Gossip and Aggression:

Adolescent Boys and Girls and their Respective Language Patterns

by

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To a few little people who have made more than a big difference:

CH, WH, SM, AM and LM

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Abstract

Language and gender research has focused primarily on linguistic differences between the speech patterns of men and women; much less attention has been given to children and adolescents. Simple binaries have often been used to describe gender-based speech patterns—for example, women are cooperative and men are competitive. Such comparisons can undermine similarities in the process of highlighting difference.

This thesis, based upon the recordings of spontaneous conversations from adolescents in single-sex groups, questions just how early gendered linguistic patterns can be observed. The results show that the topics of the girls' and boys' conversation in sessions of gossip and aggression are strikingly alike; but the discourse strategies used during such moments are strikingly distinct and seem often to mirror adult patterns.

Girls and boys talk both talk about physical appearance, personal relationships, and sports. But while interrogatives, hedging, and collaboration characterize girls' speech patterns, declaratives, verbal duels, and cooperation typify that of boys. Such findings offer evidence that both supports and contradicts various stereotypes previously linked to gendered behavior.

The methodology of the thesis is drawn from the field of discourse analysis. After a brief introduction, the thesis includes a literature review of relevant scholarship and a methodology section. The subsequent results and analysis section is split into three different subcategories – the first discusses the different topics of conversation, the second centers on gossip, and the third concentrates on aggression. By the conclusion, not only is it clear that girls show aggression and that boys gossip, but also that the language of the two genders overlaps significantly more than previous studies would lead one to believe.

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INTRODUCTION:

What about boys that don't wear blue?

Each day we are surrounded by gender-specific stereotypes. If a baby is wearing blue, we ask *his* name. If we see a child with a doll, we assume it is a girl. Consider the names of the following colognes and perfumes: *Full Metal Jacket* and *Canoe* verse *Tender Touch* and *Innocent*. It would seem odd if a man were to buy a scent called *Touch of Pink* or a woman were to buy *Preferred Stock*. When I was in elementary school, there was even a gender-specific way to check the bottom of your shoes and look at your fingernails. In third grade someone told me that I was "weird" because I looked at my fingernails the "boy way": rather than spreading out my fingers with my palms facing down, I decided to tighten my fists and turn my palms up.

Widespread stereotypes also guide the way that we are supposed to speak. Males talk about sports, females talk about relationships; males argue and quickly move on, females gossip and forever hold grudges. Stereotypes tell us how the different genders are supposed to engage in acts of gossip and verbal displays of aggression. Just as women are associated with gossip, men are associated with aggression. Rarely are observations made about men gossiping or women showing verbal aggression.

When adolescents discuss their own language patterns and those of their peers, stereotypes seem to be both reinforced and complicated. For example, in a conversation between fourteen-year-old girls about a group of boys who got in an argument and stopped speaking to one member of the group, one girl describes the boys' behavior as "the most girlish thing ever – they just dumped him [and] they were like *we don't want to be your friend* and they never called him for anything." This quote captures stereotypes

about gender-appropriate behavior: there are ways that boys and girls are expected to act in different types of situations. But at the same time, we begin to see that these stereotypes are not unbreakable; boys and girls do not live in "separate worlds"[1] consisting of perfectly aligned gender-specific behavior. As will soon be exemplified by the topics that the two groups talk about, the linguistic behavior of males and females should not be placed on opposing sides of the playing field.

In the real world, clear-cut distinctions and binaries are hard to come by. Human behavior proves to be more complicated than binaries allow. This research will critically assess pre-existing stereotypes about linguistic behavior and focus on the speech patterns of adolescents. Specifically, this study will examine instances of gossip and verbal displays of aggression amongst single-gendered groups of boys and girls.

[1] A term coined by Maltz and Borker (1982) in their key study on gendered-behavior patterns.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The Concept of Difference in Language and Gender Scholarship: *Girls always tell secrets at lunchtime while boys play soccer?*

Research in the field of language and gender has often focused on questions of difference, more specifically the differences between the speech patterns of men and women. Most of the research has focused on adults, and in particular, English speaking adults; much less has concentrated on children. English-speaking men and women are typically compared to each other while interacting in formal, public and reserved settings (Holmes 1984).[2] Though some attention has been directed to the social interactions among children in domains like those of preschool and primary school, children interacting in homogenously gendered casual situations have not been a focal point of language and gender studies. Yet, linguistic studies of children's speech in less formal peer interactions has the potential to contribute to the field of adult language studies on gender.

Linguistic studies of adolescents are even more rare. However, adolescence is a crucial time in the development of language and gender. As Penelope Eckert explains, adolescence is a "particularly rich life-stage for the study of the interplay between the construction of language and the construction of social identity" (Eckert 2003:382). It is a period where identities are being (re)evaluated, (re)formed and (re)constructed, a time of innovation, exploration and the establishment of an "adult self." Hibbard (1998) proposes that "there are reasons to suspect that peer socialization may increase during preadolescence and early adolescence" (187); Clermont and Cedergren (1979) have

[2] This is not to say that all studies are conducted in more formal settings. Jennifer Coates (1989) and Pamela Fishman (1978), for example, both work with data derived in the more private setting of the home.

found evidence to support that during times of social change like that of adolescence, language strategies are also in constant flux (1979). It is this "cohort that is undergoing rapid social change, with changing alliances, and ever-emerging new forms of identity" (Eckert 2003:391). Based on her study of phonological variables, Eckert proposes that it is "adolescents, not children, who lead in linguistic change" (391). Though studies have more regularly focused on the verbal behavior of children and adults, the adolescent population has potential to make long-lasting contributions to the greater body of linguistic behavior.

In 1982, Maltz and Borker hypothesized that linguistic conversational styles of men and women are rooted in social interactions that take place within homogeneous groups of children between the ages of five and fifteen; in other words, the researchers believed that the link between the speech of boys and men as well as girls and women is established in the early social groupings of kids and adolescents.[3] Their often-cited paper, "A Cultural Approach to Male-Female Miscommunication," discusses how two different cultural systems (more specifically, a "boys' world" and a "girls' world") provide the basic framework for two different types of conversational behavior. Their theory (often referred to as the Separate Worlds Hypothesis or SWH) states that misunderstandings between men and women result from disparities of the linguistic styles that originate and develop within these autonomous peer groups.[4] Maltz and Borker explain that "it is these same patterns, learned in childhood and carried over into adulthood" that provide the "bases for patterns of single-sex friendship relations" and

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[3] In 1970, Labov noted that even though children learn to speak from their parents, they "*do not speak like their parents*...Instead it is the local group of...children's peers which determines this generation's speech pattern" (33).

[4] Establishing the importance of studying these single-gendered social groups does not dismiss the significance of mixed interactions between boys and girls.

serve as "potential sources of miscommunication in cross-sex interaction" (1982:423). Though Maltz and Borker note that "sociolinguistic studies of school-age children, especially studies of the use of speech in informal peer interaction...may be of greater relevance for the understanding of adult patterns, particularly those related to gender" (431), they did not carry out the research that would validate or invalidate their hypothesis.

Many researchers have found evidence to support the idea that gender segregation is at the heart of the differences between boys and girls. Even in the early stages of preschool, data show that boys and girls have already begun to categorize themselves into their same gendered groups (Sebanc 2003). Maltz and Borker comment on the homogeneity of middle-childhood peer groups and the gender distribution: "they are either all-boy or all-girl" (1982:423). Whiting and Edwards propose that "the emergence of same-sex preferences in childhood are a cross universal and robust phenomenon" (1988:81). Multiple studies completed by Maccoby confirm the hypothesis that "segregated play-groups constitute powerful socialization environments in which children acquire distinctive interaction skills that are adapted to same-sex partners" (1990:516). Sebanc goes on to assert studying these peer groups of boys and girls separately will "help to explore when and to what extent these social worlds create different informal rules for...gender development" (Sebanc 2003:103). This isn't to say that boys and girls live in completely different worlds, but merely that they need to be studied in the socialization groups where language strategies and styles begin to develop. [5] Research proves that "girls and boys emphasize different patterns of social interaction and

[5] Yet previous research has noted that few studies have focused on the norms of "spoken interaction in single-sex groups" (Coates 1989).

activities in their respective peer groups," so it is likely that their respective "norms of social behavior" will be different as well (Leaper 1994:68).[6]

Research indicates that girls tend to play in smaller groups, frequently in pairs of the same age. They usually play inside and "seldom engage in organized sports activities or games of any kind" (Goodwin 1987:204). As girls move away from "playground activities," they "take to standing, sitting or walking around the peripherey...and talking intensely together" (Eckert 2003:385). In the process, girls avoid direct competition and "negotiational involvements" (Goodwin 1998:142). The "idea of a 'best friend' is central for girls" (Maltz and Borker 1982:424) and these "friendships are made, maintained, and broken by talk – especially 'secrets'" (Tannen 1998: 440). Secrets "bind the union together, and 'telling' the secrets to outsiders is symbolic of the 'break-up" (Lever 1976:484). Girls use their words to "(1) create and maintain relationships of closeness and equality, (2) to criticize others in acceptable ways, and (3) to interpret accurately the speech of other girls" (Maltz and Borker 1982:424). Through these speech acts, girls learn "who to confide in, what to confide, and who not to approach" (Maltz and Borker 1982:425). They learn to read others below the surface level and to judge motives, sincerity and sensitivity. In the process, they use their words to "establish and dominate new spheres of activity and accomplishment" and engage in "social engineering" (Eckert 2003:384).

Boys, on the other hand, tend to play in larger groups, with a greater range of participants. They "spend more time doing things than talking" (Tannen 1998:440). They "dominate certain arenas of recognized accomplishment – most notably sports and

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[6] These subsequent norms of social behavior include the development of linguistic patterns.

overt competition of many kinds" (Eckert 2003: 384). This leads to a hierarchically arranged group that is constantly fluctuating. There is a continuous negotiation process taking place, and often boys will learn what it feels like to be on both the top and bottom of that hierarchy. Maltz and Borker describe three ways that boys use speech in the group setting to: "(1) assert one's position of dominance, (2) attract and maintain an audience, and (3) assert oneself when other speakers have the floor" (1982:426). Boys use "verbal displays such as telling stories and jokes" (Tannen 1998:440) as well as narrative performance acts. However, while jockeying for a position within their group, boys do not always receive immediate support from their peers. As a result, boys learn how to "ride out series of challenges, maintain [their] audience, and successfully get to the end of [their] story" (Maltz and Borker 1982:426). They also learn how to jump in when others are talking and to assert themselves and their own judgements, reactions and attitudes.

Various aspects of the hierarchical structure create what has often been described as the competitive aspect of male talk, which contrasts with the cooperative nature of female talk. Though there is a fine line between labeling conversations as one of the two, children's and adults' speech styles are often categorized into this simple binary. Males are classified according to their competitive style while females have the reputation of being highly cooperative.

Through the context of friendly conversations between women in an informal setting, Coates provides evidence to support this binary between competitive and cooperative behavior. She finds that it is not a "myth." Instead, it is a social phenomenon rooted in socialization: "male speakers are socialized into a competitive style of

discourse, while women are socialized into a more cooperative style of speech" (1994:72). In this context, she finds women "collaborating in the production of text: the group takes precedence over the individual" (1989:248). Not all researchers would agree. Guendouzi confirms this highly cooperative style exists in different parts of women's talk but then challenges that it is a universal aspect of women's speech. Her research shows that "in examples of gossip such as bitching there is a highly competitive function, one that continually reproduces and recycles hegemonic versions of femininity that ultimately constricts the options of gender identity available to women in a so called *post-feminist world of choices*" (2001:48). Other researchers complicate the binary even further. The young men in Cameron's (1997) study exemplify the competitive and cooperative principles co-existing when parts of the conversation turn into "verbal duels," where participants collaborate together in their degradation of an absent third party but score points against other participants by "dominating the floor and coming up with more and more extravagant put-downs" (1997:279). It is possible to have a conversation where participants both compete and cooperate at the same time, where they disagree and challenge each other but listen and move forward simultaneously, or where they are supportive and share ideas but for the purpose of gaining social capital.

Cameron (1997) argues that the series of global opposites surrounding the speech of men and women are not so clear-cut ("men's talk is 'competitive,' whereas women's is 'cooperative;' men talk to gain 'status,' whereas women talk to forge 'intimacy' and 'connection;' men do 'report talk' and women 'rapport talk' " (276)). Rather, "conversation can and usually does contain both cooperative and competitive elements" (279). Cameron also suggests that it is the preconceived association of males with the

competitive style and females with the cooperative style (what Cameron simply calls the "stereotype") that "underpins analytic judgements that a certain form is cooperative rather than competitive" (1997:276).

Other researches have noticed the shortcomings of the binary and have attempted to complicate the simplicity of the comparison. Goodwin conducted a study to follow up on previous studies that demonstrated girls displaying stereotypical masculine behavior consisting of minimal disagreement and/or competition (1998). Examining competition and cooperation across girls' play activities, she finds that different domains foster different forms of social organization and potentially *do* have an effect on linguistic speech patterns. Goodwin considers a game of house, for example, where participating girls have clearly constructed a hierarchical form of organization and provide ample evidence that the use of the declarative and imperative form are not just an aspects of boys' speech. Her data shows pretend moms exercising their bossing rights and readily ordering their kids around the house.[7] Cameron's study shows that young men, too, "fail to fit their gender stereotype perfectly" (1997:276). These articles show that the elements of boys' and girls' verbal style are more complicated than a straightforward binary would suggest.

The majority of linguistic studies do not revolve around the language of children. Many people have shown interest in discussions about men and women interacting together, as the verbal interactions between the two genders often generate conflicts. Oftentimes, miscommunication is labeled as the culprit of disagreements between men and women. In her article "Talk in the Intimate Relationships: His and Hers," Deborah

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[7] The declarative form will be defined as a sentence that conveys information or makes a statement, whereas the imperative form is a sentence that gives a command or issues an order.

Tannen discusses how misunderstandings between men and women originate from the lack of knowledge regarding the linguistic norms, styles and strategies of the opposing gender. Frequently, these misunderstandings lead to conflict and arguing. Though Tannen's study discusses gendered misunderstandings at length, it does not delve as deeply into the issue of the actual origin of such gendered linguistic norms. Goodwin points out, "if we are to describe accurately the organization of male and female language, we shall have to go beyond global generalizations that contrast all men with all women in all situations and instead describe in detail the organization of talk within specific activity systems" (1987:241). The purpose of this study is to look at two different types of talk that occur in the segregated socialization groups of adolescents that create powerful arenas in which boys and girls can develop specific linguistic styles. Studying these homogenous groups will assist in the process of making comparisons and conclusions about language strategies in mixed-gendered groups. Most importantly, this study will consider how early the linguistic patterns observed in adults appears to be grounded.

This study, rather than selecting data based on a limited number of social activities, draws on a variety of different activities to focus on similar types of conversational interaction.[8] Previous studies have often isolated the social interactions that are subject to analysis but have not isolated the exact linguistic strategies for proposed research. Goodwin (1998) limits the observed social interactions in her study

[8] The Separate Worlds Hypothesis has often been criticized for not giving "sufficient emphasis to the role of social practices, activities, and the contextual factors in affecting language" (Kyratzis 2001:5). Consider a group of adolescent boys playing Grand Theft Auto (a popular violent video game) versus a group of adolescent girls lying together on a bed while discussing the details of the previous night's party. It would be unreasonable to compare the linguistic styles of the two different genders without taking into account the fact that extremely different types of activities will more likely than not affect the language strategies that are used.

but does not focus on specific types of verbal exchanges to provide a basis for comparison. In this study, I will consider a variety of social interactions that occur within single-gendered socialized groups (because verbal exchanges do not just occur in one type of setting) but look only at instances when boys and girls are participating in gossip or verbal displays of aggression. Based on the assumption that boys and girls both engage in these genres but may do so differently, the two genders and the two types of oral exchanges will be considered separately.

I understand that the small population of boys and girls that make up this study are not representative of all children; I recognize the limitations of a white, English-speaking group of upper-middle-class adolescents as the objects of study. Because of this, the study will not aim to generalize to all adolescent talk but will document and record a specific population of boys and girls. These kinds of targeted studies critically add to the body of existing literature of observed patterns regarding language and gender and play a role in our understanding of greater linguistic universals (to the extent that these universals exist) as well as our knowledge of social and cultural universals.

METHODOLOGY:

For this study, I recorded and analyzed the spontaneous, informal conversations of two different single-gendered groups. The first group is three sisters from Ann Arbor, Michigan, ages twelve, fourteen and fifteen. The girls, Mari, Sam and Kat are in 7th, 9th and 10th grade, respectively.[9] All three of them are enrolled in the same local private school.[10] For the past two years I have been working with this family on a weekly basis, and I spend a significant amount of time with each of the three girls. I coach the fourteen-year-old's club soccer team and worked at a camp the previous summer with the fifteen year old. The second is a family with two boys, Adam and Ben, from Palo Alto, California, ages ten and fourteen (in 5th and 9th grade, respectively). The boys either have or will attend a local private middle school before entering one of the city's two public high schools. I have known these boys since they were born, as we lived on the same street for six years. I babysat for them on a regular basis through middle and high school and worked for them as a part-time nanny during the summers of 2002-2005.

Both families live in affluent neighborhoods (though on different sides of the country), and both sets of parents work together at the same company. I speak with both families on a regular basis and keep in close contact with the parents and children – if not through direct interaction, then through email, instant messenger or phone conversations. I have chosen to work with these boys and girls because of my familiarity with them and their families. My goal with these recordings is to document adolescent language use in its most natural form – to record a direct representation of what adolescents sound like in their socialization groups. In order to do this, I have attempted to minimize the

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[9] All participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

[10] The school these girls attend is small: the middle and high school have less than 500 students combined.

confounding effects that a researcher could have on their[11] population of study due to the observer's paradox (the term coined by William Labov to describe what can happen when observational situations mitigate speech style). Because I have spent countless hours with both of these families, I have gradually become a part of their home environments and their social networks.

During the recordings, I tried to become more of an observer than a participant. Although I began recording without being sure of what types of interactions would become the focus of my study, I aimed for minimal participation on my part when I was in the same room as the kids. The majority of the time, I was not an active participant in the recordings. The boys and girls also brought the recorders along with them and recorded in situations when they were in a small group of their same-gendered peers outside of my presence. This method increased the number of participants in the study as various friends took part in the recorded conversations. Conversation among girls on my soccer team was also recorded to capture the voices of adolescents themselves in discussion about the various aspects of gossip and aggression.[12] All additional participants are between the ages of ten and fifteen. Each was informed about the purpose of the recorder and all issued consent before the recorder was turned on. The children were aware that their parents would not have access to the recordings.

As discussed earlier, many researchers attribute the differences in topics of conversation between boys and girls to the differences in interests, activities and social organization (Goodwin 1987). There have been ample studies conducted to support the notion that "groups of girls and groups of boys interact and play in different ways"

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[11] "Their" is being used as a third-person singular, gender-neutral pronoun in place of "his or her."
[12] This is an under-15 girls' soccer team out of Ann Arbor, Michigan.

(Maltz and Borker 1982:423). These interactions are thought to start differentiating from each other early on in childhood, and studies show that the types of differences generated in younger children "remain relatively constant across adolescence" (Markovitz 2001:885).

Due to such a correlation between social interactions and linguistic speech patterns, it is necessary to consider the specific social interactions that form the study's corpus of conversations. This large corpus was obtained in order to ensure that the excerpts chosen for analysis and the subsequent conclusions do in fact originate from a representative sample of adolescent language that is not limited to a singular social interaction producing a specific style of speech. The other purpose of extending the corpus to include a wide variety of social interactions is to provide the potential for conversation to develop into discussions over a wide range of topics. It would be difficult, for example, for a conversation about physical appearance to develop while boys are fighting against each other in Halo.[13]

It is obvious that not all types of social interactions have been recorded or will be represented in this study. However, data representing boys' and girls' speech patterns were collected over a wide variety of social situations. Boys were recorded in the following situations: playing board games, eating dinner, driving in the car, jumping on a trampoline, playing video games, listening to music, and just hanging out around the house. Girls were recorded while playing ping-pong, talking on the phone, watching

[13] Halo, a popular video game, is described as a "war between humans and a technologically advanced alliance of alien races known as the Covenant, who are united by their fanatical religious beliefs." Players try to, "with the help of artificial intelligence construct Cortana, fight off the Covenant forces and other enemies, to discover the true purpose of Halo" (Wikipedia.com). It is possible, though not likely, that the Master Chief might lend himself to critical evaluation when he takes off his helmet for the first time in the history of the game and displays his recurring bout against an extremely painful and ever-enduring case of acne. *Anything* is possible in a fantastical world.

movies, sitting at a café, eating ice cream, talking on AIM, looking at pictures, and also just hanging out around the house.

Scott Reid's (2003) study on the source of gendered language forms attributes women's strategies and styles to what has been "expected and sanctioned" throughout childhood socialization (211). Echoing the strategies used to study the speech of men and women, boys and girls will be analyzed separately. Instances of gossip and aggression have been abstracted and analyzed from this corpus of social interactions. The data-collection strategy provides a more accurate assessment of what type of situations foster gossip and aggression. It also tests the preconceived notions about the topics of conversation – and whether or not girls and boys follow the same stereotypes that have been associated with women and men. Because these conclusions will not be limited to specific social interactions, they can be used for comparison with studies of adult male and female language.

All of the gathered recordings were considered for the study, but not all were transcribed. Those that were transcribed display the adolescents engaging in either gossip or verbal displays of aggression. The recordings that have been transcribed follow the following transcription conventions (adapted from Cameron 1997 and Jefferson 1984):

=	latching (contiguous utterances)
[	turn onset overlaps previous turn
[]	turn is completely contained within another speaker's turn
?	rising intonation on utterance
(1)	pause – number within parentheses indicates approximate duration of pause in seconds
italics	if speaker is quoting another speaker
YES	increased volume of utterance
ye:s	lengthening of sound preceding colon
((xx))	indecipherable speech

((cough))	items within double parentheses indicate aspects of conversation that are not easily transcribable
(yes)	words that the transcriber is unsure about

The *Results and Analysis* section considers the various "topics of talk" before discussing the genres of gossip and aggression.

RESULTS and ANALYSIS

Topics of Talk: *"Guys are more like oh my god look at her butt and girls are like wow I can't stand her"*

It is difficult to believe that girls spend their evenings discussing baseball and boys regularly chat about their personal lives. The stereotypes surrounding gendered speech patterns consistently perpetuate the belief that girls only talk about their best friends, physical appearance and relationships, while boys simply talk about sports or don't talk at all. This section shows that topics of conversation within girls' and boys' speech are not as gender-specific as they often have been presented in previous scholarship, in stereotypes and by adolescents themselves. The following excerpts demonstrate that there appears to be much more overlap between topics within adolescent conversations. The idea that boys and girls live in completely "separate" worlds implies that that their interests, activities and conversations are "separate" as well. These excerpts show some of the intersections and common ground that exist in the worlds of both genders.

As captured in the following excerpts, girls do, as the stereotype predicts, talk about their best friends, physical appearance and relationships. Excerpt 1 occurs when Kat (the oldest girl in the family) and her good friend, Liza, are on their way back from watching their school's varsity boys' soccer team compete in the district final. An upperclassman, Julia, is driving them back to their school.

Excerpt 1 *((Kat and Liza driving back to school with Julia))*
J: wait do you guys like Grace
L: Grace is one of my best friends like I've known her since second grade so like I like I love her

Previous studies suggest that the negotiation of who is friends with whom, and how good

of friends they are, is of critical importance for girls. Excerpt 1 demonstrates the importance of alliances. Even though alliances might have been established long ago (in this case, it has been eight years since the two girls were in second grade), girls often remain loyal to them over the course of time. Because Liza has a long-lasting alliance with Grace and they have known each other "since second grade," it seems logical for Liza to answer Julia's question with the response "so like I like love her."

Many of the recordings provide data proving that girls frequently talk about physical appearance. Or in adolescent words, they "always talk about who looks pretty or what people are wearing." In excerpt 2 Caitlin, one of Samantha's (known as Sam) 9th-grade friends, is spending the night at Sam's house. Kat also joins in the conversation, as all three of them are eating ice cream downstairs.

Excerpt 2 *((Sam, Kat and Caitlin downstairs eating ice cream))*
C: whoa she has big boobs
K: they all- this is Mara
C: woah
S: her boobs aren't that big she's kinda chunky now isn't she
K: mmmm
S: she gained weight I think she's bigger than she is now

In the previous and following recording, the girls are explicitly critical of their peers' physical appearance. Sam comments that Mara has "big boobs" and is "kinda chunky." Even though Caitlin is the first girl to bring up the topic of conversation, she is not the only one who has considered Mara's physical appearance. Sam shows her attention to Mara's size when observes that Mara is "bigger" and that she has "gained weight."

Excerpt 3 takes place at Mari's 12th birthday sleepover-party. Two of her friends, Emma and Gaby, are still over at Mari's house and the three girls are watching a movie in the basement.

Excerpt 3 *((Mari watching a movie with Emma and Gaby))*
E: who do you thinks the cutest guy in ((xxx))
M: Tim (1) Seth's hot
E: Seth's kinda hot if like you look past his looks and kinda at his personality
M: yeah (1) I think he's hot I mean he has acne but I mean everyone does (3)

The topic of physical appearance, and specifically, who is the "cutest guy," does not develop out of a previous discussion. Emma initiates the topic with a question. The other girls facilitate the conversation by answering who they think is the "cutest guy." Emma does not openly disagree with Mari, but she makes the clarification that "Seth's kinda hot" when "you look past his looks and kinda at his personality."[14] Mari listens and shows agreement ("yeah") in her last turn. At the end of the excerpt, both seem satisfied with their joint-conclusion about Seth.

Just like the girls, the boys analyze members of their own gender as well as of the opposing gender. Evidence from the excerpts show that both genders are more critical of their peers within their specific socialization groups, but this is not an argument that will be pursued in this study. What is of relevance is that both boys and girls, not just girls, talk about bodily appearance.

In excerpt 4, Ben and his friend, Chris (who both attended the same private school before entering the public high school together this year), are hanging out in Ben's room. In the hour-long recording from this setting, the two 9th graders play music on Ben's computer and engage in conversation.

Excerpt 4 *((Ben and Chris hanging out in Ben's room))*
C: I can't believe he's friends with Wes
B: yeah I don't like him at all
C: Wes is cool
B: I'm not hanging out with him anymore
C: then you can't hang out with Wes [or

[14] It is interesting that hotness, as demonstrated by Emma, is first measured by looks but can also be a function of personality.

B: [I'm not gonna hang out with Wes anymore
[either
C: [or you can't talk about the Wesonator
B: I don't want to hang out with Wes
C: why I thought you liked him
B: he's my friend since kindergarten [but not
C: [yeah he says your his bestest friend (2) the other way around other way around you're like his bestest friend (1) that might've been a joke though cuz I was like I don't care what you[((*xxx*))

Though the negotiation of friendships is frequently mentioned as a topic in adolescent speech, it is rarely (if ever) associated with boys. Girls' social lives are the ones that are stereotypically centered around the idea of a "best friend." Chris's comment "yeah, he says you're his bestest friend" shows not only that boys negotiate who is friends with whom but also that there is an abstract ranking process associated with how good of friends two boys might be and who gets the title of a "bestest friend." It is also clear that this topic has already been discussed within another group of boys (Chris claims that Wes made the comment in a previous conversation) and that the boys have established alliances with each other prior to the adolescent years.

Similar to excerpt 4, in which Liza remains loyal to Grace most notably because they have known each other since second grade, boys too can remain loyal to their pre-established alliances. Although Ben says he doesn't "like [Wes] at all" and he's "not gonna hang out with Wes anymore," they have been "friends since kindergarten." Chris asks Ben why he doesn't like Wes and his answer shows that their old alliance takes precedence over Ben's previously exposed feelings towards his friend. As this excerpt demonstrates, boys *do* discuss who is best friends with whom. The boys show that they not only have a sense of who is their own best friend, but they are aware of who other people's best friends are as well (or at least who other people *think* is their best friend).

Excerpt 5 also challenges the stereotype that girls are the only ones who discuss the physical appearances of their peers.

Excerpt 5 (*(Ben and Chris talking about another boy in their class, named Dan)*)
C: I hate his hair color
B: yeah I hate his [hair
C: [dude no his head his skin first of all it's like pale
B: yeah dude I hate him
C: and then like his hair is like a cartoon color
B: and [then
C: [it's like someone took a pencil and drew it
B: and it's also such an ugly haircut

In this excerpt, two boys critique different aspects of Dan's looks (those of the absent third party), as they express their opinion of him in general. Not only do they express their hate for him, but they also show that they hate his hair color, hair, skin, and hair cut. Their observations are not sweeping generalizations about general aspects of physical appearance, but very specific critical evaluations of Dan. Chris notes that his "skin…it's like pale" and that his "hair is like a cartoon color" that "someone took a pencil and drew." Ben comments on Dan's "ugly hair-cut." Though there is not a specific example of girls characterizing their peer's hair colors according to cartoon characters, data show both genders are overtly critical about physical appearance in their own ways.

In addition to critiquing the physical appearance of other boys, excerpts 6 and 7 show that boys also critique the physical appearance of girls.

Excerpt 6 (*(Continued conversation from above: Ben and Chris are now talking about a girl in their class, named Natalie)*)
C: I don't like her
B: why not
C: she's weird
B: why
C: she's ugly

Excerpt 7 ((Ben and Jake hanging out at Jake's house))
J: Christina has those days where's she's really pretty and she has those days where she's ugly
B: sometimes she's ugly ass

J: like Friday night she was hella hot (1)
B: but then the other day she was ugly (1) I was like—I was like no no

Excerpt 6 begins as Ben and Chris discuss their feelings about Natalie and later evolves into a discussion of physical appearance. Chris says that he doesn't like Natalie because "she's weird," and then he says she is weird because "she's ugly." The critiques in the conversation are not as specific as in other excerpts, though it does prove that boys not only talk about girls, but that they also talk about the physical appearance of girls. Excerpt 7 provides another example where boys discuss the looks of a girl in their class named Christina.[15] These excerpts do not seem to be out of the ordinary. They challenge the notion that boys' conversations are limited and they only talk about sports, sports and more sports – or in the words of a 13-year old girl, that "Guys are stupid, they don't really care about anything except sports."

The final stereotype almost always associated with girls is the discussion of relationships, and more specifically, the relationships between boys and girls. Girls are known to chat not just about which couples are officially together, but also which guys are interested in which girls, who would look good together, who is flirting with whom, "how far" two people have gone with each other, etc.

The girls provide plenty of instances to show that the stereotype has a basis in reality. In excerpts 8, 9 and 10, the girls engage in discussions about the relationships between other boys and girls in their shared social spheres. The first, excerpt 8, takes place in the previously described situation where Kat and her friend Liza are driving back

[15] Notice that in this excerpt, the boys never explicitly agree with each other. But their continued progression of the same topic and lack of explicit disagreement demonstrates the boys' implicit support for each other's opinions.

to school with the upperclassman, Julia, after all three went to a boys' post-season soccer game.

Excerpt 8 *((Kat, Liza and Julia driving back to school))*

J: is there anybody dating in your grade other than those two people that look alike
L: Perris and Evan
J: oh I forgot about that
L: and then [Rebecca and Frank Green
K: [Rebecca and Frank Green
J: I don't know who Frank Green is
L: he's the guy that's like
J: is he kinda fat
L: no he's really tiny and then Gerry Sanders the kid with the long hair and Henry Washington

Julia brings up the topic of dating after a brief pause in conversation. Her question is quickly answered and the discussion continues with several different boys and girls (not including the speakers themselves) in the 10th grade that are dating. Both Liza and Kat are aware of who is dating, and they inform the older girl who doesn't have the information as readily available (most likely due to the fact that she is in 12th grade).[16] Julia does not know the boy who is dating Rebecca, so she identifies who she thinks he might be by aspects of his physical appearance. It is interesting that as the conversation develops, it is not just on relationships, but also on physical appearance. As often the case with gossip, topics merge into one another.

In excerpt 9, Sam's friend Caitlin has come over to spend the night and the girls are downstairs with Kat.

Excerpt 9 *((Sam, Kat and Caitlin talking downstairs))*

S: has she had sex yet?
K: Nancy
S: yeah
K: no
S: has anyone in your grade had
K: no

[16] It is important to keep in mind the size of the girls' school (less than 500 students total). Information travels very quickly.

C: George Falson
K: how do you know
C: yeah lost it to Hannah Crosby they did it three times

This excerpt shows another subcategory that develops under the topic of relationships – that which concerns the sexual relations of other people, otherwise known as "how far" they have gone. Sam wants to know who has had sex. Kat seems doubtful that George Falson has had sex, but accepts Catilin's claim after she is able to name the girl he has supposedly had sex with (Hannah Crosby) and that they "did it three times." Because Caitlin most likely did not find out this information through an eyewitness account, George Falson and Hannah Crosby's sexual relationship must have been discussed in a previous conversation.

The first two excerpts (8 and 9) exchange information about the relationships of absent third-person parties. The last, excerpt 10, revolves around Kat's own relationship with a boy.

Excerpt 10 *((Kat and Liza talking on the phone))*
K: John asked me to hang out again
L: he did? you're hanging out now like for real Kat I don't care what you say

Liza has asked her what she is doing over the weekend and among other things, Kat mentions the possibility that she might spend time with John. As expected, girls do not just talk about the relationships of other people; they also talk about their own.

Both of the following two excerpts (11 and 12) comment on a similar observation about the boys' conversations. The excerpts take place while Ben and Chris are once again, just hanging out.

Excerpt 11 *((Ben and Chris talking about Dana's pimp))*
B: she has a pimp
C: who
B: Dana
C: she doesn't have a pimp
B: yeah

C: who
B: her boyfriend that looks like Napolean Dynamite

In excerpt 11, Ben and Chris discuss the relationship of their friend, Dana, with an unnamed boy, her "pimp" – otherwise known as her boyfriend. Like the situation with the girls in excerpt 9, Ben's claims are not immediately accepted. Ben has to give more information about Dana's "pimp." Ben uses a pop culture analogy based on appearance to further describe the unknown boy.

Males are not known to put their personal relationships out on the table for open discussion. The stereotype is that "when boys talk to other boys, they rarely discuss relationships with the opposite sex" (Goodwin 1987:228). Excerpt 12 challenges this stereotype.

Excerpt 12 ((Ben and Jake talking about Ashley, another 9th grade student at their high school))

B: dude just get over Ashley dude
J: I am getting over Ashley
B: you're like- you like get back with her and then you like break up and then you get back and then you break up=
J: =it's like on ongoing fucking cycle
B: dude she is kinda weird
J: weird she's really weird (.5) she's really pretty but really weird
B: I dunno man (.5) she's weird (2)
J: yeah well at least I will take a girlfriend not like you (1)
B: I will (.5) Emma Sparsley baby yeah:
J: you would go out with that Emma chick right?
B: yeah [are you] shitting me
J: [k good]
J: okay you ne:ed to pursue that one
B: I will oh my=
J: =you mean you are: pursuing it
B: I am: it's in the process

In this excerpt, the boys have previously been discussing various events from the previous night, which leads into Ben's critique of Jake. What is interesting is that Jake does not shift topics when Ben brings up his friend's personal life. Even more striking is that Jake agrees with Ben's observation about the cyclical nature of his relationship with

Ashley; he does not try to deny it. Later on, he does offers his own critique of Ben ("yeah, well at least I will take a girlfriend not like you"). Ben's reply and further conversation displays that he too is willing to talk about one of his personal relationships. The excerpts make it apparent that though there is a tendency for such conversations to go unnoticed (especially in previous scholarship of men's talk and in stereotypes associated with men), such discussions of personal relationships among boys *do* exist.

Stereotypes about boys' conversations tell us that boys don't talk that much and if they do, it is about sports – whether about Joe Montana, Tiger Woods or Dwayne Wade; the World Series and Detroit's sub-par performance, the World Cup and David Beckham's resignation of his captaincy or the Tour de France's competition after Lance Armstrong's departure; or Barry Bonds and substances that falsify appropriate levels of buffness, Kenny Rogers and strange hand tonalities or Zidane's less-than-graceful exit from the sport that made him a legend. It wouldn't be considered abnormal for a girl to know that Tiger Woods is a decent golfer, but if she could keep up with a conversation about Leland's decision to let a rookie pitch not just game one but then also game five – the boys might be a little surprised. And if a girl locked herself in her room after her favorite team lost a regular season game in overtime, refused to eat for the next 48 hours, and was moody for the entirety of the following week – she could very well jeopardize the possibility of ever being called a "girl" again.

Boys are *supposed* to talk about sports. Doubts fall on those who don't watch Sportscenter. Eyebrows only rise when someone doesn't know who is #1 in the BCS polls. It is considered "manly" to be upset when games don't end with favorable results. Many of these stereotypes derive from the idea that adolescent boys are seen as

developing men, and that men are known to regularly track rankings, results, schedules, players and other various news associated with the sporting world. [17]

In the following excerpt, Ben and Chris get into a discussion about Notre Dame football.

Excerpt 13: *((Ben and Chris hanging out in Ben's room))*
C: Notre Dame should've won
B: what
C: Notre Dame should've won
B: no
C: cuz Notre Dame's awesome
B: no I don't like Notre Dame
C: I love Notre Dame

In this conversation, the boys do follow cultural expectations of what a typical group of guys would be talking about, but they do not bring in enough outside knowledge of the team to discuss what actually happened in the game and why Notre Dame lost. Chris believes that "Notre Dame should've won" the football game. Yet the only reason he can provide is because "Notre Dame's awesome." Ben disagrees. Notre Dame shouldn't have won because he doesn't like Notre Dame. They end up talking about the teams in a more abstract way – with their own subjective opinions instead of logical reasoning. The boys focus on a stereotypically masculine topic but can only develop their discussion minimally.

Excerpt 14 is a conversation that happens after Kat, Liza and Julia attended the high school boys' varsity soccer match. While this conversation involves sports, it does not necessarily shatter the pre-existing stereotypes.

[17] As I was first writing this, the man in front of me at the café was a perfect example of this stereotype. When I could only think of two sports scandals to talk about and I wasn't sure what strategic choices had become a topic of concern – he was very helpful and became a great resource.

Excerpt 14 *((Kat, Liz and Julia after Frasier's soccer game))*

L: he easily could've played it's not like he was so hurt that he couldn't walk and he coulda played for five minutes and he coulda- they would have probably won but he's just a baby and probably doesn't care about Frasier's soccer that much
K: it's like sad because everybody relies on him
L: yeah

The excerpt begins when Liza starts to talk about one of the players on their school's team (James). She believes that the team "would have probably won" if James had played. She reasons that his injury couldn't have been that bad because he was able to walk, and then hypothesizes about alternative reasons why he decided not to play. This part of the conversation does start out with the topic of sports, but the girls also begin to express their own opinions of James – for example when Liza says that "he's just a baby and probably doesn't care about Frasier's soccer that much." Liza doesn't actually know this, and it could well be considered gossip. The conversation soon turns away from sports itself and develops into whether or not the girls like James.

Though the excerpts do not show the girls conversing in depth about topics that are stereotypically associated with boys, the data in this section do display obvious instances where the same topics of conversation appear in both a "girls' world" and a "boys' world." Boys and girls seem to talk about many of the same things; the distance between their respective conversations is much closer than it has appeared in previous research. Girls don't just talk about alliances and bodily appearance. Boys don't just talk about sports and (more) sports. Though the ways in which the boys and girls navigate through these topics show some differences, the topics themselves overlap.

Finding this comparability is of critical importance to the study. The fact that boys and girls do talk about a similar range of topics eliminates the possibility that the reason boys and girls display very different verbal styles is because they always talk

about very different things. To be more specific, if conversations revealed evidence that the stereotypes were true – that boys talked only about video games and sports while girls, on the other hand, talked only about alliances and bodily appearance – then it would be unreasonable to compare the resulting speech patterns to each other. However, this evidence proves that the opposite is true. Not only do the boys and girls participate in similar types of social interactions – as discussed earlier – but also, boys and girls talk about similar topics.

Now the question arises: *how* do the boys and girls talk about these topics? The next part of the study concerns the specific structures, styles and strategies that the boys and girls use in their respective conversations. As previously mentioned, these conversations are instances where the boys and girls are engaged in one of the following verbal exchanges – either gossip or verbal displays of aggression. The next two sections will also consider stereotypes, specifically the powerful stereotypes about who gossips, who shows aggression and the rules of gossip and aggression.

Defining Gossip*: "Something you talk about like behind someone's back but then you don't want them to find out you said it"*

In order to study gossip, it is necessary to create a framework by which we can evaluate what qualifies as gossip. Most generally, gossip is a term that "has been used in the literature on discourse and gender to refer to many types of backstage talk" (Guendouzi 2001:32). More specifically, gossip is usually an exchange of information between two or more people about an absent third party. This information is usually "of a confidential or personal nature" (Jaworksi and Coupland 2005:668). Though absent,

the third party involved is usually known by all participants. Often times, this third party will be described in a negative or "highly critical" way, thus creating the pejorative connotation of the term "gossip" (Jaworski and Coupland 2005:668). Cameron asserts that the way in which participants of the 'in-group' can affirm their solidarity is through gossip – by "constructing absent others as an out-group, whose behavior is minutely examined and found wanting" (1997:276).[18]

Guendouzi summarizes all of these different aspects of gossip by defining gossip as "talk about a non-present other" (1996:33). She creates a model to categorize different types of what she calls 'backstage talk' – a category of speech characterized by informal personal conversations, rather than the controlled speech of 'frontstage' performance. 'Fronstage' performance, on the other hand, has to adhere to standards of "politeness and decorum" (Coates 2000:243). Guendouzi then splits 'backstage talk' into two different genres: that of 'gossip' and 'small talk.' For the purposes of this study, however, I will be considering only the genre of gossip.

Guendouzi arranges gossip into two different sub-genres: 'peer group news-giving' and 'bitching.' One of the differences between the two is the social functions each sub-genres serves to fulfill. "Peer group news-giving" is more of a collaborative event between group members and "functions to both maintain social links and evaluate peer opinions about the life events of others" (Guendouzi 1996:34). "Bitching" involves

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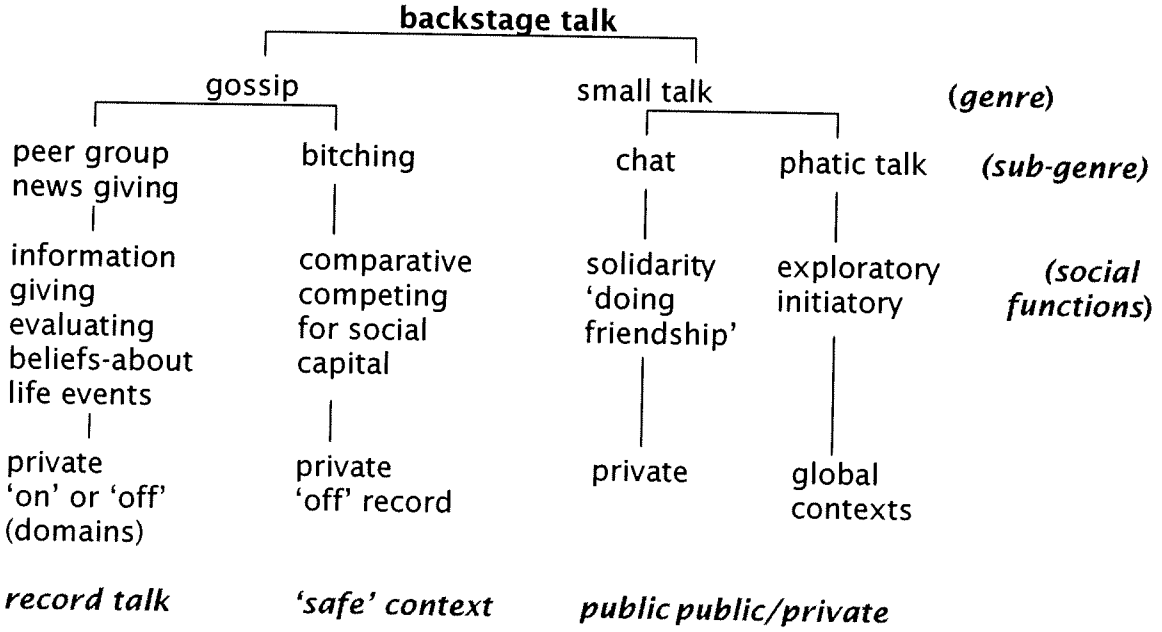
[18] Gossip is not just "entertaining and enjoyable" (Pilkington 1992:255), and it has a much more complex role in our language today than as the medium by which secrets are shared. Besides being a topic of lingustic studies, gossip has also been a topic in both anthropological and sociological studies. All fields note the social functions that are embedded at the center of gossip (Jaworski and Coupland 2005). It has been said that gossip is "at the heart of the evolution of language, a form of bonding that allows us to develop and keep in touch with our social networks" (Guendouzi 2001:33). Gossip is a way to reinforce group membership and to gain social capital. It can be a way to reflect on different aspects of the participants' personal, as well as professional, lives, or a way to share knowledge, values and history (Johnson and Finlay 1997). It most definitely is connected to solidarity.

the negotiation of social capital. Guendouzi makes the key point that there is an aspect of comparative competition involved in "bitching." However, it is important to note that this does not mean the cooperative aspect of speech is lost completely.

The two sub-genres also typically occur in different domains. 'Bitching' does not occur in a public domain, but rather in a private domain that is both 'safe' and 'off-record' – meaning that "the gossip instigator generally is not expecting the conversation to be reported back to the gossip target" (Guendouzi 1996:33). In addition to an assumed level of pre-established solidarity between 'bitchers,' there is a pre-established level of trust – trust that what is said will not be repeated out of the environment where the 'bitching' first occurred. Though Guendouzi's chart does not draw a line between 'peer ground news giving' to 'bitching,' I do not believe they are mutually exlusive categories. Conversations can quickly move between the two different sub-genres and can resemble aspects of both.



Gossip is not simply a "language of female secrets" (Jones 1980: 195). This four-word generalization perpetuates the stereotype that gossip is a form of speech spoken by women – and never by men – and limits the social implications associated with gossip. Gossip cannot be narrowed into a communication system used only by women (or "nosy bitches," "bored housewives," "groups of girly girls," or "fishwives" [Guendouzi 2001:32]), for "men too, participate in gossip" (Johnson and Finlay 1997:131). In a recent article by Jaworski and Coupland, gossip is described as an activity used by both genders in a variety of places – in "magazines, and 'reality' shows on television and in Internet chat rooms" (2005:670). Interviews with adolescents reveal that they believe *everyone* gossips – not just girls and boys but "even parents."[19] This study considers the function and structure of gossip in the conversations of both genders.

Though gossip has the power to increase or decrease solidarity among participants, gossip is not typically the initial way to establish solidarity. Because gossip occurs among "friends and intimates, not strangers" (Pilkington 1992:255), there has to be an assumed level of pre-established solidarity between participants for gossip to take place. It is difficult for gossip to occur between participants that do not share social networks and over topics that are not familiar to all. As one fourteen-year-old girl put it, "if you have something like in common with the person or you experience something or like know something's happened, then you can talk to them about [gossip]." Another one chimed in to say that "people only really gossip mostly with their like really good friends and stuff because they're like afraid that they're gonna like tell."

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[19] One girl even said "guys gossip just as much or more…like I know that for a fact." Another girl believed that gossip could be used as a form of monetary exchange. In her words, "gossip is like money – like…if I want dirt on a person then I'm gonna tell gossip to someone who they're friends with so that I can get gossip on that person."

Some of the most well-known studies that have focused on gossip have limited the social interactions from which they extract their conversations for analysis. These studies consider the language that men use while watching the television – more specifically, the language that men use while watching mainstream sports. Cameron's study was based on recordings of a group of men while watching a basketball game and Johnson and Finlay's study was based on recordings of a group of men while watching a show on football (using the European term for what is known in the United States as soccer). Not only are their conclusions based on conversations taken from in a single setting, but their recordings are of a minimal duration of time. A basketball game lasts probably around two hours and the episode of *Saint and Greavsie* was 45 minutes. Both researchers extract material and make conclusions from a very limited time and space. Coates (and her study of women's gossip) does base her conclusions on a longer duration of recordings but she overgeneralizes a group of similar-aged upperclass heterosexual British women talking with each other in the private domain of her own home as representative of all women's talk at large.

Women's gossip is stereotypically associated with 'feminine' subjects, such as clothing and bodily appearance (Cameron 1997), while men's gossip is largely centered around sports. Research links women with more personal and private topics of conversation reflecting an "inherent concern with the personal lives of individuals" (Johnson and Finlay 1997:130). Previous research on adolescent gossip has found that girls often talk about "the looks and dress of other girls" (Eder 1995:109). Men's conversations, however, do not delve so deep into the "personal psyches of the

participants" and take place without "the element of personal revelation" (Johnson and Finlay 1997:130).

The excerpts in this section all exemplify moments in conversation when either boys or girls are engaged in gossip. All excerpts fall into the genre of "gossip" in Guendouzi's model, although the sub-genres vary. Often, an excerpt will show elements of both "peer group news giving" and "bitching." Like the line between competitive and cooperative styles, the line between these two sub-genres is also thin and blurry. Rather than categorizing the excerpts according to the sub-genres, they will be grouped together under the more general genre of "gossip."

The subsequent sub-sections focus on three different discourse features: interrogatives, hedging and declaratives. The analysis compares the boys' use of these forms with the girls'. It calls upon the preconceived stereotype that pervades the field of language and gender and suggests that men and women "constitute two different cultures...in which [they] spend virtually their entire lives spatially and interactionally segregated" (Crawford 1995:88). This study shows that though *some* differences in the linguistic strategies are dependent on gender, there is no such thing as two homogenous sub-cultures; boys and girls do not live in two separate worlds.

Linguistic Strategies:

Interrogatives: *"Wait do you guys like Grace?" versus "I hate Anna"*

Interrogatives are usually found in one of two forms: as polar interrogatives (yes-no questions), or as content interrogatives (*wh-* questions).[20] As a remark or turn during speech, questions show that a participant is actively engaged in the conversation and

[20] Tag questions (a speech act that Lakoff describes as in between a polar interrogative and declarative) have been subject to particular scrutiny as one aspect of women's language (Lakoff 1975).

"willing to do further interactional work" (Fishman 1978:399). The asking of questions supports the conversation by ensuring minimal interaction and facilitating the conversation. Declaratives most often are used to make statements or assertions and do not necessarily solicit a subsequent turn from another speaker.

The use of the interrogative has often been associated with women, whereas the use of declarative has been associated with men.[21] Fishman's (1978) study entitled "Interaction: The Work Women Do" examines the linguistic strategies men and women employ in interactions in their own homes. Her data support the conclusion that the two genders use language in very different ways. Fishman comments that at times, "[she] felt that all women did was ask questions" (1978:400). She argues that questions are part of the "shitwork" that women do in order maintain and continue interactions. She finds that the men, on the other hand, "do nothing to insure their own success, or the success of the interaction" (1978:402). This was due in part to the fact that men in her study produced more than twice as many statements as women. Maltz and Borker (1980) observe the same type of behavior in their study: women ask more questions and men make more direct declarations of fact or opinion. They also note that men are more likely to interrupt, challenge others, ignore comments, and have topic control.

Interrogatives are not always interpreted as powerful language tools. In the past, research has suggested that "since women are relatively powerless members of our society, and since women use questions more than men, then questions must in some way

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[21] Robin Lakoff was one of the first linguists in the field to discuss the language of women in detail. Lakoff's (1975) book, entitled *Language and Woman's Place*, outlines ten different features of what she believed constituted "women's language." They are: 1. hedges: *sort of, kind of, I guess...* 2. (super) polite forms: *would you please, I'd really appreciate it if...* 3. tag questions: *don't you, isn't it* 4. "speaking in italics": emphatic *so* and *very*, intonational emphasis 5. "empty adjectives": *divine, charming, sweet, adorable* 6. hypercorrect grammar and pronunciation 7. lack of a sense of humor 8. direct quotations 9. special vocabulary (specialized color terms, sewing, fashion) and 10. rising intonation on declaratives.

be a powerless form" (Coates 1996:200). However, more recent studies "have suggested that questions are in fact potentially powerful linguistic forms" (Coates 1996:200). Interrogatives are an effective tool because, among other things, they prompt additional utterances, draw others into conversations, and affirm group cohesion. Lakoff asserts that "a woman has traditionally gained reassurance in this culture from presenting herself as concerned about her acceptance as well as unsure of the correctness of what she's saying" (1975:227).[22] Lakoff also believes that in this culture, women "have achieved real power while maintaining deferential behavior" (235).

Declaratives, in contrast, require little participation (if any at all) from other participants in a conversation. Most often, they are seen as assertive speech acts, speech acts that "commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition expressed" (Wilson 1988: 77). They do not request action or information, and they do not overtly encourage additional involvement on behalf of other present speakers.

This study continues to focus on the research previously associated with gendered linguistic patterns. Based upon the close analysis of questions and declaratives extracted from the adolescents' speech, both the boys and girls exemplify *some* of the gendered patterns, but not *all*. The data continue to blur the line that has often been drawn in an attempt to separate the language of males from that of females. Consider the following questions, all extracted from the girls' conversations:

Excerpt 15 - 19

(15) E: who do you think's the cutest guy in our grade?
(16) S: wait do you guys like Grace?
(17) L: is he nice?
(18) L: wouldn't you say Kat?
(19) L: would you say that Kat?

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[22] Lakoff makes sure to note that a man's projection of such qualities would be interpreted differently.

These questions are not just soliciting information. The five excerpts exemplify moments when the girls use the interrogative form to prompt another speaker for her opinion about an absent third party. Emma's question ("who do you think's the cutest guy in our grade") is not a factual question. Nor are the questions in excerpts 16 and 17. Excerpts 18 and 19 are tag questions, a much debated topic in the field. While some researchers believe that they show strength in women's speech, others believe that they display weakness. Holmes (1984) focuses on the ability for tag questions to display support for the other participants involved in a conversation and increase solidarity. She says they "encourage people to talk" and "invit(e) the addressee's participation in the discourse (1995:86). Cameron (1989) also notes this effective function of the tag, but expands the use of tags to include the modal function of the verbal strategy: tags often prompt confirmation of information. Typically, women are thought to use more tag questions than men and more specifically, tag questions of the facilitative (rather than modal) nature.

Though excerpts 15-19 demonstrate the girls' intentions to seek more than pure facts, this is not to say that the girls don't ask factual questions. Excerpts 20-24 provide specific examples.

(20) K: is there anybody dating in your grade other than those two people that look alike?
(21) K: what happened to him?
(22) K: has she had sex yet?
(23) S: Molly who?
(24) K: how do you know?

These questions are clear, straightforward direct speech acts. The girls want to know who is dating in the tenth grade, if a girl is sexually active and where gossip originated.

Though these questions can be interpreted as facilitating conversation, they do not do the same type of "shitwork" as 15-19.

Evidence from the boys' recorded conversation shows that boys do not ask questions as frequently as girls, and when they do, the interrogatives are most commonly used to solicit specific information. Consider the following questions:

Excerpts 25-29

(25) B: how do you pick up the food from Salsa's?
(26) C: is it pretty much like ordering from Frank's?
(27) C: who does Ben hang out with then?
(28) C: that's it?
(29) J: who was there?

The boys' questions seek facts. There is no corresponding data to show the boys using questions to solicit anything other than factual information. This evidence supports Maltz and Borker's suggestion about gender difference in the use of questions in adult speech patterns: "women seem to see questions as part of conversational maintenance, while men seem to view them primarily as requests for information" (1982:430). However, it is necessary to note that girls in this study don't *solely* use questions for the purpose of conversational maintenance; the girls also use questions as requests for information.

Declaratives: *"I hate Anna"*

Stereotypically, males are precise, direct and clear speakers. Unlike females, men's language is not stereotypically associated with the use of questions or hedges. Instead, the linguistic feature often cited alongside men's language is the declarative.[23] It does not invite others into the conversation or give others an opportunity to voice their

[23] Within the field of "Language and Gender," men's language tends to be the "unmarked" form. An "unmarked" term is the basic, default meaning of a word. The word "lion" is unmarked and refers to either a male or female lion; the term "lioness" is marked and refers only to a female lion. Most of the unmarked terms in English words "also convey 'male.' Being male is the unmarked case" (Tannen 1994:629). There has been far less scholarship published on men's use of the declarative (the unmarked form) than women's use of the interrogative (the marked form).

opinions in a way that interrogatives and hedges both do. Excerpt 39 demonstrates the use of the declarative and a speech style quite different from that of the girls.

Excerpt 39: ((*Ben and Chris at lunch with their friends*))
C: I hate Anna
B: no I do
C: we both hate— who doesn't hate her
B: Silvia
C: besides her
B: Lindsey
C: Lindsey doesn't like Anna
B: Lindsey's friends with Silvia
C: no she's not

Excerpt 39 consists almost entirely of declarative statements.[24] Like adult men, the boys frequently make "direct declarations of fact or opinion" (Maltz and Borker 1982:419). Strodtbeck and Mann describe these declaratives as "statements of orientation" (1956). Excerpts 40-44 demonstrate additional declarative utterances from the boys.

Excerpts 40-44
(**40**) B: don't tell her I'm saying this
(**41**) R: no that's what happens
(**42**) J: dude just get over Betsy
(**43**) B: you ne:ed to pursue that one
(**44**) C: he tries to make really lame jokes

This type of linguistic style contrasts with stereotypical "women's language" – which is usually described as lacking "authority and seriousness" or "conviction and confidence." Chris opens up the excerpt with a bald claim ("I hate Anna"). Ben responds with negation and an equally (elliptical) bald claim ("No I do). Excerpts 45-48 provide additional examples of the boys using *I-* statements.

Excerpts 45-48
(**45**) C: I hate Anna lets kill her
(**46**) C: I don't like her
(**47**) B: I dunno man she's weird
(**48**) J: I don't know what's up with her I'm really pissed (1) I hate her

[24] There is one instance in the excerpt that could be interpreted as a question ("who doesn't hate her"). However, based on the lack of rising intonation in this phrase and the increased emphasis on the word *doesn't*, Chris is most likely making a statement, not asking a question.

B: that's the way I am with Kelly I'm just like gosh I hate you

Whereas the boys use *I*-statements to tell each other their individual opinions, the girls ask questions to solicit each other's feelings.

In sum, the boys' strategy is direct; the girls' is mitigated. In their co-authored (2003) *Language and Gender*, Eckert and McConnel-Ginet discuss that:

> Women's language has been said to reflect their (our) conservatism, prestige consciousness, upward mobility, insecurity, deference, nurturance, emotional expressivity, connectedness, sensitivity to others, solidarity. And men's language is heard as evincing their toughness, lack of affect, competitiveness, independence, competence, hierarchy, control [...] (cited in Romaine 1999:155).

The adolescents appear to demonstrate similar strategies within their gender-specific language. Girls, like women, act as supportive and contributive listeners. Both employ modes of speech characterized by politeness. The fact that men have a reputation as precise, direct and clear speakers is largely due to their reported use of declaratives. Boys also demonstrate extensive use of the declarative.

The strategies that have been discussed based on the recordings in this study are not surprising. For the "interpretive model sees children's cultural knowledge as both reflecting the beliefs of the adult world and containing unique interpretations and aspects of the children's own peer culture" (Eder 1995:8).[25] What is surprising, however, is how early males and females appear to demonstrate gendered-linguistic strategies.

Hedging: *"I'm sorry if this is kinda mean"*

The following excerpt (excerpt 34) is extracted from a phone conversation between Liza and Kat. It displays more than half of the ten aspects of women's speech

[25] This is exemplified by conversational topics such as who is the "cutest guy" in the 7th grade, not just conversations about college sports.

(as outlined by Lakoff). Like the role that females have inherited as supportive and contributive listeners, the girls in this study display similar positions. As previously discussed, the girls employ modes of speech characterized by politeness and actively maintain and facilitate conversation and discussion.[26] The "articulation of strong stances or accountability for one's actions" is almost entirely absent (Goodwin 2003:241). They rarely make bold claims and declarative statements and their language is not laden with authority and confidence. This type of feminine speaking strategy is most often compared against a masculine style "which has directness and succinctness as its ideal" (Lakoff 1975:233). Embedded in this excerpt is also the extended use of the hedge.

Excerpt 34: ((*Liza talking to Kat on the phone*))

L: all of them like over the summer cuz they all used to be relatively nice like- no they all they all hung out okay I'm sorry if this is kinda mean but they all hung out with Jesse and like I don't think Jesse is mean but like some of the things he says come off really meanly and I think they all like picked up that little lovely personality trait and they're just like ass- they're just like assholes like I'm sorry and Rachel loves them she's like *oh my god the guys in our grade are so amazing* wouldn't you agree Kat?

In 1972, George Lakoff coined the term 'hedge' for a word or phrase that makes a proposition "fuzzy" or vague in some way. R. Lakoff defines a hedge as something that "conveys the sense that the speaker is uncertain about what he or she is saying, or cannot vouch for the accuracy of the statement, [...It] mitigates the possible unfriendliness or unkindness of a statement" (1975:53). Holmes describes a 'hedging' device as something that "attenuate[s] or reduce[s] the strength of the utterance (1995:74). A hedge can be used as a 'shield' or an 'approximator'. Both shields and approximators withhold full commitment to a proposition. In the previous excerpt, Liza uses the hedges *relatively,*

[26] It is interesting (and defies conventional stereotypes) that Liza uses both the super-polite form alongside the expletive. This is another example demonstrating the impossibility to make clear-cut distinctions between two aspects of speech. Just as competitive and cooperative styles overlap, super-polite and vulgar styles do as well.

kinda, and *like.* All of these words convey a lack of precision and the presence of ambiguity.[27]

Besides lengthening utterances, hedging has distinct linguistic functions. In her book entitled *Women Talk*, Coates provides an extended discussion around "Hedges and Hedging." Coates believes that hedges are very functional and constructive linguistic devices. Among other things, she mentions that hedges "are extremely useful in terms of protecting negative face: they help us to avoid imposing on people" (1996:156); they also "protect positive face, by facilitating the expression of controversial views" (157). Excerpts 35-38 provide examples of the girls utilizing hedging.

Excerpts 35-38

(35) L: I'm sorry if this is kinda mean

(36) L: he's just kinda (.5) I dunno he's a little bit stupid and I dunno

(37) S: Jack's kinda a dick too (.5) but he can be nice when he like really wants to

(38) K: like talking behind my back and stuff but (1) I think I mean I give her a little bit of credit for being like – (1) I guess the way she like did it wasn't like *she had no sign* and then like walk away but there are so: there are so: many better ways to say that to you

Hedging prevents the speaker from sounding like an expert, minimizes the distance between participants in a conversation and allows the speaker to express sensitivity to other participants in a group. In excerpt 35, when Liza says "I'm sorry if this is kinda

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[27] Besides the hedge, other aspects of women's language (as outlined by Lakoff) that are included in this excerpt are features such as speaking in italics (feature #4. ex: *so, really)* and empty adjectives (feature #5. ex: *lovely*). Liza uses the super polite form (feature #2) when explicitly apologizing to her audience in the middle of her utterance. In doing so, she exemplifies two things. One is more "defensive and ego-oriented, the other protective or alter-oriented [and] fulfilled by politeness" (House and Kasper 1981:157). Liza mitigates her statements so if she is called into question at a later point in time, she can say her claims are not definite, they are only her opinions and that she pre-warned her audience and was not trying to be offending in any type of way. Her specific language protects her from potential disagreements or feelings of anger resulting from their use (or misuse) of words. Liza also uses direct quotations (feature #8) within the utterance. She repeats Rachel's quote "oh my god the guys in our grade are so amazing." Providing Rachel's quote is advantageous for Liza because it adds to her credibility. Though it is true that Liza might be making up words that did not come out of Rachel's mouth, the usefulness of the verbal strategy remains the same. Direct quotations bolster the validity of an argument. The last aspect of women's language that is evident in Excerpt 34 is Liza's use of the use of the interrogative, and in this instance, even more specifically, the tag question (feature #3).

mean," she protects herself from sounding like a callous person, facilitating a controversial view and avoiding a clear-cut stance on the upcoming commentary. In addition to the hedges "kinda" and "a little bit," Liza also attaches "I dunno" at the end of excerpt 36. "I dunno" is not typically a phrase used to express certainty. In excerpt 37, Sam qualifies her already hedged opinion ("Jack's kinda a dick too") with the comment that he "can be nice." The meaning of her utterance is far from the unhedged utterance "Jack's a dick." Excerpt 38 (and the words "but," "I think," "I mean," "little bit," and "I guess") provides additional examples of the girls' extensive use of hedging.

Though their utterances tend to be wordier and longer, the girls demonstrate various linguistic strategies such as the interrogative and hedging that both allow and encourage joint participation of the speakers in a group. Typically, conversation is not just based on the opinion of one member but rather, everyone present. As demonstrated by Liza in excerpt 34 with the comment "wouldn't you agree Kat?" the girls have ways of inviting and allowing the opinions of group members that are both supportive and non-supportive. This linguistic behavior is not typical of both genders. While the girls send out feelers and try to get a sense of others' ideas and their potential reactions, the boys have a different theory. They are more likely to "blurt out ideas and let them fall where they may" (Tannen 1986:72). This "blurt[ing] out" of ideas will be discussed in the next section.

Collaboration versus Cooperation: *What's the difference?*

While the terms "cooperation" and "collaboration" are often used interchangeably,[28] it is useful to distinguish between the two. Dillenbourg et al's (1995) study on collaborative learning highlights that the terms "do not differ in terms of whether or not the task is distributed, but by virtue of the way in which it is divided; in cooperation the task is split (hierarchically) into independent subtasks; in collaboration cognitive processes may be (heterarchically) divided into intertwined layers" (190). The difference between the two closely corresponds with the behavior patterns of the single-gendered groups in their respective conversations. While the girls seem to move towards a conclusion collectively, the boys progress individually but in lock-step.[29]

The girls' gossiping sessions are largely based upon *collaboration*, where participants mutually engage in a coordinated effort to reach conclusions within their conversations. In such instances, authority and the acceptance of responsibility is shared amongst group members. Questions are one way to prompt collaborative moments in conversation, as the girls seek further utterances from participating group members and increase the chances of continuous transitions between speakers.[30] Declaratives, however, do not promote collaborative moments of conversation in the same type of way. As previously mentioned in the discussion of verbal dueling, often the response to a declarative is not necessarily a logical response, but a "more extravagant" use of

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[28] Even the Oxford English Dictionary barely distinguishes between these two words. The OED's first definition of *cooperation* is "The action of co-operating, *i.e.* of working together towards the same end, purpose, or effect," while *collaboration* is defined as "United labour, co-operation."

[29] Attempting to describe how the gendered groups go about the act of gossiping is almost like describing girls and boys building a castle out of blocks. Whereas the girls would collectively build various aspects of the castle together, the boys would split up the task (one might work on the bridge and moat while another focused on the structure of the castle itself).

[30] The specific types of questions (*wh-* questions versus yes/no questions) can also be a predictor for the duration of the solicited response.

language (Cameron 1997:279). There seems to be a higher correlation between declaratives and *cooperative* moments than there is between declaratives and *collaborative* moments.

The boys' conversations revolve around *cooperation*, where participants are each responsible for a portion of the "task" (in this instance, the "task" being the same as it is for the girls – gossiping about their peers). Cooperation tends to be goal-directed and content-specific.[31] It requires a different type of cohesiveness than is needed with collaboration, for the task *could* be completed in the same type of way without the presence and contributions of all group members. When something is completed through collaboration, the end product depends on the presence and contributions of the group members. In excerpts 30 through 33, the girls and boys discuss their views of fellow male peers within their single-gendered groups. The first two excerpts (30 and 31) are from the girls' conversations.

Excerpt 30: ((*Liza, Kat and Sam talking in the kitchen*))
L: is he nice?
K: yeah he's really nice
L: I mean I actually don't really like him that much
K: why?
L: he's just kinda I dunno he's a little bit stupid and I dunno
S: he's kinda like a meathead like huhuhuhuhu
K: he is- he seems like that but yet he is actually like pretty smart like as far as like school
L: I mean he doesn't get that good of grades but he's like a pretty smart person he just makes like stupid comments and is kind of a jerk to people for no reason sometimes

Excerpt 31 ((*Mari watching a movie with Emma and Gaby*))
E: who do you thinks the cutest guy in our grade?
M: Tim (1) Seth's hot
E: Seth's kinda hot it's like you look past his looks and kinda at his personality
M: yeah (1) I think he's hot I mean he has acne but I mean (.5) everyone does

[31] Theodore Panitz' (1996) article "A Definition of Collaborative vs Cooperative Learning" considers the etymology of the two words, and how *collaboration* is derived from a Latin root, stressing the process of working together, whereas *cooperation* stresses the product of such work.

The girls appear to be working together in both exceprts. The topic continues to develop throughout the excerpt. There is minimal overlapping and the turn-taking is not heavily dominated by one person.

The girls' questioning reaffirms the presence and validates the opinions of other members within the peer groups. Coates describes this type of feminine behavior as a "collabora[tion] in the production of the text: the group takes precedence over the individual" (1989:248). Collectively, the girls work together to reach some type of consensus. Or, in Pilkington's words, the girls "actively contribute to the development of their interlocuter's topic" (1998:259). In excerpt 30, Liza initiates the topic to the other two girls, Sam helps Liza answer Kat's question and Liza incorporates Kat's thoughts into the conclusion at the end of the conversation. Similar to Coates's comment about talk within women's friendships, "Everyone contributes to what is said, and who says what is not important" (Coates 1996:81). Similarly, Mari's final utterance in excerpt 31 ("yeah I think he's hot I mean he has acne but I mean everyone does") is a combination of not just her opinion of Seth, but Emma's opinion as well.

The next two (32 and 33) are extracted from a conversation between Ben and Chris. Like the previous two excerpts, the boys seem to be working together.

Excerpt 32 ((*Ben and Chris hanging out in Ben's room*))
B: I hate his head
C: I hate his hair color
B: yeah I hate his [hair
C: [dude no his head his skin first of all it's like pale
B: yeah dude I hate him
C: and then like his hair is like a cartoon color
B: and [then
C: [it's like someone took a pencil and drew it
B: and it's also such an ugly haircut
C: I can't believe he's friends with Brad
B: yeah I don't like him at all

Excerpt 33 ((*same as above*))
B: Zach Lauson is an ass
C: oh Zach Lauson
B: mmhmm he's an ass
C: he's like ohhh hi[((xxx))
B: [((xxx))
C: he tries to make really lame joke
B: and his voice is all ((*noises)*)
C: and he's always trying to make fun of his situation
B: I know

The boys' repetition of previously used words in excerpt 32 indicates their high level of attentiveness to their peers. In this way, Ben and Chris cooperate with each other to create their next insult. Chris repeats the majority of Ben's first statement ("I hate his") but replaces the direct object at the end of the sentence ("head") with another aspect of the absent boy's body ("hair color"). This could be seen as what Cameron (1997) describes as "verbal duels," where the boys work together in their degradation of an absent third party but score points against other participants by "dominating the floor and coming up with more and more extravagant put-downs" (1997:279). These "verbal duels" are more often linked to competitive behavior than cooperative behavior but show that the two styles can co-exist within the conversation. In excerpt 33, the boys engage in another verbal duel, this one based upon putting-down Zach Lauson. Ben and Chris state their own reasons as to why Zach Lauson *is* an "ass," (not why they *think* he's an ass) and show agreement not through the acknowledgement of each other's opinions but with additional examples that back up Ben's original claim.

AGGRESSION:

Defining Aggression: *"Just go up to one of [your] friends and say don't hang out with her"*

Arguing has often been viewed as a disagreement between two or more parties, as something that happens not when different people want the same thing but when there is a contest of wills.[32] Unlike gossip, which the adolescents believe to occur just as often across genders, arguing seems to be considered more gender-specific. Except for the girls who "look for drama," these adolescents concur that boys stereotypically argue much more frequently. Boys' fights are said to be more "profane," "vulgar" and "serious," but at the same time, easier to reconcile. In adolescent words, "Like when [girls] get into an argument they won't talk to each other for a week and then they'll like say one word to each other and slowly...become friends again but guys...get in a fight and the next hour they are friends again." Even though the girls might not speak to each other for an extended period of time, they seem to become actively involved in negotiation behind the scenes. Girls will "tell someone to tell someone," "try to get people on a side" or "go up to one of their friends and say *don't hang out with her.*" Boys' friendships appear more straightforward; it is surprising if they hold onto grudges or talk behind their friends' backs.

Though recent scholarship has begun to show evidence that counters these stereotypes, the majority of studies have focused on arguing as a cultural phenomenon whose structure is dependent on gender. Arguing is often defined "through a masculine lens as escalated confrontation" (Sheldon 1997:228). In the absence of such adversarial

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[32] While a large amount of research in sociolinguistics has focused on topics like politeness, little attention has been given to "how people manage opposition" (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987:200)

behavior, girls have often been labeled with some type of deficiency. Because they are portrayed as "avoiding direct competition and spending little time on "negotiational involvements," girls are seen as incapable, incompetent or ineffective in conflict management (Goodwin 1998:142). Crawford's chapter entitled "Man as Norm, Woman as Problem" describes how the assertiveness construct encodes a male norm and how the stereotypical woman is "easily influenced, submissive...lacking in self-confidence, dependent, unlikely to act as a leader, unaggressive, and uncomfortable about the possibility of behaving aggressively" (1995:61). Sheldon points out that problematic nature of these stereotypes. In her 1997 article, she comments that "if we keep these androcentric and gender polarizing lenses on, we might conclude that girls were maladaptive in a world in which conflict is all around us and is unavoidable" (228). For these reasons, other studies have chosen to look at boys' and girls' argumentative styles in a different way.

Goodwin and Goodwin's (1997) foundational article "Children's Arguing" demonstrates that oppositional interaction is "not confined to males, but is quite important for females as well" (215). Their observations of direct, unmitigated and competitive arguments amongst girls provide the basis to conclude that their argumentation practices are in no way deficient. They comment that "girls are not only just as skilled in argumentation as boys but have types of arguments that are both more extended and more complex in their participation structure than those amongst boys" (Goodwin and Goodwin 1997:200). The study shows that girls' might participate in arguments less frequently and/or in different contexts than boys, but also that the skills

are not entirely absent and girls are very capable of forming their own strategies to solve problems.

Rachel Simmons' (1992) national bestseller, *Odd Girl Out*, looks at the hidden culture of aggression in girls. Simmons acknowledges the absence of girls' use of "open conflict" techniques, like argumentation, and she explains how girls demonstrate their aggression in alternative ways, with "backbiting, exclusion, rumors, name-calling, and manipulation to inflict psychological pain on targeted victims" (1992:3). Rather than arguments marked by direct physical and verbal behavior with fists and knives, girls fight in a world where "friendship" becomes their primary weapon (3). This type of aggression, "often hidden, indirect and nonphysical," has not been a frequent topic of discussion, for it tends to slide right underneath the argumentative radar (4). As Simmons describes, this behavior isn't even called aggression, but rather, "what girls do" (1992:4).

The following definition, generated by a group of psychologists at the University of Minnesota, extends the previously considered narrow definition of aggression to include "what girls [seem to] do." They identify relational, indirect and social aggression as three subcategories of aggressive behavior among girls (Simmons 1992:21).

1. *relational aggression* includes acts that "harm others through damage (or threat of damage) to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion." In such behavior, the "perpetrator uses her relationship with the victim as a weapon." He or she might ignore someone, exclude that person or make threats.
2. *indirect aggression* takes place in the absence of confrontation. Instead, the behavior is covert; the perpetrator is not as visibly at fault. Examples of this type of aggression would be a perpetrator starting rumors about someone else or forming new alliances against another person.
3. *social aggression* is "intended to damage self-esteem or social status within a group." It does not include all examples of indirect aggression such as rumor

spreading or social exclusion. An example of an act of social aggression could be the public slandering of a victim.

I will summarize the more familiar, overt definition of aggression as the fourth subcategory, and open up the definition to the behavior of both boys and girls.

4. *Open confrontation* includes direct physical and verbal behavior. The physical presence of two or more parties (the perpetrator/s and victim/s) is crucial. For example, a fistfight, argument or dispute.

Linguistic Strategies: *"Rachel's mean and she's a brat and she's not a good person"*

Now that arguing has been established as a subcategory of aggression, the definition can be redefined as a verbal contest of wills between two or more present parties. This study will look at arguing as well as the three other subcategories of the more-general topic of aggression. Rather than just focusing on open confrontation (or the lack there of), extracted moments in the conversations of boys and girls will exemplify any of these different forms of aggressions. Like the overlap that exists across subcategories of gossip, overlap also exists across subcategories of aggression.

Though not specifically noted, the following section continues to demonstrate the girls' use of questions, the collaborative and cooperative natures of opposing peer groups, hedging, and the boys' use of declaratives. There is also a large amount of overlap that carries over from the linguistic strategies used in the gossip excerpts to the linguistic strategies used in the aggression excerpts. One of the most important conclusions in following section is that unlike the stereotype predicts, girls do, in fact, show moments of open confrontation – but not towards the same ends or with the same frequency as the boys.

Excerpt 49 has been extracted from a conversation between Kat, Sam and Caitlin. Excerpt 50 comes from a recording of a phone conversation between Kat and Liza. Both excerpts show alternative forms of aggression, rather than open confrontation.

Excerpt 49 ((*Kat, Sam and Caitlin eating ice cream in the kitchen*))
K: what happened with Stephanie?
S: nothing Kat (1)
K: just tell me
S: I'm not allowed to and neither is Caitlin
K: who am I gonna tell? I tell you stuff I'm not allowed to tell people Sam
S: I can't tell you Kat okay? if Caitlin wants to she can but I'm not going to
K: well now she's not gonna tell me
S: if she wants to she can
K: no she can't because you're gonna get mad at her
S: no I wont Kat how bout you not say what I think again
K: ((*quietly*)) okay

Excerpt 49 displays an example of *relational aggression*, where Kat does not get the information she is soliciting, and later is excluded from the conversation. Kat wants to know "what happened with Stephanie," but because of a previous conversation, Sam is "not allowed" to tell. As highlighted earlier, girls' talk often reveals the importance of girls keeping secrets, and reinforcement that the 'telling' of secrets does not go unnoticed.

The end of the excerpt shifts into open confrontation. Sam uses the declarative form "no I won't Kat" and then directly addresses Kat and suggests "how bout you not say what I think again." This last phrase is grammatically considered to be a content-interrogative form based on the initial "how bout," but Sam uses it as an imperative.[33] Linguistically speaking, it is called an *indirect speech act* – where the implied meaning of

[33] This is not the first interrogative that appears in the excerpt. The initial utterance did not end with rising intonation but was still interpreted as a question, as Sam's response ("nothing Kat") confirms. Kat also asks "who am I gonna tell?" and Sam eventually replies "I can't tell you Kat okay?"

an utterance is different from the literal meaning.[34] Kat interprets the content-interrogative as an imperative (rather than a question about whether or not she has the ability to say what Sam thinks) and quietly responds "okay." There is no further discussion about Stephanie or whatever "happened with [her]" for the entirety of the conversation. Sam's mitigated language (once again) reflects politeness strategies that have been previously discussed.

Excerpt 50 is an example of *social aggression.*

Excerpt 50 ((*Kat and Liza talking on the phone*))

K: did you see like— did you see how she went back and she like and then she just I looked at she looked at Melissa and she like shook her head (5.) like you know like not (1) you know what I mean=
L: =mmhmm
K: I was like do you think I'm dumb like do you *think* I'm dumb
L: that's so annoying just say it aloud
K: I know Melanie (.5) Melanie this is— this is what I hate (1) I do give her credit just for coming out and telling me like everything you know?
L: but she didn't say it in like a good way though
K: yeah well [I mean
L: [like she like she didn't like she didn't like confront you with like issues she just kinda (.5) just like shouted them at you
K: I mean I— I agree with you on that but it's (.5) it's better than her going behind my back and saying it which I'm sure I am *sure* she's doing now
L: what?
K: like talking behind my back and stuff but I think (.5) I mean I give her a little bit of credit for=
L: =I mean like I guess the way she like didn't (.5) wasn't (.5) like walk away but there are s— there are *so* many better ways to say that to you
K: mmhmm
L: yeah

Kat and Liza are not exactly placing the victim (Melanie) up for "public slander,"[35] but together, the girls discuss their anger towards Melanie and Melanie's actions. Embedded in the excerpt is another possibility for future social aggression, demonstrated when Kat

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[34] Asher and Lascarides (2006) article on *Indirect Speech Acts* defines an indirect speech act to be "an utterance in which one speech act is performed indirectly by performing another" (1). The question "Can you pass the salt" literally asks whether or not the listener is capable of passing salt; but the speaker is using the question to request the listener to pass the salt.

[35] Public slandering was used as an example in the original description of "social aggression."

says "it's better than her going behind my back and saying it which I'm sure I am *sure* she's doing now." If Melanie were, in fact, talking about Kat behind her back, this would be another example of social aggression. If she were spreading rumors about Kat, it would be an example of *indirect aggression.* [36]

The girls' linguistic strategies within this excerpt correlate with those of the girls in Goodwin's (1987) study. Goodwin notes that the girls' language in her study "differ[s] from baldly stated accusations both in terms of their syntactic structure and with regard to the participation framework they make available for those present" (Goodwin 1987:231). The strategies do not echo those of verbal dueling of boys. The girls openly discuss what has happened with Melanie and their feelings about the situation. It is interesting that Kat makes the comment "I do give her credit just for coming out and telling me like everything you know?" Kat is aware of the gossiping that takes place. She does, however, continue to talk with Liza about Melanie, and does so in a collaborative way. But the difference between the two is that while Liza only demonizes Melanie and her actions, Kat gives her "credit" for the way she approached the issue.

At the end of the excerpt, Kat says "mmhmm." This is not surprising, for, as other scholars have noted, when "disagreements occur in girls' groups, speakers tend to express the disagreements indirectly by using fewer direct imperatives and more phrases that solicit engagement and promote a sense of groupness" (Corson 1997:151). By using "mmhmm," a minimal response, she shows that she is listening. She does not agree or disagree with what Liza is saying based upon the meaning of the word "mmhmm," but

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[36] Defined previously as aggression that takes place in the absence of confrontation...the behavior is covert; the perpetrator is not as visibly at fault. For example: starting a rumor or forming new alliances against someone else (Simmons 1992).

her lack of agreement might say even more than the word itself. Yet in the girls' conversation, "mmhmm" ends up serving a similar type of purpose as when the boys' use "no." Because Liza is not prompted with anything new to talk about (either a question to answer or more information to discuss), she allows Kat to drop the topic and the girls move onto something else. Liza does not pursue a disagreement.

Though the original definition created by the group of psychologists at the University of Minnesota was supposed to describe the behavior of girls in the absence of *open confrontation*, excerpts in this study (like 49 and 50) and the following excerpt (51) show there are moments of conversation where the girls do, in fact, display aggression in an overt way.

Excerpt 51 ((*Kat, Sam and Caitlin eating ice cream in the kitchen*))
K: Rachel and Henry are like (.5) ((*whispering*)) the tightest couple
K: do you think ((*xxxx*))?
S: ((*xxx*)) (4)
K: you [think? You don't?
S: [not at all (2)
K: you think him and I? are better than him and Rachel?
S: mmhmm
K: you do?
S: Rachel's mean (.5) and she's a brat (1) and she's not a good person (1)
K: I think she means well
S: I don't
K: I just think she has a really rough at-home life (1) when she was growing up (1)
S: oh (1) but I also think she thinks she has to be the center of attention all the time (5)
K: ((*under her breath*)) I don't know about that but ((*trails off*))

Excerpt 51 captures another example of collaboration, where the girls engage in a coordinated effort as they come to a conclusion in their discussion. It also illustrates a moment of overt aggression and collaboration taking place simultaneously.[37] Once again, these data emphasize the difficulty of applying distinct categories to account for

[37] It is also important to note the girls' use of interrogatives and its facilitation of the first half of the excerpt.

the differences in the language patterns boys and girls. It also questions the pre-existing stereotype that girls do not display overt aggression.

Halfway through this excerpt Sam says "Rachel's mean and she's a brat and she's not a good person." Sam uses the declarative form to make three statements of orientation. They are not mitigated in any way. Her language does not invite the other girls into the conversation or prompt them to voice their opinions. Kat's response does not follow the same suit. Her response is *not* equivalent in its baldness – instead, she uses an *I*-statement, which emphasizes that what she is saying is an opinion, not a fact. In Kat's next turn, she continues to explain the reasoning that has led to her opinion of Rachel.

At the end of this passage, Sam's style shifts – she ends up mitigating her final response. After acknowledging Kat's point (with "oh," "but," and "also"), she expresses herself with an *I*-statement. 'I-me' sentence structure and 'feeling verbs' help to construct a sentence in which "the speaker is the subject and the topic is the speaker's feelings" (Crawford 1995:54). Sam's words enable her to avoid open confrontation but still express her disagreement.

Like Sam, Kat also avoids confrontation. At the end of the passage, she provides an example for what Holmes describes in her observations about girls' "disagreeable responses" (1995:62): the tendency for girls to "modify or qualify their disagreeing responses, so that they [are] not so confrontational" (62). Kat does not agree with Sam's last statement of the excerpt, but she chooses not to pursue an argument. Instead, she demonstrates politeness and settles with an unresolved disagreement. This type of behavior is *not* replicated throughout the boys' conversations.

Excerpts from the boys' conversations show that they often use arguing or open confrontation as a technique to display their aggression. As Pilkington describes in her own study of boys, they "disagree very directly and bluntly with others' statements" and "abuse each other and criticize each other very directly" (Pilkington 1998:266). And similar to Pilkington's findings, the boys do not duel throughout every turn of the conversation. But even during the moments when they aren't dueling, they do not collaborate in the same way as girls. Consider excerpt 52, extracted when Adam, Ben and Chris are playing Game Cube and excerpt 53, extracted when Ben and Jake are hanging out at Jake's house.

Excerpt 52 (*(Adam, Ben and Chris have just put in a different Game Cube game and are in the process of picking what teams)*)

B: hey can I have the –
A: no Eagles
C: stop it [you can't (xxx)
A: [Eagles
C: Adam stop it (3)
A: fine (1) then you pick your team I pick my team
B: I'm picking
D: he[y
A [no
C: *((picking))*
A: what? we weren't done
C: yes we are
B: [no we aren't
A: [no we're not
C: yes we are (1) [you guys are the Steelers
B: [go back go back no we are not
C: no (1) [no (1) no
A: [no we are not
C: no (1) Adam=
B: =yes

Excerpt 53 (*(Ben and Jake during a discussion about the Ben's Winter Formal)*)

B: oh my god the Laura chick is attached to me again
J: oh: not this story (.5) she hates you now get over it=
B: =no she loves me now
J: no she hates you
B: no (.5) honestly

Excerpt 52 begins as the boys make declarations of what team they want to represent in the videogame. This display of arguing is similar to that in Pilkington's study, who also notes that one feature found in the male data and not in the female data was the "occurrence of frequent, direct, and repeated expression of disagreement or hostility" (1998: 263). Ben attempts to ask for the team he wants ("hey can I have the –"), but he is cut off before he can even finish. The rest of his utterances throughout the excerpt are declaratives, as are the majority of the utterances from the other boys.[38] Their turns in the conversation shift quickly. Each utterance is relatively short – in this excerpt, the average utterance-length is less than four words (the average utterance-length in the previous two girls' excerpts (50 and 51) was more than seven).

Also like the males in Pilkington's study, the boys in this study "often openly disagreed with one another" (1998:263). The word "no" is used far more than any other word in the passage, appearing ten times and in eight different utterances. The frequency of the word is also fairly high in excerpt 41, appearing three times within five utterances.[39] Similar to Goodwin's observations of her own data, when the boys do not agree with each other, their utterances are organized in a way that "highlight[s] that opposition" (1987:206). The placement of "no" at the beginning of the turn immediately announces and emphasizes their opposition.[40] As demonstrated in excerpt 53, boys have the tendency to use some of the same strategies discussed in the gossip section. For example, they "recycle" some of the words of other speakers, but not all; they replace or

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[38] The exception to this is Adam's short "what?" which turns out to be an an expression of disbelief. Goodwin also describes this strategy as a way to "call into question the competence" of another speaker (1987:208). Rather than "simply disagreeing with someone…the aggravated character of the intonation used in opposition prefaces actively challenges what has just been said" (209).

[39] Other studies have made similar conclusions from their data. A study by Brown and Levinson (1987) found that boys were six times more likely than the girls to respond with a bald disagreement.

[40] The baldness of the word "no" is even more evident when contrasted with words like "mmhmm."

insert their own words into a previously-used utterance. This repetition "frames the item being corrected and helps to emphasize that what is being done is a correction of something he or she said" (211). The term that has been replaced "is typically spoken with heightened emphasis, giving it "contrastive stress" (78). This is the same strategy that the boys utilize throughout their verbal duels.[41]

The excerpts from both the gossip and aggression sections demonstrate various linguistic strategies of adolescents. Some of these strategies are shared by both genders and some are not, but it isn't as if girls only ask questions during gossip, or that boys just use declaratives during verbal duels. The gendered verbal strategies cannot be split into such a simple binary.

[41] This strategy was not evident in the girls' recordings. This is not surprising, however, for interrogatives have been shown to be an essential part of the girls' conversations. Interrogatives are most frequently responded to with responses, rather than similar interrogatives phrased slightly differently.

CONCLUSION:

The Solar System Suffers Another Blow

Shortly after scientists declared that Pluto is no longer a planet, we have come to similar conclusion that two other "planets" – the two on which men and women have been rumored to live – ohave also been demoted from their previous position. However, these two planets have not suffered the same type of death as Pluto.[42] Instead, it has been confirmed that these two planets never existed in the first place. Similar to the conclusion that Cameron made in her (1997) article, men and women are not from separate planets.[43] There is no such thing as a planet of men and a planet of women, and there is no such thing as two "separate" worlds; boys and girls live together in the same world and have access to the same linguistic vault. Had John Gray known this when he was writing his bestselling (1992) novel *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, he might have titled it differently.

This study complicates the pre-existing stereotypes revolving around the field of language and gender. Based on a corpus of conversations amongst single-gendered socialization groups of adolescents between the ages of 11 and 15, this study suggests that the line separating the linguistic behavior of boys from that of girls is far more difficult to draw than previously thought. Not only do both genders gossip and "argue," but they also gossip and argue about similar topics. What the two genders do not consistently do is utilize gossip and aggression strategies towards the same ends.

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[42] In an article posted on MSNBC.com called "Scientists decide Pluto's no longer a planet," Mike Brown, a planetary scientist at the California Institute of Technology, is reported to have made the comment that "Pluto is dead." The decision was made after astronomers voted that Pluto is a "dwarf planet" by definition, not a planet – for it has not cleared the neighborhood around its orbit and it is not a satellite.

[43] Or, in Cameron's words, "Men and women do not live on different planets" (as cited by Jones 1999:151).

Data demonstrate that though there are conversational approaches that differ depending on the gender of the speaker, there are also tactics that are strikingly similar. Both boys and girls talk about their best friends, physical appearance, and relationships. And within these topics of conversation, both genders make use of the interrogative and the declarative, and display moments of open confrontation. But more frequently than not, girls use questions for the purpose of conversational maintenance, while boys use questions in order to request specific information. And though there are utterances where the girls display their aggression through arguing, these are only momentary. The boys regularly take part in open confrontation and verbal duels.

It does appear as though boys in this study, like Cameron's (1992) study, are "more competitive in talk" while the girls "are more cooperative" (16). This study, like Cameron's, also shows that competitive and cooperative styles co-exist, that boys and girls employ both styles, and that a subtle but extremely important distinction lies in the difference between cooperative and collaborative styles. In the center of the boys' cooperative efforts is the widespread use of the declarative form, especially during instances of verbal dueling. At the heart of girls' collaborative efforts is the extensive use of mitigation techniques such as the interrogative form and hedging. This study will not, however, go so far as to suggest that the socialization groups of children are the source of miscommunication between males and females. The limitations of the population used in the data-collecting process must be taken into account.

Before concluding, one more stereotype – that which surrounds utterance length – will be called into question. Is it true that girls supposedly "talk a lot," "talk more than

boys," or "talk too much"? Or, is this notion a myth, just like the myth that girls do not argue or the myth that boys do not talk about their personal relationships?

Based on mathematical calculations from the excerpts appearing in this study (1-41), the average length of a girl's utterance is 9.31 words. The average length of a boy's utterance is 4.97 words.[44] These numbers provide support in favor of the stereotype – the utterances of girls are nearly two times as long (1.87 times to be exact) as those of boys. But these numbers are not entirely conclusive.[45]

Other researchers have used mathematical calculations to support their findings. In her debut book, *The Female Brain*, neuropsychiatrist LouAnn Brizendine brings up a striking statistic – that women use about 20,000 words per day, while men only use about 7,000.[46] While the exact numbers are debatable, Brizendine continues to argue that women speak more than men. The book goes on to discuss *oxytocin*, which she calls the "hormone of intimacy" (Solomon 2006: 22). Brizendine asserts that women get a "rush" of oxytocin when they talk to each other, and that "teen girls especially, when they're talking about who's hooking up with whom, who's not talking to whom, who you like – that's the bedrock, that excites the girl's brain" (22). She believes that her research

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[44] These results were calculated by summing the total number of words used in each utterance and dividing that number by the total number of utterances. The girls used 875 words in 94 utterances, while the boys used 582 words in 117 utterances. There was one excerpt (34) that is included in the study but not in the calculations, as it is a strong outlier (114 words) and more than two times the length of any other utterance.

[45] These calculations show the amount of words that is estimated to be in an individual utterance. They do not show the amount of utterances that a boy or girl speaks on average. For example: consider a two-minute conversation between two girls, where each participant speaks ten different times. Every utterance averages 9.3 words. This means that both girls average 93 words in their conversation. Next consider a different two-minute conversation, where two boys speak 20 different times each. Their utterances are 4.9 words on average. Both boys will have spoken 98 words at the end of their conversation, five *more* words than each of the girls.

[46] Mark Liberman from *The Boston Globe* followed up on this statistic. He reports that "A bit of Googling easily turns up at least nine different versions of this claim, ranging from 50,000 vs. 25,000 down to 5,000 vs. 2,500. But a bit of deeper research reveals that none of the authors of these claims actually seems to have counted, and none cites anyone who seems to have counted either."

suggests there is a biological basis behind the stereotype. This study suggests otherwise.[47]

The recorded conversations show that there is a parallel between the linguistic variation in homogenous peer-groups of adolescents and those corresponding groups of men and women. One of the most striking findings from the study is just how early linguistic strategies are codified into gender-specific patterns. This gives evidence that the socialization process of children is a crucial factor in determining the linguistic styles of men and women. Like Cameron (1997) suggests, males and females "not only learn, and then mechanically reproduce, ways of speaking 'appropriate' to their own sex; they learn a much broader set of gendered meanings that attach in rather complex ways to different ways of speaking, and they produce their own behavior in the light of those meanings" (280). If there be any planet at all, it would have to be called "Planet Peer Group."[48]

Though sociolinguistic research in the past tends to conclude otherwise, a postmodernist approach suggests that language is one of the ways that people define who they are.[49] The shift changes the focus to look at masculinity and femininity as a social construction, for "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman [or man]" (de Beauvoir 1953:267). This approach allows for the flexibility to accommodate those whose identities are not yet fixed – those who are still in the process of defining (or redefining) who they are. And because adolescents are "undergoing rapid social change, with

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[47] This study also provides evidence that girls and boys talk about a similar range of topics, including gossip about the sexual relations of other people. Such evidence questions whether or not Brizendine's claims are resting on stereotypes.

[48] This term was originally used in one of Cameron's articles (1995:193).

[49] More traditional sociolinguistic studies would argue that "people talk the way they do because of who they (already) are" (Cameron 1997:272).

changing alliances, and ever-emerging new forms of identity" (Eckert 2003:391), it is only appropriate to characterize the source of their linguistic behavior with a theory that accommodates such flux.

This study provides data that gendered linguistic styles are socially constructed.[50] But this implications of this study push even further than this. Evidence from the recorded conversations suggests that the evaluation of these two groups should be made according to different standards than we have seen in the past; it would be more useful to analyze gendered data within gender-specific categories, rather than attempting to compare males versus females, men versus women or boys versus girls.

Pursuing a similar study in a non-Western country would be of critical importance to reach additional conclusions regarding the relationship between language and gender and culture. Unlike Brizendine, the implications of this study suggest that linguistic strategies are dependent upon the socialization groups of children. A future cross-cultural study comparing the language of adolescents to the language of adults would be crucial for the further discussion of gendered-behavior as a socially-constructed phenomenon versus gendered-behavior as a biologically-constructed phenomenon.

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[50] In her research on gendered politeness strategies, Louise Mullany asserts that "Boys and girls do not only learn the gendered meanings associated with their own sex during the socialization process. Rather, they learn a much broader set of gendered meanings that are complexly attached to different ways of speaking. The speech they produce is dependent upon these gendered meanings. Both male and female participants are capable of using discourse strategies associated with traits of either masculinity or femininity" (1999:139).

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