# GENDER AND POLITENESS

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Gender and Politeness

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ways politeness is socially constructed from childhood to adulthood. Integrating gender and politeness theory, this study shows that gender roles differ in certain contexts. It discusses ways gender corresponds with social expectations of behavior and permeates rules in the work force. In addition, gender stereotyping is discussed as a contributor to linguistic barriers. Transcripts from *CNN's Crossfire* represent a specific example of aggressive speech between males during a debate. Literature on teaching pragmatic politeness is also outlined to show how people acquire socially constructed rules of speech. Many foundational linguistic strategies are presented as part of pragmatic competence within conversation.

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## 1. Introduction

Linguistic politeness plays a vital role within language use and interaction. However, since the notion of polite speech is not universal among all cultures or within all contexts, there is an issue of social environment and surrounding factors when people interact with each other. At the same time, the contrast between politeness and impoliteness, as well as the fact that one is not necessarily the opposite of the other, simply is not unproblematic. Moreover, politeness theory has aroused a bit of controversy because of the ways it can be examined, especially when looked at in terms of gender, which I will discuss further in chapter 3.1.

What is politeness? Many people might say that, generally, politeness is the act of being thoughtful, nice, or considerate toward others. In addition, people are sometimes socially expected to exhibit good manners. If, for example, a person talks loudly on his or her cellular phone in an elevator full of strangers, the other passengers might consider the behavior impolite. However, the rules of politeness for a group of friends riding in a car might be less stringent, and people would not be offended if somebody spoke on the phone. Thus, the familiarity of the people within interaction is also important.

Many times, when people are not in close relationships, expectations for linguistic politeness are determined by social roles of the participants. When a student speaks to a professor, it is usually understood that the doctor will be addressed as "Dr. *last name*" or "Professor *last name*," and not by his or her first name, unless they have already established otherwise. Friends and peers typically refer to each other by *first name*. Whether or not people decide to use *title last name* or *first name* is often determined by which effect the speech is supposed to have— a showing of respect or an indication of solidarity (Brown and Attardo 2000:77-79). When speaking to a superior, a person will most likely commit to formal politeness forms in order to show respect. Social expectations and traditions often determine people's linguistic choices, and people must be aware of the hierarchy of social roles.

Linguistically, speakers tend to adjust their messages according to a particular situation, within which people might become more protective of a certain self-image during conversation, and this will be discussed in the next chapter as part of Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework of *face* as a direct link to a person's self-image. Janet Holmes also discusses how people approach politeness, stating, "Everybody has *face needs* or basic wants, and people generally cooperate in maintaining each other's face, and partially satisfying each other's face needs" (1995: 5). During harmonious, non-contentious interaction, people will pay more attention to the way they express themselves, avoiding conflict and subsequently accommodating the hearer's face needs. This is the basis of my study.

In chapter 2, I present the most influential politeness theories that are used in the bulk of current research. The chapters that follow will show how politeness is a part of our everyday language practices, right down to the modals verbs (i.e. can, could, may, might, would, shall, should, etc.) we choose to form polite requests or comments. The semantic values of words are vitally important to how our utterances come across to others. The notion of *presentation of self to others* (see Goffman 1959 and 1967) is what determines how (and why) we use certain types of speech. Chapter 3 will outline gender differences in language, presenting the notion that social expectations create barriers for speakers within conversation. The discussion of gender surfaces in the critical works of linguists such as Sara Mills (2003) and Janet Holmes (1995). In chapter 4, I will present an examination of the CNN debate program, *Crossfire,* where three men, Jon Stewart, Paul Begala, and Tucker Carlson, represent more aggressive (and inherently more impolite) male speech. Chapter 5 concerns the way politeness is taught during childhood. This topic is included because of its importance to linguistic politeness theory and language acquisition theory. As I will mention later, not all people interpret polite language in the same manner. Because of factors including social context, rules learned during childhood, and personal ethics and values, people's linguistic choices are often based upon pre-existing ideas regarding language and meaning.

The issue of gender and politeness is still an ongoing topic within society as well as among linguistic researchers. After many years of struggle, the two genders are still divided according to societal rules. I will discuss why this continues to be an important linguistic issue today.

**2. Politeness Theory**

Paul Grice's Cooperation Principle (CP) and Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Principles (PP) are two of the major precedents in politeness theory. Importantly, Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) includes the maxims of *quantity*, *quality*, *relation*, and *manner*. The CP maxims include the following guidelines:

> *Quantity*
>
> 1) Make your contributions as informative as required.
> 2) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
>
> *Quality*
>
> 1) Do not say what you believe to be false.
> 2) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
>
> *Relation*
>
> 1) Be relevant.
>
> *Manner*
>
> 1) Avoid obscurity of expression.
> 2) Avoid ambiguity.
> 3) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
> 4) Be orderly.

(Grice 1975: 167-168)

Grice's maxims are connected to his CP, which he defines as the following:

> ...Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. One might label this the *Cooperative Priniciple.*

(Grice 1975: 167)

Grice calls the CP a "quasi-contract" for communication. According to his work, there are features of communication that exist when people cooperate, and he says they include the following:

> 1) The participants have some common immediate aim [...]
>
> 2) The contributions of the participants should be dovetailed, mutually dependent.
>
> 3) There is some sort of understanding (which may be explicit but which is often tacit) that, other things being equal, the transaction should continue in appropriate style unless both parties are agreeable that it should terminate. You do not just shove off or start doing something else. (1975: 169)

When people utilize the CP, they should experience more ease of communication; but Grice says there are times when people will not follow the maxims, and telling lies or simply not giving enough information could be examples of this (1975: 170). With morality aside, language use revolves around decisions made by a speaker—who creates his or her own messages and can "opt out of the CP" (1983: 9). When a speaker does this, however, it is not that they choose to misuse the English language; it is that they make their own choices regarding how to utilize it. In addition, Grice admits that the acts of quarreling and letter writing, where there might be "too many types of exchange," do not fit the CP well (1975: 169).

Leech modifies the CP to include more sociolinguistic explanations, without relying solely on "statistical" explanations as he says other researchers have done (1983: 80). His theory also includes a Politeness Principle (PP) (and his aforementioned maxims), a concept that is intertwined with a CP because of its connection to social harmony. Pragmatically, Leech explains that Grice's CP involves the interaction within the language being spoken. He says, "Part of the essence of Grice's CP, for example, is its extralinguistic motivation in terms of social goals" (1983:27). Essentially, the PP functions as a pragmatic mechanism and allows a speaker to implement polite forms, phrases, or sentences of a language. Leech says that speakers use "pragmatically specialized" grammar in order to overlap grammar and pragmatics within speech (1983: 28). He looks at linguistic choices and how they are perceived by both the speaker and the hearer. He ultimately says that there is a cost-benefit scale, where the cost for the hearer that occurs results in more impoliteness. His six maxims demonstrate this idea.

Leech's six politeness maxims are: 1) The Tact Maxim; 2) The Generosity Maxim; 3) The Approbation Maxim; 4) The Modesty Maxim; 5) The Agreement Maxim; and 6) The Sympathy Maxim (Leech 1983: 132). As mentioned previously, these maxims present a scale between the costs and benefits for the speaker and the hearer. This is how the maxims are classified:

1) Tact Maxim: Minimizes the cost to other.
2) Generosity Maxim: Minimizes benefit to self.
3) Approbation Maxim: Minimize dispraise of other; maximize praise of other.
4) Modesty Maxim: Minimize praise of self; maximize dispraise of self.
5) Agreement Maxim: Used to minimize disagreement.
6) Sympathy Maxim: Used to express sympathy for misfortune or to express congratulations .

(Leech 1983: 131-137)

Leech's maxims allow speakers to create their messages carefully, with the hearer's perspective in mind. If people want to maximize their abilities to interact with others without disagreements, arguments, or insult, they might want to consider following these maxims so as to improve their interpersonal skills. These also seem like they might be useful in small group communication as well. This might take the context of business meetings, gatherings with friends, or classroom discussions. They not only help people become more aware of what behaviors are considered more polite but also inform people of their potentially face-threatening acts. This concept relates to Brown and Levinson's model of face.

Pragmatically, there are specific types of politeness to consider when interpreting speech or behaviors. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) foundational work, politeness is classified in three ways: 1) positive politeness; 2) negative politeness; and 3) off-record politeness. They define the first form *(positive politeness),* as "the expression of solidarity," the second *(negative politeness)* as "the expression of restraint," and the third *(off-record politeness)* as "the avoidance of unequivocal impositions" (Brown and Levinson 1987). In addition, this concept parallels the act of protecting face within interaction, where a person's face, or public persona, could be threatened by another person's verbal expressions. Brown and Levinson's model says that positive politeness "is oriented toward the positive face of H, the positive self-image that he claims for himself" (1987: 70). Negative politeness is said to be "oriented mainly toward partially satisfying (redressing) H's negative face, his basic want to maintain claims of territory and self-determination" (1987: 70). So, if a hearer feels that a speaker has asked for too much or baldly inconveniences the hearer, then negative face has been threatened. Also, if a person feels insulted by a speaker's utterance, and his or her self-image is subsequently threatened, then positive face has been compromised. Thus, face is presented as two specific types:

> a) *negative face:* the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others
>
> b) *positive face:* the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others
>
> (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61-62)

These two concepts are important to politeness theory because there are different ways to assess whether language is either polite or impolite.

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that people use politeness (and also impoliteness) as a deviation within conversation, thus creating speech with intentionally constructed polite (or impolite) messages. The hearer can then interpret the speech conveyed, but interpretation is often dependent upon context and particulars of the situation. In other words, there is a level of neutrality in language, where any deviations from neutrality can occur, and this is where politeness or impoliteness is recognized by a hearer (see Brown and Levinson 1987: 4). Obviously, this prompts a reaction from the hearer, depending on his or her interpretation of the message(s). So, if the message is very polite, the hearer's positive face would be reinforced. However, if the speaker's tone is confrontational in nature, the hearer's negative face might be violated.

Brown and Levinson (1987) begin their discussion of the politeness framework using Gricean theories and Leech's PP maxims. Their criticism presents Leech's use of maxims, which they say could actually represent an infinite number of maxims when applied to "regularities" of language use (1987: 4). Furthermore, they say:

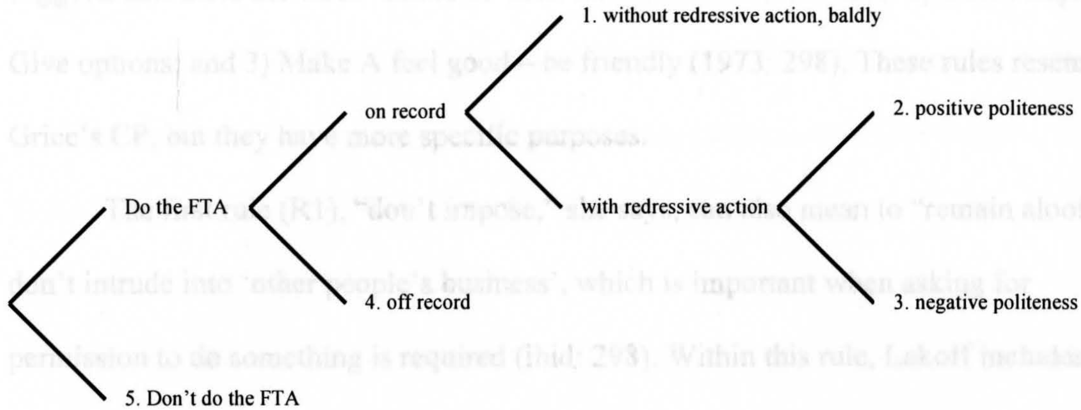
> Now if politeness principles had maxim-like status, we would expect the same robustness: it should, as a matter of fact, be hard to be impolite. Instead, when one said 'Shut your mouth' or the like, we would expect an attempt to construct an inference of the sort: 'The speaker has broken the maxim of Tact (or some such principle); however, given the Politeness Principle, we must assume that the speaker is in fact following the PP; the only way to preserve this assumption is to assume that he is not in a position to observe the maxim of Tact, say, because he is in a hurry; it is clear that we can work this out; therefore he P-implicates that he is in a hurry.' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 5)

Here, Brown and Levinson argue that people's utterances would be more difficult to define as impolite, if PP maxims are assumed by the hearer. So, if somebody were to use hasty language, they might have a reason to deviate from the PP by default, which in the example above the reason is being in a hurry. But what happens to the hearer's face? Face is certainly an important aspect of interaction, and the addressee's perception of the speaker's language should be taken into account.

When face needs are violated during interaction, face-threatening acts (FTAs) are the result. FTAs are avoided when a speaker uses FTA-minimizing strategies. In Brown and Levinson's work, FTAs are committed when a person ignores the need for FTA-minimizing strategies (Brown and Levinson 1987). According to Brown and Levinson's model, there is a choice for a speaker either to use or not use an FTA-minimizing strategy; moreover, "face loss" is more likely to occur when no strategy is used at all (1987: 60). If the strategy/strategies is/are used, however, there are different ways that face loss can occur but on different levels. A speaker can implement "on record FTAs" or "off record FTAs," depending on the situation and the hearer's possible reaction (Brown and Levinson 1987: 68-71). If a speaker is not afraid of the hearer's possible reaction, then he or she will more often use off record FTAs. Hence the following example given by Brown and Levinson:

> ...if I say 'Damn, I'm out of cash, I forgot to go to the bank today', I may be intending to get you to lend me some cash, but I cannot be held to have committed myself to that intent (as you would discover were you to challenge me with 'This is the seventeenth time you've asked me to lend you money').
>
> Linguistic realizations of off-record strategies include metaphor and irony, rhetorical questions, understatement, tautologies, all kinds of hints as to what a speaker wants or means to communicate, without doing so directly, so that the meaning is to some degree negotiable. (1987: 69)

The above example is a speaker's "off record" attempt to hint at asking for money (Brown and Levinson 1987: 69). However, the "negotiation" of the intended message goes bad because the speaker habitually borrows money from the hearer (Brown and Levinson 1987: 69). If the speaker had no reservations about asking for money directly (i.e."Lend me some money."), the request would then be done "baldly, without redress" (Brown and Levinson 1987:69). In the case of somebody who doesn't habitually borrow money without repayment, and who directly asks to borrow money, the danger of damaging the hearer's face is probably not as great. Thus, the hearer would not be as likely to react negatively after receiving the request because it does not require an extenuating "sacrifice" (see Brown and Levinson 1987: 69; Eelen 2001: 4). The following figure represents the possible linguistic choices which occur when a possible FTA is at hand:




(Figure 1. Brown and Levinson 1987: 5)

The figure above indicates that when a person wants to avoid threatening the hearer's face (or in some cases, the speaker's), he or she will try to utilize a politeness strategy so to minimize the possibility of conflict or rejection. Brown and Levinson say that "a face-bearing rational agent will tend to utilize the FTA-minimizing strategies according to a rational assessment of the face-risk to participants" (1987: 91).

Next, Robin Lakoff's (1973) approach, which also plays an integral role in historical politeness theory, involves semantics, or the meaning of language, and pragmatics, the way language is used in context. Her research emphasizes a need for "Rules of Pragmatic Competence" (1973: 296). Using Grice's CP as her model, Lakoff combines the CP maxims into her first overview of politeness, "Be clear," and her second rule, "Be polite" (ibid: 296). Like Brown and Levinson, she looks at how choices are made during conversation, hence supporting what she calls a level of "pragmatic consideration" when speaking to others (ibid: 296). She says that clarity and politeness go hand-in-hand; moreover, she says that "clarity" sometimes *is* "politeness," due to the ways communication changes in certain contexts (1973: 297). From here, Lakoff suggests that there are three "Rules of Conversation" to bear in mind: 1) Don't impose; 2) Give options; and 3) Make A feel good – be friendly (1973: 298). These rules resemble Grice's CP, but they have more specific purposes.

The first rule (R1), "don't impose," she says, can also mean to "remain aloof, don't intrude into 'other people's business', which is important when asking for permission to do something is required (ibid: 298). Within this rule, Lakoff includes passives and impersonal expressions, because she says that there are situations that require distance. She gives the example of a "proper" butler who would say, "Dinner is served" instead of "Would you like to eat?" (ibid: 299). Here, social distance is important, because the butler must not step outside of his service-oriented role. In other words, he must remain professional, without acting too informal.

According to Lakoff, the second rule (R2), "give options," is closely related to R1. Giving options to the hearer is imperative and allows them to react to language in their own way, she says. The act of allowing the hearer to make choices functions as a "politeness device" (1973: 300). Basically, Lakoff suggests that R2 is meant to give the hearer the option to determine the truth and legitimacy of speech on their own. She uses these sentences to represent this idea: 1) "I guess it's time to leave;" and 2) It's time to leave, isn't it?" (ibid: 300). Another interesting distinction between R1 and R2 encompasses the ways people use words to describe things that might seem too informal, naughty, or crass. Of course, when we are being *careful* of what we say, we might choose to substitute gentler or more informal words to represent terms that could make a situation uncomfortable. In R1 language, one might decide to use technical and/or medical words; and in R2 language, one might choose euphemisms (Lakoff 1973: 299-300). These are some of Lakoff's examples of each type of substitution for "unmentionables," which are used to make the hearer feel more comfortable — although in North American culture they might sound slightly different (ibid: 299-300):

**1) R1 Language Choices (Technical Terms)**

"copulation" instead of "sex"

"defecation" instead of "elimination"

"disadvantaged" instead of "economic difficulties"

**2) R2 Language Choices (Euphemisms)**

"doing it" instead of "copulation"

"doing number 2" instead of "defecation"

"being hard up" instead of "disadvantaged"

Obviously, both the R1 and R2 styles can be used in different contexts (i.e. formal versus informal) when necessary. The language choices are meant to allow the hearer to make his or her own assumptions, and they will be gauged to appropriately fit the tone within conversation (i.e. Is the conversation with peers, superiors, or friends?). R3 choices, Lakoff says, are not as closely related to R1 and R2 language. Lakoff's R3 is used to "make A feel good – be friendly." This is an especially important aspect of interaction because, within hierarchical relationships, being overly informal is actually improper.

Lakoff suggests that the statement "It's cold in here" is fine in the realm of R2, but if the person says this to their boss, they will violate R3 and "several of the rules of politeness" (ibid: 303).

In Lakoff's view, conversation entails a great deal of decision-making. There is a sense of compromise when people choose what they say within certain contexts. People must assess to whom they speak, whether the person is a peer, friend, or superior, and then implement the most polite forms of speech to minimize offense. The idea of impoliteness should then be considered. What is impoliteness? Is it the opposite of politeness? Or is it more closely related to rudeness? In the next chapter, we will explore the contrasting features of politeness and impoliteness, beginning with Richard Watts' (2003) analyses.

**2.1 Examinations of Impoliteness**

Watts (2003) presents the hypothesis that not all "polite" behaviors and utterances are actually polite. He posits that even though people tend to use the conventional apologies, etc., they can still be considered impolite for their actions. While he admits in his work that he maintains loose ties to Brown and Levinson's work, Watts steers away from their general focus on the speaker's role in conversation and refers to the hearer's role as well. He begins this discussion with the notion that politeness strategies are not exempt from offending other people. Interestingly, he explains the importance of the message within a context rather than whether or not somebody uses what can be called socially acceptable behavior. Brown and Levinson (1987) say, "This semiotic system is then responsible for the shaping of much everyday interaction, and in so shaping it, constitutes a potent form of social control." Watts only somewhat parallels this notion because his work highlights the ways socially acceptable interaction can sometimes be considered impolite at the same time.

The idea of implicature, a key concept that was established by Grice, is a contextual analysis tool emerging in current politeness research. For example, Watts refers to theory which says that a Conversational Contract (CC) exists between people when they interact (5). Watts also suggests that the CC might be the reason that people take notice of and talk more about impolite behaviors. He says:

> [...] Theories of politeness have focused far more on polite behaviour than on impolite behaviour. This is all the more surprising since commentators on and participants in verbal interaction are more likely to comment on behaviour which they perceive to be 'impolite', 'rude', 'discourteous', 'obstreperous', 'bloody minded', etc. than on 'polite' behaviour, and they tend to agree far more readily in their classification of the negative end of the scale than of the positive end. (2003: 5)

The idea here could also be that people might assess more polite behavior as conventional and consider it more neutral than positive. At the same time, any neglect of the previously mentioned CC would be immediately noticed and rejected during interaction. Violations of the CC can be as simple as interrupting somebody by saying, "Sorry if I interrupt you..."; and Watts cites a BBC interview that presents this prototype of a common interruption (2003: 6). After the interruption, the person who is being interviewed becomes annoyed and chides the interviewer for interrupting him after asking him a question (see Watts 2003: 6). He also cites a situation where a female calls in to a radio station and gets completely ignored while the jockeys talk amongst each other. She is less hostile yet more sarcastic in her response to the rudeness she perceives and hangs up without further comment (Watts 2003).

This brings to light another important aspect of the politeness-impoliteness spectrum. People who interact with others might "call out" perpetrators of impolite or rude behavior. It seems that people are more likely to condemn behavior that they deem inappropriate than to commend behavior that is considered standard and commonly expected during interaction. This, too, is an idea that can be attributed to Brown and Levinson because it is reminiscent of their idea surrounding politeness as "formal diplomatic protocol" (see Culpeper 1996: 349). Watts questions how it is that people can pinpoint impolite behavior and interpret it as such. The issue really sheds light on this question: What can actually be considered genuinely impolite and ultimately face-threatening?

If it is true that face is directly linked to one's self esteem (see Brown and Levinson 1987), then people will vary greatly on what they perceive to be polite or impolite. Watts says that the role of linguistic politeness within interaction is subjected to weighed interpretation and can be affected by cultural differences regarding social etiquette (2003). So, he points out, if in a certain context it is more acceptable to belch while talking to somebody, the interaction will most likely remain jovial if one happens to find its way into discourse (2003). Again, this leads back to the standards of social etiquette within certain parameters of discourse. If a store clerk were to belch in front of a customer in a retail store, the act would be taken much more seriously as a rude behavior. The key element here is simple—just because somebody politely apologizes for their burp, the conversational partner might still consider the person's actions to be impolite. Therefore, polite speech acts (like apologies) do not immediately prompt the listener to perceive them as polite. Watts (2003:3) refers to this as simulated politeness.

Simulated politeness, as demonstrated by Watts, is often found in debates. He presents the following transcription excerpt of a TVEI (Technical and Vocational Education Initiative) debate between "'S', a Conservative Party Politician, and 'C', a professor of education" (Watts 2003: 3-4):

---

S: yes\can I come back on Mandy's point\because I think this is one aspect . of TVEI\ which has been
C:

---

S: totally underemphasized tonight\ what TVEI is about is creating fresh opportunities\ it is creating
C:

---

S: fresh initiatives— no let me finish\ it is a pilot scheme . where …
C: it's not\

---

Here, the transcription demonstrates the simulated politeness of using the modal "can" in line one of S's statements. Watts argues that many people would expect more abrasive behavior within the context of a debate and would accept the omission of the simulated politeness (3). He also emphasizes that if this can be considered a *simulation* of politeness that there could still be disagreement as to whether or not this is really an act of politeness (3). Subsequently, I suggest that politeness is not absolutely the opposite of impoliteness due to peoples' differences of interpretation.

In the example above, Watts demonstrates the way that the conventions of politeness are not always going to prevent confrontational behavior in interactions. However, this also proves that there is a reason behind people's tendency to pinpoint impoliteness and vary more on what is considered polite. In addition, Jonathan Culpeper says that impoliteness is socially linked with social disruption (1996: 350). Culpeper cites Fraser and Nolan, who say:

> …no sentence is inherently polite or impolite. We often take certain expressions to be impolite, but it is not the expressions themselves but the conditions under which they are used that determines the judgment of politeness." (Fraser and Nolan 1981; see Culpeper 1996)

The general notion is that politeness is quite arbitrary if looked at within certain contexts. So, basically, if people interrupt frequently and simply apologize every time they do so, others will still notice the rude behavior and probably address it at some point. There are also times when impolite behavior is acceptable. Culpeper cites the example, "Go on, eat up" as an invitation for a guest to eat dinner with the speaker (1996: 351). While this is obviously a command, it is still a polite gesture in the name of solidarity and generosity. Perhaps this reveals a certain level of arbitrariness surrounding impoliteness as well. I use the term arbitrary loosely, however, because politeness and impoliteness are not synonymous by any means, and Culpeper says that there are different levels of impoliteness. For example, he says that if somebody picks their nose and another person asserts, "Do you think you could possibly not pick your nose?", thus "the face-threatening potential in the request to desist from a particular line of activity can be mitigated by politeness work, but the face damage incurred in drawing attention to an anti-social habit cannot" (1996: 351). Here, the speaker uses the opening question, treading lightly, "Do you think," and the modal "could" to again emphasize a polite tone, but does not successfully sound particularly polite. (More on modality will be presented later.) Basically, if people use the "conventions" of politeness in this way, they are not safe from sounding impolite or even rude. Culpeper also cites another phenomenal type of impoliteness called "mock impoliteness". This is meant to encourage solidarity and not to create hostility. In relation to this, he cites an Australian advertising slogan that says, "Eat beef—you bastards…" (1996: 352). The combination of a demand and vulgarity would normally foster hostility if presented in certain contexts, but it is much more jovial within this context and will probably make people laugh.

The idea that impoliteness and laughter can occur together relies on Brown and Levinson's idea that face is related to one's self-esteem (1987). If people feel more comfortable within certain interactions due to feelings of solidarity and basic safety, they will be less likely to become hostile when somebody uses different types of banter. This also applies to previous research that I found which suggested ways people can use modals to convey a more polite message. For example, in Anna Papafragou's article, "The Acquisition of Modality: Implications for Theories of Semantic Representations," there are different ways to avoid implicature. She uses the example, *"I must go on a diet soon"* (1998: 370). The speaker, referring only to him or herself, is not implying that the hearer must also go on a diet. In order to avoid a negative interpretation from the hearer, the speaker only includes oneself in the assertion. In turn, this results in a less face-threatening speech act.

There are other instances when people are impolite. Culpeper cites Brown and Levinson's idea here:

> In general, people cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face. That is, normally everyone's face depends on everyone

> else's being maintained, and since people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened, and in defending their own to threaten others' faces, it is in general every participant's best interest to maintain each others' face…" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61; Culpeper 1996: 354)

Culpeper notes that people in close relationships are sometimes much more impolite to each other. While he maintains it is difficult to generalize what defines closeness in a relationship, he says:

> In a familiar relationship one has more scope for impoliteness: one may know which aspects of face are particularly sensitive to attack, and one may be able to better predict and/or cope with retaliation that may ensue. (1996: 354)

Furthermore, Culpeper attempts to differentiate between intimacy and familiarity. His hypothesis is one that says that close friends will often use more positive politeness, but this is not the case in all situations as we can see from my previous examples. The debate is over what is considered an intimate, familiar relationship because rules can be determined, adjusted, and flexible from one situation to the next. Obviously, all conversations are not alike, and context is still an important factor in interaction.

There are many influences surrounding politeness forms due to the differences people possess culturally and emotionally. One thing that seems to be consistent in politeness research is the idea that impoliteness is often pinpointed more quickly, while politeness is often disregarded as expected and neutral in most situations. It's like renting an apartment—people don't get a good credit score for paying on time every month like they do with credit cards, but if they fail to pay, the consequences are severe. This is similar to linguistic politeness. While it is often taken for granted, it is also noticed if it is not practiced.

We now approach the issue of defining gender. Because context is so important within interaction, we should first look at the linguistic choices females and males make within different situations. Gender roles are different during workplace talk than they might be in more informal, low-stake conversations. In the next chapter, I will present some of the current research, which looks at the stereotypes and social barriers that exist.

**3. Gender Roles**

Research shows that females exhibit speech patterns that differ from male speech patterns. In Jennifer Coates' article "Women Behaving Badly: Female Speakers Backstage," the female voice exists according to many societal expectations. She writes, "It is undeniable that one of the burdens of being born female is the imperative to be nice," highlighting a common stereotype surrounding the female persona (Coates 67). Realistically, the dust is still settling from the Women's Rights Movement which spans approximately 150 years. Today, females have gained more rights, but there are still many issues that surround female oppression. Linguistically, there is a definite divide between the ways men and women speak, which also applies to a difference in what defines acceptable behavior. Coates says of contemporary British women, "It can be argued […] that 'behaving badly' has positive connotations when associated with men, while the phrase has negative connotations when associated with women (67). The question is directed at whether or not this is fair. Has oppression and judgment of females gone away? This is certainly not the case. An understanding of the feminine voice is needed to understand the dynamics of social evolution in relation to the role of woman.

Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet's theory surrounding "gendered language" and "community of practice (CofP)" unveils the underpinnings of linguistic sexism (Bergvall 274). In her essay, "Toward a Comprehensive Theory of Language and Gender," Victoria Bergvall discusses the CofP function and how it stems from the power issues women face. She attributes the social construct of gender to public confusion about the meaning of the gender due to the historical construct that says males are dominant (277). The essay concentrates on a "focus on learning a jointly negotiated practice of gender" (273). Egalitarianism between the sexes might sound idealistic, but Bergvall proposes some foundational theories that support this need for equality. She cites Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's work surrounding the "socialization patterns of women":

> Modern work on language and gender has generally drawn in three accounts of variation: that women's language is regarded as DEFICIENT when compared to men's; that it fundamentally reflects men's DOMINANCE over women; or that it arises from the DIFFERENCE in the socialization patterns of women and men. (277)

Historically, these three assumptions have had their place in gender studies. In the "deficit" category, Bergvall says that females have often been expected to engage in "insipid, lady-like discourse" – and leave the strong, coarse language to males (277). This is precisely the problem in today's society. One can also see this same type of criticism occurring frequently toward American pop stars like Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera who have both been under close media and public scrutiny for their sexually charged song lyrics. In fact, Kendel Ehrlich, the wife of Maryland's governor, Robert Ehrlich, recently had to publicly apologize for saying she would shoot Spears if she had the chance (Fox News). What an interesting shenanigan. Spears, who successfully sells sexual innuendo, is viewed in a negative light; and Ehrlich, who publicly bashes her naughty image with brash language, is forced to apologize. The media jumped at the chance to say that her animosity "promotes violence" (*Fox News Online*). Subsequently, she was cornered into a public apology. While her comment was very violent in nature and probably one of the most surprising from a political figure, it was certainly not the first time we have heard this kind of language. Certainly, she was probably talking out of frustration and would probably not kill the pop star if she had the opportunity. However, regardless of her right to freedom of speech, she was forced to withdraw her statement. Within reason, her situation represents at least two of the three facets of gender – Deficient and Difference. Violent or coarse language from women is considered appalling while the same from men is sometimes considered sexy and powerful.

The notion that females are more hesitant and insecure than men in conversation is the basis for a great deal of feminist sociolinguistics research. Scholars say there has been a shift of focus from biological factors to social factors. Janet Holmes' essay "Women, Language and Identity" explores the idea of "gendered identity" within the context of conversation (195). Research has shown that women control their public personas and "pay attention to their speech" (198). This is something we see among female public figures very often. There is a social pressure to be appropriate for females, and the rules affect the sexes differently. Holmes calls this a "gender barrier," and says, "Social dialect research has indicated the ways in which women and men signal their gender by their phonological and morphological choices" (215). These choices not only identify gender but class as well.

Pragmatically, studies show that females often use tag questions regularly throughout different continents. For example, Australian women used "or something" and "and that" at the ends of their sentences (Holmes 199). These tiny particles within sentences help identify their place in the class system, but Holmes suggests that they go beyond class due to their diverse meaning among the masses (201). Sometimes, it is very difficult to identify class, for example, if a young person with high societal status uses the terms "like" and "you know". These are very common pragmatic particles, which have become a part of today's pop culture. Holmes says that both men and women use these phrases, but they do so at different frequencies (215).

Contemporary women endure stereotypical, archaic constraints on their language and behavior; nevertheless, females have a different presence in today's society than in previous decades. For example, if we observe women within public interactions, we can surmise that females are capable of using powerful language. From today's *Sex in the City* iconic female to the scholarly poet, we discover women who own their language and their sexuality. Do women feel more comfortable using naughty, crass, or downright rude language when they are alone or "backstage" (Coates 65)? Studies have shown that women feel obligated to hide their true feelings when they are in front of others; although there are more artistic ways to break the rules of conformity publicly. For example, this contemporary poem by Wanda Coleman, from her book *Bath Water Wine* (1998), quite possibly encourages women to talk dirty with pride:

*The Tender of Splendor*

We belly laugh and drink in
the gold and green of impending fall
there is never winter. snow? Perhaps once every score

september lies
desire's dust scattered on sultry wind
snug inside
his hands push me back against our bed. i feel
the press of his heart.

my lips cracked, chapped by furtive lickings of
his tongue, soft dusky aspects of my face rubbed and
scraped by his graying beard

repeated mountings the rhythms of
flying feet
drummings and hummings
of thighs

shared breaths shared throbbings/ wet
heavy wonder

afterwards, the odors of singed hair and burnt air (1998: 51)

Females are often chided for talking about their wild sexual excursions, but Coleman undoubtedly shirks this societal pressure. Her sexual undertones and descriptions of blatant sexual acts are representations of rebellion against societal norms. This type of expression is bold, because it does not attempt to keep anything from public consumption and critique. She talks about sex with a sense of subtle aggression, using powerful descriptions of a sexual romp like "repeated mountings" (line 12) and "singed hair" (line 18). The intensity of her desire is not something women might talk about with everybody.

Moreover, people would most likely accuse Coleman of parading bad morals in her poetry. However, it is often acceptable for men to talk dirty or flaunt their sexuality aggressively. The double standard is not a new concept; it simply has not gone away. Jennifer Coates says of this type of double standard (referring to men in the UK):

> The television programme *Men Behaving Badly* plugs into this sense of laddish masculinity. The programme's title emphasizes a particular aspect of contemporary masculinity – in fact the series could (with tongue-in-cheek affection) be called *Men Behaving Normally*. (67).

There is a distinction between the ways women behave privately and in public. First, Coates says, "Informal personal conversations are widely acknowledged to be backstage activity." So, in essence, a female who talks with her friends is engaged in a behind-the-scenes conversation and feels a certain level of comfort. However, what *is* backstage language or private talk? Perhaps, it means that females put on a façade in public.

Coates' research states that females as young as four exhibit similar habits when they engage in "fantasy play" (69). She cites Jenny Cook-Gumperz's data of three kindergarteners who assume roles of mothers about to give their baby dolls a bath. This is the sequence of talk documented in the study: 'G3 suggests the water is hot; G2 says: "Let's boil the babies"; G1: "Yes let's boil them and boil them"; G2: "We'll boil them until their skins fall off"' (see Coates 69).

Interestingly, the girls engage in this private conversation as they pretend to be mothers. The girls' not-so-nice antics are merely play and not real. Cameron's example shows how females begin to develop a true-self and a façade-self at a very early age. Perhaps females allow other females to behave this way because they know that this behavior is only temporary or not their true persona. Basically, this phenomenon epitomizes the term "girl talk", and Deborah Cameron calls it "the silence of women" in *The Feminist Critique of Language* (4).

Linguistically, girls' public speech often follows the conventions of social conformity. It is their private discourse that possesses an identity of femaleness, which carries with it a sense of community. According to Cameron, female linguistics has been categorized into a number of "genres", which include 'gossip', storytelling, private letters, and diaries (4). She says, "For none of these genres are especially prestigious, and some, like gossip, are actually disparaged" (4). Here, we can see a definite correlation between powerless language and the genres of female linguistics. Because the private voice of females is considered frivolous, their public personas are often devoid of true self. Thus, women are silenced by the conventionalities imposed on them by society's unwillingness to treat them the same as their male counterparts. Deborah Cameron defines female "silence" with this explanation:

> The silence of women is above all an absence of female voices and concerns from high culture. If we look at a society's most prestigious linguistic registers – religious ceremonial, political rhetoric, legal discourse, science, poetry – we find women's voices for the most part silent – or rather, *silenced,* for it is not just that women do not speak: often they are explicitly *prevented* from speaking, either by social taboos and restrictions or by the more genteel tyrannies of custom and practice. Even where it seems that women could speak if they chose, the conditions imposed on their lives by society may make this a difficult or dangerous choice. Silence can also mean censoring yourself for fear of being ridiculed, attacked, or ignored. (4)

An example of this is the aforementioned scenario of a female political figure having to apologize for a brutal comment against Britney Spears. Because of her high position in society, Ehrlich was ridiculed and attacked for her public expression of animosity for one of the most controversial singers in the world. Because of the public's negative reaction, it is likely that she will not publicly attack another person ever again. Therefore, she has inadvertently become representative of the silenced female. In the future, she could avoid negative media attention by hiding her *true* feelings 'backstage' where nobody but her closest friends or her diary can hear.

There are other findings in the study of feminine linguistics in general. For example, in Pamela Fishman's essay "Conversational Insecurity," female speech is an identity issue that evolves from childhood. Using Robin Lakoff's work as a model, Fishman says that females often convey insecurity in their interactions with others (235). She says of Lakoff's theory:

> [She] argues that the asking of questions is a prime example of women's insecurity and hesitancy. She deals with women's extensive use of two interrogatory devices: tag questions ('Isn't it?' 'Couldn't we?') and questions with declarative functions ('Did you see this in the paper?' 'Should we [go] grocery shopping?'). (235)

In addition, it seems that females are very interested in keeping a conversation alive and "connected" (236). Of course, we know from the research that females are often hesitant to break social norms. Perhaps this is another indication of female oppression. There has to be a reason why female language differs so greatly from male language. A recurring theme is difference in socialization. Some studies suggest this is a biological factor – innateness, if you will – and no amount of social effort can erase the dominance of males. But does this account for individual personality? Fishman says that it does. In fact, she says that the little hedges women use everyday play a big part in female insecurity. The hedge "you know" is the example she presents as one of the phrases more frequently used by females than males (237).

Perhaps the aforementioned "silencing" of women (Cameron) has more to do with the ways women censor themselves. Instead of publicly announcing their feelings, they engage in woman-to-woman talk that is referred to as "gossip". This is often a safe zone for true feelings and publicly unacceptable speech for women. Deborah Jones' 1980 article "Gossip: Notes on Women's Oral Culture" defines gossip with the following:

> [...] [G]ossip [is] a way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting, a female cultural event which springs from and perpetuates the restrictions of the female role, but also gives the comfort of validation. (Cameron 243)

The preceding explanation introduces the idea that females have a sense of community when they talk as a social group (244). It seems that gossip is a private way to vent or use brash language. Functioning within its secret society, gossip allows women to break free from the social pressure to be nice. Gossip can be vile and negative, but it is not always necessarily so. However, the stigma surrounding gossip evolves out of the negative connotations that it carries. Jones describes in more detail the topics often covered within the context of gossip. She defines what she calls "female subculture" with these topics in four categories: house-talk, scandal, bitching, and chatting with this:

> 1) *House-talk.* If shop-talk is a term for the male occupational register, house-talk can describe the female version. Its distinguishing function is the exchange of information and resources connected with the female as an occupation. This usually centres around concrete tasks, as in the exchange of recipes, household hints, and dress patterns. It also includes the discussion of relationships from a strictly practical point of view: how to catch a husband, how to manage a child [...]
>
> 2) *Scandal.* Women's gossip is often dismissed as malicious scandal-mongering. However, this is only one aspect of gossip, and rather than being distinguished by malice, it is marked by a considered judging of the behavior of others, and women in particular [...]

3) *Bitching*. While scandal keeps women's dissatisfaction focused on each other, and so does not threaten men, bitching is the kind of gossip that men feel most uneasy about. Bitching is the overt expression of women's anger at their restricted role and inferior status. Overt, that is, in that it *is* expressed, but in private and to other women only […]
4) *Chatting*. Chatting is the most intimate form of gossip, a mutual self-disclosure, a transaction where the skills that women have learned as part of their job of nurturing others are turned to their own advantage[…] Chatting sessions such as this provide a continuous chorus and commentary on women's daily lives, in an evaluative process that also provides emotional sustenance. (246 – 248)

Within these categories, females maintain their "feminine persona," while permitting themselves the forum vent (and be not-so-nice) in a safe environment. The category of "bitching" interestingly suggests that people, males in particular, are "uneasy" about female aggression. This article was published in 1980, but this trend is still very prominent today. Female aggression is not as believable as male aggression. It is not taken as seriously by the public. Perhaps this is why Americans still have not voted a female President into office. Are we afraid of strong females? Should females only engage in cutesy "chatting" amongst each other and refrain from participating in any *important* talk (i.e. politics, business, or medicine)? The fact remains, females are progressing in society, but they have not yet won the battle for equality. Generally, the female role is still considered the weaker sex in the public eye.

Studies show that from the time females are children, they learn their societal role. Bergvall's research finds that popular linguists, particularly Tannen, say that "[people] shouldn't be blamed for their socialized roles, but that each sex should come to value the style of the other" (277). The gender and language issues that occur today reflect a need for understanding and equality. Time has not erased the barriers that exist between the sexes. The CofP approach to language barriers tries to outline some ways to promote education on the matter. Here, Bergvall cites Eckert and McConnell's 1992 message to researchers:

> a. Recognize that gender is not fixed and pre-existing – a dynamic verb rather than a static noun.
>
> b. Consider how gender interacts with other aspects of social identity (e.g. class, race, ethnicity, and age), rather than taking it as an "additive" variable, easily abstractable from a person's other identities.
>
> c. Challenge premature generalization of the assumptions about gender variations based on studies of small (usually Western, middle class) populations.
>
> d. Share research with other gender theorists from other fields.
>
> e. Undertake local studies of communities across a broader range of social settings, countries, and languages. (279)

Overall, it seems that peoples' intentions are in the right place – at least researchers' intentions are – and efforts are being made to break down the linguistic and social barriers between genders. Language has a great deal to do with identity, and historical constraints still sometimes interfere with our linguistic personas. We know that certain functions of language are considered more feminine (i.e. gossip) than others, and this is a cultural reality. I do not know if it will ever go away. Human nature does have its place in this research, but the problem stems from the public's non-acceptance of equality between male and female speech.

Do women use language differently than men, or do women succumb to society's stereotypes? In the next section, we will look at the ways females make different linguistic choices based on many factors, including gender stereotypes that stem from childhood.

### 3.1 Gender and Politeness

Because the sociological and sociolinguistic roles of females and males are often scrutinized differently, it is important to look at how gender affects peoples' linguistic choices. Mills (2003) presents some of the common stereotypes regarding females' linguistic choices. She says:

> ... [P]oliteness is often considered to be a woman's concern, in the sense that stereotypes of how women in general should behave are in fact rather a prototypical description of white, middle-class women's behaviour in relation to politeness. The teaching and enforcement of 'manners' is often considered to be the preserve of women. (2003: 203).

As part of the social milieu, in general, Mills suggests that females are often expected, by society, to speak and behave in more 'feminine' ways. Mills conducted surveys and found that women are often categorized as polite if they do not exhibit impolite behaviors or language. She says, "Indeed, the epitome of stereotypical language behaviour for males and females seems to be white working-class men (direct, assertive, impolite) and white, middle-class women (polite, deferent, 'nice' to others)" (2003: 204). When the issue of gender is applied to Brown and Levinson's (1987) definition of positive politeness, which is that a person's face is protected through face-minimizing strategies, there is an interesting outcome. In the following passage, Mills identifies the way positive politeness correlates more with the stereotypes of women than of men:

> Positive politeness is associated with being friendly and nice towards others, and because there is an association between white, middle-class women's stereotypical behaviour and niceness, this form of politeness is then associated with women's linguistic politeness in general. (2003: 205)

Basically, females are not *supposed* to engage in aggressive, vulgar, or fractious discourse, but instead should conform to a middle-class standard of being soft, kind, and lady-like (Mills 2003; see also Lakoff 1973). For men, there is an unbalanced amount of flexibility. For example, if men are polite and show concern for others, they are often praised for their mild behavior; however, women are simply expected to use politeness at all time or risk public ridicule. So, even the types of politeness set up by Brown and Levinson (1987) are not (or, more specifically, *cannot be*) equally practiced by both males and females.

Tannen examines how gender affects linguistic strategies and says, "That men dominate women is not in question; what I am problematizing is the source and workings of domination and other interpersonal intentions and effects" (1994: 208). These 'intentions and effects' could revolve around a person's face and self-image. It is often the case that men are stereotyped as being more dominating than women, but the issue at hand concerns the differences of language use on the two sides of the gender divide. For example, Robin Lakoff outlines some female habits regarding interaction and politeness strategies, which include that women often have a social persona that they maintain in conversation, or a *woman's language* (i.e. using more tag-questions or fluffy adjectives to describe things or colors), if you will (1973: 203).

So, what about today's career woman? Certainly, households in today's America do not look like 1950s sitcoms, where the mother stays home baking brownies for her 2.5 children and professional husband. No, in this fast-paced society, there are a lot more working mothers and childless-by-choice women who do not find it necessary to conform to a standard set by society more than fifty years ago. Unfortunately, the standards have not drastically changed. According to the research, women must still endure the stereotypes and rigid expectations of polite behavior. Perhaps, in many situations, politeness is determined by relationships that people have before having engaged in conversation at all. The Bulge Theory (Wolfson 1989) accounts for the ways people gauge and measure societal roles when speaking to each other, which could also be an explanation for gender stereotyping. The Bulge Theory encompasses the ways preconceived notions of social class, which could include gender, can affect conversation. Wolfson defines the *Bulge* as the following:

> There is a qualitative difference between the speech behavior which middle-class Americans use to intimates, status unequals, the strangers on one hand, and to nonintimates, status equal friends, co-workers, and acquaintances on the other. I call this theory the *Bulge* (Wolfson 1986, 1988), because of the way the frequencies of certain types of speech behavior plot out on a diagram, with the

> two extremes showing very similar patterns, as opposed to the middle section, which displays a characteristic bulge. (1989: 129)

If the Bulge indicates that there is a certain level of social distancing within interaction, then this could be a possible explanation for the different approaches to social interaction of males and females. Because there is a "negotiation of roles" that takes place in many types of networks (see Wolfson 1989: 128), there is a great possibility that social roles are naturally established through these set behaviors. In her sample, Wolfson shows how the Bulge Theory sheds light on "the status-related social strategies of women," when compliments and solidarity are examined (1989: 136; see also Holmes 1995).

In the work force, people typically do not abandon their politeness strategies, but they are sometimes more aware of them, especially when it comes to polite compliments. Due to laws imposed on the work force, which are in place to minimize discrimination and/or sexual harassment, people have become much more aware of what and how they might be perceived in conversation. Subsequently, gendered identity in discourse is not abandoned either. The Bulge Theory could also explain the type of restraint used in employment settings. People who work together are not considered 'intimates,' but they often become friends to a certain degree; however, they are familiar enough with one another to not be considered strangers. Thus, the Bulge then can occur somewhere in the grey area that exists. Also, *politeness* must never seem *overly* friendly or flirtatious, because it could cause problems for those who speak the offending utterances or behaviors. Of course, sexual innuendo is not the only problem that could arise. There is the societal struggle for equality (for women and men) that remains eminent in today's work force, which has more to do with status, power, and equality than it does with sexuality.

For example, Kendall looks at "face-related practices" of women at a radio network, where, like most businesses, there is a certain hierarchy which exists when employees are not status-equals at the job (2004: 55). In the following excerpt, she highlights the ways people modify their linguistic choices in the professional setting:

> An indirect, indexical relationship between language and gender suggests that women and men do not generally choose linguistic strategies for the purpose of creating masculine or feminine identities; instead, they draw upon gendered linguistic strategies to constitute roles— such as 'manager'—in a gendered way. (2004: 56)

When people obtain a higher-status position, such as a manager, they often exhibit a certain style when speaking to others, depending on each hearer's position within the hierarchy of authority. Kendall examines one female's demeanor and "face-related practices" during what she calls "naturally occurring talk in a work setting" (2004: 57). The female worker was examined under two different circumstances: 1) "one with the technical director of the master control room (an equal-ranking male colleague)" and 2) "another with a substitute soundboard operator (a male subordinate)" (Kendall 2004: 57). She found that the female technical director is able to utilize face-saving strategies in most situations:

> [She] seemingly downplays her authority by using face-saving strategies as tools for successfully accomplishing the task at hand; and, by using these strategies, she constitutes an egalitarian demeanor of authority. (2004: 64)

Kendall's findings show that the female, who is the authority figure, often downplays her authority, even while talking with her equal-status peers. In fact, Kendall says, she minimizes her level of expertise and allows the others to assert their ideas with authority, which is considered a "negotiation of authority" and an issue of "problem-solving vs. expertise, " where, in this case, the female uses language that is very goal-oriented (2004: 65-66). Holmes calls this negotiating behavior "women's norms," and further says that men consider these politeness norms to be "redundant verbal frippery" (1995: 194-195). Using Wolfson's Bulge Theory (1988), Holmes says that the workplace 'bulge' occurs within the grey area, which is a context I mentioned previously, where people are sort of friends but still co-workers:

> Women's norms are accepted as defining polite behaviour—but in a relatively limited sphere. Since men are the power brokers in society, it is men who determine what this sphere will be. Men consider explicitly polite behaviour to be appropriate in a rather limited range of relationships. It is appropriate to superiors and in the limited semi-private contexts of social interaction between acquaintances and people who are friends but not intimates—the 'bulge' area of ambiguous relationships [...] in some public spheres too, men seem to regard polite behaviour as unnecessary—especially between apparent status equals. (1995: 194)

According to this notion, politeness also functions within a varied hierarchy. If men simply do not feel that politeness is necessary, they may or may not use it— if they choose to use it at all. Generally, men tend to keep their emotions out of public and some private interaction, perhaps because they believe it is indicative of utmost professionalism or composure. The problem with this is simply how people perceive the neutral language or behavior men exhibit. When lower-status co-workers experience this kind of behavior, will they automatically perceive the man as professional, or will their face become violated? According to Kendall, face is less of a chore for higher status workers:

> In general, higher ranking individuals have more face, and are thus entitled to NOT expend as much effort, linguistic or otherwise, on maintaining the face of the other, whereas lower-ranking individuals must expend such effort (Kendall 2004: 59).

Social status is a factor when people choose to interact or speak with others. Interestingly, gender also factors in when people have a *tête-à-tête* encounter and is based on the ways each participant is perceived. Holmes says that women tend to create an environment more conducive to livelier participation in the workplace, which she says is due to women's use of positive politeness "facilitative strategies" (1995: 213). She says:

> Men agree with others less often than women, and they are more likely than women to disagree without softening their assertions. Pragmatic particles are used more often by men to indicate the validity of a proposition, for example, than to signal the relationship between the speaker and addressee. The focus is often on information rather than feelings. (1995: 193)

In addition to being much softer in their presentation, women in higher ranking positions at work are also more aware of people's feelings. For example, Kendall (citing a study by West 1990) found that male physicians were quicker to diagnose patients in a technical, non-emotional way, but the female nurses in the same context minimized their medical authority by asking the patients more questions, allowing them to participate in their medical evaluation (2004: 60-61). Especially when the speaker is socially accepted as an authority, such as a physician, addressees will be more vulnerable to face threats and the speaker (the doctor) will possess a lesser threat to face. However, studies seem to show that men are more likely to threaten others' face due to their different use of politeness strategies when compared to women.

In a male's world, however, there is a different approach to FTAs. There is less emotion and more aggression. In the next chapter, we will look at the ways a male debate on a popular debate television show, *Crossfire,* becomes more and more aggressive as its participants grow more and more antagonistic toward each other.

**4. Impoliteness: Male Speech and *Un*friendly Debate on *CNN's Crossfire***

The particular airing of the program I have examined, "Jon Stewart's America," which showcases comedian Jon Stewart discussing politics with the show's co-host Paul Begala, and an infamously ornery, bow-tie clad co-host Tucker Carlson, presents a heated debate about the 2004 U.S. Presidential candidates, George W. Bush and John Kerry. On the surface, the men use politeness conventions, or what would most likely be considered acceptable media conventions, including announcing a preliminary "plug" for Stewart's new book and introducing him as "...either the funniest smart guy on T.V. or the smartest funnyman..." *(Crossfire* transcript*)*. In the very next breath, Begala slyly challenges Stewart's ability to perform intelligently by saying, "We'll find out in a minute" (transcript). Here, what might seem to most people to be an innocent remark can actually be interpreted as an intended challenge meant to antagonize Stewart. The main argument for this transcription analysis is that impoliteness is not merely the polar opposite of politeness. More importantly, I will examine how the use of linguistic politeness conventions does not always represent a polite message through an examination of *Crossfire's* presentation of "Jon Stewart's America."

The question is not an entirely new one as Watts posits that people often use polite language but instead express a message that only "simulates" politeness (2). A few linguistic (semantic) factors must come into play when considering this type of argument: face, face-threatening acts (FTA), and intentionality of impoliteness. In the context of the *Crossfire* debate, we know that three individuals are present, which obviously means that face naturally exists for each participant. When this face is threatened, we will see the debate become more verbally abrasive. In the beginning of the discussion, the face appears to be neutral and even *normal* in that it is seems to follow the conventions of a typical news program. However, Begala, the show's host, quickly (and somewhat fractiously) reminds viewers that the show is based on debate, setting the stage for a heated debate. In the following exchange, Stewart (S) immediately inserts an example of negative face by posing a simply stated question, which is acknowledged by Begala (B) and Carlson (C) with a humorous stance—probably because they expect Stewart to maintain his role as a comedian rather than a political commentator:

> C: Thank you for joining us.
> S: Thank you very much. That was very kind of you to say [referring to B's introduction]. Can I say something very quickly? Wh-Why do we have to fight?
> B: [laughs]

Here, it appears that neither Begala nor Carlson is sure which way this debate is going to go, laughing at Stewart's initial question as if anything Stewart says will be intentionally funny, but Stewart has a social comment that he intends to express. Stewart uses this to his advantage, presuming that he is being underestimated by his opponents. In the next excerpt, even the audience exhibits knee-jerk laughter when Stewart parallels his funny side and his serious side:

> C: Is John Kerry—is John Kerry really the best? I mean, John Kerry has—
> S: Is he the best? I thought Lincoln was good—
> Audience: [laughs]
> C: Is he the best the Democrats can do?
> S: Is he the best the Democrats can do?
> C: Yes, this year of the whole field.
> S: I had always thought, in a democracy—and again, I don't know—I've only lived in this country—that there's a process. They call them primaries.
> C: Right.

From here, Carlson decides to probe Stewart further (transcript continues below), asking him which of the candidates is his personal favorite. We will see that Stewart uses this question as his segue into verbal assault against the two co-hosts:

> S: And they [primaries] don't always go with the best, but they go with whoever Won. So is he the best? According to the process.
> C: Right. But of the nine guys running, who do you think was the best? Do you think he was the best, the most impressive?
> S: The most impressive?
> C: Yes.
> S: I thought Al Sharpton was very impressive.
> Audience: [laughs]
> S: I enjoyed his way of speaking. I think, oftentimes, the person that knows they can't win is allowed to speak the most freely, because, otherwise, shows with titles, such as *Crossfire*—
> B: *Crossfire.*
> S: Or "*Hardball*" or "*I'm Going to Kick Your Ass*" or—
> Audience: [laughs]
> S: Will jump on it. In many ways, it's funny. And I made a special effort to come on the show today, because I have privately, amongst my friends and also in occasional newspapers and television shows, mentioned this show as being, uh, bad.
> Audience, B, C: [laughs]
> B: We have noticed.

Now, finally, it becomes obvious to Begala that Stewart has appeared on the show to speak his mind. This kind of exchange goes beyond what could be considered traditional joke-telling; moreover, Stewart calling the show 'bad' here violates the positive face of the show's co-hosts. In relation to this kind of talk, Watts cites Helga Kotthoff and Jonathon Culpeper's ideas, stating, "Kotthoff (1996) has examined impoliteness in conversational joke-telling and Culpeper (1996) discusses 'mock impoliteness' or 'banter' which is not intended to be understood as serious criticism" (5). However, in this exchange, it is apparent that the speech has a much more explicit attack involved in it. In fact, "serious criticism" is exactly what comes through in Stewart's choice of language. Stewart's FTAs are certainly meant to create disharmony within this debate. In his own way, Stewart fulminates against the show and its hosts without even having to raise his voice, and as I will present later, his judgments sometimes narrow in on one particular person through personal attack.

With an emphasis on the idea of *disharmony* in communication, Jonathon Culpeper says that there is a big distinction between the polite and the impolite. In relation to this, Culpeper looks at confrontational language and aggression and considers it "social disruption" (1996: 350). He first looks at Brown and Levinson's definition of politeness, which says that people cooperate in order to maintain face (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61). Taking this definition into account, it seems there is a pattern of mutual FTAs in the *Crossfire* debate. At first it is very unapparent but, as the discussion moves, it becomes much more intense and intentional. The strongest negative face initiatives are taken by Stewart, who has come into a territory as a guest but fails to conform to politeness standards because he genuinely has something to say. Eventually, he just puts it on the table as we see here:

S: Here's just what I wanted to tell you guys.
C: Yes.
S: Stop.
B/C/Audience: [laughs]
S: Stop, stop, stop, stop hurting America—
B: Ok, now.
S: — and come work for us, because we, as the people—
C: —How do you pay?
S: The people? Not well.
Audience: [laughs]
B: Better than *CNN,* I'm sure—
S: But you can sleep at night.
Audience: [laughs]
S: See, the thing is, we need your help. Right now, you're helping the politicians and the corporations. And we're left out there to mow our lawns.
B: By beating up on them? You just said we're too rough on them when they make mistakes—
S: No, no, no, you're not too rough on them. You're part of their strategies. You

are partisan, what do you call it, *hacks*.

Here, Stewart presents the ultimate back-handed insult, saying that co-hosts are actually "partisan" in their efforts, a political stance that journalists are typically renowned for being against. While all of this is being presented, there is a great deal of laughter. The audience laughs probably because they are amused over Stewart's bluntness; moreover, Carlson and Begala laugh probably because they are being lambasted on their own show, which is either a sign of haughtiness or acceptance of the challenge.

In the exchanges that follow, Carlson attempts to speak to these allegations and tries to insinuate exactly the same thing about Stewart's tactics on his show, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. But Stewart is keen to his upcoming FTA and appears not to be wavered by Carlson's remarks. In this exchange, Carlson attempts to take a superior tone, implying that their show is more representative of good journalism than his as if he is an authority on the matter:

C: Wait, Jon, let me tell you something valuable that I think we do that I'd like to see you—
S: —I would like to hear it.
C: And I'll tell you. When politicians come on—
S: —Yes.
C: It's nice to get them to try and answer the question. And in order to do that, we try and ask them pointed questions. I want to contrast our questions with some questions you asked John Kerry recently.
C: —up on the screen.
S: If you want to compare your show to a comedy show, you're more than welcome to—
Audience: [laughs]

Stewart is a comedian, but he is being seriously underestimated here. Also, humor is used to relieve some of the contention, but does not necessarily promote politeness in this context. Incidentally, his show is not on a news station like *CNN*, which is the selfproclaimed, "Most trusted name in news." In fact, his show appears on *Comedy Central.* Carlson attacks Stewart's credibility as a journalistic figure, but he does so by looking at a show that is not intended to be entirely serious. Carlson tries to drive his point home, but Stewart maintains his face through his indifference toward Carlson's assertions. At the same time, Carlson grapples for the floor and desperately tries to protect his face.

> C: —No, no, no, here's the point—
> S: —If that's your goal.
> C: It's not.
> S: I wouldn't aim for us. I'd aim for *Seinfeld.* That's a very good show.
> C: Kerry won't come on this show. He will come on your show.
> S: Right.
> C: Let me suggest why he wants to come on your show—
> S: —Well, we have civilized discourse.
> Audience: [laughs]

Carlson persistently tries to pose a counter-attack on Stewart's credibility, but finds himself facing adamant ridicule. In turn, Stewart suggests that his discourse is "civilized" and the discourse displayed on *Crossfire* is *uncivilized.* The most interesting aspect of this conversation is that Carlson admits to not being able to interview Presidential candidate John Kerry. Carlson is trying to make his show appear superior by downplaying the questions Stewart asks during interviews. (At the same time, could this also imply that their questions could indeed be considered "partisan" or "uncivilized," which would turn politicians away?) We can see from this particular line of questioning that *Crossfire's* antics are, to say the least, questionable.

To be fair, let's examine what support Carlson offers as proof of *Crossfire's* credibility and Stewart's suspect questions:

> C: Well, here's an example of "civilized discourse". Here are three of the questions you asked John Kerry—
> S: —Yes.
> C: You have a chance to interview the Democratic nominee. You asked him

questions such as, quote, "How are you holding up? Is it hard not to take the attacks personally?
S: —Yes.
C: "Have you ever flip-flopped?" et cetera, et cetera.
S: —Yes.
C: Didn't you feel like—you got the chance to interview the guy. Why not ask a *real* question, instead of just suck up to him—
S: —Yeah, "How are you holding up?" is a real suck-up. And I was actually giving him a hot stone massage as we were doing it.
Audience: [laughs]
C: It sounded that way. It did.

Carlson's attempt to derail Stewart's argument is diffused through Stewart's ability to use humor to make the logic seem ridiculous here. He first addresses the fact that he doesn't feel he was "sucking up" to Kerry during their interview and does not allow Carlson to downplay his choices of questioning. Stewart successfully protects his face, especially because of his ability to reel in the audience with his humorous comebacks. Interestingly, Stewart is not prompted to act in the beginning and simply acknowledges his questions with "yes" responses. He does not feel that he must defend his questions until Carlson reiterates that he thinks Stewart's questions are not "real" questions, thus impeding upon Stewart's face, using intentional impoliteness.

In addition, Stewart maintains his stance that his role is not necessarily comparable to that of a *CNN* journalist. He is obviously interested in clarifying his television role. He also questions the co-hosts' motives for scrutinizing his line of questioning; after all, is Jon Stewart really expected to present the news in the same way that *CNN* is expected to? Here, the conversation continues, and we see the debate heating up with more interruptions due to these accusations:

S: You know, it's interesting to hear you talk about my responsibility.
C: —I felt the sparks between you.
S: I didn't realize that—and /maybe this explains quite a bit—\
C: /No, the opportunity to\

S: /—is that the news organizations look to *Comedy Central* for their cues on integrity.\

Stewart successfully proves his point that his show cannot and should not be compared to a show that is considered to offer hard news. To this Carlson responds with, "We're here to love you, not confront you" (transcript).

The best examples of FTAs in this debate occur in roughly the second half of the segment, where the intentional impoliteness becomes more apparent. In this section of the debate, Stewart has dismissed the co-hosts' attempt to put up the metaphorical retreat flag. They basically tell Stewart that they do not intend to confront him and that they're there to "be nice." But Stewart retorts with, "I'm not. I'm here to confront you, because we need help from the media and they're hurting us" (transcript). Carlson then continues to question Stewart's knowledge of the news, which proves to be a big mistake:

C: Let me ask you a question on the news—
S: Now, this is theater. I mean, it's obvious. How old are you?
C: Thirty-five—
S: And you wear a bow tie.
Audience: [laughs] [applauds]
C: Yeah, I do, I do—
S: So this is—
C: I know, I know, now let me just—/now come on\
S: /Now, listen\ I'm not suggesting that you're not a smart guy, because those are not easy /to tie.\
C: /They're difficult.\
Audience: [laughs]
S: /But the thing is\ that this—you're doing theater, when you should be doing debate, which would be great.
B: We do, do debate—
S: It's not honest. What you do is not honest. What you do is partisan hackery. And I will tell you /why I know it.\
C: /You had John Kerry\ on your show and you sniff his throne, and you're accusing us of partisan hackery?
S: Absolutely.
C: You've got to be kidding me. He comes on and you—
S: You're on *CNN*. The show that leads into me is puppets making crank phone calls—What is wrong with you?

These personal attacks are serious, yet they still evoke laughter and applause from the audience. Stewart completely discredits *Crossfire* by pointing out all of the things that make this show more like "theater," pointing out that Carlson somewhat portrays a character because he wears a bow tie. In a sense, Stewart exposes a theory that the news presented on *Crossfire* is "dishonest" to viewers and inappropriately misrepresents the truth. Here, there is no obvious evidence of positive face interaction taking place among the debaters, but there is a definite sense that Stewart and Carlson are each vying for the support of the audience and viewers.

Interestingly, through all of this debate, Begala seems to be content with listening more than contributing to the argument. In the next segment, he even goes as far as to encourage more brutal comments from Stewart:

> S: You know[…], you have a responsibility to the public discourse, and /you fail miserably.\
> C: /You need to get a job at a journalism school, I think.\
> S: —You need to go to one […]
> C: Wait. I thought you were going to be funny. Come on, be funny.
> S: No, no. I'm not going to be your monkey
> Audience: [laughs]
> B: Go ahead. Go ahead.

Stewart's argument continues to be coherent, and Carlson reveals how threatened he is with defensive remarks that only provide Stewart with more ammunition to keep on firing. At the end of it all, the co-hosts make an attempt to "change the subject" to no avail. At this point Stewart has single-handedly and successfully taken ownership of the topic. Protecting his face and his social relevance, Stewart makes it clear that he is more than a comedian. He also makes it clear that he has not appeared on *Crossfire* to necessarily perform as a comic; although, at the same time, his wit often encourages laughter.

The most dynamic and brutal personal attack explodes at the end of the debate, after the co-hosts make an unsuccessful attempt to change the subject. Carlson and Begala try to the conversation back to Stewart's comedy. Carlson even goes as far to say, "Is this really Jon Stewart? What is this, anyway?" which is a statement made out of astonishment (of Stewart's sharp wit) and verbal admission of feeling threatened. Stewart replies, "Yes, it's someone who watches your show and cannot take it anymore" (trans.). This evokes more laughter from the audience. The co-hosts reclaim ownership of the show as they take a commercial break. When they return, Stewart continues to call the show "deceptive", which prompts some nasty comments from Carlson, who tries to get the last word in. Stewart does not allow this to happen, shouting an obscene insult while Carlson tries to switch gears:

> C: I do think you're more fun on your show. Just my opinion.
> C: Ok, up next, Jon Stewart goes one on one with his fans—
> S: You know what's interesting, though? You're as big a *dick* on your show as you are on any show.
> C: Now you're getting into it. I like that.
> S: Yeah.

In this exchange, Carlson attacks Stewart's face by first interrupting him and then downplaying his authority by insinuating that Stewart should be more "fun" on this show. Much to his surprise, Stewart lashes out, calling him a dick, making it very clear just what he thinks of Carlson. Overall, face-minimizing acts, such as positive and negative politeness, are used in speech to minimize conflict or violation of face of an addressee. In the *Crossfire* example, humor is used to make a point in an authoritative way, but very few positive/negative politeness strategies are implemented, which is evident in all of the criticisms interjected from both sides to the other. In Zajdman, some of the common threats of face that are found within the debate are defined:

> Acts threatening the positive face of [the hearer] H are, for instance, a negative evaluation of aspects of H's face such as disapproval or criticism of him/her, or showing [the speaker's] S's carelessness in regard to H's positive face, such as expressing contempt or embarrassing him/her. (1995: 325)

Of course, at the very end of the debate, Jon Stewart calls Carlson a "dick," just as the show is ending, and could be considered a bald on-record attack of Carlson's face (see Brown and Levinson 1987). It is his most harsh criticism, and is most likely intended to seriously verbally pummel his opponent in front of the cameras one final time. The very real contention going on during the debate is the result of a male competition for the floor and to simply *one-up* the other side (see Mills 2003; Holmes 1995; Kendall 2004:64). Carlson's final comment on the debate, which is the final word, is "Oh, that went *great!*" Of course, he knows he has been brow-beaten unmercifully and admits defeat here.

The context of this situation is that of a debate forum, but the co-hosts are certainly lambasted by their guest. This is due to what Culpeper refers to as a "conflict of interest" (354). This is what he says of contest-like situations:

> In some circumstances it is not in a participants' interests to maintain the other's face. Participants may have conflict of interests. For example, in zero-sum games, such as legal cases or sports contests, only one participant can win and in doing so causes the other participant to lose. Sometimes, it may be the case that a long-term goal can be best achieved by a short-term impoliteness strategy. For example, one might shame somebody into doing something that will be of long term benefit to him or her.

This happens in the *Crossfire* debate. The participants, who are mostly Carlson and Stewart, find themselves in confrontational talk for almost the entire duration of the debate. From this, the strategy of "negative impoliteness" often emerges as the participants continuously talk back and address each others' insults. Avoiding the complex "bald-on-record" definition altogether, I will list the other three parts to this strategy as they are defined by Culpeper (356):

1) *Positive impoliteness:* the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants.
2) *Negative impoliteness:* the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants.
3) *Sarcasm or mock politeness:* the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realizations.

My understanding of sarcasm is close to Leech's (1983) conception of irony. He states the Irony Principle (IP) as follows:

> "If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which doesn't overtly conflict with the PP [Politeness Principle], but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of implicature." (1983: 82).

We can see all three of these types of communication in the debate. For example, when the discussion begins, Begala greets Stewart with compliments, but Stewart immediately begins to use a confrontational stance, thus using *positive impoliteness,* and at the very end even uses profanity, which is considered a positive impoliteness strategy (Culpeper 358). Second, we see a multitude of examples where Stewart and Carlson each try to overthrow the other through the use of *negative impoliteness,* often using condescending tones and ridicule to overpower and dismiss threatening comments (Culpeper 358).

Stewart has appears on this show with a definite agenda and makes it clear that he is not going to commiserate with the co-hosts of the show to add to the "theater" that he says the show conveys. He adamantly dismisses the implicatures that he is not a credible journalist because he knows he is a powerful social commentator—whether or not he is on a serious news show. He acknowledges the fact that he is a comedian and uses this fact to prove that *Crossfire* has a bigger responsibility to the public when they deliver hard news. He finds himself attacking the show but also defending his at the same time. This is what keeps him and Carlson at odds throughout the debate.

The discussion is certainly fueled by contempt, and it was probably to Stewart's benefit that the co-hosts often appear flabbergasted by his comments. Because he is seriously underestimated, Stewart is able to bolster his argument even more, proving his stance as a serious and educated commentator, and he uses his wit and humor to maintain his face. Zajdman's (1995) work shows that positive politeness is often used to minimize social distance, which appears to be the opposite situation in the *Crossfire* debate. Furthermore, she says that humor often functions as a 'defense mechanism,' stating "Joking, too, can be used as a strategy for creating psychological distance" (1995: 328). Zajdman also says, "Although a 'joke is a cooperative enterprise' (Raskin 1985: 104, *citation hers*), the principles of humorous communication violate Grice's (1975) cooperative principle of communication" (1995: 331). So, while they aren't sitting around telling each other jokes, the three debaters do use their humor as a strategy to maintain their face as well as gain power within the argumentation, which does successfully maintain order within the debate (Zajdman 1995: 327).

How do people get to the level of using humor, irony, sarcasm, or impoliteness strategies? From here, we can start to look at the ways language evolves in our lives. People can only get to a certain point of pragmatic competence after learning the essential rules of interaction. Politeness, for example, can be expressed in many different ways. It can involve turn-taking during interaction, or it can be as specific as using particular words (i.e. modal verbs) to show pragmatic competence. In the next section, we will dissect language to expose the more specific words that indicate politeness in speech. Semantically and pragmatically, the uses of modal verbs are extremely important. We use them to assess one's intentions when they speak to us, and we base our assumptions on whether or not the modals are used when expected. First, we must look at both the semantic and pragmatic values of modality.

## 5. Deontic/Intrinsic and Epistemic/Extrinsic Modal Verbs: Semantics and Pragmatics

Longman's *Grammar of Spoken and Written English* concurs with most grammars that the central modal auxiliary verbs are the following: can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, and must. According to this corpus grammar, these verbs function to convey modality rather than tense, and can never function as both simultaneously (Biber *et al.* 483). The historical bearings of modals are based upon the notion that they have semantic and pragmatic value in communication. The implications of this belief have led to a linguistic quandary of having to delineate the purpose and value of modality forms. Semantically and pragmatically, modals typically function as a politeness form. This form is not necessarily a simple one for first language learners (L1) or second language learners (L2) to master, because there are many pragmatic possibilities to consider when using the form. For example, the speaker must know which auxiliary is the correct usage for the semantic meaning he or she tries to convey. If people use an incorrect form (i.e. *can* instead of *may*), they could experience an uncomfortable pragmatic situation if, for example, their error is pointed out during conversation. Therefore, new language learners, L1 or L2, would need to understand the types of meanings that modals can possess.

The most well-known meanings for modals include these three categories, as presented in Longman, are: 1) permission/probability/ability, 2) obligation/necessity, and 3) volition/predication (485). There are many instances when the modal is necessary for politeness when proposing probability. For example, a person who wants to change a meeting time (probability/ability) sounds more polite if they use the modal *could* instead of omitting it altogether. So, they might say, *"Could we meet tomorrow at noon, because*

*I might not be able to meet today,"* instead of saying, "*Meet me tomorrow at noon, because I simply can't meet today."* The latter is much more curt, demanding, and insensitive to the listener, which displays a lack of concern for the way the question is emotionally interpreted. It is important for language learners to realize this type of pragmatic and semantic function. However, some forms seem to be more natural in different registers. In general, the corpora (found in the Longman grammar) show that some forms are used more frequently than others.

Interestingly, Longman graphs the frequency of *could* as approximately 1,700 per one million words (486). This form, while typically considered a more polite form, is more popular in fictional texts than in conversation. The obligation/necessity modals, *must* and *should,* are found at the lower end of the frequency chart. They both occur nearly 1000 times per one million words (486). They say that the leading modal (with nearly 3,600 occurrences per million words) is *will,* and that conversation (versus fiction, news, and academic text) is where modals mostly occur (486). W*ill*, as well as *would,* falls into the volition/prediction category. The modal *will* is widely used for marking prediction in academic register; however, it is noted that, in conversation, the modals *would* and *be going to* (including *gonna*) can be used to mark both volition and prediction (495). The idea here is that there are different occurrences of modality within different registers.

The theories behind modality encompass the deontic and epistemic meanings. (Longman refers to these as *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* meanings.) The deontic, or intrinsic, explanation of modality refers to certain events or activities that are controlled by an agent, human or otherwise (Biber *et al.* 485). The epistemic, or extrinsic, modality refers to the likelihood of events or activities, typically performed by a non-human agent (Biber *et al.* 485). Here, the philosophical representations of modals are meant to separate thought from action. There are also more interpersonal implications within the epistemic realm, because there is more implicature involved. For example, using the epistemic/extrinsic modal *must* to suggest, "*You must be her daughter*" could imply, *"She could be her daughter, but there is the possibility that she is not."* Obviously, if the woman is indeed not the daughter and actually the mother, this could be awkward for the daughter who has been presumed much older. In Anna Papafragou's article "The Acquisition of Modality: Implications for Theories of Semantic Representation," deontic/intrinsic modality appears to represent less implicature. In her example, *"I must go on a diet soon" (370),* the speaker refers to himself/herself, relinquishing any implicature towards the other party. I suggest that the intrinsic modal form is more polite when examined for what Papafragou refers to as "utterance comprehension" or "utterance interpretation" (371, 372). Obviously, one saying that he or she, personally, needs to diet does not implicate the other party semantically or pragmatically, nor does it suggest that the other party also needs to diet.

Interestingly, Papafragou suggests that there is an order of acquisition for the semantics and pragmatics of modality. *(Note: In addition to epistemic and deontic modality, she mentions a third category, root/epistemic, which are associated (in this particular article) as both synonymous and separate.)* As part of her "utterance comprehension" analysis, Papafragou says the semantic meanings [or root meanings] for utterances are acquired before epistemic [and pragmatic] ones, and she attributes this to polysemy (372). I deduce from this idea that dual-meaning modals like "can" are understood for their denotation and then their pragmatic value. Papafragou says, "In other words, successful use of epistemic modals requires the speaker to perform deductive operations on abstract propositions [...] and to arrive at a warranted conclusion" (373). Obviously, as a parallel to this notion, the acquisition of politeness and implicature must also take more time to acquire.

Papafragou presents data from naturalistic longitudinal studies that show the following:

> A number of studies focusing on syntactic aspects of modality (her citation; Brown, 1973; Kuczaj and Maratsos, 1983; Shatz, Billman and Yaniv, 1986, among others, reviewed in Shatz and Wilcox, 1991) all point to the following general conclusion: the use of English modals begins gradually, between 1;10 [year; months] and 2;6, often with a single negative modal form (such as can't) appearing in limited syntactic environments (mainly declaratives). [M]odal vocabulary growth proceeds fairly rapidly during this early period, while the range of syntactic constructions in which the modals appear changes somewhat more slowly. (374)

The research that follows highlights data out of the Bristol Language Development Study, which says that 60 children who were monitored every three months acquired root modality more quickly than epistemic modality (374). This result could be a reflection of Papafragou's thoughts on the deductive thought, as mentioned earlier, that she suggests is required for more epistemic/extrinsic usage. The Bristol study also shows that epistemic modality is acquired at the [approximate] age of 5 (Papafragou 374). Also cited is the inferential [BrE] example, "'That *will be the postman'* (uttered on hearing footsteps)," as one of the ways 5-year-olds might begin using the epistemic/extrinsic modal form (374).

Child acquisition of modality has also been explored in Michael Tomasello's *Constructing A Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition.* Tomasello says that children can use modals to express immediate future events (221). He finds that children use *will* and *gonna* most commonly (222). These modals are within the realm of implicature and personal volition category. Tomasello's look at deontic/intrinsic and epistemic/extrinsic modals differs slightly from Papafragou and Longman's definitions. He uses a more practical approach, and his definition seems slightly asymmetric to my original assumption that intrinsic modals are more polite. He defines the two as such:

> Deontic modality concerns actions and is "necessity based." The question is whether one ought to, has to, can, may, will, or wants to do something. According to Stephany (1993), this class of attitudes has its ontogenetic origins prelinguistically in imperatives, typically expressed through a demanding intonation. (224)

Here, Tomasello is possibly suggesting that the deontic/intrinsic form is identified as more face-threatening, thus making it more explicitly impolite than the coded, or implied, impoliteness found in epistemic/extrinsic form. Because of its explicitness, deontic form should be mastered by L1 and L2 speakers so to avoid negative interactions or confrontations. Through practice, L2 speakers will acquire the epistemic modality as they become more familiar with cultural values in communication. In essence, the more obvious aspect of politeness (as in deontic) will lead to a more native understanding of implicature (as in epistemic). Once the learners become more acquainted with the culture of the target language, they will find themselves more confident when deciphering whether or not an utterance may or may not offend others. In relation to this idea, Tomasello describes epistemic modality as such:

> [It], in contrast, concerns knowledge and is "possibility based." The question is whether something is, must, might, could, or should be the case. Historically, deontic modality typically emerges first, and then that same form often expands to epistemic uses as well (his citation; Fleischman, 1982; Traugott, 1989; Sweetser, 1990). (224)

Tomasello argues that deontic/intrinsic expressions emerge in children around the age of 2 (224). Using this premise, I began to examine the differences between the two forms. My hypothesis supports that one form (epistemic/extrinsic) entails more implicature, while the other form (deontic/intrinsic) is more face-driven and grammatically imperative.

When children use the initial deontic/intrinsic forms, they will use phrases like, *"I hafta go to the bathroom,"* but the phrase is really indicative of the command, *"Take me to the bathroom."* The child's guardian might instruct the child to say "please," insisting on good manners; however, there are no underlying insults or misinterpretations here. It would be very difficult to misinterpret such a command.

At the same time, after children acquire the epistemic/extrinsic modals, they could become very embarrassing company in public places. For example, if a 5-year-old child blurts out, *"Why does that lady hafta walk like that?"* about an obese lady who limps, the implicature here goes beyond a simple question. Without realizing the implications of such an insensitive comment, the child will ultimately insult the obese person if they are within earshot.

While there still seems to be a grey area between the deontic/intrinsic and epistemic/extrinsic modals, I have attempted to simplify the possible differences. The idea is one that supports the scholarly finding that the acquisition of pragmatics takes much longer than the acquisition of semantics (as well as syntax). It seems to be an ontogenetic process that changes over the course of peoples' lives from the time they are children (Tomasello 224). One can insist that knowing how to use modals grammatically does not mean that people initially learn how to use them pragmatically. As children acquire language, they become more aware of appropriateness and politeness after repeated faltering. It would also be very beneficial to look at L2 learners' rate of pragmatic and semantic acquisition in a different culture. Next, we will look at the ways teachers can help students achieve pragmatic competence.

### 5.1 Teaching Linguistic Pragmatics

L2 learners are faced with many semantic and pragmatic obstacles when learning a new language. They not only must familiarize themselves with vocabulary but also with conventions of conversation. Kang Shumin discusses the ways L2 learners can accomplish appropriate interaction within a different culture. In her article, "Factors to Consider: Developing Adult EFL Students' Speaking Abilities," she discusses how particularly complex this process can be for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. She says, citing various studies on foreign language learning, "Because of the influence or interference of their own cultural norms, it is hard for nonnative speakers to choose the forms appropriate to certain situations" (206). Basically, she says that what works for one culture may or may not work in the target language. This is both very true and extremely important for ESL/EFL teachers to remember when students in their classroom practice interpersonal communication.

Students practicing politeness forms such as modals will need to integrate the cultural values that play a major role in the pragmatics of interaction into their repertoire. First, they will need to familiarize themselves with the types of output—politeness, impoliteness, and rudeness. Using these three categories, the instructor can suggest that modals would support politeness, avoid impoliteness, and prevent rudeness. Emphasizing the most common day-to-day interactions within the target culture, the lessons will, for example, encourage students to use modals in interrogative and imperative utterances.

Shumin suggests that students should practice language in a variety of ways. This practice will encourage students to adapt to situations when they engage in real-life conversations. She says that students would benefit from engaging in what can she calls "small talk" (208). The students will practice basic conversational techniques, which can be considered positive face. Modals might not be as immediately necessary at this level, but students will use small talk to foster confidence when speaking with others. However, modals might be necessary for certain questions like, *"Can you believe this weather?"* or *"Can you believe that lottery jackpot?"* Using small talk in classroom activities will promote a sense of competence at the basic level for students. It will also transition students into more interactive discourse with others. Other means of practice, according to Shumin, can actually involve specific examples of situations of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic difference (210). This would benefit language learners because they can apply their learned knowledge of politeness to real-life verbal exchanges.

Students should be encouraged to practice deontic/intrinsic (permission, obligation, or volition/intention) and epistemic/extrinsic (likelihood, possibility, necessity, or prediction) modals in imperative and interrogative sentences (Biber et al. 485). When forming questions, students would benefit from learning different types of approaches. For example, they might be exposed to the following "more polite" conversational forms:

- *Can you be available for lunch? (possibility/extrinsic)*
- *Would you be interested in going to lunch? (possibility/intrinsic)*
- *Will you be off that day? (possibility/extrinsic)*
- *Could you tell me what day you are off again? (ability/intrinsic)*

Here, there are varying degrees of politeness, and there seems to be a definite line drawn between what can and cannot be determined by the other person who receives the question. It also appears that the past forms sound more polite, and this concurs with Greenbaum and Quirk's suggestion that they are, indeed, the more polite form (60).

In the L2 classroom, students should be encouraged to think about and describe possible attitudes that can be associated with certain types of questions and requests. For example, students should be able to recognize the difference between politeness, impoliteness and blatant rudeness. This, perhaps, falls into the category of cultural awareness; nevertheless, it is a way to familiarize students with cultural conventions of politeness.

Within the realm of politeness, students should be able to recognize that modals affect the message and create a certain attitude. Basic formulas for politeness should be introduced in the L2 classroom. According to Richard Watts, there is a formulaic basis for politeness in English. In a more academic example, Watts presents a researcher's question that combines the use of a "term of address" along with the modal *can*. It is as follows: "Dr. Weber briefly\ **can you explain** exactly what AIDS is\" (171). Watts says that politeness is subject to individual interpretation but explains that there exists, "within the context of the ongoing social interaction, what would be the minimum set of linguistic structures required to carry out the necessary politic behaviour" (170). If this is to be assumed, then students can be expected to practice the structures that are socially accepted as polite. The above example serves as an academic prototype of sorts that L2 students should be expected to understand and critique. Interestingly, Watts points out that this is a polite form in general, but also says that, if analyzed closer, the form can be seen as a face-threatening request due to the addition of "briefly" after the initial address (171). If students can achieve this type of analytical process, they will be much more successful in learning formulaic politeness and deciding whether or not it is genuinely polite. There are ways to teach these formulas using top-down processing so that students can begin to pick apart various politeness forms.

If students use top-down processing, they can make several assumptions about particular utterances. First, they can look at the context in which an utterance is used. Second, they can decide whether the utterance is socially acceptable as polite. Finally, they can determine what particular aspects, if closely critiqued, could be indicative of impoliteness or even implicit rudeness. This process will train students to recognize when they could possibly commit face-threatening acts. One way to begin this process would be to expose students to a series of listening activities where they would have to explain specifics like context, power relationships, and particular diction presented in the examples (Nunan 239). They would start with a general notion of meaning and pick the sentence apart to determine whether or not negative connotation is present. Thus, they would engage in very beneficial top-down processing and build pragmatic competence.

After achieving a sufficient familiarity with the pragmatics of modals, students should be able to recognize the level of politeness within particular utterances even when modals are used. Some examples of this are listed here:

- *Can you please shut up?* (possibility/extrinsic/rude)
- *Could you please close your mouth?* (possibility/extrinsic/rude)
- *You may never stop talking.* (possibility/extrinsic/impolite)
- *Would it be possible to chat later?* (prediction/extrinsic/polite)

The above examples present extrinsic modals of possibility, but they are not all explicitly impolite. In fact, there appears to be a range from very rude to basically polite. As a parallel to my hypothesis, it seems that this could be the reason that extrinsic modality is often foreshadowed by impoliteness. It is important that students understand that simply using a modal does not necessarily avoid impoliteness or rudeness, especially in the case of extrinsic modality.

After students can successfully critique utterances and locate connotative words in sentences, they can begin to construct their own examples of polite utterances. Hopefully, they will begin to recognize that impoliteness is not necessarily the opposite of politeness, because it is much more complex. In order to facilitate this kind of critical thinking, the instructor must allow students to practice and learn from their mistakes. As they progress, the L2 learners will become more aware of the relationship between politeness and interaction and how it differs from their native culture.

Next, we will examine more closely Tomasello's stance on language acquisition and how it determines future linguistic habits.

**5.2 Michael Tomasello's *Constructing a Language:* Language Acquisition Issues**

As mentioned earlier, in his book *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition,* Michael Tomasello presents language acquisition theory that challenges Noam Chomsky's Universal Grammar position. At the heart of the argument are the parallels between innatist, cognitive, and social language learning theories. In chapter eight, the theories surround what Tomasello calls the "three time frames" of linguistic competence; these categories are 1) phylogenetic, 2) historical, and 3) ontogenetic (282). First, phylogenetic competence involves the existence of people's innate ability to use language. This biological look at language acquisition involves what Tomasello says can be attributed to Dual Inheritance Theory, which is the model for social and biological adaptation in humans (283). The overall hypothesis is that humans not only adapt to their environment, but do so because they are genetically capable of cognition necessary for adaptation. Second, he says that historical competence arises out of the cultural influences found within the speech community. Basically, this means that cultural history determines the norms that emerge within the community. Third, ontogenetic competence is defined as the overall process that one undergoes over the course of his or her life span. While he agrees that biology plays a small role in language learning, Tomasello argues that children's linguistic competence is mostly achieved ontogenetically and historically (283).

Tomasello also argues that nativists have not successfully accounted for "developmental change" (284). He cites an example of a British family who is considered grammatically deficient and does not use correct morphological structures, which allows for the possibility of a "genetic marker" regarding linguistic competence—thus raising the collective nativist brow (285). However, because the family's overall performance is affected, their problem cannot be attributed solely to biology. He says, "The fact is that neither this case nor any other provides evidence that there are grammar genes that code for specific aspects of language structure" (285). If this is true, then language acquisition is actually based less on grammar and more on historic and ontogenetic forces indeed.

Another important argument emerges in Tomasello's piece. He says that the Critical Period Hypothesis does not prove that there is a "sharp" decline in adults' ability to learn language; moreover, he states that the decline is actually continuous, which could indicate a correlation between "interference" that occurs more and more over the course of one's life (286-287). While he agrees that children do learn language much easier than adults, he also posits that this could be the result of historic and ontogenetic influences. Consequently, this encompasses the idea that children's language is, in a sense, newer, and they have experienced less time, practice, and interference with the language(s).

In an attempt to disprove the poverty of stimulus notion, Tomasello says that children learn key functions of words (for example, auxiliaries) in order to construct questions and statements (288). He disregards (it is omitted from the text) the fact that children learn language constructs despite hearing people use false starts, hedges, and fragments, for example. He also highlights a kind of "inventory" that children amass over time through social interaction. It is this practice, he says, that enables children to build on previous knowledge of language constructs through a "cut and paste" method, which is used to create appropriate utterances according to the situation (308-310). (He contrasts these constructs from speech by calling them utterances.) He says this of children's acquisition of pragmatics and syntax:

> The other thing that children must manage in parallel as they produce an utterance in a particular usage event is the formulation of that utterance in terms appropriate to the particular communicative context. The child must pragmatically ground what she wants to say in the current joint attentional frame [...]. (313-314)

Here, Tomasello has set up the idea that children learn more from their environment than anything else. He suggests that children begin to construct language through trial and error in order to function pragmatically in conversation with others.

Cognitively, children learn certain linguistic representations that often "change" ontogenetically, according to Tomasello's presentation of cognitive science theory (314). It seems that he tries to explain that which the poverty of stimulus hypothesis cannot explain spontaneity. He basically says that linguistic symbols become the springboard for the ontogenetically and historically (and culturally) developed language; moreover, it is this change that becomes important. This theory says that children use concrete (vs. abstract) notions of language to build (and build upon) schema (321). These representations are thought to change over time and are considered to be constantly evolving.

Tomasello's argument, while poignant, is often unsound due to the fact that he, too, leaves room for speculation. His language acquisition theories are just as mysterious as the theories that already exist in formal linguistics. Also, his audience would most certainly have to be people familiar with linguistic terminology and theory. He attempts to debunk many of the long-standing (and long accepted) language acquisition theories, but fails to present a logical argument at times. For example, how can he argue that poverty of stimulus is not relevant? This is contradictory to some of his claims. He says that children can "cut and paste" language and build linguistic competence according to their schema; but this ties into the idea that children in fact hear errors and mistakes in others' speech and still create sound linguistic structures. Perhaps, this could be indicative of the notion that children are spontaneous because of their amassed inventory of symbols and representations that can be used during certain situations. However, is his theory merely an outline of habituation and routinization? These competencies stem from what we are taught as children. Polite behavior and speech are both taught early in life, and the standards are different for males and females. These socially determined gender roles are reinforced throughout childhood, and hence support stereotypical assumptions about gender in society. In the next and final chapter, we will synthesize how the genders utilize their linguistic competencies within different contexts.

**6. Conclusion**

Whether people communicate in the workplace or just talk at home with family and friends, gender still divides the ways talk will occur due to stereotypes. As we saw, people either acquire politeness as children or learn the pragmatics of a culture in an L2 situation. However, the rules for males and females are definitively different within many cultures, including America. Holmes (1995) suggests that there are different perceptions regarding these rules. Research also shows that females are more concerned than men about other people's feelings, solidarity, and politeness (Holmes 1995; Mills 2003). Context is, of course, a factor, and researchers seem to agree on this across the board. However, women are generally more approachable, cooperative, and polite in many different contexts. There are still clichés surrounding women's speech, such as the notion that they gossip much more often than men, or that they are much more intimate when they talk to other women (Jones 1980; Holmes 1995).

To a certain extent, context defines all interaction and linguistic strategies. But the issue of gender differences remains important, and females still differ from males regarding what is considered appropriate social behavior. This is partly due to how females and males are socialized as children and what type of persona is going to be conveyed to others (see Tannen 1994 and Holmes 1995). For example, Mills says this of 'femininity':

> Femininity, that set of varied and changing characteristics which have been rather arbitrarily associated with women in general, and which no woman could unequivocally adopt, has an association with politeness, self-effacement, weakness, vulnerability, and friendliness... (2003: 203)

This is a stereotype to an extent, but women have shown a tendency to exhibit more caring behaviors than men when interacting with others. They seem much more aware of other people's face vulnerability. However, whether all women act the same within a culture is seriously debatable. At the same time, not all men are alike either.

It is a difficult question to specifically define how men and women differ in their interactions. In hierarchical situations, for example, it seems that men typically show their power more often than women. Females just tend to minimize conflict. The only problem with this is the issue of respect. Are females or males more respected linguistically? This, too, is difficult to answer. Certain situations might require specific linguistic strategies (i.e. an argument would be much different than normal conversation). Also, Lakoff has highlighted the ways women acquire woman's language. She says, "We will find, I think, that women experience linguistic discrimination in two ways: in the way that they are taught to use language, and in the way general language use treats them" (Lakoff 1994: 203).

This research shows that time has not erased the ways women are perceived linguistically and psychologically in society. Perhaps, these stereotypes could be the result of the sexually provocative ways women are portrayed in society. Men are, to a certain extent, exploited too, but it does not have the same effect on society. Women are still trying to gain respect in the workforce and to be taken seriously in their everyday lives. The stereotypical notion is that women who are nice, polite, and soft-spoken are often assumed to be weak or vulnerable. Men, nevertheless, who are nice, polite, and soft-spoken, are sometimes accused of being feminine and using 'woman's' language. It is a vicious cycle when it comes to all that is *femininity*.

Politeness, on the other hand, is not restricted to a female-only linguistic strategy. Men and women are often scrutinized within all of these realms of politeness study. There are understood rules for female language and male language (for example, females who curse a lot are considered to be vulgar and socially disruptive, where it is often acceptable for men to curse). From the time we are children, most of us have been exposed to the maxims mentioned earlier in this thesis. However, even in early childhood, girls tend to be less aggressive than boys and less likely to violate the maxims. Is it because of biological factors? Do women innately possess a mechanism in their brains that is different from men? A question like this is terribly hard to prove. If men are more dominant in society than women, it is only because they have been socially permitted and encouraged to do so. Whether it starts at the time of birth, or evolves through social interaction in school, males and females develop and reinforce their differences as they grow into adults. As it is right now, the current research shows that men and women use language strategies differently and aim for different outcomes in conversation.

As discussed earlier, Mills (2003) suggests that females are often subjected to many stereotypical linguistic expectations. It is women who are *supposed* to be nice and affectionate. It is men who are *supposed* to be more aggressive, brusque, and unemotional. These are the various stereotypes that have lasted for many generations. It is acceptable for men to use vulgarities, but when women use them, they are considered crass and uncouth. Mills says that females are often expected to be friendly, while men can get away with being less concerned about others. The notion of manners is also key. Women are expected to exhibit good manners, those that would indicate lady-like behavior. At the same time, etiquette standards for men seem to be much more lax. Of course, these are called stereotypes for a reason. We all know that every person is unique and will make unique linguistic choices. Most people represent themselves according to how they want to be perceived by others, and it is a performance of sorts (Goffman 1959).

This idea of a social persona is critical to the gender divide in language. Today, women struggle to maintain their professional image. Men, on the other hand, still receive the benefit of the more superior side of the stereotypes, where they are often assumed to possess a more professional language. Women are said to use more "fluff" language for colors and other adjectives (see Lakoff 1973). Unfortunately, when males use the same fluffy words to describe something, they are often labeled effeminate and unprofessional, which is also extremely unfair and stereotypical. Social norms within the professional realm might be one major example of this type of divide.

Addressing the professional stance of males, Janet Holmes says that males tend to be more competitive for the floor, and interrupt more often to achieve that goal (1996: 25). So the basic approach to workplace interaction seems to be much different for males than for females. But is this due to social constraints or lessons learned during childhood? I think these differences can be attributed to both. Men and women are subjected to very different stereotypes; moreover, in the professional world, they are most likely very aware of them.

Holmes discusses how women are keener to offenses within interaction than men. She says that women will often apologize more often when they think they have said or done something wrong, despite the fact that they are "more often the victims of such talk offenses than men" (1995: 170). Sometimes, too, women will simply be too self-effacing and overly apologetic. Women, who are believed to be more polite, are often seen as using powerless, weak language. However, Holmes asserts that the belief is that "women tend to give greater weight to social relationships than men do" (1973: 170). Because of this, it can be assumed that women try harder to achieve social harmony with others.

Overall, the identities on both sides of the gender fence are still being debated. There is still a wave of research which shows that males use more dominant, confident language. However, the debate constantly revives itself due to the ever-changing roles for both males and females in our fast-paced society. Social constraints still exist for both genders, but progress is occurring. The male identity and female identity differ greatly, but there seems to have been many strides toward equality in more recent years. Assumptions are always dangerous in any context, whether it be about gender, race, or age, so it is important that people continue to talk about talk. That is the only way progress can ever be accomplished.

### 6.1 Final Considerations

People use politeness principles to maintain social harmony. The principles function as pragmatic tools for people to utilize, but, at the same time, the norms for males and females are different. Current research shows that men are socially permitted to be impolite, where women are expected to be more polite. Especially in the work force, as Holmes and Mills discuss, males are shown to exhibit much more aggression and a lot less emotion than females. Each gender differs in its approach to relationships differently, too. Women are more concerned about how others see them, while men tend not to concern themselves with this as much. Embedded in these constructs are the stereotypes that have evolved from preceding generations. However, the inequity that women face in the professional realm is still an issue today. The social standard is learned long before a person ever enters the work force. From childhood on through stereotyping, politeness involves a socially constructed set of rules. Moreover, whether a person is learning an L1 or L2, he or she is taught social norms that are reinforced throughout his or her language acquisition process.

Further research is needed to show whether or not females might actually embrace gender stereotypes within certain contexts.

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