my findings concur with those of Murphy (2014): conventional politeness strategies were evident in my dataset and were useful in the examination of reciprocal im/politeness used by May. Members are not always deliberately trying to damage face needs of the Prime Minister, or vice versa, if this would be damaging to the face needs of the political party they both represent, or counter-intuitive to the advancement a particular policy. Examples of this are apparent in my May datasets, where May responded to questions from Conservative MPs. On the topic of Brexit, even when May disagreed with Conservative MPs, conventional politeness strategies were apparent in both the questions and May's answers to them.

7.4.3 Role Trap Discourses

This study also expanded upon Kanter's (1993) model of role trap discourses. These original role traps (Iron Maiden, Pet, Seductress, Mother) were apparent within my dataset, but were in no way an exhaustive list. I added two new roles, the Victim and Dead Woman

Walking, which were sometimes more prevalent in the data than Kanter's (1993) original roles. This framework has been expanded before (e.g. Baxter's (2018) study and her inclusion of the Queen Bee as a new role trap used to define Theresa May), and it should also be acknowledged that previous research has argued that women are conceptualised as archetypal personas in ways comparable to role trap discourses without adopting this framework specifically (e.g. Atkins and Gaffney's (2020) discussion of May adopting an archetypal 'healer' persona). My additions of the Victim and Dead Woman Walking support the premise that role traps remain a useful framework, but the exact classification of role trap discourses remains flexible and may vary based upon context. This proves the merits of Kanter's theoretical framework, providing further evidence for the idea that women are depicted in stereotypical ways to create a singular impression of their identity.

7.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

An obvious limitation of this study is that it is impossible to draw conclusive arguments regarding the treatment of women Prime Ministers from a sample size of two. However, until more women are appointed to the role of Prime Minister, this is hard to correct. The sample could be expanded by including other frontbench Members such as Shadow/Cabinet Ministers; combining such a study with these results on Prime Ministers and previous research into backbench MPs would create a comprehensive illustration of the effect of gender on behaviour within the political hierarchy of the House of Commons. Investigating Cabinet Ministers would also allow for a more comparative study in linguistic variation, as research could cover how both men and women Ministers perform in the same debate and are received by exactly the same audience.

This study also did not thoroughly explore the influence of party affiliation on behaviour. In this study, questions were categorised as helpful, straight, or unanswerable, there was no further distinction based upon the party of the questioner. Across all datasets, there was a correlation between Conservative Members asking helpful or straight questions and Opposition Members asking unanswerable questions, but this distinction was not intentional. Further research could make this distinction explicit, intentionally investigating the impact of party politics on the behavioural choices of woman Prime Ministers. Nor was

the gender of the questioner considered a comparative element. Again, further research could focus on whether the gender of the questioner impacts the communicative strategies the Prime Minister uses to respond.

8.0 Conclusions

This thesis has focused on the discursive construction of gender and authority by Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May in Prime Minister's Questions, and the ways in which these identities are represented in newspapers. By way of concluding arguments, I would like to return to the research questions I presented in Chapter 1:

- 1) How do women Prime Ministers navigate the 'double bind' between political authority and femininity?

The findings of this study reveal that both Thatcher and May conformed with the norms of the House of Commons as a CofP, participating in the contest for authority. Their methods for doing authority were not homogenous: in her first year, Thatcher was found to do authority through rapport-enhancing behaviours more closely resembling RP, but in her final year, demonstrated a greater willingness to criticise the Opposition, in a closer reflection of the masculinised norms of the CofP. Across all data from both her first and final years, May was seen to use conventional politeness strategies to redress face-threatening behaviours directed at Conservative MPs, as well as indirect speech acts to show deference and mitigate the face-threatening content of her answers. However, both Thatcher and May consistently discursively positioned themselves as powerful through the use of patronising behaviours. This had the simultaneous effect of establishing solidarity amongst their supporters and indexing in-group membership, but these in-groups are recognised as "fraternal networks" and membership thus contributes to the construction of a more stereotypically masculine identity (Shaw, 2020: 92).

Thus, both Thatcher and May achieved authority through a combination of stereotypically masculine and feminine interactional styles. It is impossible to determine the extent to which these strategies were motivated by a deliberate choice to influence how they would be perceived outside the Chamber, but May's Chief of Staff seemed to suggest that May was aware that her perceived gender identity could potentially impact how she was evaluated (see Section 7.2.3). This would indicate that, for May at least, gendered discourses were carefully mediated so as to not compromise the construction of political authority.

- 2) How do the interactional behaviours of women Prime Ministers affect the way they are represented in newspapers?

Despite finding that both Thatcher and May participated in the contest for authority within PMQs and successfully indexed in-group membership, this does not conclusively indicate that women Prime Ministers have unhindered access to the discursive norms of PMQs. Analysis of the media representations of Thatcher and May determined that they were both routinely evaluated in relation to their gender, regardless of their gendered performances in PMQs. These gendered evaluations often sustained perceived links between femininity and unsuitability for leadership, perpetuating ideas about who *can* and *should* be a leader. For Thatcher, as a Victim or an Iron Maiden, her leadership either went unrecognised or was considered tyrannical. For May, as the genderless Maybot or a Dead Woman Walking, her leadership was considered unnatural and ineffective. These representations preserve inequalities where woman politicians are regarded as outsiders, with gender as the primary 'othering' factor.

Criticisms for May were not exclusive to any one role trap, but more premised on the understanding that May was intentionally attempting to *perform* gendered and powerful identities, so these identities were considered unnatural and inorganic. This was particularly apparent in her final year, when Dead Woman Walking discourses accentuated May's position atop the glass cliff. May's inability to lead was depicted as predetermined and a natural consequence of her insistence on continuing her chosen *performance* instead of adapting to meet the requirements of her glass cliff appointment. She was ultimately positioned as unsuitable for leadership, not because she was a woman, but more because she attempted to hide her woman-ness. As a result, May was positioned as an agender robot, and an undesirable leader.

- 3) Have the standards of femininities by which women Prime Ministers are evaluated evolved over time?

There were some variations between the ways Thatcher and May were evaluated in newspapers. Thatcher was placed in the roles of a Seductress, Mother, and Teacher, with

these gendered discourses used to mock and undermine her authority, but May was not critiqued in the same way. When Thatcher was positioned as a Victim, she was positioned as an outsider unable to stand up to the abuse of the male Opposition Members. When May was represented using Victim discourses, placed in direct opposition with Jeremy Corbyn, May wasn't depicted as naturally less authoritative *because* she was a Victim; she was a Victim because she was less authoritative. When Thatcher was portrayed as an Iron Maiden, these discourses were used to position her as oppressive and dictatorial, an absurd and perverse caricature of leadership. In stark contrast, May was predominantly positively evaluated in conjunction with Iron Maiden discourses; May was placed in these discourses in recognition of her successful construction of authority within PMQs, and this was considered a respectable position for her to occupy.

My data were collected from four separate months across a span of 40 years, so my datasets may be too limited to be truly indicative of temporal variation, but I argue that the observed changes are significant enough to warrant further study into the representation of women political leaders over long research periods, such as this. In this study, I have proposed that Thatcher's legacy as a critical actor may have had a lasting impact on the ways in which women politicians are perceived. While women politicians may continue to be represented in relation to existing gender role stereotypes, the individual cases of Thatcher and May indicate that there is the potential for women politicians to autonomously influence their own gendered representations, as well as influence attitudes towards the women who will succeed them.

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Appendix 1

Transcription conventions (adapted from Jefferson, 2004):

- = An equals sign denotes latching. One speaker starts talking immediately after another, without a discernible gap in-between.
- [] Square brackets indicate overlapping speech.
- / A slash designates instances where a speaker abruptly stops because they have been interrupted.
- A hyphen indicates self-interruptions, where a speaker cuts off their speech to make a correction.
- (...) Three full stops in parentheses indicates a significant pause or hesitation.
- (()) I have included descriptions of collective interruptions within two sets of parentheses. This includes descriptions such as ((LAUGHTER)) and ((PROTESTS)).

Appendix 2

List of MPs contributing questions analysed in this thesis.

Extract	Member	Party	Constituency	Most recent Government/Opposition Post
1	Tony Marlow	Conservative	Northampton North	
2	Fergus Montgomery	Conservative	Altrincham and Sale	
3	Patrick Cormack	Conservative	South West Staffordshire	
4	Andrew Mitchell	Conservative	Gedling	
5	Maureen Hicks	Conservative	Wolverhampton North East	
6	Daniel Kawczynski	Conservative	Shrewsbury and Atcham	
7	Jamie Reed	Labour	Copeland	Former Shadow Minister (Health)
8	Philip Hollobone	Conservative	Kettering	
9	Shailesh Vara	Conservative	North West Cambridgeshire	Former Minister of State (Northern Ireland Office)
10	Peter Bone	Conservative	Wellingborough	
11	John Baron	Conservative	Basildon and Billericay	Former Opposition Whip
12	Barry Jones	Labour	East Flint	Former Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Welsh Office)
13	Michael Foot	Labour	Ebbw Vale	Deputy Leader of the Labour Party
14	James Callaghan	Labour	Cardiff South East	Leader of the Opposition
15	Roy Hughes	Labour	Newport East	

Extract	Member	Party	Constituency	Most recent Government/Opposition Post
16	Neil Kinnock	Labour	Islwyn	Leader of the Opposition
17	Meg Hillier	Labour and Co-operative	Hackney South and Shoreditch	Former Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Home Office)
18	Stephen Pound	Labour	Ealing North	Shadow Minister (Northern Ireland)
19	Kirsty Blackman	Scottish National Party	Aberdeen North	SNP Deputy Westminster Leader
20, 21	Jeremy Corbyn	Labour	Islington North	Leader of the Opposition
22	Martin O'Neill	Labour	Clackmannan and East Stirlingshire	
23	Jack Straw	Labour	Blackburn	
24	Michael Foot	Labour	Ebbw Vale	Deputy Leader of the Labour Party
25	Dale Campbell-Savours	Labour	Workington	
26	James Callaghan	Labour	Heywood and Middleton	
27 - 30	Neil Kinnock	Labour	Islwyn	Leader of the Opposition
31, 32	Jeremy Corbyn	Labour	Islington North	Leader of the Opposition
33	Luciana Berger	Labour and Co-operative	Liverpool, Wavertree	Former Shadow Minister (Mental Health)
34	Kenneth Clarke	Conservative	Rushcliffe	Former Minister without Portfolio (Cabinet Office)
35	Jeremy Corbyn	Labour	Islington North	Leader of the Opposition
36	Ian Blackford	Scottish National Party	Ross, Skye and Lochaber	SNP Westminster Leader

Appendix 3

Full list of newspaper articles included in qualitative analysis.

Thatcher's First Year

Aitken, I. 1980. 'Cabinet heads for collision on strike law'. *The Guardian*. 06 February.

Aitken, I. 1980. 'Plan to dock state pay revived'. *The Guardian*. 15 February.

Anon. 1980. 'Difficult decisions to be taken on rundown of steel industry'. *The Times*. 20 February.

Anon. 1980. 'Making unions pay for strikes: plan proceeds to link union funds with social security benefits'. *The Times*. 15 February.

Anon. 1980. 'PM's policy is not to intervene on pay'. *The Times*. 27 February.

Anon. 1980. 'Sale of BSC works to private sector 'an excellent solution''. *The Times*. 13 February.

Anon. 1980. 'Thatcher backs ballot of steel strikers'. *The Guardian*. 27 February.

Anon. 1980. 'Thatcher for the selling-off of BSC's ailing plants'. *The Guardian*. 13 February.

Anon. 1980. 'Thatcher will cut strikers' benefit'. *The Guardian*. 15 February.

Brown, C. 1980. 'Unions will have to pay to strike soon, says PM'. *The Guardian*. 15 February.

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