

## LITERATURE REVIEW ON ISSUES SURROUNDING GCSE TEXTILES COURSES IN ENGLISH SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Olexandra M. Solomka

University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom

os380@cam.ac.uk

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*Textiles is currently the least popular mainstream GCSE option in England, and because I am a Textiles teacher, I conducted a literature review to determine and understand why this may be the case. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the number of male pupils' opting to take a GCSE in Textiles is very low. Indeed, the association between sewing and female domesticity appears to have had a negative impact on male students opting for the subject, as the low male GCSE numbers are also present in Child Development, Dance and Health & Social Care. Additionally, the literature suggests creative subjects in general have been taught in a manner that does not motivate pupils nor allow creativity within the lessons. Furthermore, many pupils in Textiles classes are often given projects that result in stereotypical and unoriginal final outcomes, as teachers favour the reliability of getting all their students to produce the same outcome e.g. an embroidered cushion. Additionally, as a result of these sorts of Textiles projects, pupils struggle to see the point in the designing and planning stages of their products, as they will all be the same. Moreover, uninspiring projects that favour practical skill learning, over designing, planning and problem solving activities, have resulted in schools and the government questioning whether Textiles can be considered an academic subject. Indicatively, Textiles subjects have not been included in the English Baccalaureate qualification, and feasibly, this may have led to certain top UK universities listing Textiles subjects as undesirable academic qualifications to possess.*

**Keywords:** Textiles, Fashion, Design and technology, Creativity, Gender.

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## Introduction

This literature review is presently active and ongoing, and has been compiled as part of a thesis investigating the potential reasons as to why Design and Technology Textiles and Art and Design Textiles are so unpopular at GCSE level. It should be noted, in English secondary schools, Textiles education is taught via two alternative GCSE, Art and Design: Textiles (AD:T), and Design and Technology with a textiles speciality (D&T). Similarly, both courses assess using a project-based Non-Exam Assessment (NEA), and D&T students also undertake an exam paper. Furthermore, the D&T qualification does not have a specific textile course, although all students opting for D&T must study textiles as part of the exam. However, this literature review will often refer to Textiles, and this should be taken to represent both AD:T and D&T Textiles.

After establishing the research questions for my thesis, I was able to set the parameters for selecting the literature for the literature review, and I also had a clear picture of the questions I wanted to ask the literature. Furthermore, the answers I received from the literature would go on to form the questions included within the semi-structured interviews conducted as part of my thesis research study. The aforementioned parameters were as follows; the research was published in one of the following formats: a peer-review journal, a book from an established publisher, government documentation, and official documentation. However, in a small number of cases, newspaper articles have been referenced, this is due to the lack of research into Textiles within English secondary schools, although, these articles are often used to add weight to a point made by an author from the former list. Furthermore, the majority of the research featured within the literature review is qualitative studies, which was a deliberate decision, as the thesis will apply qualitative semi-structured interviews as the research method. The literature also needed to reference Textiles, Gender, Creativity, Design and Technology or Art and Design, and unless a seminal text, needed to have been published after 1991, as this is the date Design and Technology was introduced to English schools.

Currently, Textiles is the least popular mainstream GCSE option in England. Indeed, in a recent report published by Cambridge Assessment, AD:T is the least popular subject at GCSE, with 1.1% of students taking it, and D&T Textiles had 3.2% of students taking it at GCSE (Carroll & Gill, 2018, p. 6). Certainly, the literature suggests that the main reasons behind the unpopularity of Textiles are: the way Textiles is taught within English secondary schools (Baum, 1988; Brendtro and Shahbazian, 2004; Kimbell, 2000; McClusky, Baker and McClusky, 2005; McLellan & Nicholl, 2013; Nicholl and McLellan, 2008; Renzulli and Reis, 1997; Tannenbaum and Baldwin, 1983; Treffinger, Schoonover and Seibly, 2013), gender divides (Bain, 2016; Bell, Hughes & Owen-Jackson, 2013; Bramley et al, 2015; Carroll & Gill, 2018; Sayers, 2002) and gender stereotypes (Butler, 1988), the association with Textiles being a non-academic subject (Abrahams, 2018; Coe, 2008; O’Sullivan, 2013), and implementation of the *English Baccalaureate* (Ebacc) and *Facilitating* subjects (Bloom, 1958; Bell, Hughes & Owen-Jackson, 2013; De Bono, 1992; Greevy, Knox, Nunney, & Pye, 2015; Nicholl & McLellan, 2008; Torrance, 1965). To conclude, the literature review presents my opinions on, personal experiences of issues outlined above, drawing the three sections together and explaining why society should take note of the decline in Textiles. Furthermore, the conclusion briefly describes the research that this literature review is part of, and will clarify how the project will continue in the next few months.

Firstly, the literature on how Textiles is taught within schools is focused on D&T Textiles, as opposed to AD:T. Essentially, this is due to the lack of literature that focuses on AD:T, rather than a bias towards

D&T. Nevertheless, the emphasis within this section is on how creativity, in general, is taught (McLellan & Nicholl, 2013), and the consequences that not allowing pupils' to express their creativity has on their motivation levels (Baum, 1988; Brendtro and Shahbazian, 2004; McClusky, Baker and McClusky, 2005; Renzulli and Reis, 1997; Tannenbaum and Baldwin, 1983; Treffinger, Schoonover and Seibly, 2013). Furthermore, the section aims to present theories as to why teachers use projects that do not facilitate pupils' creativity, despite teachers acknowledging that creativity is an important life skill (Kimbell, 2000; Nicholl and McLellan, 2008).

Following on from concerns with how Textiles is taught, the focus turns to literature surrounding how gender affects a pupils' likelihood in opting to study Textiles at GCSE. However, while the literature review makes reference to gender and gender biases within Textiles, and while the thesis will be able to tackle the issues of gender in more depth, this shortened version refers only to male and female sex, and does not focus on the role of those who identify as transsexual, non-binary or ambiguous. Certainly, the fashion industry as a wider sector has often provided a place for members of the LGBTQ+ community, and there are many celebrated, high profile gay fashion designers, and transsexual models that work within the fashion industry (Davis, 1992; Steele, 2013). However, this openness to fashion within schools does not include cis male teenagers, who are not opting to study GSCE Textiles (Bell, Hughes & Owen-Jackson, 2013; Bramley et al, 2015; Carroll & Gill, 2018; Sayers, 2002). In order to explain the lack of male pupils, the literature offers historical associations with female domesticity (Bain, 2016), an abundance of female (and a dearth of male) Textiles teachers (Sayers, 2002), gender performativity (Butler, 1999), and a preoccupation with getting girls to study traditionally male subjects (Bell, Hughes & Own-Jackson, 2013; Sayers, 2002), which thus enforces a stereotype of Textiles being a feminine subject.

Perhaps as a result of Textiles association with female domesticity, it is not considered to be a difficult, intellectual or academic GCSE choice (Abrahams, 2018; Coe, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2013). Furthermore, the result of Textiles not being perceived by the government as an important qualification is that the subject is not included in either the UK Government's English Baccalaureate (GCSE), nor the Russell Group's Facilitating subject list (A-Level). Both the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc), and the facilitating subject list were designed to allow students the best possible chances of getting into university (Department for Education, 2019; Informed Choices, 2017). Although, the EBacc and the Facilitating subject list, include maths, English, science, geography, history, and modern foreign languages (Department for Education, 2019; Informed Choices, 2017). However, the consequences of students not being able to pursue traditionally creative subjects, is that creativity becomes less valued by society, and directly negatively impacts on pupils' motivation levels (Bloom, 1958; Bell, Hughes & Owen-Jackson, 2013; De Bono, 1992; Greevy, Knox, Nunney, & Pye, 2015; Nicholl & McLellan, 2008; Torrance, 1965).

### **Issues with how creativity is taught in Textiles**

Within the context of D&T Textiles, the teacher will often begin a project by showing students' what the final outcome will look like, for example, everyone will make a cushion cover. Furthermore, the project will often involve a decorative element, e.g. the pupils need to come up with an applique design for the front of their cushion (Nicholl & McLellan, 2013, p. 167). However, McLellan and

Nicholl take issue with the fact that often pupils lack the opportunity to come up with original and novel designs as a result of the constricting briefs set by their teachers (2013, p. 167). Indeed, as part of their research, McLellan and Nicholl (2013, p. 176) interviewed D&T GCSE students, and one pupil stated, “I think if you look at everyone’s folios and all the research is the same, you’ve got a specification and you’ve got an analysis and you’ve probably got a mood board” (2013, p. 176). However, in a paper titled *Creativity in Crisis*, Kimbell blamed Ofsted, and not just teachers, for limiting creativity in schools, as the emphasis from Ofsted was on measurable results, and not creativity (2000, p. 209). In addition, Bloom suggested that when teachers, schools and pupils focus solely on memorising established facts about a subject, there is a direct negative impact on a pupil’s creativity and ability to problem solve (1958, p. 599). Also, Torrance underlined the importance of teaching creativity, praising its role in pioneering inventions, such as “the alphabet, printing, radio, television, computers, spacecraft, great art, architecture, music and literature.” (1965, p. 10). Likewise, De Bono listed four ways that creativity can aid human development: for improvement; for problem solving; for the future and for motivation (1992, p. 55-56). These creative skills can be applied in many different subjects, and not just within the traditionally creative ones (such as Textiles, Art or D&T), although, creative skills need to be taught somewhere.

Indeed, both state and private sector teachers are under pressure to produce good results for their pupils, in both official examinations and internal end of unit assessments. However, in a study by Nicholl and McLellan that conducted interviews with English state secondary teachers, they found that the pressure on good grades often results in D&T teachers focusing on developing projects that easily and routinely produce consistent results (Nicholl and McLellan, 2008, p. 587). Conversely, projects that reside within the consistent and safe area of Textiles do not often require any creative input from the pupils’ (Nicholl and McLellan, 2008, p. 587). Furthermore, the teachers interviewed in Nicholl and McLellan’s study stated that creativity is an important skill for pupils to develop (2008, p. 591). Although, the teachers also believed creativity was not an essential skill for achieving a high grade at GCSE, and therefore, they often favoured the routine outcomes over creative ones (2008, p. 591). Moreover, teachers also valued the practical skill and craft element of D&T over teaching creativity, as they believed the pupils needed to learn these skills before they could effectively design (Nicholl and McLellan, 2008, p. 595). However, this rolls back to the rote learning of step-by-step skills, and these procedural projects result in pupil’s perceiving many aspects of the subject as somewhat pointless (Nicholl and McLellan, 2008, p. 592). In turn, these kinds of D&T projects lead to formulaic learning, which is problematic because it limits both pupil creativity and motivation levels, and arguably puts students off opting for the subject at GCSE.

Furthermore, when pupils are not encouraged to practise creativity in their D&T projects, they often produce unimaginative and stereotypical designs. In addition, Textiles projects that produced the most fixated design responses from pupils were tasks that required students to design a motif or embroidery to go on top of an object (Nicholl and McLellan, 2007, p. 40). As Nicholl and McLellan state, “stereotypical ideas were more evident in some projects than others. For instance, if pupils had to decorate or embellish a product (for instance, the lid of a pencil box or the design on a cushion), stereotypical ideas were particularly common” (2007, p. 40). Likewise, the benefits of pupils following child-centred projects that focus on an issue they are interested, and invested in has been widely reported to have a very positive effect on underachieving pupils’ behaviour and motivation levels within school (Baum, 1988; Brendtro and Shahbazian, 2004; McClusky, Baker and McClusky, 2005; Renzulli and Reis, 1997; Tannenbaum and Baldwin, 1983; Treffinger, Schoonover and Seibly, 2013).

Concerning D&T, the projects that have been found to motivate and inspire pupils the most are, “real world problem solving, and self-selected topics” (Renzulli, McCluskey and McCluskey, 2014, p. 4). Nevertheless, in my experience as a secondary school D&T teacher, these sorts of embellishment projects are very common and, as a result, stereotypical designs are prevalent within schools. Indeed, potentially, pupils could feel frustrated at the levels of control over the outcomes of their projects, leading them to not opt for the subject at GCSE.

## Issues of Gender within GCSE Textiles Courses

Alongside projects that do not facilitate pupil creativity or choice, gender also plays a role in the unpopularity of GCSE Textiles courses. The strong association between femininity and fashion has limited the appeal of Textiles GCSE courses to male students. Certainly, an important theory for understanding the reason for why this gender divide exists within the textiles GCSE is Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. Thus, Butler’s theory of performativity (1988, p. 519) is a theory as to how humans construct their outward identities. Indeed, Butler suggested we consistently perform a “stylised repetition of acts” in order to construct our own identities, and these ‘acts’ are entrenched within our societal traditions, e.g. a female displays her gender by wearing a skirt or boys don’t study Textiles GCSE, and these rules are learnt through repetition, as opposed to a natural act, (1988, p. 519). However, Boucher criticises Butler’s performativity theory, questioning who decides what we repeat and how individuals imitate or repeat, and if these actions are subconscious, then why do we not replicate everything we witness (2006, p. 116). While Boucher’s point is valid, it could be argued that within the context of GCSE options, gender as ‘performance’ acts as an inhibitor to males opting for Textiles GCSEs.

In order to illustrate the gendered issues within textiles, in a study by Bramley et al (2015), it was found that out of all the subjects offered at GCSE, Art and Design: Textiles, and Design and Technology: Textiles had the lowest percentage of uptake from boys (2015, p. 12). Furthermore, in 2017, Carroll and Gill found that only 0.2% of males were studying GCSE Design and Technology Textiles, and 0.1% of males were studying GCSE Art and Design Textiles (2018, p. 6). These statistics are supported by Bell, Hughes and Owen-Jackson, who state Textiles is “predominantly a female-based discipline, with even smaller numbers of male teachers and boys electing to study it at examination level” (2013, p. 157). Bell et al. suggests the only apparent reason for Textiles’ low male GCSE uptake is its strong historical associations with female domesticity (2013, p. 157), and this could also be linked back to performativity in action. Interestingly, Carroll and Gill (2018) found there were three other subjects with equally low percentage levels of popularity with male students: Home Economics: Child Development, Dance, and Health & Social Care (2018, p. 6). All three subjects have been traditionally associated with female domesticity, although it is not possible to say that their links with domesticity are the cause of their unpopularity.

Therefore, as subjects and activities (such as sewing, textiles and fashion) do not have a gender, the associations must be social, certainly gender performativity could be in play, in so much as pupils have learnt, through observing the socially constructed world, that a Textiles GCSE is for female pupils. Indeed, considering the above, even if a male student enjoyed Textiles at school, he may be put off due to gender performative stereotyping. For example, if a male student were to opt to study textiles,

he may be subject to peer or parental pressures not to take it (Bell, Hughes & Owen-Jackson, 2013, p. 153). Additionally, to further illustrate this point, Sayers suggested, “gender, seen as a social construct, allows us to examine typical gender characteristics and even stereotypes” (2002, p. 171). Furthermore, gender stereotyping has been recognised by curriculum developers, and it is acknowledged as occurring within subjects in secondary schools (Sayers, 2002, p. 171). However, action taken on attempting to even out gender imbalances within the secondary school curriculum has been weighted in favour of attracting female students to study traditionally male subjects, and not on attracting boys to study textiles (Bell, Hughes & Own-Jackson, 2013, p. 153; Sayers, 2002, p. 171).

Indeed, sewing and textiles have represented female domesticity, alongside cooking, cleaning, and child rearing; therefore, the subconscious perceives sewing and textiles with femininity (Bain, 2016, p. 58). Similarly, in schools, girls were taught home economics (sewing and cooking) and boys were taught wood and metal work (Bell, Hughes & Own-Jackson, 2013, p. 153; Sayers, 2002, p. 171). Again, this further reinforced the gender performative nature of sewing being for girls, and not for boys. However, second wave feminism condemned dressmaking and sewing due to its deeply ingrained ties with female oppression, “exiting the home and leaving behind its seemingly frivolous activities was a fundamental goal for the activists of second wave feminism who viewed such practices as domestic drudgery and sought women’s entry into the public sphere” (Bain, 2016, p. 59). Despite the decline in popularity coinciding with second wave feminism (1960s- 1980s), there has been a resurgence of dressmaking in more recent years, and many haberdasheries, sewing blogs, and craft websites have opened up or launched (Burt, 2011; Dunk, 2009; Holson, 2012; Paul, 2013; Pithers, 2013). However, there has been a certain pressure put on women who enjoy fashion, regarding the fact it is not considered a feminist pastime (Corner, 2015, p. 36). Furthermore, when Bain interviewed female sewers who considered themselves feminist, one striking quote from her research reads “As if sewing is easy and designing patterns doesn’t take math, engineering, spatial abilities, and so many other “masculine” skills because it is something traditionally associated with women” (Erin Seamstress Designs in Bain, 2016, p. 61). Thus, potentially, the perception of Textiles being non-academic could impact on a pupil’s decision to opt for the subject, as they could be apprehensive about the prejudices they may face.

In addition, male students may be subject to “embarrassment and teasing from others” (Sayers, 2002, p. 177) if they opted for GCSE Textiles. To elaborate on this last point, Bell et al. suggested that within the D&T environment there is “a (western) feminist argument that because food and textiles are considered domestic, and female, they have a lower status than resistant materials and electronics” (2013, p. 156). For example, in single-sex secondary schools, GCSE AD:T was taken by 0% of males in all boy’s schools, and GCSE D&T Textiles was also taken by 0% of males in all boy’s schools (Carroll & Gill, 2018, p. 8). This could be explained as, historically, “boys would invariably follow a workshop-based curriculum based on metal and wood manufacturing skills, while girls would follow a curriculum preparing them for domestic life through subjects such as cookery and needlework” (Bell et al., 2013, p. 153). What is more, teachers of textiles tend to be females themselves, which further reinforces the gender performance of Textiles as a feminine subject (Sayers, 2002, p. 180). Interestingly, academics concerned with textiles and education have suggested that combining textiles and fashion, a predominantly female subject, with computer science and IT, a predominantly male subject, may neutralise the gender divide (Buechley, Eisenberg, Elumeze, 2007; Kafai, Searle, Kaplan, Fields, Lee, 2013; Searle, Fields, Lui, Kafai; 2013). However, the results of these studies seemed to increase female interest in IT, as opposed to male interest in fashion and Textiles.

## Issues with the ‘Ebacc’ and ‘Facilitating Subjects’

In addition to gender issues, another reason for low popularity of Textiles may be that the GCSE is less difficult than more traditionally academic GCSE’s, such as Latin, science or English. For example, Coe applied the Rasch model to measuring individual ability and exam difficulty to thirty-four GCSE subjects, this was a statistical approach, which relied on the assumption that a more able pupil could do better in exams than a less able pupil (Coe, 2008, p. 613). In addition, within Coe’s Rasch model, individual ability and exam difficulty are related by “the logit function, the difference being equal to the log of the odds, and item difficulties and person abilities are estimated in logit units” (Coe, 2008, p. 615). However, if the subject did not fit the Rasch model, it was not included within the study. Nonetheless, Coe found that GCSE Physical Education and GCSE D&T Textiles were the two easiest GCSE’s; and in contrast, GCSE Latin was the hardest (2008, p. 625). Of course, applying a statistical model to ‘difficulty’ is problematic, as highlighted by Coe within his publication, as a GCSE candidate may do well in an exam because they worked very hard and revised, and not because it is ‘less difficult’; likewise, it is very hard to compare subjects, for example, Art and PE have very few overlapping aspects, and therefore why should they be compared; finally, and somewhat important for gender performativity issues, students are likely to succeed in different subjects dependant on their gender (Coe, 2008, p. 611). Although, having said this, statistical and quantitative approaches offer objective results, in the case of GCSE difficulty, an objective approach to an issue that would otherwise be very subjective (Coe, 2008, p. 612).

What is more, Coe’s data demonstrated that the ability of a Textiles GCSE grade A candidate is equal to a French GCSE grade B candidate:

For example, grade B in German, Spanish or French is about equivalent to an A in child development, textiles or PE. For the lower grades, the overlap seems bigger still, sometimes approaching two grades; a grade F in Spanish, IT or history is almost the same as a D in textiles, PE or drama. (Coe, 2008, p. 620)

Therefore, it may be fair to assume prospective students perceive a GCSE in D&T Textiles as a less valuable qualification than one in Latin, Spanish or German. Furthermore, pupils are often aware of the academic value associated with GCSEs in subjects such as Latin; for instance, “some pupils appeared to be distinctly aware of the value of this qualification [Latin], feeling that by studying it they demonstrate a particular form of intelligence” (Abrahams, 2018, p. 1149). Moreover, the issues surrounding the perceived intellectual differences between practical and non-practical subjects has led to the most able students being discouraged in opting to study practical subjects at GCSE.

Another key issue to consider regarding GCSE Textiles courses in English secondary schools is how they are assessed/measured. The British Government measures schools on how well its pupils achieve in the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc) subjects at GCSE level: “the EBacc is a set of subjects at GCSE that keeps young people’s options open for future study and future careers” (Department for Education, 2019). The subjects included with the EBacc are English literature, English language, maths, the sciences, geography or history and a modern foreign language (Department for Education, 2019). The UK government advised the EBacc subjects based

on the entry requirements to attend a Russell Group university. Therefore, it may be safe to assume that parents, and self-aware students, will be conscious of how subjects, such as Textiles, might dampen (or at least not aid) their future university prospects, especially if they're aiming for Oxbridge or a Russell Group institution.

Indeed, due to the ease of a Textiles qualification, it is not perceived as a facilitating GCSE or A-Level choice by Russell Group Universities themselves (Informed Choices Guide, 2017, p. 29). Instead, facilitating GCSE and A-Level subjects are maths, further maths, English literature, physics, biology, chemistry, geography, history, and languages (Informed Choices, 2017, p. 29). Although, facilitating subjects are simply defined as ones that “are required more often than others” for study at university (Informed Choices Guide, 2017, p. 29), the guide acknowledges that specific courses may require different subjects, and it does not advise that students should only opt for facilitating subjects. However, the London School of Economics lists both Art and Design, and D&T, as non-preferred A-Level subjects on the website's entry requirement list (LSE, 2019). Furthermore, there are no undergraduate courses in fashion or textile related subjects at any Russell Group university. However, Oxford, Newcastle, UCL, Leeds, Southampton, Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities all offer Art and Design courses (Complete University Guide, 2019). Therefore, it seems as though perhaps the two go hand-in-hand, that is, Textiles being an easy GCSE and A-Level subject, and its relatively low desirability from respected universities.

It can be the case that practical subjects, such as Textiles, are considered less academic in nature by institutions. For example, Martin and Owen-Jackson explained that bright pupils are often discouraged from taking practical subjects, because “higher value is placed on academic subjects, which are deemed suitable only for the more intelligent pupils, while practical subjects are considered less academic, and suitable for less able pupils” (2013, p. 64). Additionally, there is debate around whether D&T is an academic or vocational subject. O'Sullivan suggested that D&T can be perceived as both vocational and academic, in so much as it focuses on developing practical construction skills, problem solving and socio-cultural issues (2013, p. 74). In addition, O'Sullivan stated that if professionals continue to focus on the differences between vocational and academic subjects, there will remain a divide and hierarchy, and inevitably the subjects that occupy this space will be irradiated from the curriculum (2013, p. 74-75). Although, guidance from The Wolf Report (2011) on age 14-19 vocational education advised that any vocational courses should be constructed with the strong involvement of industry figures (O'Sullivan, 2013, p. 81). However, students should at first focus on attempting to obtain academic qualifications before pursuing vocational courses (O'Sullivan, 2013, p. 81). Although subjects such as Art, Textiles and D&T may be considered non-academic, if they are taught well, they do allow pupils to express their creativity, and this impacts positively on their wellbeing and motivation levels, as mentioned in the creativity section.

The government introduced the EBacc in order to even out the number of state school pupils gaining a place at a Russell group university, as it was believed that privately educated pupils were advantaged significantly. However, a UK Government report on the EBacc, found that although there had been an upward trend in state school pupils taking the EBacc, it was not a statistically significant increase (Greevy, Knox, Nunney, & Pye, 2015). In addition, the report also stated that the increases in EBacc uptake were seen in academically selective state schools (Greevy, Knox, Nunney, & Pye, 2015). Furthermore, the report found schools were targeting their most able pupils to take EBacc subjects, and promoting fewer academic



subjects to the least able (Greevy et al, 2015). It could certainly be argued that the EBacc has had a negative impact on the popularity of Textiles GCSEs.

## Conclusion

Presently, there is a dearth of research into why specifically the Textiles GCSE is unpopular in English secondary schools as the academic focus has been on engaging female students to take ‘male’ subjects. However, it is evident that gender is a predominant issue in terms of student uptake of Textiles at GCSE, as half of the pupil population is, on the whole, not opting for it. In addition, many male single-sex schools do not offer Textiles at KS3 or at GCSE, as they may assume that no students would pick it, as the consensus is that Textiles is for girls. Perhaps emphasis should be put on the social benefits for girls of opting to study traditionally male subjects, *and* the promotion of boys opting for female subjects. The role gender plays within fashion and textiles becomes especially important, as it is clear that gender is one of the more prevalent factors in answering why there is a decline in students opting for Textiles at GCSE. Indeed, as we can see in Erin Seamstress Design’s quote from Bain’s paper (2016, p.61), there is a stigma to working or studying a fashion or textiles-related discipline. It is belittled due to its association with domestic, female pastimes, and is widely considered non-intellectual.

What is more, within creative subjects, such as Textiles, teachers are, according to the literature, giving students uninspiring projects. Pupils are not required to be creative in their lessons, and end up following a set of prescribed steps to complete a project that ends up exactly the same as everyone else’s. These factors arguably could contribute to the subject being perceived by pupils and society as a non-academic subject. Often, pupils are aware of the pointlessness of the tasks they are set, however, teachers are reluctant to provide more ambiguous and creative tasks due to the higher levels of risk involved with such projects. However, the research highlights just how creative and inspired pupils become when they do have more autonomy and say in how their project will come out, this is especially apparent in pupils who are underperforming at school.

In my experience having worked as a D&T teacher in both private and state secondary schools, the gap between privately and state-educated pupils remains present. Most private and public schools have compulsory extra-curricular clubs and societies as part of their school day. Therefore, pupils have the opportunity to partake in creative activities, which are not part of their GCSE choices. In contrast, pupils at state schools do not have as many opportunities to partake in extra-curricular activities, in so much as there are fewer clubs on offer, and they are optional for both pupils and teachers. Furthermore, those pupils who attend state schools and *do* partake in creative extra-curricular activities often have middle class parents who are willing to pay extra for those opportunities, such as music lessons or art clubs. The risk, therefore, becomes that creativity evolves into something that is only available for those who have the means to pay for it.

The next stages in development for the thesis, of which this literature review is part of, involve gathering data. The research method chosen to collect this data is elite semi-structured, interviews. Furthermore, participants have been selected because of their roles within the fashion/ textiles industry, education, educational research, or in all three and their authority within the subject area means that

through their responses to my interview questions, they can aid in addressing my three research questions:

RQ1: Why is pupil uptake of GCSE Textiles so low within English secondary schools?

RQ2: What consequences may there be from Textiles education being removed from the English secondary school classroom?

RQ3: How can Textiles education be improved within English secondary schools?

The interview questions aim to gauge the participants' levels of agreement, or disagreement with the three main issues surrounding the low GCSE uptake of Textiles, as identified in the literature (projects, gender and subject bias). Furthermore, due to the gap within educational research in Textiles education, the arguments and statements provided by my participants will assist the thesis in producing a balanced argument, and therefore, a well-considered potential solution to the problem of such low Textiles GCSE uptake. On a similar note, the lack of literature on the low textiles uptake at GCSE, meant that there were not many counter arguments to the ones presented which have been published; the completed thesis will provide a multi-dimensional approach to the issue and hopefully provide Textiles teachers with advice on how to improve their subjects popularity.

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