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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative study of impoliteness techniques employed by different genders in computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the context of the microblogging website Tumblr. It uses a modified version of Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness framework to categorize and analyze the data collected on Tumblr. Culpeper's (1996) framework is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which is one of the most influential work in the field of linguistic politeness. According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) everyone has a "face", a public self-image that they wish to maintain and protect. A person's face consists of two separate aspects, negative face and positive face. Negative face refers to one's wish to be free from imposition whereas positive face is concerned with being accepted and belonging to a group (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61). Typically in an interaction people cooperate and aim to maintain each other's face (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61). However, sometimes the face is threatened by face threatening acts (FTAs) that can be mitigated by using politeness strategies presented by Brown and Levinson.

This study examines the characteristics of impolite language on Tumblr, and discusses how far it can be categorized using a system designed for the study of spoken conversations. It also discusses the most frequently used impoliteness strategies by men and women and the gender differences in their use. Moreover, it considers whether the topic of conversation has an effect on the impoliteness strategies chosen.

The data for this study were collected from mixed gender interactions on Tumblr on the five topics of feminism, politics, racism, religion and social justice. These topics were chosen because of their controversial nature in order to maximize the relevant data. The data consist of 404 separate utterances that were collected from 304 individual speakers and marked for gender and topic as well as categorized under specific impoliteness strategies.

The results show that while there are differences between the genders in the use of impoliteness, this has little to do with who is more impolite as the both men and women have strategies that they have a tendency to use more often. The most visible differences in impoliteness between men and women emerge from the use of specific words or abbreviations, for instance. The topic of discussion does have some effect on the type of insults used. Furthermore, it is not easy to distinguish between positive and negative politeness in CMC and the environment renders negative politeness much less effective compared to face-to-face interaction.

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1. Introduction

This thesis is a comparative study of impoliteness techniques employed by different genders in computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the context of the microblogging website Tumblr. The data for this study were collected from mixed gender interactions on the five topics of feminism, politics, racism, religion and social justice. The data were categorized using a modified version of Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness framework, which in turn is based on the politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987). The research questions addressed in study are the following:

1. What are the characteristics of impolite language on Tumblr, and how far can it be categorized using a system designed for the study of spoken conversations?
2. What are the most frequently used impoliteness techniques by men and women?
3. Are there any notable differences between the genders in the use of impoliteness techniques?
4. Does the topic of conversation have an effect on the impoliteness techniques chosen?

The focus of this thesis is linguistic impoliteness, an area of study that arguably has been overshadowed by the vast amounts of research done on linguistic politeness. Impoliteness in language is less frequent than politeness (Culpeper 2011: 130); however, this does not make it a less important subject of study. Rather, because impoliteness has often been overlooked in the past there is still both need and ample space for more study in the area.

Much of the study on the subject so far has focused on face-to-face interaction. However, in today's society, computer-mediated communication has become increasingly common as a means of informal interaction, and has rapidly developed conventions of politeness and insult that differ considerably from those of spoken communication. Thus it is imperative to shift the focus of linguistic impoliteness to more readily encompass the new way of interaction between individuals that the current and constantly developing technologies give rise to. Naturally there are numerous factors that affect the impoliteness strategies chosen by speakers: however, face-to-face interaction and computer-mediated communication offer two significantly different environments and both of these lack some of the attributes of the other, which inexorably influence the choices made by the participants. To make sense of these differences, it is important to study how and why impoliteness strategies differ not only between

face-to-face interactions and computer-mediated communication but also between the different media of CMC.

This thesis examines impoliteness conventions on Tumblr and aims to find patterns in the use of different impoliteness strategies. It studies the ways in which these strategies are used as well as the context surrounding their use. In particular, it focuses on differences in their use between men and women and comments on the gender specific tendencies in the use of impoliteness. In brief, this thesis offers concrete examples of how impoliteness functions in CMC in the context of Tumblr while taking into account the gender variable. Additionally, it comments on the ways in which CMC as an environment differs from face-to-face interaction and how this affects both the production and interpretation of impoliteness.

The second chapter of this thesis introduces some of the major theories in the field of linguistic politeness with special focus on the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) and their concept of 'face', a public self-image, which everyone has and wishes to maintain and protect in a conversation. This chapter also discusses impoliteness and the impoliteness framework by Culpeper (1996) that was inspired by Brown and Levinson's theory and is used as a basis for this study. The chapter also includes a section on gender, which focuses on differences between men and women's language. This area of study in sociolinguistics is often said to have started with Robin Lakoff's (1975) book *Language and Woman's Place*, which introduced many of the key ideas in the field. The chapter concludes with a section that discusses the typical characteristics of the language of computer-mediated communication (CMC).

The third chapter describes Tumblr and gives a brief overview of previous studies of this website. It also describes the process of data collection and analysis, including the modifications made on Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness framework for the purposes of this study, as well as the reasons they were deemed necessary.

The fourth chapter presents the findings. After a general overview, each of the impoliteness strategies studied are discussed in turn. The frequencies are presented in both absolute and proportional figures, and related to the gender of the speakers and the topic. Furthermore, the strategies that typically appear together are also examined.

The fifth chapter discusses the implications of the findings with reference to gender and conversation topic. It also problematizes the distinction between positive and negative politeness and its relevance to impoliteness in CMC.

Finally, because CMC includes many terms and abbreviations that are not typical of spoken language or universally known outside certain contexts a glossary of internet language

is provided as appendix. The glossary clarifies terms found in the data that are typical of CMC in general or at least regularly used on Tumblr.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Politeness

2.1.1. Approaches to politeness

Because the field of linguistic politeness contains such vast amounts of research it would be impossible to discuss every theory that has contributed to the study of politeness. However, this section aims to introduce the most influential and prevalent theories in the field, starting with Grice's cooperative principle which has influenced many of the other theories. The other theories introduced in this section are Leech's politeness principle and Lakoff's rules of politeness, as well as Brown and Levinson's politeness framework. Brown and Levinson's work in the field has been especially influential and has therefore also garnered criticism from various scholars; these criticisms are also addressed. The last part of this sub-section briefly discusses Fraser's four perspectives on politeness.

2.1.2. Grice's cooperative principle

Grice's (1989: 26) Cooperative Principle (CP) describes the way in which the participants in a conversation must cooperate with each other in order to be understood. His exact phrasing of the CP is: "make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1989: 26). Under this general principle Grice (1989: 26-27) lists the following four maxims and submaxims:

1. Quantity

- Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
 - Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
2. Quality – Try to make your contribution one that is true
 - Do not say what you believe to be false.
 - Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
 3. Relation
 - Be relevant
 4. Manner – Be perspicuous
 - Avoid obscurity of expression.
 - Avoid ambiguity.
 - Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
 - Be orderly.

The first one of these, the maxim Quantity, relates to the quantity of information provided in a conversation (1989: 26). Grice (1989: 26) states that the second submaxim for this category is disputable because giving too much information may simply be a waste of time rather than an actual transgression against the Cooperative Principle. The second category, Quality, relates to the quality of information provided whereas the third one, Relation, highlights the importance of making one's contribution as relevant as possible and not, for example, excessively long and detailed as also suggested by the first maxim, Quantity (1989: 27). The last category, Manner, differs from the previous categories in that it does not relate to what is being said but rather to how things are said (1989: 27).

Brown and Levinson (1987: 5) stress that the Gricean maxims are not simply statements of regular patterns in behavior, but also background presumptions that people tend to take for granted in interaction. However, this does not mean that the maxims are rules that cannot be broken in a conversation. Grice (1989: 30) lists four examples of different ways in which a speaker may fail to fulfill a maxim. First, they may violate a maxim quietly and unostentatiously (Grice 1989: 30). Second, they may opt out from the operation of the maxim and say or indicate that they are unwilling to cooperate in the way the maxim requires (Grice 1989: 30). Third, they may be faced with a clash, a situation where they are unable to fulfill one maxim without

violating another (Grice 1989: 30). Lastly, they may *flout* the maxim and blatantly fail to observe it (Grice 1989: 30). Flouting the maxims in turn signifies conversational implicatures (Grice 1989: 30). These are “non-explicit messages intended by the speaker to be inferred by the hearer” (Fraser 1990: 222). Grice (1989: 31-37) offers several different examples of conversational implicature and states that such phrases as *war is war* and *women are women*, for instance, are examples of flouting the first maxim of Quantity. In other words, these phrases are totally uninformative at the level of what is said but at the same time informative at the level of what is being implicated (Grice 1989: 33).

2.1.3. Leech’s politeness principle

Leech has developed what he calls the Politeness Principle (PP) as “a necessary complement” to Grice’s Cooperative Principle (CP) (Leech 1983: 80). Leech (1983: 80) argues that while the CP should not be rejected, it has its weaknesses, which is why the Politeness Principle is needed. For instance, according to Leech (1983: 104), “politeness is an important missing link between the CP and the problem of how to relate sense to force”. The PP is divided into six maxims that deal with polite behavior. These are the tact maxim, the generosity maxim, the approbation maxim, the modesty maxim, the agreement maxim and the sympathy maxim (Leech 1983: 132). Leech (1983: 133) points out that not all of these maxims are equally important and neither are they absolute rules but rather “observed up to a certain point”. In addition, Leech (1983: 131-133) notes that, in conversation, the speakers may also show politeness towards a third party – whether they are present or not – but this is generally not as important as politeness towards the addressee. Leech (1983: 14) explains that there is a difference between the concept of *an utterance* and the concept of *an illocutionary act*. Because an utterance may be understood both as a form of act or activity and also as the product of a verbal act, a distinction needs to be made (Leech 1983: 14). Therefore the term *illocutionary act* refers to the utterance-action itself, while *utterance* is used to describe the linguistic product of that act (Leech 1983: 14). Moreover, Leech (1983: 104) lists the following functions of illocutionary acts:

- (a) COMPETITIVE: The illocutionary goal competes with the social goal; eg ordering asking, demanding, begging.

(b) CONVIVIAL: The illocutionary goal coincides with the social goal; eg offering, inviting, greeting, thanking, congratulating.

(c) COLLABORATIVE: The illocutionary goal is indifferent to the social goal; eg asserting, reporting, announcing, instructing.

(d) CONFLICTIVE: The illocutionary goal conflicts with the social goal; eg threatening, accusing, cursing, reprimanding.

Leech (1983: 104) also specifies that it is the first two types that mainly involve politeness. The competitive function involves negative politeness and reducing discord between what the speaker wished to achieve and what is “good manners” (Leech 1983: 104-105). Moreover, competitive goals are essentially discourteous and the PP is required to mitigate this discourtesy (Leech 1983: 105). The convivial function on the other hand involves positive politeness and is intrinsically courteous (Leech 1983: 105). Leech’s view on negative and positive impoliteness differs from that of Brown and Levinson’s (discussed in 2.1.4.) in that to him negative politeness consists of minimizing the impoliteness of impolite illocutions while positive politeness involves maximizing the politeness of polite illocutions (Fraser 1990: 226).

As mentioned, Leech’s classification is based on functions whereas Searle’s (1977), cited in Mey (2001: 120), classification of illocutionary acts is based on varied criteria and is divided into different categories (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations)(Leech 1983: 105-106). Leech (1983: 132) associates these categories with his own maxims in the following manner:

- (I) Tact Maxim (in impositives and commissives)
 - (a) Minimize cost to the *other* [(b) Maximize benefit to *other*]
- (II) Generosity Maxim (in impositives and commissives)
 - (a) Minimize benefit to *self* [(b) Maximize cost to *self*]
- (III) Approbation Maxim (in expressives and assertives)
 - (a) Minimize dispraise of *other* [(b) Maximize praise of *other*]
- (IV) Modesty Maxim (in expressives and assertives)
 - (a) Minimize praise of *self* [(b) Maximize of dispraise of *self*]
- (V) Agreement Maxim (in assertives)
 - (a) Minimize disagreement between *self* and *other* [(b) Maximize agreement between *self* and *other*]
- (VI) Sympathy Maxim (in assertives)

- (a) Minimize antipathy between *self* and *other* [(b) Maximize sympathy between *self* and *other*]

Here “self” refers to the speaker whereas “other” refers either to the addressee(s) or people who are not present in the speech situation (Leech 1983: 131).

2.1.4. Lakoff’s rules of politeness

Lakoff (1975 [2004:87]) proposes three Rules of Politeness that are meant to be able to predict why a certain act is polite or impolite in a particular context. These rules should apply to both linguistic polite behavior, such as saying “please”, as well as nonlinguistic politeness, which could include, for example, opening doors for others (Lakoff 1975 [2004:87]). The three rules are as follows:

1. Formality: keep aloof
2. Deference: give options
3. Camaraderie: show sympathy

Lakoff (1975 [2004:88]) lists several examples of the first rule, all of which relate to formal politeness. One case where the first rule applies is in the case of technical terminology in various fields of study, for example in the medical field where the doctor is able to maintain distance from and superiority over the addressee by using jargon instead of a more common word, which may carry significant emotional connotations (Lakoff 1975 [2004:88]). Another example of this rule is the use of passive voice over an active voice in academic texts (Lakoff 1975 [2004:88]). The second rule, Lakoff (1975 [2004:89]) points out, can be used alone or in combination with either of the other rules while the 1st and 3rd rule are mutually exclusive. Both hedges and tag questions are examples of the second rule as long as the speaker is not using them because they are actually unsure (Lakoff 1975 [2004:89]). This second rule gives the addressee the impression that they are given the option to choose how to behave even though this is often simply an illusion and the speaker has the power to enforce a decision (Lakoff 1975 [2004:89]). The purpose of the third rule is to make the addressee like the speaker likes them and is interested them and like the other rules can be either real or conventional (Lakoff 1975 [2004:89]). Colloquial language use as well as the use of nicknames both fall under the third rule, which implies full egalitarianism whereas the first two rules typically occur in

circumstances where there is or may be inequality between the speaker and the addressee (Lakoff 1975 [2004:89]). Lakoff (1975 [2004:91]) stresses that, depending on culture, these rules may be given different priorities and be applicable under different conditions, but that they are nevertheless universal.

Lakoff's theory was published several years before that of Brown and Levinson and may be said to have in some ways predicted their influential theory (Holmes 2014: 152). Holmes (2014: 152) points out that Lakoff's three rules of politeness have clear parallels with Brown and Levinson's positive and negative politeness. Rules 1 and 2 fall into the category of negative politeness and relate to the person's need for space and autonomy (Holmes 2014: 152). Rule 3 on the other hand deals with positive politeness, the addressee's need for approval from others and their need to belong to a group (Holmes 2014: 152).

2.1.5. Brown and Levinson's politeness framework

The theory developed by Brown and Levinson remains the most influential one in the field of linguistic politeness. According to this theory everyone has a "face", a public self-image that they wish to maintain and protect (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61). A person's face consists of two separate aspects, negative face and positive face (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61). In short, negative face refers to people's "freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61) and has more to do with independence whereas positive face refers to people's wish to be accepted and appreciated, or as Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) put it, it is "the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' claimed by interactants". Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) point out that people usually both cooperate and assume each other's cooperation when it comes to maintaining face in interaction.

However, sometimes interactions contain face threatening acts (FTAs) whose purpose is to threaten another person's face (Brown and Levinson 1987: 65). These can be divided into four categories. First, according to whether the act threatens the negative face – as in the case of orders, requests and threats – or the positive face, as in the case of insults, ridicule or blatant non-cooperation (Brown and Levinson 1987: 68). Secondly, according to whose face, the speaker's or the addressee's, the act threatens (Brown and Levinson 1987: 68).

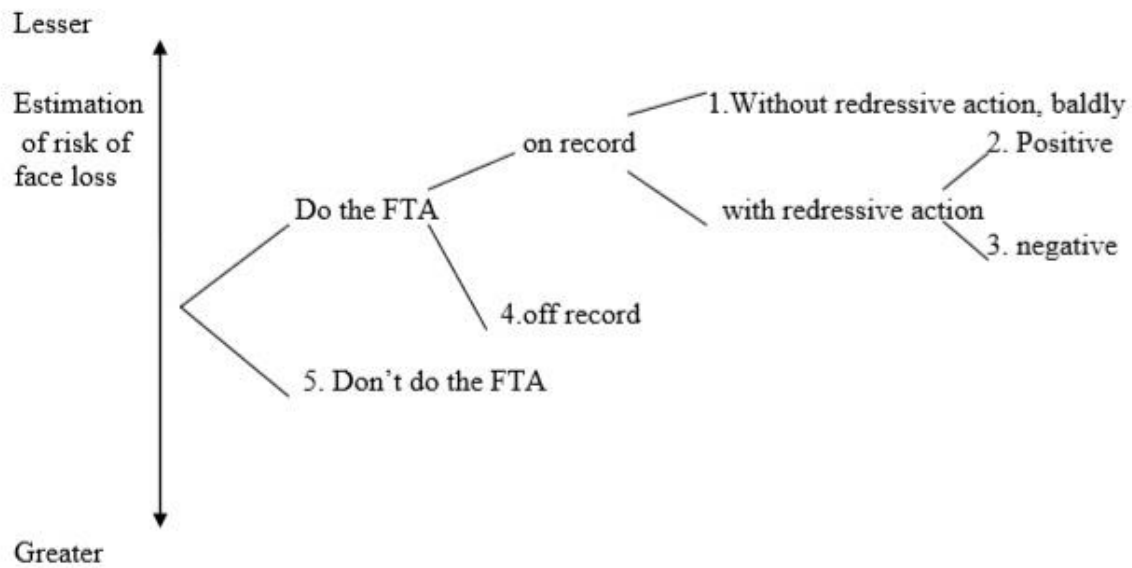


Figure 1. Brown and Levinson's (1987: 60) possible strategies for doing FTAs

Moreover, Brown and Levinson describe different strategies for doing FTAs. These can be done either on record or off record and by redressive action or without it (Brown and Levinson 1987: 69). An act that is done on record is unambiguous and its communicative intention is clear, while an off-record FTA only hints at the speaker's intention without stating it directly (Brown and Levinson 1987: 68-69). A FTA done baldly, without redress, means doing it in the most direct and concise way possible and would usually only be used in specific circumstances, such as in a case of urgency where people's face demands are less relevant (Brown and Levinson 1987: 69). For instance, this kind of FTA is likely to be used in an emergency situation where the speaker and the addressee agree that because of the special nature of the situation and their need for efficiency and urgency communicating in a precise and quick manner is more important than minimizing FTAs (Brown and Levinson 1987: 69). In contrast, a FTA done by redressive action uses additions or modifications to show that the speaker recognizes the addressee's face wants and does not intend to threaten their face (Brown and Levinson 1987: 69-70). This can be achieved by using either positive politeness strategies, for example treating the addressee as a member of the group, or negative politeness strategies, which attempt to minimize the imposition on the addressee (Brown and Levinson 1987: 70). Lastly, there is always the option to withhold the FTA altogether (Brown and Levinson 1987: 69).

Brown and Levinson (1987: 102) list multiple possible positive politeness strategies. These consist of three positive politeness super-strategies: A. Claim common ground, B.

Convey cooperation with the addressee and C. Fulfil addressee's wants. The first two super-strategies are both divided into three sub-strategies and then further into more exact politeness strategies while the last super-strategy only consists of a single politeness strategy:

A. Claim common ground

- A1. Convey that the addressee is admirable, interesting
 - 1. Notice, attend to the addressee (their interests, wants, needs, goods)
 - 2. Exaggerate interest, approval, sympathy
 - 3. Intensify interest to the addressee
- A2. Claim in-group membership with the addressee
 - 4. Use in-group identity markers
- A3. Claim common point of view/opinions/attitudes/knowledge/empathy
 - 5. Seek agreement
 - 6. Avoid disagreement
 - 7. Presuppose/raise/assert common ground
 - 8. Joke

B. Convey cooperation with the addressee

- B1. Indicate you know the addressee's wants and take them into account
 - 9. Assert or presuppose knowledge of and concern for the addressee's wants
- B2. Claim reflexivity
 - 10. Offer, promise
 - 11. Be optimistic
 - 12. Include the addressee in the activity
 - 13. Give or ask for reasons
- B3. Claim reciprocity
 - 14. Assume or assert reciprocity

C. Fulfil addressee's wants

- 15. Give gifts to the addressee – goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation
(adapted from Brown and Levinson 1987: 102)

The list of the possible negative politeness strategies is somewhat more complicated than that of the positive politeness strategies. There are five separate super-strategies, two of which also

contain further impoliteness sub-strategies. Additionally, some of the more exact strategies – *question*, *hedge* and *give deference* – are listed under more than one super-strategy or sub-strategy:

A. Be Direct

1. Perform the FTA on record

B. Don't presume/ assume (make minimal assumption about addressee's wants)

2. Question, hedge

C. Don't coerce

- C1. Give addressee option not to act

2. Question, hedge
3. Be pessimistic

- C2. Minimize threat

4. Minimize the imposition
5. Give deference

D. Communicate that your want is not to harm the addressee

6. Apologise

- D1. Dissociate the addressee from the particular infringement

7. Impersonalise, avoid I and you
8. State the FTA as a general rule
9. Nominalise

E. Redress other wants of the addressee

5. Give deference
10. Go on-record as incurring a debt

(adapted from Brown and Levinson 1987: 131)

To summarise, there are many ways of mitigating the offensiveness of an FTA for speakers to choose from and they may use several different approaches to convey what is inherently the same notion. For instance, if the speaker wishes to borrow money from a friend they may do it in four different ways. First, they have the option to perform the FTA off-record and only hint at their intention. This could be achieved by a phrase like *oh no, I forgot my money*, which does not explicitly ask for anything but shows the speaker's wish that the friend will offer to lend

them money. Second, the speaker has the option to perform the FTA on record and without a redressive action. This would involve stating their intention in the most direct way possible and could be done with the phrase *give me some money*. Third, the speaker can choose to perform the FTA on record with a redressive action. In this case they must choose a positive or negative politeness strategy from the ones listed above. Positive politeness could involve asserting common ground (e.g. *since we're such good friends, I hope you don't mind paying*) whereas negative politeness might involve apologizing (e.g. *I'm sorry to have to ask, but can you borrow me some money*). However, although all of these phrases aim for the same result they may not be equally successful depending on the context and thus the choice of how to perform an FTA depends on multiple factors such as how well the participants know each other, where the interaction is taking place and so on.

2.1.6. Criticism towards Brown and Levinson

Even though Brown and Levinson's theory is still the most dominant in the field, it has not escaped criticism. Mills (2003: 57-58) notes that although data can be found which seems to prove that their theory is adequate for analyzing politeness the model can only deal with certain elements of the data when looking into how politeness actually functions in conversation. She criticizes Brown and Levinson's model for its overly positive view on politeness and the way it equates politeness with "being nice, considerate, and thoughtful" (Mills 2003: 59). Their model assumes that all politeness is sincere when this could not be farther from the truth (Mills 2003: 60). In fact, politeness can often be used in insincere and manipulative ways (Mills 2003: 59-60). Mills (2003: 66-67) also points out that there are language items – such as *please* and *thank you* – that may be classified as polite according Brown and Levinson's model yet are perceived by the speakers as only having fulfilled a social function rather than being explicitly polite. Therefore, Janney and Arndt (1992), cited in Mills (2003: 67) propose integrating the notion of "social politeness" into Brown and Levinson's model. Furthermore, Brown and Levinson's model has been criticized for not being fully applicable to other cultures. While Brown and Levinson (2006: 312) state that their theory is universal, many academics have pointed out that it is heavily based on Western culture and individualism and thus does not take into account those non-Western cultures that have a different approach to politeness and may, for example, value group identity over everything else (Mao 1993: 452). Meier (1995: 388)

goes as far as to say “Politeness can be said to be universal only in the sense that every society has some sort of norms for appropriate behavior, although these norms will vary. This accounts both for societies in which an individual’s position within a group takes precedence [...] or for those in which the individual take precedence.”

Nwoye (1992: 327) also suggests that Brown and Levinson’s generalizations should have been made culture-specific. He illustrates this point with the example of the egalitarian Igbo society in Nigeria. According to him in this society “very few actions are regarded as impositions”: for example, requests are not seen as impositions but rather as “a type of social insurance” that guarantees that people feel free to make requests when in need as they trust others to also make them when in need (Nwoye 1992: 327). Thus the behavior is not seen as polite or impolite but appropriate (Nwoye 1992: 327).

Similarly, Gu (1990: 241-242) states that the Chinese notion of negative face differs from that of Brown and Levinson and thus their model is not suitable for Chinese data. According to Gu (1990: 242) the acts of offering, inviting and promising would not, under normal circumstances, threaten the addressee’s negative face. Additionally, Brown and Levinson fail to take into account the normative function of politeness and the way in which society endorses constraints on individuals (Gu 1990: 242). Moreover, Matsumoto (1988: 405) explains that the Japanese notion of face is also very different from Brown and Levinson’s definition. The rights of individuals are not the main concern in the Japanese society where one’s relation to and acceptance by the other people in the group carry more weight (Matsumoto 1988: 405). As Matsumoto (1988: 405) puts it: “loss of face is associated with the perception by others that one has not comprehended and acknowledged the structure and hierarchy of the group”.

Consequently, other theories have been developed as a response to these criticisms, in order to improve or offer an alternative to Brown and Levinson’s theory. Culpeper (1996: 358) points out that it is important to be aware of the weaknesses in Brown and Levinson’s model in order to avoid those same weaknesses being carried over to the impoliteness framework. He notes that one of the weaknesses in Brown and Levinson’s theory is that it focuses on matters that relate to linguistic form whereas Leech’s politeness model is more concerned with linguistic content (Culpeper 1996: 358). Thus these two models can be used to complement each other. Culpeper (1996: 358) also stresses that Brown and Levinson do not have much to say about non-verbal politeness even though, for example, avoiding eye contact could be seen as impolite. Additionally, Fraser (2005: 68) discusses the importance of separating the concept of impoliteness from the more narrow concept of deference, something often not done by

Brown and Levinson. He also echoes the criticisms of many others about how the model ignores “the obverse of politeness: impoliteness/rudeness/aggravation” (Fraser 2005: 70). Moreover, Turner (1996), cited in Fraser (2005:71), points out that some politeness strategies can address more than one face want at the same time.

2.1.7. Fraser’s perspectives on politeness

Fraser (1990: 220) divides politeness into four distinct categories: the social-norm view, the conversational-maxim view, the face-saving view and the conversational-contract view. The first one of these, the social norm view, reflects the historical understanding of politeness especially in the context of the English-speaking world (Fraser 1990: 220). It assumes that each society has a set of norms that prescribe certain kind of behavior and a positive evaluation (politeness) arises when an individual’s actions follow the norm whereas a negative evaluation (impoliteness) occurs when the actions go against these norms (Fraser 1990: 220). This view historically considers politeness to be connected to speech style and for higher degree of formality to signify greater politeness (Fraser 1990: 221). The second perspective, the conversational-maxim view, relies principally on Grice’s work on his general cooperative principle (see 2.1.1.; Fraser 1990: 222). The theories by Leech and Lakoff discussed above are both based on Grice’s CP. The third view, the face-saving view, is basically that of Brown and Levinson’s (Fraser 1990: 228). In other words, the notion that everyone has a “face”, the individual’s self-esteem, that can be lost and maintained and is divided into negative and positive face (Fraser 1990: 228-229). The last perspective, the conversational-contract view, is presented by Fraser and Nolen and states that when entering a conversation, each party brings an understanding of certain right and obligations that determine what the participants expect from each other (Fraser 1990: 232). However, as time goes by or the context changes the participants may adjust their expectations (Fraser 1990: 232). Fraser (1990: 233) calls this understanding a conversational contract, or CC. Some terms of the CC may be imposed through convention or by previous encounters, for example (Fraser 1990: 232). According to Fraser (1990: 233) “politeness is a state that one expects to exist in every conversation; participants note not that someone is being polite – this is the norm – but rather that the speaker is violating the CC”. In other words, politeness does not involve making the hearer “feel good” or “not feel bad” like some of the other theories suggest but simply involves acknowledging the terms and conditions of the CC (Fraser 1990: 233).

2.2. Impoliteness

2.2.1. Approaches to impoliteness

Impoliteness is a complex subject that is, perhaps obviously, closely linked to politeness, or as Culpeper (1996: 355) says “impoliteness is very much the parasite of politeness”. Linguistic politeness has been studied a great deal more than linguistic impoliteness, possibly because impoliteness in language is less frequent than politeness (Culpeper 2011: 130); however, it might be pointed out that impoliteness stands out more noticeably because of its very nature of going against what is expected (Fraser 1990: 233). Moreover, many classic politeness theories focus heavily on “harmonious interactions” and give only minimal attention, if any at all, to the concept of impoliteness (Culpeper 2011: 6). Culpeper (2011: 6) points out that many of them give the impression that “impoliteness is either some kind of pragmatic failure, a consequence of not doing something, or merely anomalous behavior, not worthy of consideration”. However, such approaches seem unjustified, as recent research has shown impoliteness to be a hugely complex and multidimensional field, to the extent that the concept itself defies succinct definition.

Bousfield and Locher (2008: 3) discuss the difficulty of defining impoliteness and state that the lowest common denominator is the following: “Impoliteness is behavior that is face-aggravating in a particular context”. However, they proceed to add that most scholars deem this definition to be insufficient and have proposed more elaborate definitions (Bousfield and Locher 2008: 3). Culpeper (2011: 21) argues that the fact that “impoliteness always involves emotional consequences for the target (victim)” should be a central part when defining impoliteness. He lists the following key notions regarding impoliteness: face, social norms, intentionality and emotions (Culpeper 2011: 21). The concept of face is central in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness model; it also plays an important role in the impoliteness strategies suggested by Culpeper (1996), largely based on the framework of Brown and Levinson; however, Culpeper (2011: 31) stresses that “face is not at the heart of all interactions that can be considered impolite”. In many cases, the central issue instead has to do with breaches of social norms and conventions (Culpeper 2011: 31).

Impoliteness is, accordingly, a complex phenomenon that is also heavily context dependent. Culpeper (2011: 22) notes that impoliteness depends both on how one perceives what is said and done and on how that relates to the situation at hand. In other words, there are verbal behaviors that are typically considered impolite; however, no expression – not even taboo words – is inherently impolite. Basically, it is neither the linguistic expression nor the context alone that “guarantee an interpretation of (im)politeness” but rather the interaction between the two (Culpeper 2011: 125).

2.2.2. Impoliteness and intention

Bousfield and Locher (2008: 3) stress that one key factor in defining impoliteness is the recognition of the speaker’s intention. They list Bousfield and Culpeper as researchers who “make the hearer’s understanding of the speaker’s intentions the key for impoliteness (Bousfield and Locher 2008: 3). However, Culpeper (2011: 51) argues that “(full) intentionality is not an essential condition for impoliteness” because in some contexts people can and do take offence even in the absence of intention. Nevertheless, he suggests that making a distinction between the terms *rudeness* and *impoliteness* may be helpful and labels the cases where offence is unintentionally caused as *rudeness* and the cases where it is intentional as *impoliteness* (Culpeper 2008: 31).

Similarly, Terkourafi (2008: 61) states that although *rudeness* and *impoliteness* are both characterized by a face-threatening perlocutionary effect it does not mean that a distinction cannot be drawn between the two terms. However, contrary to Culpeper’s view, Terkourafi (2008: 61-61) classifies *impoliteness* as the case where the face-threat is taken to be accidental, whereas in *rudeness* the face-threat is taken to be intentional. She also stresses that recognizing whether the speaker’s FTA is intentional or not plays a significant role in charting one’s subsequent course of action (Terkourafi 2008: 62).

2.2.3. Impoliteness and power

Bousfield and Locher (2008: 8-9) state that impoliteness is always an exercise of power. Therefore the very concept of impoliteness is inextricably tied up with power and the addressee whose face is damaged by an utterance has their response options strictly restricted. Culpeper (1996: 354) argues that, in an interaction, a more powerful participant has more freedom to be impolite because they can reduce the less powerful participant's ability to retaliate with impoliteness, as well as threaten more severe retaliation should the less powerful participant be impolite. This implies that impoliteness is more likely to occur in situations where there is an imbalance of social structural power (Culpeper 2008: 39). However, impoliteness also occurs in some situations – for example in children's discourse – where the social structure is more symmetrical (Culpeper 2008: 39). Additionally, there are many situations (e.g. doctor-patient interactions) where the social structure is asymmetrical yet impoliteness is not expected (Culpeper 2008: 39).

Furthermore, Culpeper (2011: 1) states that impoliteness often involves damaging or attempting to damage a person's identity or identities. He discusses the notion of social identity face, a term defined by Spencer-Oatey (2002), cited in Culpeper (2011: 28), as being concerned with "the value that we effectively claim for ourselves in terms of social or group roles". Insults, especially ones involving a person's social identity face, can be used to both control others and – at the expense of others – maintain dominant groups in society (Culpeper 2011: 199-200). This relates, for example, to racism and sexism. Mills (2009: 1049) takes issue with the fact that, in politeness research, often no clear distinction is made between impoliteness at a social level and at the level of the individual. She argues that "judgements about impoliteness at a social level tend to be ideological rather than analytical and draw on models of individual interaction" (Mills 2009: 1049). Mills (2009: 1054) states that statements about impoliteness on a social level are often conservative, and people making them seem to think that, compared to the past, polite language is on the decline. Since the same behavior can be interpreted differently according to the context, and different groups of people have very different views on impoliteness and inappropriate language, it is not unproblematic to make judgements about what kind of language is appropriate for a society: this might also mean casting judgement on whether certain groups of people belong to a language group or culture (Mills 2009: 1055).

2.2.4. Culpeper's impoliteness framework

Culpeper's framework for impoliteness is based on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory that lists different strategies for positive and negative politeness. He notes that his is not the first model inspired by Brown and Levinson, but that all such models differ considerably in theoretical slant and detail (Culpeper 2011: 7). In his theory, Culpeper (1996: 350) adopts the notion of a "face", a person's public self-image that they wish to maintain in an interaction. According to Culpeper (1996: 356), each of Brown and Levinson's politeness super-strategies has an opposite impoliteness super-strategy as follows:

(1) *Bald on record impoliteness* - the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimised. It is important to distinguish this strategy from Brown and Levinson's Bald on record. For Brown and Levinson, Bald on record is a politeness strategy in fairly specific circumstances. For example, when face concerns are suspended in an emergency, when the threat to the hearer's face is very small (e.g. "Come in" or "Do sit down"), or when the speaker is much more powerful than the hearer (e.g. "Stop complaining" said by a parent to a child). In all these cases little face is at stake, and, more importantly, it is not the intention of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer.

(2) *Positive impoliteness* - the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants.

(3) *Negative impoliteness* - the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants.

(4) *Sarcasm or mock politeness* - the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations.

(5) *Withhold politeness* - the absence of politeness work where it would be expected. [...] For example, failing to thank somebody for a present may be taken as deliberate impoliteness. (Culpeper 1996: 356)

Thus there are numerous different ways of performing impoliteness similar to the ones shown in 2.1.5. with Brown and Levinson's model. Culpeper's list includes *sarcasm or mock politeness*, which is not part of Brown and Levinson's corresponding list that lists performing the FTA off-record in its stead. He states that this kind of impoliteness remains a surface realization because it is understood that it is not meant to sincerely cause offense (Culpeper 1996: 352). Culpeper (1996: 357-358) goes on to present the following list of possible positive and negative impoliteness output strategies:

Positive impoliteness output strategies:

Ignore, snub the other - fail to acknowledge the other's presence.

Exclude the other from an activity

Disassociate from the other - for example, deny association or common ground with the other; avoid sitting together.

Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic

Use inappropriate identity markers - for example, use title and surname when a close relationship pertains, or a nickname when a distant relationship pertains.

Use obscure or secretive language - for example, mystify the other with jargon, or use a code known to others in the group, but not the target.

Seek disagreement - select a sensitive topic. Make the other feel uncomfortable - for example, do not avoid silence, joke, or use small talk.

Use taboo words - swear, or use abusive or profane language.

Call the other names - use derogatory nominations.

etc.

Negative impoliteness output strategies:

Frighten - instill a belief that action detrimental to the other will occur.

Condescend, scorn or ridicule - emphasize your relative power. Be contemptuous. Do not treat the other seriously. Belittle the other (e.g. use diminutives).

Invade the other's space - literally (e.g. position yourself closer to the other than the relationship permits) or metaphorically (e.g. ask for or speak about information which is too intimate given the relationship).

Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect - personalize, use the pronouns 'I' and 'you'.

Put the other's indebtedness on record

etc.

However, he stresses that the list is not exhaustive that the list depends upon an appropriate context to be impolite (Culpeper 1996: 357). To sum up, whereas Brown and Levinson's (1987) model presents different ways for minimizing the FTA to the addressee's face, Culpeper's model presents different ways of performing the FTA. To cause offense, the speaker can choose to perform the FTA on record in the most direct way possible. However, as Culpeper points out, this has to be done in a context where such statements are not expected and accepted.

Therefore a teacher telling the student to *close the window* would not constitute as impoliteness but if the student were to utter the same sentence to the teacher, it would most likely be considered impolite. The speaker may also choose a positive impoliteness strategy to cause offense (e.g. *open the fucking window*) or one of the negative ones (e.g. *open the window or I'll hit you*). They may also opt for mock politeness and use one of the politeness strategies in an insincere way (e.g. *my good sir, would you be ever so kind and open the window*). Finally, there is always the option to withhold politeness where it is expected and thus cause offense.

2.3. Language and gender

According to Swann (2000: 216) the idea that women and men use language differently has its roots in folk linguistics. This is a term used to describe sets of popular beliefs about language that do not necessarily have any empirical proof but which are widely accepted among a certain population (Swann 2000: 216). Although there are a few early studies from as early as the 1920s it was not until the 1970s that language and gender became a major area of research (Swann 2000: 216). Before this, early sociolinguistic research was primarily concerned with social class differences, and it was only gradually acknowledged that other variables – for example ethnic group, age and gender – had their own effect on linguistic variation (Coates 1993: 67).

In 1975 Robin Lakoff, one of the early pioneers in the field of language and gender, published her study *Language and Woman's Place*, which introduced many ideas about women's language and inspired new strategies for studying language and gender. Since then the field has grown exponentially and many scholars have contributed their own input and criticism towards Lakoff's ideas. Coates (1993: 116, 119), for example, repeatedly criticizes Lakoff for providing no empirical evidence of her assertions about women's more frequent use of hedges and tag questions. Furthermore, Mills (2003: 166) draws attention to the fact that the early feminist research on language focused on a very small group of women, more precisely that of white middle-class Anglo-Americans. This research also tended to be based on personal anecdotes and focus on upholding stereotypical views of typical women's language without considering any counter-examples (Mills 2003: 166). Still, regardless of its shortcomings, this early research into gender and language was instrumental, among other things, in raising consciousness about language use as a reflection of power relations between men and women (Mills 2003: 165).

When discussing “gender” it is important to note that the term is not synonymous with “sex”. Coates (1993: 3-4), for instance, makes a definite distinction between “gender” and “sex”, pointing out that “sex” refers to a biological distinction whereas “gender” describes socially constructed categories which are based on sex. Although most societies acknowledge only two genders, feminine and masculine, gender is not a strictly binary opposition but rather a continuum like class and age (Coates 1993: 4). Mills (2003: 173) points out that “many feminist linguists and theorists have been influenced by Judith Butler’s work on gender and performativity”. Butler (1990: x) argues that gender is constructed through repeated performative acts associated with a particular sex. Thus gender is not something inherent in a person but rather a process one performs (Butler 1990: x).

Understandably, the notion of gendered language differs between different languages. Unlike English, some languages have strict rules or at least prevalent customs in terms of gendered language. Coates (1998: 7) acknowledges this in relation to gender-exclusive language and gender-preferential language. She states that gender-exclusive differences in language mean that a speaker who uses a form inappropriate to their gender will be heavily reprimanded, whereas gender-preferential differences simply imply that men or women have the tendency to use certain forms more frequently (Coates 1998: 7).

Coates (1998: 7) notes that “the difference between gender-exclusive and gender-preferential usage seems to correlate with differences between non-industrialized societies [...] and industrialized societies”. In other words, gender-exclusive language is more typical of non-industrialized societies, which also tend to have stricter gender roles, while modern industrialized societies with their less rigid gender roles lean more towards gender-preferential language (Coates 1998: 7). Swann (2000: 218) discusses Japanese, which differentiates between men and women by, for example, having different pronouns depending on the speaker’s gender. She mentions this as one example of how gendered language forms reflect women’s relative powerlessness in society (Swann 2000: 118). Nevertheless, the speakers are able to rebel against this custom and Japanese women have been observed – at least in certain contexts – to opt for more masculine or neutral forms of speech (Swann 2000: 218).

Another example of language differences associated with women’s inferior status, especially in more traditional societies, is the custom of married women’s avoidance of certain syllables that occur in the names of their in-laws (Swann 2000: 220). This is a practice that is prevalent in many southern African languages (Swann 2000: 220). Humphrey (cited in Coates 1993: 43) investigates a similar custom in Mongolia, where it is a linguistic taboo for women

to use either the names of their husband's male relatives or any syllables or words that are similar to the forbidden names.

Coates (1993: 12) stresses that women as a social group are distinctly different from men and thus it is logical that also their language use differs in certain ways. In terms of gender differences in language, there are two main approaches that reflect women's status as a group (Coates 1993: 12). First, the dominance approach views women as an oppressed group, and this model often focuses on the ways in which male dominance is enacted through language (Coates 1993: 12-13). Second, the difference approach puts emphasis on the fact that women and men belong to different subcultures (Coates 1993: 13). Because both of these approaches have yielded valuable insights into gender differences in language, many sociolinguists have decided to adopt a position that compromises and combines the two approaches (Coates 1993: 13).

Coates (1993: 8) refers to Tajfel's theory of inter-group relations and social change. She argues that women as a group have inferior social status and are thus seen in negative terms when compared to men (Coates 1993: 8). According to Tajfel (1974; 1978; 1981), cited in Coates (1993:8), an inferior social group like this has the option to either accept or reject their position in society. If they accept it, it is to be done by attempting to achieve self-esteem by operating as individuals rather than a group and this can be done via two different strategies. First, instead of measuring themselves against the superior group they can measure themselves against the members of their own group. Second, they may try to join the superior group individually. However, in the cases where an inferior social group refuses to accept their position they will work as a group to try and change things, which can be achieved through three different strategies. The first strategy is called *assimilation* and entails trying to gain equality with the superior group and adopting its values. The second strategy involves attempting to give positive value to such characteristics which have previously been defined as negative by society. The third strategy has to do with creating new dimensions for comparison so that the inferior group can define for themselves what has positive value, which in turn allows them to create a positive image for themselves (Coates 1993: 8-9).

Lakoff (1975 [2004:95]) suggests a very similar chain of strategies, when she discusses the prevalent idea that women lack aggressiveness, something that has been seen as a negative trait and a reason that women cannot "make it" in the real world. She lists two possible strategies that women can use to deny the stereotype: "to deny it, proving that they are just as pugnacious as men, or to reaffirm it and take nonaggressiveness to be a virtue" (Lakoff 1975 [2004:95]).

Coates (1993: 9) notes that, in the past, women seemingly accepted their inferior status and accepted the definition given to them by men. This is still true for many women today, and

many of them attempt to achieve a positive self-image through intra-group comparisons with other women (Coates 1993: 9). Women today are generally more aware of their unequal status in society and less willing to accept their position.

Coates (1993: 9-10) discusses how women use assimilation especially in terms of language by, for example, using more taboo language, adopting a more assertive style in group interaction and using prosodic features more typical of men. This is something that was already remarked on by Lakoff (1975 [2004:44]) when she discusses why women are increasingly adopting the masculine style of speech while men are not using women's language unless they wish to explicitly reject the traditional notion of masculinity. According to her "the language of the favored group, the group that holds the power, along with its nonlinguistic behavior, is generally adopted by the other group, not vice versa" (Lakoff 1975 [2004:44]).

However, using the strategy of assimilation means that women are redefining themselves in terms of male values; assimilation may therefore be seen a flawed strategy, in that it cannot equip women with a satisfactory identity of their own (Coates 1993: 10). A better strategy might be re-evaluating characteristics that have previously been seen in negative terms, which in terms of language means reappraising the merits of cooperative language (Coates 1993: 10). Research suggests that the male mode of interaction is more aggressive and competitive, whereas women tend towards cooperation (Coates 1993: 10). In the past, women's conversational style has not been valued but has been viewed as weak and unassertive (Coates 1993: 10-11). However, this is changing as women are starting to resent having to adopt typically male features of interaction in mixed groups and learning to see their own cooperative style as more beneficial (Coates 1993: 10-11).

Research has found that, in many speech communities, women tend to use more prestige forms compared to male speakers (Coates 1993: 67). In comparison, the use of non-standard forms is associated with both working-class speakers and male speakers (Coates 1993: 77). However, even though it has been established that women tend to use forms that are closer to standard English while men select more vernacular forms, the reasons for this are not yet fully understood (Coates 1993: 86). Here Coates (1993: 106) brings in the concept of "communicative competence" first introduced by Dell Hymes in 1972. Basically, communicative competence is the knowledge of how language is used in a given society and includes knowing when to speak and when to remain silent, as well as knowing what to talk about and how to talk about it according to the situation (Coates 1993: 107). Coates (1993: 107) suggests that many perceived differences in communicative competence – such as the belief that women talk and gossip more and are more polite than men – are actually part of folk

knowledge and often get challenged and proven false by research. One of the stereotypes about women's language is that they are more talkative than men; however, many studies carried out on diverse settings have proven this to be false, as it is men who dominate the floor in mixed conversations (Coates 1993: 115). In many cases, men also perceive that women are dominating the conversation even if the majority of the contributions are made by men (Coates 1993: 115).

Lakoff (1975 [2004:78-79]) argues that women use more hedges in their speech and the reason for this is that "women are socialized to believe that asserting themselves strongly isn't nice or ladylike, or even feminine". This has led to the assumption that women's language is more tentative and uncertain. While it has been shown that, in certain situations, women do use more hedges, this is not necessarily a weakness because hedges serve several different functions in interaction (Coates 1993: 116). Coates (1993: 117) points out that hedges such as *you know* can be used to express confidence as well as uncertainty and that in some cases women have been found to employ them more than men for this purpose. In addition, in single-sex discourse women tend to discuss topics that are highly sensitive while men focus on topics that are more impersonal (Coates 1993: 118). Thus female-only discussions tend to involve more hedge use, as this convention prevents the talk from becoming too face-threatening (Coates 1993: 118).

Lakoff also claims that women tend to favor tag questions which, according to her, decrease the strength of their assertions (1975 [2004:47-49]). However, this is very narrow view and as with hedges research has shown the importance of distinguishing between the different functions of tag questions. Although one function of tag questions – and questions in general – is to express uncertainty they are also used by speakers to facilitate the addressee in order to keep the conversation going as well as to soften the force of an utterance (Coates 1993: 120). Moreover, certain kinds of interrogatives are in fact associated with powerful speakers, regardless of their gender, which refutes Lakoff's original view on the tentativeness of tag questions (Coates 1993: 123).

Another area where gender differences emerge clearly is with commands and directives. Coates (1993: 124-126) refers to several studies that have observed that women tend to use more mitigated directives whereas men are more likely to choose aggravated directives. In other words, commands by men are often more explicit and demand things directly – as in *get off* or *lie down* – while among women it is more common to soften the directive in some way, for example, by using *maybe* or *could* or employing *let's* to include the speaker in the proposed action as in the sentence *let's ask her* (Coates 1993: 124-125).

There is also a widespread notion that swearing and taboo language are more typical to male speakers, who also tend to use stronger expletives (Coates 1993: 126-127). However, the

use of this kind of language also varies widely depending on the sex of the participants as well as the class of the speakers (Coates 1993: 127-128). It seems that both men and women tend to swear more in the company of their own sex, for example Gomm (1981), cited in Coates (1993:128). Additionally, working class women employ taboo language frequently Hughes (1992), cited in Coates (1993: 128), while middle-class women show less tolerance towards swearing Labov (1971), cited in Coates (1993: 127). Mills (2003: 193) also points out that women can use swearing to negotiate a more powerful position for themselves. The reason for this is that there is still a certain level of taboo on women swearing, even if it is becoming more accepted (Mills 2003: 193). Therefore, even if swearing goes against what is “proper” and expected of women, they may use it to affirm their position to show that they are not restricted by conventional femininity (Mills 2003: 193). However, this kind of linguistic behavior can often be met with backlash from others Walsh (2001), cited in Mills (2003:193).

With regard to compliments, there are also some significant differences between men and women. Coates (1993: 128) refers to several studies which have found that women tend to both give and receive more compliments than men. She also draws attention to the fact that cross-sex compliments can be problematic and are clearly more face-threatening than same-sex compliments as they often ignore the negative face-needs of the addressee (Coates 1993: 129). The concept of face is of course related to politeness and according to both folk linguistics and linguistic research, women tend to be more polite than men (Coates 1993: 129).

Thus it is clear that there are some differences between women and men’s language and many folk linguistic ideas about the topic are widely accepted even if the research does not always support them. It is also important to not make generalizations about women’s or men’s language without taking into account all the other variables that may have an effect on linguistic choices. Moreover, many areas of language are multi-faceted and function in unexpected ways and thus it is paramount to not interpret linguistic data based on folk linguistic views.

2.4. Computer-mediated communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is an area that is constantly changing and evolving, which naturally creates many challenges for linguistic research in the area. It is also an area of study that is relatively young since, as Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic (2004: 26) point out, before early to mid-1990s the interest in the language of CMC was fairly limited and more concerned with Human-Computer interaction. They also discuss the difficulty of defining the concept of

communication and state that part of what makes CMC such an interesting field of study is that it has forced us to “reconsider what the essential nature of communication really is” (Thurlow et al 2004: 28). According to Thurlow et al (2004: 29-30) communication is dynamic, transactional, multifunctional and multimodal. In other words, the meaning of a message does not reside in the words themselves but rather in the context surrounding them, which is constantly shifting (Thurlow et al 2004: 29). Furthermore, communication is not simply an exchange of messages between senders and receivers but a transaction between them as the interactants interpret each other (Thurlow et al 2004: 29). Whether it is consciously or unconsciously, communication also serves several different functions and often at the same time (Thurlow et al 2004: 29). Lastly, verbal messages always come with other, non-verbal messages that significantly affect how the verbal message is interpreted by the addressee (Thurlow et al 2004: 30). Thurlow et al (2004: 30) stress that these four aspects of communication are central to understanding the three crucial themes of CMC: identity, relationships and community. Additionally, they discuss the “mediation” in “computer mediated communication” and how all communication is mediated to some extent (Thurlow et al 2004: 30). Simply put, mediation is “the process or means by which something is transmitted” (Thurlow et al 2004: 30). In every interaction there are several layers of contextual variables that can be said to influence – or mediate – communication between the individuals (Thurlow et al 2004: 30-31). These can be psychological, social or cultural but CMC adds a more material dimension that can be called technological mediation (Thurlow et al 2004: 31).

However, it is important not to think of CMC as a unified whole where the language conventions are always the same. As Thurlow et al (2004: 45) put it, rather than being a single communication technology the Internet is a collection of different technologies used for communication. It contains different sub-systems, each of which has a genre of their own, that affect the way they are used (Thurlow et al 2004: 45). For instance, the language used in a formal email and in instant messaging is very different. Thurlow et al (2004: 45) list the following contextual factors that influence the communication on the Internet:

- the type of channel (e.g. email or webpages) and the modes of communication it enables (e.g. text-based, graphics-based or audio-visual – or all three)
- the participants (e.g. male or female, young or old) and the number of participants (e.g. one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many)
- the length (e.g. long term or fleeting) and the nature of people’s relationship (e.g. personal or professional)

- the topic (e.g. medical advice or romantic date) and purpose of the exchange (e.g. scholarly, private or commercial)
- whether the interaction is synchronous (i.e. in real time) or asynchronous (i.e. not in real time, with delayed interactions)
- whether it is public or private (e.g. interpersonal, small group or mass communication) and whether it's moderated or unmoderated (e.g. under the direct or indirect supervision of someone or not)
- what the general attitude of participants is towards communication on the internet (e.g. enthusiastic or skeptical, half-hearted or committed) and how long they have been doing CMC (e.g. are they newcomers or are they really experienced)

Thurlow et al (2004: 43) point out that a key factor in studying CMC is the wish to find out how and if communication is different when it is mediated by the internet. One of the defining characteristics of CMC is the way in which it combines traits normally associated with face-to-face interactions with those usually attributed to written language (Georgakopoulou 2011: 94). Georgakopoulou (2011: 94) lists the following as shared qualities of CMC and face-to-face communication: immediacy and informality of style, transience of message, reduced planning and editing, rapid or immediate feedback. Other qualities are shared by CMC and written language are the following: lack of visual and paralinguistic cues, physical absence of the addressee, written mode of delivery (Georgakopoulou 2011: 94).

Georgakopoulou (2011: 96) notes that synchronous modes of CMC, such as chat and conferencing, tend to adhere closer to spoken discourse practices than asynchronous modes of CMC, such as e-mail. Nevertheless, Crystal (2001: 29-30) stresses that even those forms of CMC that resemble spoken language differ from face-to-face interaction in several major ways. First, in CMC there is not simultaneous feedback because the message is not sent one letter at a time but only when it has been completely typed out and thus the recipient has no chance to respond to it while it is being created (Crystal 2001: 30). Additionally, the sender has no sense of whether their message has been understood or if more clarification is required (Crystal 2001: 30). It is also impossible for the messages to overlap like spoken utterances and therefore there is always a wait period involved in the interaction (Crystal 2001: 30). Second, the time-delay is longer in CMC because even synchronous chats lack the pace and predictability found in telephonic and face-to-face conversations (Crystal 2001: 31). Still, this kind of interaction between the features of spoken and written language in CMC provides further evidence that

spoken and written language should be treated as a continuum rather than a dichotomy with absolute differences.

In the past, CMC has sometimes been viewed as sterile, dry and impersonal. However, more recent research shows a very different picture. Humor and playfulness are highly characteristic of many forms of CMC, and often make creative use of the specific features of the written mode. Play can be achieved, among other ways, by the use of capital letters, symbols and icons (Georgakopoulou 2011: 100). Emoticons, such as smileys, that aim to express a certain feeling or facial expression are not just a part of the playful aspect of CMC but also aim, at least to a certain extent, to make up for the lack of non-verbal cues in interaction (Georgakopoulou 2011: 101). Verbal glosses (e.g. <smiles at you>) are also used in CMC to get around the lack of non-verbal cues (Crystal 2001: 39).

Georgakopoulou (2011: 101) points out that this lack of non-verbal cues allows and even encourages participants in CMC to be something other than themselves. Thurlow et al (2004: 63) also state that CMC has been accused of being asocial – cold and unfriendly – as well as antisocial because it “diminishes face-to-face interaction”. This is opposed by the view that CMC allows people to form relationships across geographical and social boundaries and find new, and even better, social relationships that would not be possible without the use of the Internet (Thurlow et al 2004: 63).

The traditional definition of the concept of community has presupposed shared space (Georgakopoulou 2011: 102). However, Georgakopoulou (2011: 102-103) notes that, even though theorists have expressed pessimism about the quality, duration, and depth of relationships in relation to CMC, these doubts have been refuted by more recent research. In fact, Thurlow et al (2004: 67) point out that people tend to idealize offline face-to-face interaction, which is one of the biggest problems for CMC. In other words, even though CMC is often presented in a negative light, no communication is ever perfect. The basic need for social bonding is the same in CMC and face-to-face conversation and even if forming a connection may take slightly longer in text-based CMC that does not necessarily make it inferior (Thurlow et al 2004: 68).

There is a stereotype that, in CMC, impolite language or “flaming” is notably more prevalent compared to traditional face-to-face interaction (Thurlow et al 2004: 90). Although some studies have found this to be true, others have proven that the context also plays a significant role in the use of this kind of language (Thurlow et al 2004: 90). In other words, hostile language occurs with more frequency in, for example, group forums than emails (Thurlow et al 2004: 90). Moreover, defining and identifying hostile language can be very

difficult, because different groups have different norms and expectations. Thus an outsider may interpret name-calling as impoliteness in a situation where it is not used with unkind intentions (Thurlow et al 2004: 91-92). In fact, one of the main functions of name-calling is to express affection and to bond with people (Thurlow et al 2004: 92). In addition, hostile language may be seen as a characteristic of CMC, but it is not unique to it nor is it caused by the technology (Thurlow et al 2004: 92).

The language of CMC offers new avenues for research but can also be an alienating aspect for people who are not acquainted with the specific terms associated with it. Herring (1996: 3) lists words (e.g. “lurking”, “flaming” and “spamming”) as well as acronyms (e.g. FAQ, IMHO) that have emerged from and are mainly used in CMC or to talk about CMC. Much of the online terminology has also made its way into offline domains and many terms end up incorporated into dictionaries (Thurlow et al 2004: 148). Thurlow et al (2004: 142) also stress that it is important to remember that “netspeak” is not just a version of English but there are numerous languages that have notable presence on the Internet even if they are easy to overlook.

Crystal (2001: 34) discusses the ways in which CMC has attempted to solve the problem of paralanguage, which cannot be expressed the same way in written language as it is used in spoken language. He lists an exaggerated use of punctuation and spelling, the use of capitals, spacing and special symbols for emphasis (Crystal 2001: 34). For example, all capitals can be used to indicate shouting (e.g. I SAID NO), letter spacing may be used to make the message “loud and clear” (e.g. w h y n o t) and asterisks may be employed to emphasize a certain section of an utterance, e.g. the *real* answer(Crystal 2001 :35). Because there is a strong tendency to use lower-case everywhere in CMC, any use of capitalization is strongly marked and can therefore also be used for extra emphasis, e.g. this is VERY important(Crystal 2001: 87).

CMC also offers new and ways of self-presentation because it allows people to conceal parts of their identity that would normally be visible in face-to-face interaction (Georgakopoulou 2011: 104-105). This opportunity for concealment of extra-linguistic cues has led some to hypothesize that CMC is better suited for transfer of information than personal relationships (Herring 1996: 4). However, many see this aspect of CMC as a chance to function free from such status-based prejudices as gender, class and ethnicity, and argue that CMC is inherently democratic (Herring 1996: 4). Thurlow et al (2004: 80) argue that the anonymity of CMC can actually enhance communication because people feel more free to speak their mind and are less worried about external issues such as their looks. On the other hand, it also offers

people the chance to be more offensive than in a face-to-face conversation because, for example, a physical counter-attack is impossible (Thurlow et al 2004: 80).

To sum up, many aspects of CMC are both special and interesting but not as many that are truly unique compared to face-to-face interaction (Thurlow et al 2004: 94). In other words, most of the time what goes on in CMC is similar to any other kind of communication – just by different means (Thurlow et al 2004: 94). Newhagen and Rafaeli (1996) list the following five major technical qualities that make CMC different from “ordinary” communication:

- *multimedia*: Because it can convey text, voice, pictures, animation, video etc. the Internet’s capacity to address senses surpasses that of any other medium
- *hypertextuality*: CMC is non-linear and the ideas of predetermined order and the authority of writer over reader are being questioned
- *packet switching*: Unlike other communication CMC is not route directed because much of the Internet is designed to be route oblivious
- *synchronicity*: CMC “stretches the edges of the synchronicity continuum” because communication on the Internet can travel at unprecedented speed but also be consumed at unprecedented delays
- *interactivity*: makes CMC very responsive/reflexive communication

However, as Thurlow et al (2004: 94) point out, none of these factors alone is enough to make CMC special; rather it is the combination of all five which does.

3. Materials and methodology

3.1. What is Tumblr

The data for this study were collected from Tumblr, which is a microblogging and social networking website founded in 2007 by David Karp. In 2013, Tumblr was sold to Yahoo!, which in turn was acquired by Verizon Communications in 2017 when both Tumblr and Yahoo! were placed under its Oath subsidiary. David Karp remained Tumblr’s Executive Officer until 2017, when he was replaced by the current CEO, Jeff D’Onofrio. According to the statistics listed on Tumblr in April 2018, the site contains 405.7 million blogs and 159.5 billion posts all

in all. The amount of daily posts is 31.3 million and the amount of domestic (U.S.) traffic is listed as 42 percent. Tumblr is a website that is especially popular among young adults, and although it is perhaps best known for its female user base that is vocal about social issues, according to available statistics the split among users according to gender is almost even.¹ Based on the number of users Tumblr's total reach as a social media platform is relatively small at least compared to Facebook.² However, Tumblr plays a significant role in, for example, "fandom" discussion, related to movies, television shows, music and books.

The site allows users to post their own material as well as to react to, or simply "reblog", other users' content. Many different forms of media are supported, and thus the users can post anything from text and links to videos and audio files. Each user has their own blog that contains, in chronological order, both the material originally posted by them and the material that they have reblogged from other users. Each blog also contains an archive that allows other users to access earlier content from that blog. This content is organized according to year and month. Users follow new content on their own "dashboard" that contains material from each of the blogs that they have chosen to follow. New content can also be found through Tumblr's search function or through recommendations.

All the material posted on Tumblr is public and therefore available for study. However, the users have the opportunity to set posts private, in which case they cannot be viewed by other users. It is also possible to delete one's original posts or reblogged content, but only from one's own blog. In other words, once something is posted and reblogged by other people it is no longer possible to delete the content from the website altogether.

Even though users are not required to share any personal information publicly, many choose to do so. Most, if not all, layouts for Tumblr blogs include a section for writing a description about either the blog itself or its user, and many take this opportunity to disclose their gender, age and nationality. In addition, it is not uncommon for people to share even more detailed information, such as one's preferred pronouns, sexual orientation or even mental illnesses.

On Tumblr it is also possible to add commentary to other people's posts. Even though this is often in the form of text, the use of reactional images and gifs is also prevalent. An additional feature very typical of Tumblr is the use of *tags*, short for *hashtags*. These are used to help people find related content on the site in general, as well as individual blogs; in this sense their use does not differ greatly from that of such social media websites as Twitter and

¹ <https://www.statista.com/topics/2463/tumblr/>

² <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/03/most-popular-social-networks-mapped/>

Instagram. However, on Tumblr there has evolved a convention of using tags as a space for discourse and commentary. In other words, users tend to not always comment on the posts itself, but they rather write their commentary in the tags so that it is only visible to their followers. Additionally, sometimes the users comment on the post itself but then extend the commentary to the tags as well. This does not serve any practical purpose but is simply a widely spread characteristic of the website.

Unlike many other websites that focus on discussion, Tumblr does not have moderators who would actively regulate the content posted on the site; this, in part contributes to the extreme nature of some of the discourse found there. The rules of the website are quite lax, and are not very strictly practiced, with the result that many hateful and extremely offensive comments are allowed to exist. In addition, Tumblr is well known for its pornographic content, which has even led to some countries blocking the whole website. Nowadays this content has to be marked as “NSFW” (not safe for work), however, and will not be visible to users who are not logged in or who have activated the “safe mode” that filters out violent and sexual content. Moreover, searching for certain terms such as “depression” or “suicide” brings up a public service announcement that directs the user to resources that offer help. Tumblr’s content policy also bans blogs that promote self-harm, suicide and eating disorders.

Tumblr’s guidelines do prohibit malicious speech, which is defined as “encouraging violence or hatred on the basis of things like race, ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, age, veteran status, or sexual orientation”.³ The users have an option to report this kind of language; however, such kind of “malicious speech” is prevalent on the website. The guidelines also state that “if you encounter negative speech that doesn’t rise to the level of violence or threats of violence, we encourage you to dismantle negative speech through argument rather than censorship”. Thus it is perhaps not always entirely clear what kind of language constitutes as offensive enough to report.

The reason that Tumblr was chosen as a source for the data in this study is twofold. Firstly, as mentioned above, many users choose to disclose their gender, which makes it possible to include gender as a variable when analyzing the data; here, it differs from many other websites which do not display any information about their users apart from a username. However, it should be noted that this information cannot be verified and thus it is possible for people to assume an online identity that does not correspond to their real gender. Therefore it is possible that not every utterance categorized under female speakers in the data in this study

³ <https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/community>

actually comes from women. Regardless, one has to assume that the vast majority of people are being truthful about the information they choose to share. In the end, in CMC there is always the possibility to conceal part of one's identity or to lie about them.

Secondly, Tumblr is infamous for its almost militantly opinionated users and active debates on current issues. A term made famous by the website is "sjw", *social justice warrior*: a person who aggressively defends minorities and takes part in arguments against more conservative viewpoints. However, Tumblr's user base does not only consist of people with liberal views, but has a large number of more conservative users as well. This often leads to arguments that are less than civilized, but produce an ample amount of impoliteness, making Tumblr an excellent source for the study of impoliteness in computer-mediated communication.

3.2. Previous research on Tumblr

Because of its unique format and perhaps also due to its user base – much of which consists of college-aged students – Tumblr has inspired research in numerous different fields. In the field of communication studies, for instance, Shorey (2015: iii) discusses how the anonymity and the audience specificity of Tumblr both facilitate both the personal expression and the political participation of college-age women. In the same field, DeMeo (2016: 3) focuses on social media marketing and the fan engagement on Tumblr in relation to the 50th anniversary of the popular science fiction show *Doctor Who*. Additionally, Staps' (2014) e-ethnography studies the normative rules within the fans of the television show *Game of Thrones* on Tumblr.

In the field of sociology, Short (2016: iii) examines the niche fandom subculture *SuperWhoLock*, a crossover fandom concerned with the television shows *Supernatural*, *Doctor Who* and *Sherlock*, both from the point of view of its origin and the ways in which this subculture manifests in the context of Tumblr. Moreover, a study done in the field of cultural anthropology by Lundqvist (2015: 1) discusses – using data primarily from Tumblr - how sense of significance is formed and maintained by fans when the text is still evolving. Bury et al (2013: 300), deal with several questions in the area of fan studies. They ask, for example, how “older fans and fandoms adopt and use new technologies” and what an effect the use of social media has on the relationship between the producer and the fans (Bury et al 2013: 300). Bourlai and Herring (2014), finally, study the ways in which the communication of Tumblr users' utilizes textual and image posts, using a corpus comprised of posts collected through user-

generated tags, five of which are exclusively fandom related. Accordingly, a great deal of the research on Tumblr focuses on fandoms and the sense of community within them, both of which are defining characteristics of the website.

The language of Tumblr has not been studied to the same extent as the social and cultural aspects, but some linguistic studies do exist. Ruhl (2016), for example, documents common orthographical conventions used on Tumblr. She remarks that, because of the nature of CMC, internet users need to fill pragmatic gaps by “repurposing and expanding the meanings and connotations of orthographic and typographical conventions” (Ruhl 2016). Multiple question marks, for instance, are often used in a non-lexical way to demonstrate confusion and do not in any way imply an interrogative statement (Ruhl 2016: 9). In another linguistic study based on Tumblr, Grant (2015: 3) discusses the innovative linguistic practices of its users and proceeds to compare her data to the language used on another website, BuzzFeed. She draws attention, among other aspects, to the way in which Tumblr users typically forego the use of punctuation in their text posts (Grant 2015: 19) as well as the use of certain expressions (*SCREAMING, I’M CRYING*) written in all capitals to express enthusiasm or frenzied emotional state (Grant 2015: 22). All the research conducted on Tumblr is relatively recent and thus it is likely that interest towards it is still emerging and will increase in the future. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is still ample space for new studies in the area, especially on the linguistic conventions of the platform.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

The process of data collection for this study did not aim to collect specific impoliteness strategies but rather to collect an equal number of impolite utterances from men and women on pre-chosen topics that were later categorized according to the modified version of Culpeper’s (1996) impoliteness framework. The data collection involved choosing five separate topics that were deemed appropriately controversial in order to maximize the relevant data. Because impoliteness is most prevalent in situations where people disagree with each other, it was logical to choose topics that were especially likely to lead to heated discussion and to the writers disregarding each other’s face wants. The five topics that were chosen are feminism, politics, racism, religion and social justice. All of these are regular areas of debate on Tumblr and were chosen because of the abundance of discourse available. Especially the topics of politics and

racism emerged as extremely heated and controversial because of current events in the United States. In the spring of 2018, much of the political discussion on Tumblr revolved around gun control as a result of the recent large school shooting that killed 17 people in Parkland, Florida. Furthermore, the anticipation of the premiere of the movie “Black Panther” inspired a great deal of discourse on racial issues. In the context of this study, the topic of social justice consists mostly of discussions centered around sexual orientation and gender and the issues surrounding them.

In practice, the data collection involved finding discussions in the chosen categories that had collected enough “notes” to show active participation from other users. On Tumblr, a post gathers notes when other users either like it or reblog it to their own blog. Reblogging the post can also involve adding their own commentary, which can be either in reference to the original post or to comments made by other users. Therefore, the larger the amount of notes on a post, the larger the amount of comments. Once a potential post in an appropriate category was found, all the added comments were read through for potential impoliteness strategies. When an utterance containing one or more impoliteness strategies was found, the commenter’s blog was checked for extra information, mainly their gender and the original date on which the comment was written. These were then added to the database alongside the utterance itself and the name of the writer. The utterances were also marked for a specific topic although it should be noted that in some cases making a distinction between the topics involved some interpretation and was not always entirely clear-cut. In cases where it was not possible to determine the author’s gender the utterance was disregarded altogether.

Due to the nature of the website it is possible for Tumblr blogs to have different layouts that display information in various ways. In addition, the users are able to delete their comments from their own blog but they may still be visible either in the “comments” section or the original post or on another user’s blog. Because of this, it was not always possible to determine the exact original posting date of a comment was not always possible. In these cases, the utterances were marked with the original posting date of the main post itself. This made it possible to control the timeframe of the included data, all of which derived from texts originally written in the period of approximately two years between 2016 and February 2018. The main reason for this timeframe is that it is simply easier to find current data on Tumblr because of its design. The search function, for example, rarely brings up posts that are more than a few years old. Moreover, some of the most popular posts have tens or even hundreds of thousands of notes that span from the year 2016 to today. In other words, some of the data for this study were collected from posts that were originally posted in 2016 but that are still active and constantly

accumulating new notes and comments. Lastly, because CMC is constantly changing and evolving it makes sense to use the most current data available.

The data were collected in an Excel spreadsheet together with the gender, topic and date information. Altogether 404 utterances were collected. The data consist of approximately 80 utterances in each of the five topics in which approximately 40 of the utterances come from women and 40 from men. Each example was then classified using a modified version of Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness framework (see 3.4.). It turned out that, while some of the utterances only employ one of the strategies, the majority combine two or more of them.

This study addresses both the frequency of different techniques used by different genders and the context in which they are used. The quantitative results are presented in the form of tables and graphs. These are then discussed in depth with individual examples from the analyzed data.

3.4. Modifications on Culpeper's model

The framework chosen for this study is based on that presented by Culpeper in 1996. While Culpeper's model has been highly influential in the study of impoliteness, it has limitations with regard to the present study, as it focuses heavily on face-to-face interaction. Over the twenty years since Culpeper's study, practices of communication have changed and advanced in ways that could not ever have been predicted. In other words, Culpeper's framework for impoliteness is not only potentially outdated but was also never intended to be used for studies with a focus in computer-mediated communication. Thus some modifications and specifications are needed in order to form a framework that properly allows for categorizing the data collected for this study.

First of all, the original model includes impoliteness strategies that are specific to face-to-face communication and serve no function, or are impossible to observe in, CMC environment; these may therefore be excluded from the list of impoliteness strategies. One of these is "*ignore, snub the other* - fail to acknowledge the other's presence". This is clearly a strategy that cannot be observed in this study: when someone ignores another on Tumblr it never comes to the attention of anyone but the individual doing the ignoring. This is not necessarily the case for all kinds of CM,C as in group chats, for example, such behavior may be carried out and observed. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study it was excluded from

the list. Furthermore, “*exclude the other from an activity*” was excluded because it relates heavily to face-to-face interaction and is not relevant for this study. The rest of Culpeper’s categories were retained, as they could in principle be employed and observed in the context of Tumblr. However, no examples were found of the following categories: *use obscure or secretive language*, *seek disagreement*, *invade the other's space* and *Put the other's indebtedness on record*.

On the other hand, CMC has developed certain conventions that may in many cases be considered impoliteness, yet are not addressed in Culpeper’s framework. One such convention is the use of Caps Lock to suggest shouting and aggression (in some cases also excitement). Thus the strategy “*Shout* – raise your voice, use Caps Lock to display aggression” was added to the list of negative impoliteness output strategies. Even though Culpeper (1996:358) acknowledges that such paralinguistic or non-verbal cues as avoiding eye-contact or shouting can be used as means of conveying impoliteness he does not include them in the strategies of his original framework.

The data collection also yielded many examples of impoliteness that did not clearly fall into any of the existing categories and required the addition of new ones. This is the case with phrases such as *fuck off* and *go to hell* that basically give the addressee an order that tells them to do something detrimental to their health, uses taboo words or commands them to cease further contact. The order is generally given with the sole purpose of giving offence rather than with an expectation that the addressee will actually follow through. For this purpose, the category “*Use negative orders* – order the other to do an act detrimental to their health, deny further contact, explicitly command the other to leave the situation” was created. The examples found in this category vary from relatively mild – *shut up* – to explicitly telling the addressee to “kill yourself”. The category “*Condescend, scorn or ridicule*” has been broken into three separate categories:

- *Condescend* - emphasize your relative power, belittle the other (e.g. use diminutives)
- *Scorn* - be contemptuous, express distaste
- *Ridicule* - do not treat the other seriously, make fun of the other

This was done in order to differentiate more precisely between different types of impoliteness and to avoid lumping together utterances such as *its not a fucking stereotype you ignorant rose tinted glasses wearer* and *oh no...we've rustewed the gross racist and ablest's*

jimmies,,whatevew shaww we do? Uwu, the first of which has been categorized as “scorn” whereas the latter falls into the category “ridicule”. In addition, the category “*Express judgement* – make a moral point, convey that what the other said is ethically wrong” was added to make a further distinction from “scorn”, which expresses personal distaste. For example, the phrase *op is a bad person* (*op = the original poster*) would fall under the category “express judgement” while *This is the dumbest fucking post I have ever read* would be another example of “scorn”.

Finally, one needs to consider the category of “taboo words”, something that Culpeper does not define in his original article. He acknowledges that the context is essential in determining what is considered taboo and includes such words as *bullshit*, *ass*, *damn*, *goddamn* and *hell* in this category (Culpeper 1996:363). However, Culpeper’s examples belong to the context of a relatively formal situation in the army. Tumblr and many other social media websites are extremely informal contexts where the use of words like “damn” would hardly be considered taboo at all.

On the other hand, because of Tumblr’s characteristic focus on social issues, certain words are considered taboo and highly offensive by a great number of its users even though they may not be as strongly marked in other contexts. For instance, the word *retard* may have been acceptable in the past and in some contexts still serves as a mild insult. On Tumblr, however, this word is almost certain to result in strong reactions and is often used in the hope of eliciting such responses. For the purposes of this study, the words found in the data and classified as taboo are *fuck*, *shit*, *bitch*, *retard*, *cunt*, *asshole*, *twat*, *dick*, *hell*, *fag*, *pussy*, *prick*, *hoe*, *asswipe*, *nigga* and *cock*. All combinations and forms of these words are included in the same category: both *fuck* and *fucking* belong here, as do *shit* and *bullshit*. Abbreviations such as *stfu* (shut the fuck up) and *af* (as fuck) are also included in the category of taboo words. However, contrary to Culpeper’s study, the words *damn*, *goddamn* and *ass* are not counted as taboo in the context of this study, as they are clearly not used in a particularly offensive way.

The modified framework includes the following categories:

Positive impoliteness output strategies:

- *Disassociate from the other* - for example, deny association or common ground with the other
- *Be disinterested* - be unconcerned, unsympathetic

- *Use inappropriate identity markers*
- *Use taboo words* - swear, or use abusive or profane language.
- *Call the other names* - use derogatory nominations.
- *Express judgement* – make a moral point, convey that what the other said is ethically wrong

Negative impoliteness output strategies:

- *Frighten* - instill a belief that action detrimental to the other will occur.
- *Condescend* - emphasize your relative power, belittle the other (e.g. use diminutives).
- *Scorn* – be contemptuous, express distaste
- *Ridicule* - do not treat the other seriously, make fun of the other.
- *Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect* - personalize, use the pronouns 'I' and 'you'.
- *Use negative orders* – order the other to do an act detrimental to their health, deny further contact, explicitly command the other to leave the situation
- *Shout* – raise your voice, use Caps Lock to display aggression

3.5. Validity and reliability

This study measures a specific group of people and should not be used as a basis for generalizations for general population. In other words, the data collected comes only from only the type of person who uses Tumblr and is additionally keen on participating in the discourse on the website and uses impolite language on occasion. No attempt is made to study the overall frequency of insults on Tumblr or provide a comparison with users who do not produce impolite language. Although the study examines the gender difference, many other variables and thus their potential effects are unknown. However, for a study of this nature there are no other superior ways of collecting authentic data. Due to the nature of impolite language as well as computer mediated communication, examples cannot be methodically collected from

volunteers, but rather have to be harvested from anonymous users who are not able or willing to provide information on all the potentially meaningful variables.

In order for a study to be reliable it needs to be replicable by other researchers. Using the described framework for categorizing impoliteness techniques and collecting data on Tumblr from users disclosing their gender should allow anyone to replicate this study. However, the changing nature of computer mediated communication may have a considerable effect on the results if the study is replicated many years in the future or conducted on older material.

3.6. Ethical considerations

The main ethical considerations in this study concern the anonymity of the users whose material is used as its basis. Because the data is collected from a public website anyone can have access, there is no need to request permission from individual users in order to use the data they have produced. Nevertheless, the anonymity of the users who have produced the data used in this study is ensured. Although the usernames of the individuals are recorded in the database, this information remains confidential and is only used to track the original source of the collected data make sure that the results are not skewed because a disproportionate amount of data is accidentally collected from any one individual. If the need arises to refer to any single individual, their name is changed in order to protect their anonymity.

3.7. Limitations of the study

Due to the nature of this particular study, there are certain limitations that should be addressed. Firstly, as is the case in most studies that involve using online data, the personal information is entirely self-reported and thus not guaranteed to be entirely reliable. This study is concerned with the gender of the users whose utterances it analyzes, but because of the anonymous nature of Tumblr it has to simply assume that the data reported is on the whole accurate. Additionally, because there is no obligation to report one's gender – or any other personal information – much otherwise suitable data had to be discarded because the user had decided not to report any personal information. This placed an additional time constraint for the data collection: searching

for relevant data manually is already time consuming, but as not all of the data found turned out to be usable, a much larger number of searches has to be carried out to identify the data to be included in the study.

Because of this, the number of examples needed to be limited to a reasonable number. Additionally, it was not possible to compare the data according to other potential parameters, such as age and nationality, without directly contacting the users individually and asking them for extra information. This is why the study focuses on gender and the topic of the original post – both information that is available. Moreover, due to the nature of the website used in the study, it is quite cumbersome to find older data in a way that is time efficient; thus the material for this study has been limited to the years 2016-18, even though comparing examples from different years could potentially have been of interest.

4. Presentation of findings

4.1. Overview

This section presents the findings of this study. After an initial overview, all impoliteness strategies are discussed in turn. In each case, the figures are presented in tables and graphs, and then each of the strategies is then discussed in detail with examples from the corpus.

The data consist of 404 utterances, 201 of which were produced by users who identified themselves as women and 203 from ones who identified themselves as men. They were collected from discussions that centered around five different topics: feminism, politics, racism, religion and social justice. 83 of the utterances are categorized under RELIGION, 82 under SOCIAL JUSTICE, 80 under RACISM, 80 under POLITICS and 79 under FEMINISM. The data were collected from 304 separate individuals. This means that, in some cases more than one example was included from the same individual; however, no more than 5 utterances were included from any single individual, in order to avoid skewing the data. In addition, the corpus includes 17 utterances that were collected but do not fulfil the parameters set because the gender of the author is not known or they were uttered in a topic not included in this study. These are excluded from the figures reported and are discussed separately in section 4.15.

It should be pointed out that on Tumblr – as is the case with many other websites – typing the symbol “@” before a person’s username in the text “tags” this user and turns their name into a link to their blog as well as alerts them that someone has mentioned them in a post. Thus some of the examples in this section include mentions of other Tumblr users; in order to preserve their anonymity these have been changed into the form “@[name]” where “[name]” indicates the original username. Many of the utterances discussed contain terms that are specific to either Tumblr or Internet language is general, but that are not in general use; a glossary of such terms, based on the present data, is included as Appendix 1.

Impoliteness strategy	Quantity	Percentages
All utterances	404	100
Use taboo words	259	64.1
Call the other names	155	38.4
Scorn	137	33.9
Use negative orders	77	19.0
Condescend	52	12.3
Associate the other with a negative aspect	48	11.9
Ridicule	44	10.9
Use inappropriate identity markers	31	7.7
Disassociate from the other	23	5.7
Shout	11	2.7
Be disinterested	8	2
Express judgement	6	1.5
Frighten	3	0.7

Table 1. The frequency of occurrence of different impoliteness strategies

Table 1 displays the frequencies of the impoliteness strategies found in the data, organized in order of frequency. By far the most frequent category is *use taboo words*, which occurs in 259 of all the utterances. The second most used strategy is *call the other names* with 155 occurrences. *Scorn* emerges as the third largest category at 137 occurrences. The least frequent categories include *shout*, *be disinterested* and, not surprisingly given the medium, *frighten*.

There are many more occurrences of the strategies than there are utterances in the corpus: accordingly, the percentages in Table 1 add up to more than a hundred. Due to the

nature of impoliteness, it is common for the different strategies to be employed together; some of them, especially *use taboo words* and *call the other names*, especially tend to appear alongside each other more often than alone. There are only 109 instances in the data collected for this study where one of the strategies is employed alone, while the remaining 295 utterances combine two or more strategies. In addition, it is possible for the same strategy to be employed more than once in one utterance, something that is extremely common especially in the most frequent category, *use taboo words*, in which different taboo words can be combined or the same one used repeatedly and in different forms.

4.2. Use taboo words

With 259 occurrences, the category *use taboo words* is overwhelmingly the most frequent one found in the data collected, appearing in over 50 percent of the utterances analyzed. As can be seen in Table 2, the use of this strategy is somewhat more common among men, who employed it in 25 more instances compared to women.

	Quantity	Percentage
men	142	54.8
women	117	45.2
total	259	100

Table 2. The gender divide in the category *use taboo words*

	Quantity	Percentage
politics	56	21.6
religion	56	21.6
racism	53	20.5
social justice	49	18.9
feminism	45	17.4
total	259	100

Table 3. The frequency of *use taboo words* according to topic

The prevalence of *use taboo words* among the separate topics does not differ greatly though it is highest in RELIGION and POLITICS, both of which contain an equal amount of uses of the strategy, and lowest in FEMINISM.

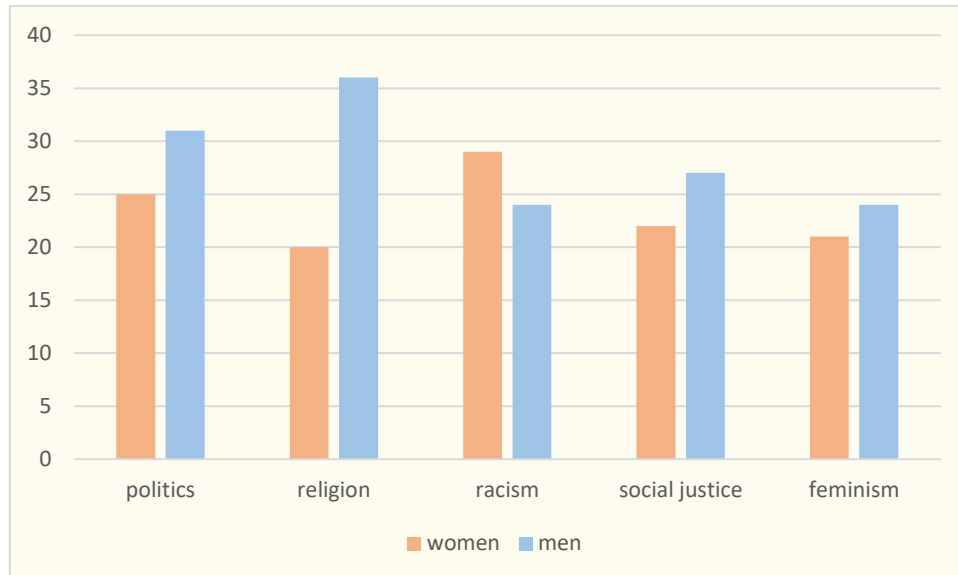


Figure 2. The gender divide according to topic in *use taboo words*

As Figure 2 shows, men employ *use taboo words* more than women in almost all of the topics. However, under the topic of RACISM women use the strategy 29 times compared to the men's 24 times, making it the only instance where the strategy is more common among women. RELIGION is the topic that has the most uses of the strategy by men while also having the lowest number of uses by women out of all of the topics.

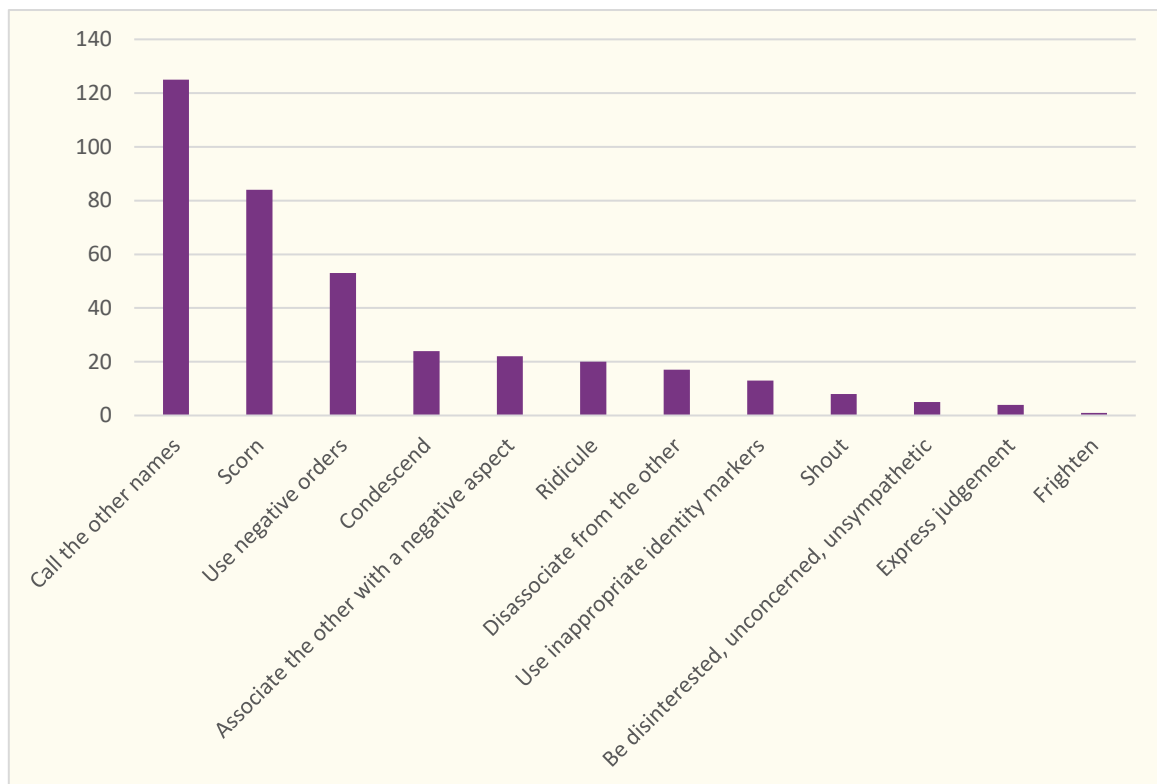


Figure 3. The occurrence of *use taboo words* with other impoliteness strategies

Figure 3 illustrates that *use taboo words* occurs most frequently with the other most frequent strategies: *call the other names* and *scorn*. This is the case with all the strategies; each occurs most with the most frequent categories. However, not all of the strategies occur together, which is the case especially with some of the least frequent strategies. Unsurprisingly, *use taboo words* occurs with each of the other strategies at least once.

	Quantity	Percentage
All occurrences of <i>use taboo words</i>	259	100
fuck	156	60.2
shit	53	20.5
bitch	25	9.7
retard	13	5.0
asshole	12	4.6
cunt	11	4.2
twat	6	2.3
dick	6	2.3
hell	6	2.3
fag	5	1.9
pussy	5	1.9
prick	3	1.2
hoe	2	0.8
asswipe	1	0.4
asswad	1	0.4
nigga	1	0.4
cock	1	0.4

Table 4. The frequency of specific taboo words in the category *use taboo words*

Table 4. contains each of the words categorized as “taboo” in the context of this study. *Fuck* with its different variations emerges as the most prevalent word in this category, used in about 60 percent of all the instances of *use taboo words*. *Shit* and *bitch* follow as the second and third most common taboo words. The taboo words with only a single occurrence are *asswipe*, *asswad*, *nigga* and *cock*. *Fuck* and *shit* are the only taboo words that occur more than once within one utterance. *Fuck* appears in 156 utterances but is used 181 times altogether whereas *shit* occurs in 53 utterance but is used 55 times in all the data.

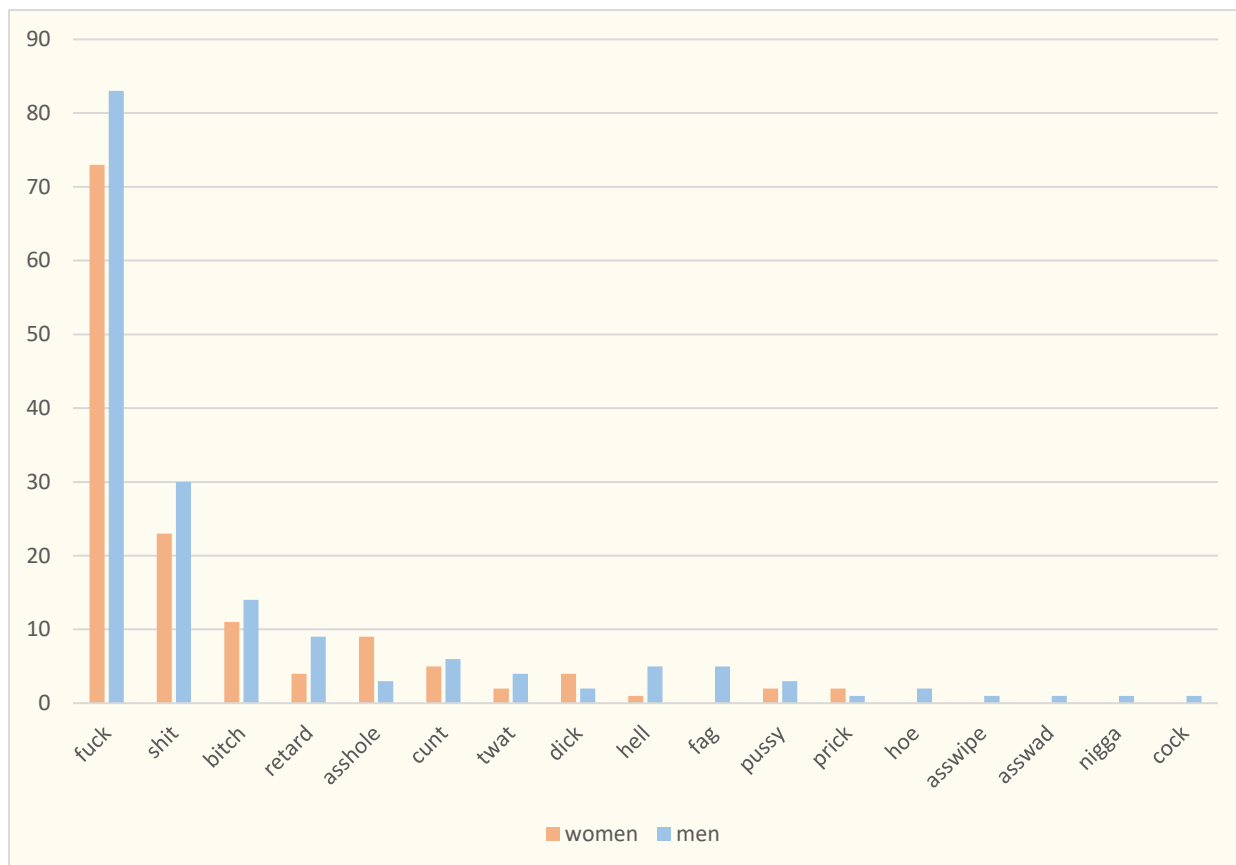


Figure 4. The gender divide in specific taboo words

Figure 4 illustrates that men use all of the most frequent taboo words more compared to women. The specific taboo words that occur more with female speakers are *asshole*, *dick* and *prick*. Many of the taboo words with only one or two occurrences are uttered by men.

It was noted above that the strategy *use taboo words* is often used repeatedly within the same utterance. This is, however, the case especially with the word *fuck*, rather than with taboo words in general: for example, *shit* is used repeatedly in only two utterances. Example (1) illustrates an utterance where *fuck* is used three times all in all, while in example (2) *shit* is used repeatedly, making a particular point of the repetition:

- (1) *Yeah fuck you dude why the fuck would you say this shit like shut the actually fuck you can choke* (female, feminism)
- (2) *why talk shit about others when you're the one being a piece of shit???*(female, religion)

There are also numerous cases in which different taboo words are used together in one utterance, as evidenced by examples (3) and (4), as well as (1):

(3) @[name] okay ugly bitch fucker :) its okay that your parents dont love you :) (male, social justice)

(4) literally you're just a nazi scum dipshit, go fucking die alone in a hole. (male, politics)

Fuck is not only the most prevalent taboo word in the data but also the most versatile. Whereas most of the other taboo words are used as insults and often fall into the category *call the other names*, *fuck* is used in multiple different ways. It is, for instance, popular in short scornful statements and negative orders, as in examples (5)-(8):

(5) *Fuck you.* (male, religion)

(6) *Fuck off.* (male, religion)

(7) *Get fucked @[name]* (male, feminism)

(8) *shut the fuck up lmao* (female, social justice)

Furthermore, often *fuck* is used to amplify and modify other words, as in example (9) where it is used as an adverb to modify the adjective *disgusting*, and similarly in (10) where the modified word is *free*. In example (11) *fuck* modifies the verb *asked* and in the case of (12) it functions as an adjective modifying *moron*.

(9) *You're fucking disgusting* (male, politics)

(10) @[name] *Google is fucking free you despicable piece of shit* (female, politics)

(11) *"Sorry, but the burkah is something we don't need" who fuckin asked u???????*
(female, religion)

(12) *Don't be a fucking moron.* (male, religion)

Nevertheless, this taboo word is sometimes also used in the similar manner as the others, such as *bitch*, so that it functions as an insult in itself as can be seen in examples (13) and (14):

(13) *He bought the gun legally you empty headed fuck* (female, politics)

(14) *Hmm, do you specialize in being wrong, or does it come naturally, you ugly fuck?*
(male, politics)

There are many cases where the taboo words do not occur on their own but rather as a part of a compound word. Example (15) illustrates a case where two different taboo words – *fuck* and

retard – have been combined to form a new insult, *fucktard*. In examples (16) and (17) the taboo word is one part of an insult where the other part does not fall into the taboo word category even though they are part of the same word.

(15) *Grow the fuck up and move on. Get some therapy, you fucktards.* (female, racism)

(16) *You're born with it, dipshit.* (male, religion)

(17) *You can both get fucked, by your stick of choice, since men are apparently toxic, and we don't want your rancid cuntflaps acquiring any new poisons.* (male, feminism)

Retard is another taboo word, in addition to *fuck*, that is often used in various ways. In many cases it also falls into the category *call the other names* as in (18) but it is also used as an adjective to modify other words like in (19). There are also a couple of cases that employ the phrase “go full retard”, which seems to be an insult used by more than one individual.

(18) *You're right, I don't care how my words personally affect you. Congratulations retard, you cracked the code.* (male, social justice)

(19) *Have you even listened to me, you retarded cunt?* (female, social justice)

(20) *Ho-ly fuck, that was going full retard if I ever seen it.* (male, social justice)

As can be seen in examples (21)-(23) the use of abbreviations is another prevalent trend in *use taboo words*. These can be easily overlooked since the words are not fully spelled out and perhaps this is partly the reason for why the abbreviations in examples (21) and (23) are written in all capitals to highlight and stress the taboo part of the sentence as the most important part of the utterance.

(21) *How bout you not be a racist POS* (female, racism)

(22) *Bruh chill tf out* (male, religion)

(23) *OP is basically being homophobic AF* (female, social justice)

The case of the taboo word *faggot* is an interesting in the sense that in this data it is used exclusively by men and often together with other insulting terms that are rarely if ever used by women. Example (24) employs both *beta* and *cuck* in a combined form whereas (25) and (26) also use *cuck* alongside with *fag*.

(24) *Betacuck normie faggot* (male, feminism)

(25) *Guys...its a cuck living in australia. He doesnt have any balls anyway. And he is a hipster fag.* (male, feminism)

(26) *This fucking cuck still makes posts wow it must hurt to be a fucking fedora fag.* (male, social justice)

The corpus contains only one instance of a woman using the word *cuck* and all the uses of *beta* are by men. Therefore it can be said that the data suggest that these insults are more typical of male writers; they also tend to appear in the same context: men insulting other men's masculinity. The distribution of the terms *faggot*, *cuck* and *beta* probably reflects their association with a specifically male area of discourse. They all attack the addressee's "manliness" and sexual prowess, and are irrelevant or even ridiculous if used towards women. Consequently this leads to women rarely using the words because, for one, they do not deem them as offensive, and secondly, because they are hardly ever targeted towards women they do not become an active part of their vocabulary in the same way that they are part of men's vocabulary.

4.3. Call the other names

The second largest category in the data is *call the other names*, with 155 occurrences. Like *use taboo words*, this one is employed by men more than women. In the great majority of cases, it appears together with *use taboo words*: out of the total of 155 occurrences *call the other names* occurs without *use taboo words* in only 30 instances. In other words, these two strategies occur together in 125 instances and are thus closely linked.

	Quantity	Percentage
men	85	54.8
women	70	45.2
total	155	100

Table 5. The gender divide in *call the other names*

	Quantity	Percentage
religion	35	22.6
politics	34	21.9
social justice	32	20.6
racism	30	19.4
feminism	24	15.5
total	155	100

Table 6. The frequency of *call the other names* according to topic

Call the other names is used most frequently in RELIGION, which is closely followed by POLITICS. It has the least frequent uses in FEMINISM.

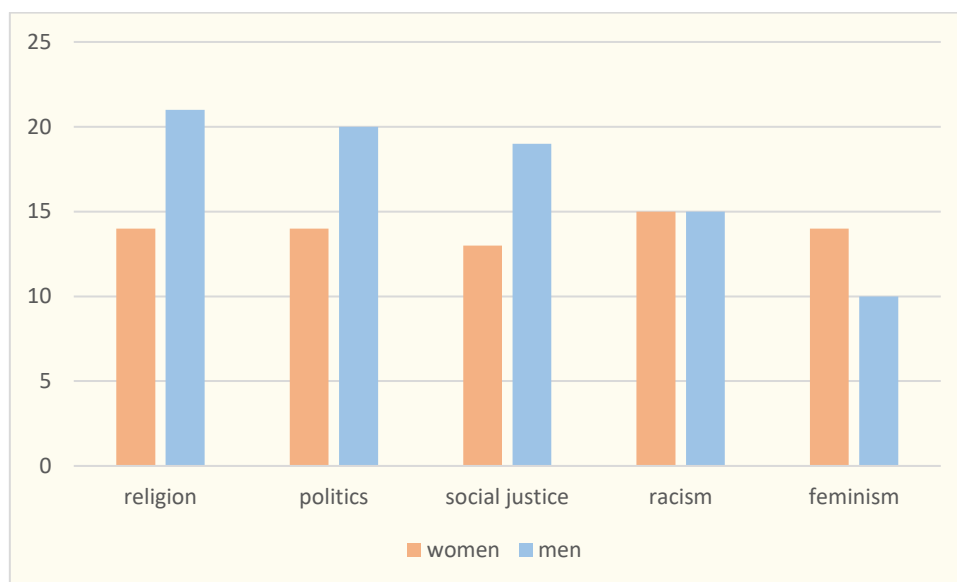


Figure 5. The gender divide according to topic in *call the other names*

Men use this strategy most in RELIGION while women employ it most in RACISM. FEMINISM is the only topic in which women use *call the other names* more than men while men use it more frequently in RELIGION, POLITICS and SOCIAL JUSTICE.

As discussed above, this strategy often appears in combination with *use taboo words*, and in many cases the two categories are merged, so that the naming term consists wholly or partly of the taboo word, as in the examples (27) and (28).

(27) *Nah, trust me. You're a cunt.* (female, religion)

(28) *God, what a retard* (male, social justice)

In other words, the same part of the utterance – *a cunt* and *a retard* – fulfills two different tasks: *use taboo words* and *call the other names*. In (29) the taboo word – *cock* – forms only part of the insult – *you absolute cock waffle* – that falls into the category *call the other names*. This demonstrates how *use taboo words* is often embedded in other impoliteness strategies.

(29) *Do you really want to open that box of fire crackers you absolute cock waffle?* (male, politics)

However, in many cases where the two strategies occur together they can be found in different parts of the utterance. In example (30), the taboo word is part of the negative order *go fuck yourself* and not really connected to the insult – *you absolute waste of oxygen* – that causes the utterance to be categorized as *call the other names*. Similarly, (31) contains both strategies but they function in different positions.

(30) *Go fuck yourself, you absolute waste of oxygen.* (female, social justice)

(31) *Use your fucking brain, moron.* (female, social justice)

However, it appears that often this strategy is used most creatively when it is not employed together with *use taboo words*, perhaps because some individuals wish to express their contempt towards the addressee while also refraining from using language they deem to coarse. Examples (32), (33) and (34) all illustrate extremely creative individual insults which, unlike the words in the taboo word category, cannot really be anticipated or quantified since there is almost no chance of an insult like this appearing more than once in the data.

(32) *you senile bag of oatmeal* (female, religion)

(33) *you turd muffin* (female, religion)

(34) *you moldly bucket of cottage cheese.* (male, racism)

However, in some cases these creative and milder insults are used together with taboo words in an almost contradictory manner. The writer in example (35) chooses to use a relatively mild insult – *mud puddle* – but then then proceeds to modify this with the taboo word *fuck*.

(35) *The fucking mud puddle up there saying the girl didn't deserve to try and love herself is named [name], but it looks more like she should change that to Miss-Soggyknees since she just finds random women to fucking hate on.* (male, feminism)

Although many insults in this category are extremely creative, there are some that are more predictable and appear repeatedly. Some of these are *dumbass* – or its variant *dummy* as seen in (36) – which appear six times all in all and *idiot*, as demonstrated in (37), which is used 12 times. These occur both with and without taboo words.

(36) *Check ur facts dummy* (female, politics)

(37) *^^^ I swear you guy are close minded idiots* (female, religion)

4.4. Scorn

Out of the strategies which women used more than men, *scorn* has the most notable difference in numbers between the genders. Women's use constitutes almost 60 percent of all uses of the strategy and they used it in 27 more instances compared to men.

	Quantity	Percentage
women	82	59.9
men	55	40.1
total	137	100

Table 7. The gender divide in *scorn*

	Quantity	Percentage
racism	30	21.9
religion	30	21.9
politics	28	20.4
social justice	26	19.0
feminism	23	16.8
total	137	100

Table 8. The frequency of *scorn* according to topic

Scorn occurs most frequently in RACISM and RELIGION, both of which include 30 instances of the strategy. It is the least prevalent in FEMINISM with 23 occurrences.

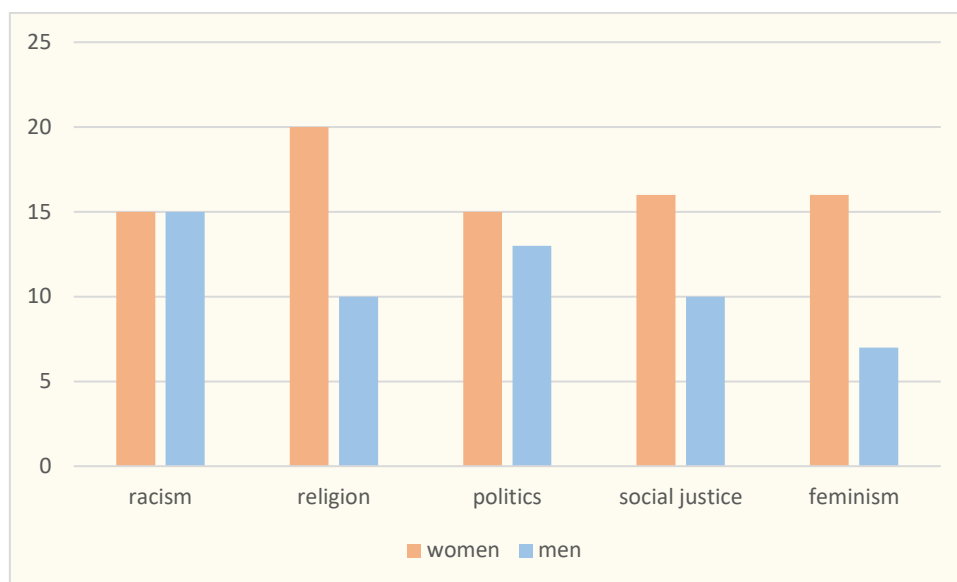


Figure 6. The gender divide according to topic in *scorn*

In RACISM, women and men have an equal number of occurrences of *scorn* while in all the other topics women use the strategy more than men. Among women the strategy is most frequent in RELIGION while men use it most in RACISM.

Many utterances in this category involve the speaker expressing personal judgement of either the addressee or the content of their comments. For instance, in (38) the speaker calls the addressee's post *dumb* whereas (39) the speaker calls the addressee himself *dumb*. In example (40) the speaker's criticism is threefold as she insults the addressee but also their logic and the content of their post.

(38) *This is the dumbest fucking post I have ever read.* (female, politics)

(39) *holy shit he's really this dumb* (male, politics)

(40) *@[name], good thing there are men that know to ignore your moronic advice. And yeah you are spineless and your logic is atrocious.* (female, feminism)

In many cases the utterances that include *scorn* emphasize the speaker's disgust towards the addressee. In some cases this is achieved simply by calling the addressee *disgusting* like in (43). However, often the statement is more explicit like in (42). At least in one occasion, a comment

like this also started “a chain reaction” in which many users started repeating the same or a very similar utterance under the same post resulting in a flood of speakers stating the addressee’s post “made them puke” (see 4.6. for a similar example). As in (38), example (44) also uses a superlative to emphasize their distaste for the addressee who is not just *bad* but *the worst*.

(41) *OP sickens me.* (female, social justice)

(42) *I puked in my mouth from this post* (male, social justice)

(43) *You're fucking disgusting* (male, politics)

(44) *Dear fucking Christ. You two are the worst sacks of shit I've ever seen holy lord baby Jesus on rye bread with a breadstick up his ass I feel unclean* (female, religion)

One way in which *scorn* manifests in the data is with the speakers expressing their hatred or dislike of the addressee. In both (45) and (46) the speakers take it upon themselves to indicate the dislike of their whole community towards the addressee while also employing the strategy *disassociate from the other*.

(45) *Also, OP, congratulations. The LGBT Community hates you and you're scum.* (female, social justice)

(46) *dont bring black women into this we dont like you.* (female, social justice)

In many cases the speakers employ *scorn* to indicate that there is something wrong with the addressee because they have said something a normal person would or should not say.

(47) *op what the fucking hell is wrong with you like???* (male, feminism)

Often *scorn* occurs alongside with *call the other names* as calling someone names – especially together with taboo words – often in itself expresses contempt towards the addressee. Especially in cases like (48) and (49) where the insult contains words such as *despicable* and *imbecile* it is clear the speaker wishes to heighten the sense of contempt in the utterance and make it particularly clear to the addressee.

(48) *@[name] Google is fucking free you despicable piece of shit* (female, politics)

(49) *im mixed you imbecile fuck.* (female, racism)

One prevalent way in which *scorn* manifests in the data is the structure *fuck you* or, as seen in (50), *fuck this*. This combination of *scorn* and *use taboo words* is used both alone and as a part of longer utterances to indicate general contempt and dismissiveness towards the addressee.

(50) *Masculine men need no fucking tumblr positivity, they are rewarded through all other aspects of life for doing what is already expected. Fuck this post* (female, social justice)

One way in which the speakers employ *scorn* is to indicate that the addressee should never have children as can be seen in examples (51) and (52). The intention behind such comments is usually to convey a value judgement on the addressee's parenting skills or to imply that the world does not need more people like the addressee. Since it can be assumed that the interactants do not know each other, comments such as this are usually based on the notion that, because the addressee disagrees with the speaker on an important issue, they are not fit to raise children; accordingly they are unlikely to be comments on their actual skills in the area of parenting.

(51) *Dont ever habe children, thanks.* (female, social justice)

(52) *Today on: People who should never breed.* (male, feminism)

Some comments go further and state that the addressee themselves should die or should never have been born as seen in examples (53) and (54). The category *use negative orders* (discussed in the next section 4.4.) has similar examples, but whereas those explicitly tell the addressee to *die* or *kill yourself* the ones in *scorn* use different structures. For instance, in (53) the speaker says people like the addressee *need to be thrown into a volcano*. However, this could be easily turned into a negative order by making in an imperative, e.g. *throw yourself into a volcano*.

(53) *People like this need to be thrown into a volcano. Jesus Christ I am going to be mentally scarred for life.* (female, religion)

(54) *That [name] whatever and his girlfriend are literally so disgusting. I'm serious. Someone should've strangled them at birth.* (female, religion)

4.5. Use negative orders

Use negative orders is used very evenly by both genders, with very slightly more numerous examples by women. The strategy occurs most often in SOCIAL JUSTICE, which is closely followed by FEMINISM. It has the least occurrences in RELIGION.

	Quantity	Percentage
women	40	51.9
men	37	48.1
total	77	100

Table 9. The gender divide in *use negative orders*

	Quantity	Percentage
social justice	20	26.0
feminism	18	23.37
politics	14	18.18
racism	13	16.88
religion	12	15.58
total	77	100

Table 10. The frequency of *use negative orders* according to topic

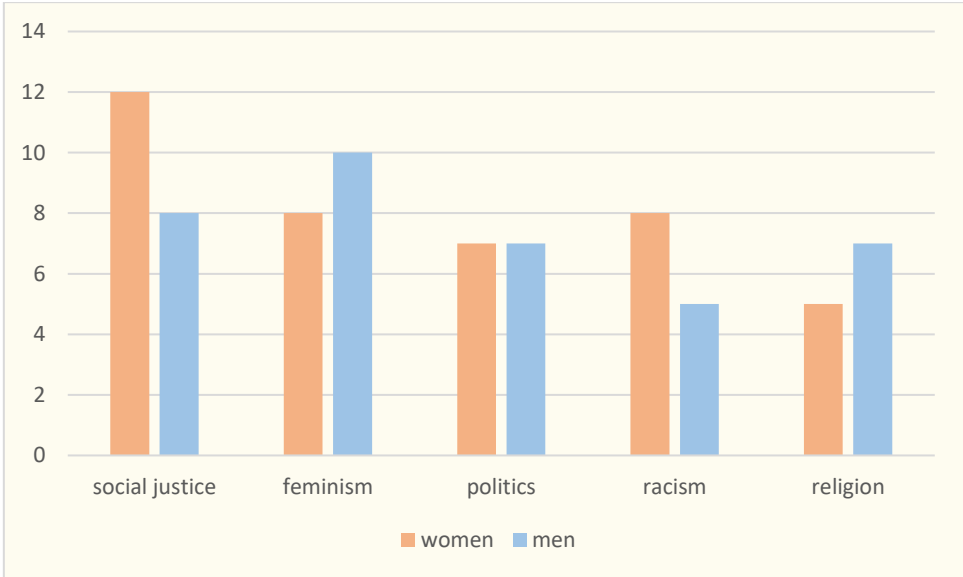


Figure 7. The gender divide according to topic in *use negative orders*

Women's use of the strategy surpasses men's in SOCIAL JUSTICE – which also has the most uses by women in this category – as well as in RACISM. Men employ *use negative orders* more often in FEMINISM, the topic with most occurrences of the strategy by men, and RELIGION.

One of the common and perhaps the most extreme ways that this strategy occurs in the data is when the writer explicitly tells the addressee to kill themselves. The examples range from the very succinct *kys* in (55) - in which the writer has not bothered to even type out the whole command but has used an abbreviation instead – to much more elaborate utterances like (57) that also employ other impoliteness strategies.

(55) *kys* (male, social justice)

(56) *op kill yourself* (female, feminism)

(57) *i hate when people tag me especially closet fascist with no profile pic, if youre reading this kill yourself cracker* (male, politics)

Similar to the cases where the writer tells the addressee to *kill yourself* are the ones where the addressee is told to simply *die*, and as the earlier examples these also vary greatly in length and detail. Example (58) achieves its goal with only a one-word command whereas example (60) goes into great detail and essentially assembles a list of the things the addressee should do to harm themselves. Usually these utterances emerge as an emotional response to something the addressee has said, which the writer perceives to be extremely hurtful or insensitive.

(58) *Die* (female, feminism)

(59) *hey op go fall in a ditch and die you scumsucking waste of bone marrow* (female, feminism)

(60) *I want you to go camping. I want you to go to a nice camp called auschwitz. Or even better, go to Warsaw. Go to the Ghetto. Where my family once was. And die. I want you to starve yourself, beat yourself, gas yourself, burn yourself, and die. Painfully.* (male, religion)

Though it is doubtful that the writer of such utterances actually expects or even wishes for the addressee to go through with killing themselves or dying, these kinds of comment skirt very close to the guidelines of Tumblr that ban content that actively promotes self-harm of any kind. Comments such as these may be a step below actual death threats but this does not make them harmless. The prevalence of comments wishing for someone's death in this data alone suggests

that their use is a common trend on the website, which has the age limit of 13 years. In other words, in most interactions on Tumblr there is a possibility that the person one is addressing is as young as 13 or 14, and statements like (56) and (60) can have a much more profound effect than expected by the speaker. It is unlikely that one stray comment will end up driving anyone to suicide but the nature of the user base is to occasionally “gang up” on users who have done something that the others perceive as wrong and this has in the past led to some users attempting suicide. Therefore it is possible that some impoliteness strategies may have far reaching consequences regardless of the original intentions of the writer, especially on websites where the addressee is likely to be a young individual.

Example (61) is a less explicit and more humorous version of the ones listed above. While it implores the addressee to commit an act harmful to their health it also sets a tone that is less serious and thus less harsh than any of the earlier six utterances.

(61) *And [name] go play in traffic you human equivalent of a wet fart* (male, politics)

Another, and much less extreme, way in which *use negative orders* appears in the data is when the speaker commands the addressee to cease talking. Example (62) achieves this in a slightly exasperated but not overly offensive way, whereas example (63) combines the order with other impoliteness strategies, such as *ridicule* and *use inappropriate identity markers*.

(62) *Jesus Christ just stop talking* (male, social justice)

(63) *like lmfao be quiet hunty it's not her fault you're a broken person* (male, politics)

Nevertheless, as example (64) illustrates, the most common way to order someone to be quiet is to use *shut up* – or in this case its abbreviation – often accompanied by *use taboo words*. Example (65) takes the order even further on the impoliteness scale with its command to *shut your fucking mouth and rot*. Basically, this method of employing *use negative orders* has much variety in severity which becomes clear when comparing, for instance, examples (62) and (65). The first one, while impolite in itself, does not come anywhere close to the amount of scorn and offence apparent in the latter.

(64) *stfu with that “cracker is a racial slur” bc it really isn't* (male, racism)

(65) *do you think you know me, bitch?do you really think you know shit about me?shut your fucking mouth and rot* (male, social justice)

Many examples in this category consist simply of the speaker telling the addressee to *fuck off*, to leave the conversation and not to contribute anything further. It was originally the prevalence of utterances like this that determined the need for the category *use negative orders* since they do not properly fall into any of the categories that already existed. However, often this category functions together with others, especially with the strategy *scorn* and *use taboo words*.

(66) *Fuck off* (male, feminism)

(67) *piss off, [name]*. (female, social justice)

(68) *go fuck yourselves and take your obsolete superstitions and sociopathic imaginary friends with you* (male, religion)

There are a few utterances in this category involve body parts with clear sexual connotations as in examples (69) and (70). While they may not compare in impoliteness to telling the addressee to *die* they often signal the speaker's dismissive attitude. Additionally, the sexual connotation in utterances like *eat a dick*, *suck my fat healthy ass* or *suck my dick* can easily veer too close to a sensitive topic especially considering that in CMC the speaker and the addressee do often not know each other and thus sexual comments, for example, may be aimed to make the addressee uncomfortable on purpose.

(69) *Idk who you're geek ass is but like all I'm saying is my pussy has a higher net worth than you and also eat a dick* (male, politics)

(70) *@[name] suck my fat healthy ass* (female, social justice)

Many of the examples in this category have less to do with ordering the addressee to do something detrimental to themselves and focus rather on explicitly telling the other to cease contact on Tumblr. Example (71) orders the address to delete their whole blog, essentially telling them to leave the website and stop posting there. The speaker in (72) essentially tells the addressee too stop replying to their post and not to tag them anywhere while the speaker in (73) does essentially the same but in an exaggeratedly scornful manner.

(71) *Dont delete the post, delete your blog you sloppy fuck* (male, feminism)

(72) *You can get your bitch ass up out my notifications* (female, politics)

(73) *Now you can march your ass right the fuck off my blog, you festering sack of bile.*
(female, social justice)

4.6. Condescend

As with use negative orders, women use *condescend* in a little over 50 percent of the utterances in which it occurs, which makes it one of the few strategies that are used more by women; however, the difference is, again, very minor so that the strategies may be considered fairly evenly used by both genders.

	Quantity	Percentage
women	28	53.8
men	24	46.2
total	52	100

Table 11. The gender divide in *condescend*

	Quantity	Percentage
racism	12	23.1
religion	12	23.1
feminism	10	19.2
politics	10	19.2
social justice	8	15.4
total	52	100

Table 12. The frequency of *condescend* according to topic

Condescend is most prevalent in RACISM and RELIGION, which both have an equal amount of uses of the strategy. This strategy appeared least commonly in SOCIAL JUSTICE.

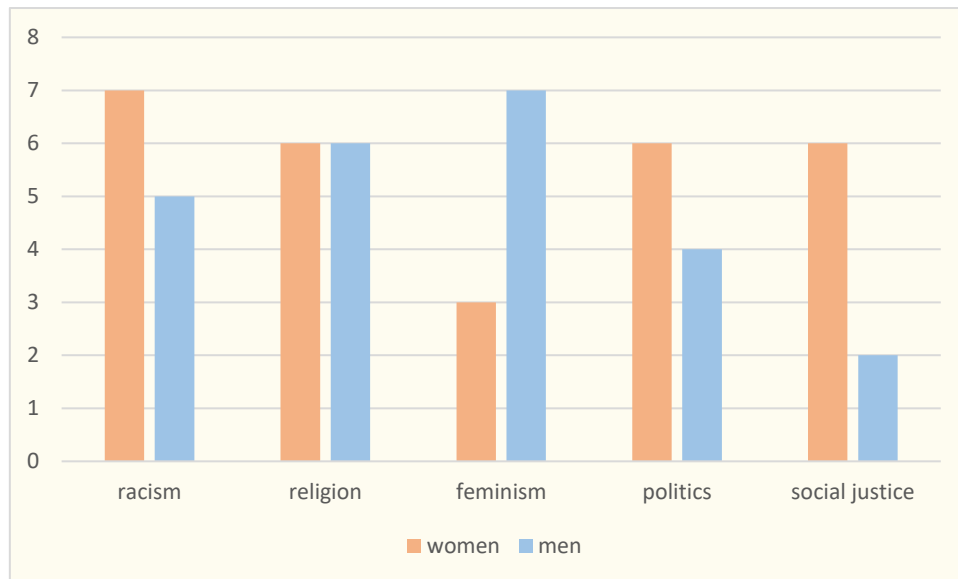


Figure 8. The gender divide according to topic in *condescend*

Although women use *condescend* more or as much as men in almost all of the topics, FEMINISM shows a rather surprising difference when compared to the other topics. Not only do men use the strategy more commonly under FEMINISM, but the gender difference is quite notable, especially when one takes into account the women dominate in 3 of the other topics and are equal with men in one.

Example (74) likens the addressee to a child, which is perhaps one of the simplest and most obvious ways to use *condescend*. It is also similar to the cases that involve the strategy *use of use inappropriate identity markers* (discussed in depth in 4.8.) which functions as a sub-category to *condescend*. *Boy*, *girl* and *kid* are all inappropriate identity markers found in the data that basically refer to the addressee as a child.

(74) *you sound like a fucking child who will never gain the ability to mature past what you are now* (male, politics)

Many of the utterances in this category involve the use of diminutives to denote that the addressee is weak or childish. The speakers in example (75) and (76) use the word *little*, or its variant *lil*, in this sense to elevate themselves above the addressee. The speaker in (77) calls the addressee *cute*, which is clearly meant as a diminutive rather than an endearment in this context.

(75) *You're willful ignorance is exactly what makes you a disgusting little racist* (male, racism)

(76) *make that lil bitch eat their words oooooooh suck on that lil bigot* (male, religion)

(77) *You are so cute, really. I should have known by your blog that you would be entrenched in the victim mind set.* (female, feminism)

Many examples of *condescend* involve the speaker calling into question the addressee's knowledge or competence in a certain area in an unconstructive manner. The speaker in (78) uses the strategy together with *use taboo words* to dismiss the addressee's comment while the speaker in (79) goes even further and insinuates that anyone living on planet Earth should have a better grasp on the topic at hand. In both of these utterances, the speakers position themselves above the addressee and assume authority to criticize their level of knowledge. Example (80) has the speaker expresses their distaste towards the addressee by insinuating that they do not think at all before voicing their opinions because anyone who considers what they say would have said something more considerate or factual.

(78) *OP, you have no fucking idea what you're talking about.* (female, religion)

(79) *holy shit what planet do you live on? Do you you even understand what feminism is? You clearly don't.* (male, feminism)

(80) *Do you ever consider like ...thinking... before u open the great ugly maw that is ur mouth.....do you????* (female, politics)

4.7. Associate the other with a negative aspect

This strategy is somewhat more prevalent among male speakers whose use accounts for nearly 60 percent of all the instances found in the data. *Associate the other with a negative aspect* is most prevalent in RACISM, which includes 17 uses of the strategy. It is used least frequently in SOCIAL JUSTICE.

	Quantity	Percentage
men	28	58.3
women	20	41.7
total	48	100

Table 13. The gender divide in *associate the other with a negative aspect*

	Quantity	Percentage
racism	17	35.4
politics	10	20.8
feminism	8	16.7
religion	7	14.6
social justice	6	12.5
total	48	100

Table 14. The frequency of *associate the other with a negative aspect* according to topic

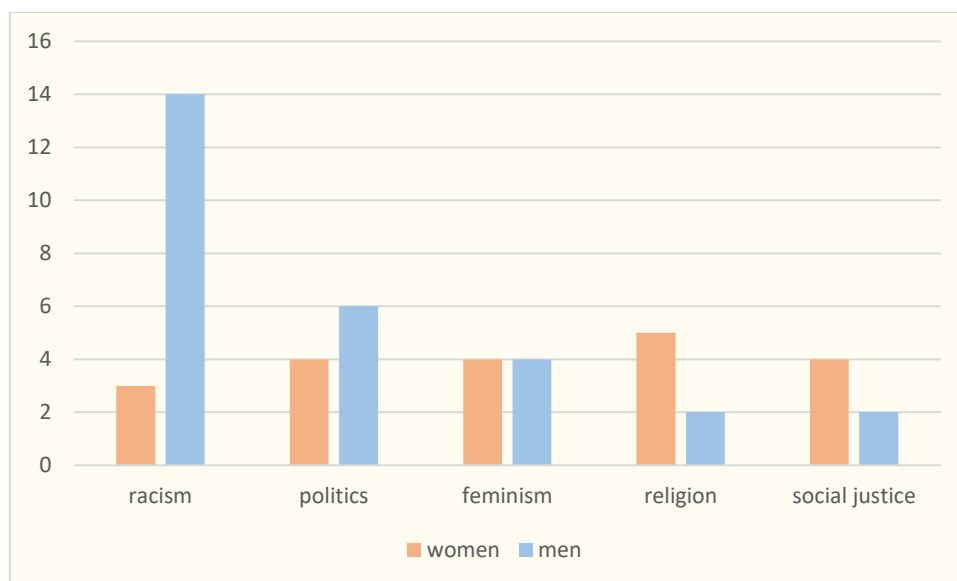


Figure 9. The gender divide according to topic in *associate the other with a negative aspect*

In *associate the other with a negative aspect*, the most radical difference between men and women can be seen in RACISM under which men employed the strategy 14 times compared to the women's 3 uses. All the other topics have a much smaller difference between the genders. Women employed the strategy more often compared to men in two topics, RELIGION and SOCIAL JUSTICE.

The instances where *associate the other with a negative aspect* appears alone without any of the other strategies accompanying it are mostly in situations like the following two examples:

(81) *Op is a terf* (male, feminism)

(82) *OP is a fascist* (male, politics)

In other words, this strategy appears when the writer uses a succinct utterance to refer to the addressee's ideology or personal attributes in a manner that is somewhere between descriptive and insulting but does not fall into the category *call the other names*. Although it is clear that neither of the speakers in (81) and (82) intend for their statements to be taken as neutral, the terms used are also descriptive and may even be used by the implicated persons or groups themselves. In the case of (81), for example, with the use of the term "terf" the writer wishes to convey that the original poster's opinions should be dismissed because of their ideology - trans-exclusionary radical feminism - is hateful and undesirable.

Notably, in many cases a statement such as (81) began a sort of "comment train" where a large number of people would repeat the same sentiment, some version of *op is a erf*, under the main post, seemingly to signal to others that it is not worth discussing the issue with an individual who belongs into the said group. In this context, the reason for calling another poster "terf" often comes from that person's blog where they openly state their beliefs and some even incorporate the word into their username. Although the term has historically been used as a derogatory term by people outside the group, it is not unheard of for the Tumblr users to also use it to describe themselves. A quick search through Tumblr even provides such tags as "#terf positivity", "#terf safe" and "#pro erf". In (82) the speaker calls the addressee *fascist*, which at least in principle refers to legitimate political views and is in certain contexts used as a neutral term. However, in the context of this interaction the speaker uses it with the connotation that being a fascist is dislikable.

The case of (83) is similar to that of (81) and (82) in a sense that the term *incel* is not purely a derogatory one but is also used by some people as a term of self-identification. Nevertheless, it is almost always used as an insult by the people outside the group and has spread into wide use on the Internet as a way of mocking people, especially men, who are awkward or inappropriate in interactions with the opposite sex or simply seen as pathetic in some way. Whereas speakers tend to call others *erf* or *fascist* based on their political opinions, there is no one specific attribute to determine who is labeled an *incel*. In the case of (83) the speaker is a woman who is commenting on a post under the topic of FEMINISM. Therefore, she seems to imply that the addressee will never engage in a sexual relationship with a woman because he writes ignorant posts about feminism and consequently no woman could ever find him attractive.

(83) *op is god tier incel* (female, feminism)

Since this strategy has most occurrences in RACISM, it is not surprising that many of the examples also involve calling the addressee or their comments racist. Although referring to another person as *racist* is usually intended as criticism it does not quite fall into the category *call the other names*. Furthermore, racism is not seen as an inherently negative trait universally, even though in the context of Tumblr it is widely despised. Still, it is quite clear that in the examples above the speakers wish to convey that they consider the addressee repugnant because of their racist beliefs or comments. Each of the utterances (84)-(86) employ impoliteness strategies such as *scorn*, *use taboo words* and *use negative orders* to augment the impoliteness of *associate the other with a negative aspect*.

(84) *i won't do it till you say it out of your shitty racist mouth.* (female, racism)

(85) *you disgusting racist.* (male, racism)

(86) *fuck off if you don't like people based of their skin your racist. YOU ARE RACIST!
Sorry but all your virtue signaling won't do shit.* (male, racism)

In addition to racism, there are quite a few other attributes or perceived behaviors that are frequently criticized in this category. The speaker in (87), for instance, draws attention to the addressee's sexism while the one in (88) deems the addressee homophobic. In (89) the addressee is linked to criminal behavior and the speaker in (90) accuses two addressees of being sociopathic while implying it is synonymous to being evil or emotionless. Lastly, in (91) the speaker refers to the addressee as a *troll*. This suggests that the speaker considers the addressee's post so ridiculous she thinks it must have been written provocatively on purpose.

(87) *you're just a sexist prick hiding behind the gay shield.* (female, feminism)

(88) *OP is basically being homophobic AF* (female, social justice)

(89) *Sounds like you should be marked as a sexual predator...* (female, social justice)

(90) *How fucking sociopathic do you have to be to even try and derail from this
@[name] @[name]* (female, religion)

(91) *OP is either a class A troll or just an absolute waste of oxygen* (female, politics)

4.8. Ridicule

As is the case with most of the strategies, *ridicule* is used more by men whose use accounts for almost 60 percent of all the uses in the data. The use of *ridicule* is most prevalent in RACISM, followed closely by FEMINISM. It is used the least frequently in SOCIAL JUSTICE.

	Quantity	Percentage
men	26	59.1
women	18	40.9
total	44	100

Table 15. The gender divide in *ridicule*

	Quantity	Percentage
racism	11	25.0
feminism	10	22.7
politics	8	18.2
religion	8	18.2
social justice	7	15.9
total	44	100

Table 16. The frequency of *ridicule* according to topic

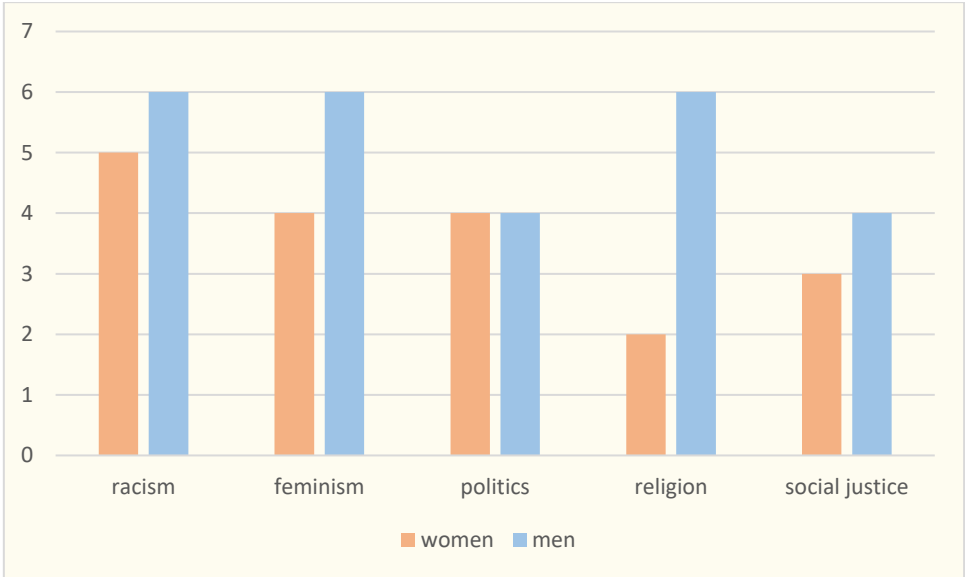


Figure 10. The gender divide according to topic in *ridicule*

The diagram illustrates how *ridicule* as a strategy is not only more popular among men in general but is also used more by them in each of the different topics apart from POLITICS, under which men and women employed the strategy equally often. Among women the strategy is used most often in RACISM and least often in RELIGION.

A common element in this category is the use of acronyms such as *lol* and *lmao* that express laughter and amusement. Out of the total of 44 utterances that contain the use of *ridicule*, 20 utterances also contain these initialisms. *Lol* – or its variant *lawl* as seen in example (94) – are used 5 times in total while *lmao* and its variant *lmfao* are employed 14 times. In many contexts the use of these acronyms may express genuine amusement and be a way of indicating that, for example, a joke told by the addressee is funny. However, in examples (92)-(94) the acronyms are clearly meant to express derision towards the addressee and something they have said. It is a strategy used to show that the speaker is laughing at the addressee, not with them, and does not consider them worth taking seriously.

(92) *lmao u stupid as fuck boi* (female, feminism)

(93) *Lmao what fucking kind of shit is this.* (male, racism)

(94) *I like how the “anti-sjw” asswipe conflates the burqa and niqab like they’re the same thing, lawl.* (male, religion)

In many examples there are various typographical clues that indicate the speaker is making fun of the addressee. In example (95), for instance, the speaker begins their utterance with *hur dur* – an interjection meant to depict sarcastic laughter and to criticize posts deemed “subpar” – and then proceeds to imitate the addressee and write from their point of view. In other words, they are putting words in the addressee’s mouth and depicting them in a negative light while making fun of them.

(95) *Hur dur I have the right to impose my morals and values on other people and decide what’s right and wrong to say* (male, social justice)

Example (96) illustrates a different kind of approach, where the speaker basically imitates the manner in which some adults talk to babies and small animals, using words like *rustewed* and *shaww* instead of *rustled* and *shall*. He also ends the utterance with Uwu, which refers to the emoticon “:3” (where the u stands for an eye and the w for the mouth) often used to express either happiness or smugness and also used in connection with cute things. All of this combines to form an impression that the speaker is not taking the addressee seriously and is relating to

them like to a child and just like when a child says something offensive, the speaker deems the addressee's offensive remarks ridiculous rather than taking offence. Lastly, example (97) begins with *aww*, which is an interjection meant to indicate that something is cute or sweet. Nevertheless, it is clear that previous to this comment the addressee has said something that can be considered racist and that now the speaker is mocking them rather than implying that they are genuinely cute. Example (97) is similar to example (96) in the sense that in both the speaker treats the addressee as something that is below them. In other words, by indicting that the addressee is "cute" both of the speakers are saying the addressee has no power to actually offend them with their racist views. Thus both cases are a mix of the strategies *condescend* and *ridicule*.

(96) *oh no...we've rustewed the gross racist and ablest's jimmies,,whatevew shaww we do? Uwu* (male, politics)

(97) *Awwwwwwwwwwww look everyone, it's a racist* (male, religion)

Many utterances in this category aim to question the addressee's mental or physical capabilities without outright calling them incompetent. The speaker in example (98) focuses on the addressee's mental faculties and insinuates that their opinion is wrong or offensive because only someone who has sustained brain damage as a child could hold such an opinion. Furthermore, the speaker in (99) basically states that because the addressee is *throughing hate* on the Internet they are unfit to be working as a social worker and could only have obtained their job through sexual favors. Because the speaker cannot know this for sure the utterance is not meant to literally say the addressee "fucked their way into a job" but rather to ridicule their apparent lack of skills in the area and to dismiss the value of their education.

(98) *How many times were you dropped on your head as a baby* (male, social justice)

(99) *She's also a social worker throughing hate on some random fucking girl like bitch how'd you fuck your way into your job?* (male, feminism)

In example (100) instead of calling the addressee ugly the speaker says their grandma told them to refer this insult to the addressee. There is little chance that this statement is true and the speaker undoubtedly does not think that the addressee will genuinely believe it. ?? Example (102) is more of a mix between *scorn* and *ridicule* because it implies that what the addressee has said is so vile the speaker needs to *snort bathtub cleaner* in order to get the statement out of their mind. However, the sentiment is expressed in a way that is clearly humorous and not to be taken seriously.

(100) *Well my grandma told me to tell you that you're ugly.* (female, racism)

(101) *Its a joke not a kosher butt plug take it out your ass grandpa.* (male, religion)

(102) *i'm going to go snort bathtub cleaner brb* (female, religion)

Culpeper (1996:356) lists *sarcasm or mock politeness* as one of the possible impoliteness strategies and describes this as an utterance in which “the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain only surface realisations”. He points out that it is possible to use prosody that undermines the politeness or impoliteness expressed verbally and thus convey sarcasm (Culpeper 2011:169). However, for obvious reasons this is not the case with purely textual data like the one used for this study. Nevertheless, the data contains some obvious instances of sarcasm, many of which are categorized under the impoliteness strategy *ridicule* because the speakers are using sarcasm to invalidate the addressee in a joking manner. The speaker in example (103) expresses a sort of mock astonishment at having learned something new from the addressee. He compares converting to a religion to the process of converting digital files to a different format on a computer and thus reveals that he is not treating the issue or the addressee seriously. Furthermore, in example (104) the speaker seemingly apologizes to the addressee but the first sentence in the utterance already contradicts this because he proceeds to call the addressee *an asshole* before he apologizes for having called them *racist*. The speaker in (105) thanks another user for their *obviously unbiased input*, which insinuates that she in fact considers this user’s input entirely biased. Thus her utterance functions as a means to put focus on the addressee’s username – which contains a variation of the word *faggot* – in order to invalidate their opinion and is not meant as a genuine expression of gratitude.

(103) *Wait, you CAN convert to Islam? I thought you could only convert to mp3, mp4, PDF and jpg. Wow.* (male, religion)

(104) *So you aren't racist, you're just an asshole. My apologies for the miss-classification* (male, religion)

(105) *Ok Tumblr user [name] thank you for your obviously unbiased input.* (female, politics)

4.9. Use inappropriate identity markers

The gender divide in *use inappropriate identity markers* is almost even with men using the strategy in one instance more than women. This strategy is most prevalent in RACISM and RELIGION, both of which include eight uses of the strategy. It is used the least in POLITICS.

	Quantity	Percentage
men	16	51.6
women	15	48.4
total	31	100

Table 17. The gender divide in *use inappropriate identity markers*

	Quantity	Percentage
racism	8	25.8
religion	8	25.8
feminism	6	19.4
social justice	5	16.1
politics	4	12.9
total	31	100

Table 18. The frequency of *use inappropriate identity markers* according to topic

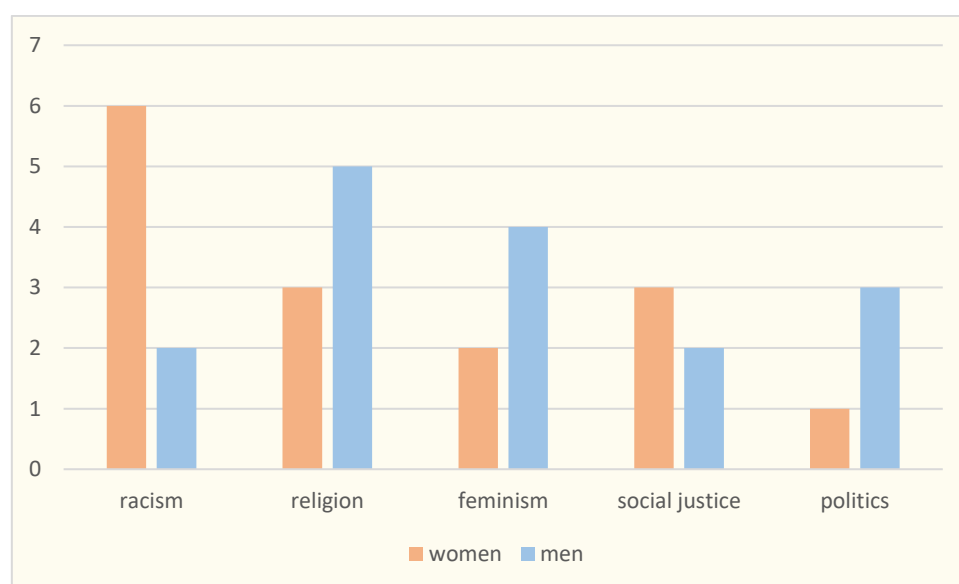


Figure 11. The gender divide according to topic in *use inappropriate identity markers*

In RACISM this strategy is quite notably more prevalent among women compared to men despite the fact that all in all men use the strategy more. Men use the strategy more than women in three topics out of which RELIGION has the most uses by male speakers.

	Quantity	Percentage
total	31	100
honey	9	29.0
sweetheart	8	25.8
boy	6	19.4
girl	3	9.7
darling	2	6.5
sis	1	3.2
buddy	1	3.2
pal	1	3.2
dude	1	3.2
kid	1	3.2
liebbling	1	3.2
Brunhilda	1	3.2

Table 19. The frequency of individual inappropriate identity markers

The most prevalent inappropriate identity marker used in the data is *honey* and its different variations such as *hun*, *hun bun* and *hunty*, which appear nine times. The second most used inappropriate identity marker is *sweetheart* and its variations – *sweety*, *sweetie*, *sweaty* and *sweetpea* – which are used eight times. *Boy* or *boi* is used six times all in all, but notably four of those uses are by the same individual and this personal preference towards this particular term might make it seem like it is more widely used than is actually true. Moreover, *darling* is used twice and a variety of others – listed on table 19. – appeared once. The data even includes a German endearment *liebbling*, meaning “beloved”, which appears in the context of a sentence that is otherwise written in English and is thus included. Moreover, it should be noted that *Use*

inappropriate identity markers is always accompanied by the strategy *condescend* and functions, at least in the data found in this study, more as a sub-category to it.

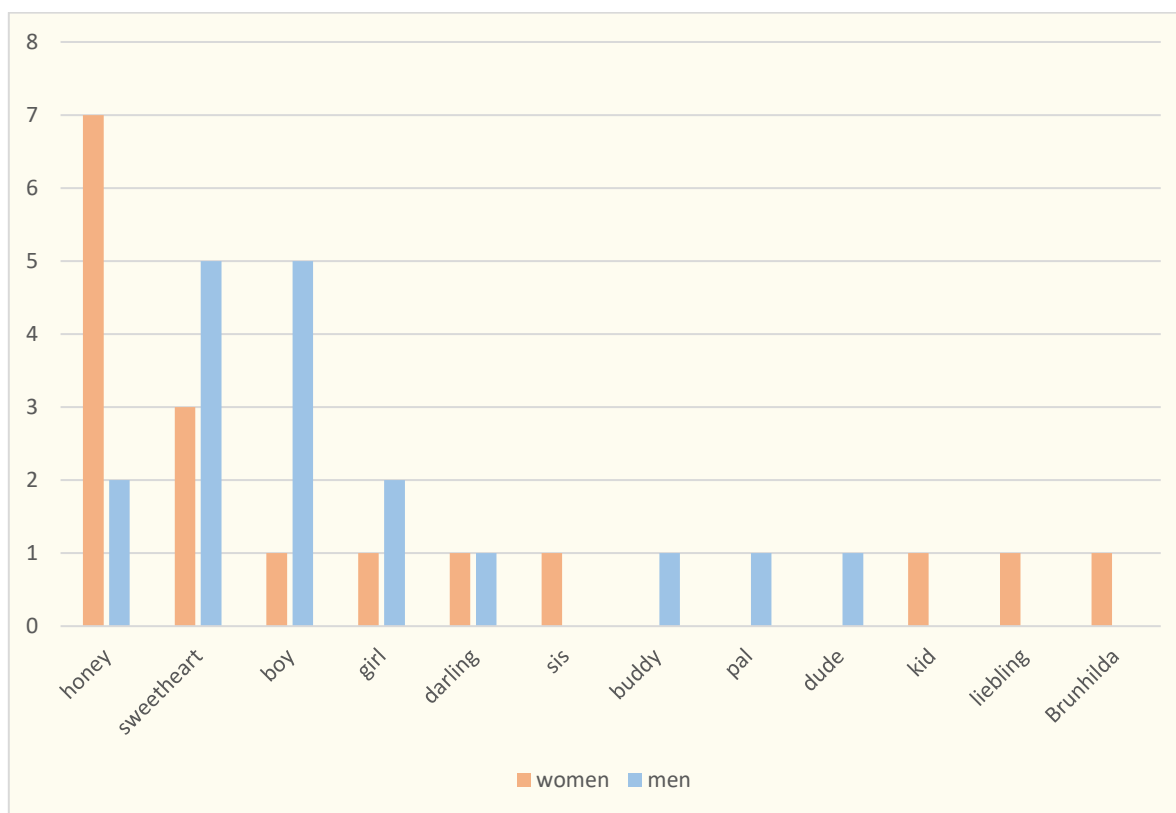


Figure 12. The gender divide in specific inappropriate identity markers

Figure 12 illustrates that the most frequently used inappropriate identity marker among women is *honey* whereas men tend to prefer *sweetheart*. The use of *boy* is much more frequent by men, but in most instances it was used by the same individual and thus it seems more frequent than it truly is.

One characteristic of the strategy *use inappropriate identity markers* seems to be that it lends itself to this kind of “stacking” of different terms. The data includes two separate instances of this and they both follow a similar pattern of first addressing the other person with three separate terms before proceeding to the actual content of what they wish to say. Although all the uses of this strategy found in the data also belong in the category *condescend*, the repetition of the overly familiar form of address in these two examples really takes the condescension to a level above the other examples. The fact that the inappropriate identity markers are placed in the very beginning of the utterance further contributes to this effect as the position gives them both more visibility and significance. In many of the other examples the identity marker is

placed further towards the end of the sentence, which contributes a different kind of effect since the utterance does not begin with referring to the addressee in an impolite way.

(106) *Girl. Honey. Darling. You should stop while you're behind.* (female, social justice)

(107) *Buddy, pal, dude, listen, I'm not about to start assaulting people.* (male, racism)

It appears that the use of smileys often accompanies *use inappropriate identity markers*, as can be seen in the three examples above, while in the rest of the data their use is almost non-existent. The smiling emoticons such as “:)” and “;)” are perhaps not what one typically associates with impoliteness but they can add a certain sense of condescension in an utterance. In both the examples (109) and (110) the writer thanks the addressee for something they have neither yet done nor are likely to actually do, making the “thanks” clearly insincere. This, accompanied by the use of *sweaty* and *hun* as well as the smiley contribute to the impression that the addressee is far below the writer and not worth taking seriously. The use of *sweaty* is also notable because it occurs so frequently on Tumblr that it cannot be discounted as a simple error in spelling. Its origins may lie in a simple spelling mistake but it has since spread into much wider use perhaps because of its double function as a (condescending) endearment and an insult implying that the addressee is, indeed, sweaty.

(108) *Try again, sweaty. ;)* (male, religion)

(109) *Take your islamophobia and your false sense of superiority with you, sweaty, thanks ☺* (female, religion)

(110) *So how about YOU stop defending a disgusting religion and calling ME ignorant. Thanks hun :)* (female, social justice)

As stated before, in this data the strategy *use inappropriate identity markers* is always accompanied by *condescend* but whereas in some utterances in some utterances the condescension mainly comes from the use of a word like *sweetie*, in many examples this is accompanied by other technique that add to the tone of the utterance. In (111) the speaker uses several different ways to achieve an extremely condescending tone towards the addressee. First, they focus on the addressee's lack of knowledge and stress this with capitalizing the word *faintest* to convey that the addressee does not have any knowledge of the topic at all. Second, they assume authority over the addressee by giving them orders like *go sit down* and *eat some schnitzel*. Lastly, they employ *use inappropriate identity markers* and refer to the addressee as

Brunhilda, which is used as a generic German name and is definitely not the addressee's given name.

(111) *Also you haven't the FAINTEST idea what equality means, so go sit down and eat some schnitzel **Brunhilda**.* (female, racism)

The speaker in (112) calls the addressee *sweetie* but also uses the diminutive *little*, which often appears with *condescend* (further examples are discussed in 4.5.). Furthermore, example (113) likens the addressee to a child before calling them *boy*, which creates an impression that the speaker is in a position of authority over the addressee or at least considers himself to be.

(112) *An **sweetie** stop puffing your little chest out like you gonna do something and get the fuck out my face.* (male, social justice)

(113) *Well, aren't you just an angry child. Run along, **boy**. You don't know shit.* (male, religion)

4.10. Shout

Shout is more prevalent among male speakers who used it in over 60 percent of all cases. This strategy is the most prevalent in RACISM and POLITICS, respectively, and does not occur at all in FEMINISM.

	Quantity	Percentage
men	7	63.6
women	4	36.4
total	11	100

Table 20. The gender divide in *shout*

	Quantity	Percentage
racism	5	45.45
politics	4	36.36
religion	1	9.09
social justice	1	9.09
feminism	0	0
total	11	100

Table 21. The frequency of *shout* according to topic

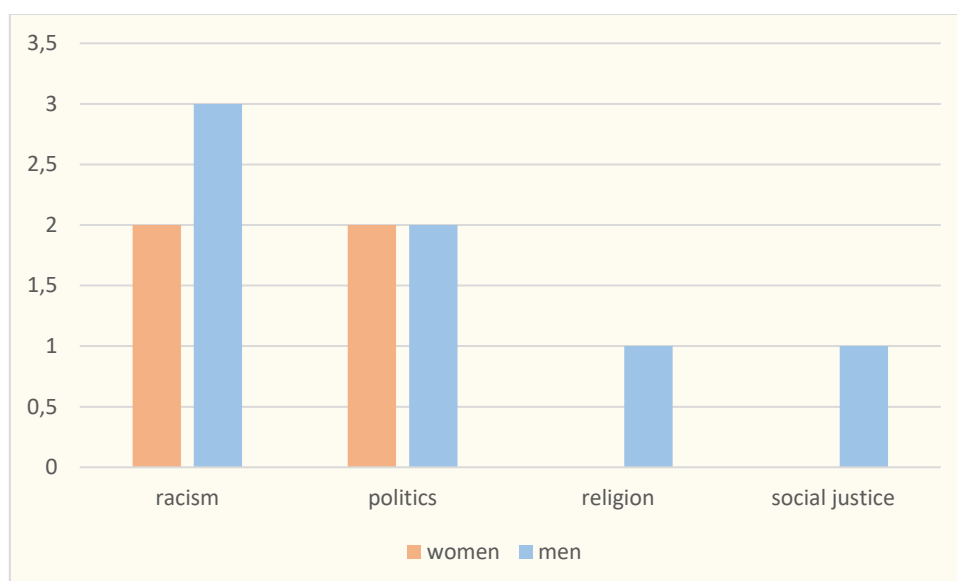


Figure 13. The gender divide according to topic in *shout*

Men use *shout* more or as often as women in all the topics in which it occurs. Women use the strategy in only two topics, RACISM and POLITICS. Both genders use *shout* most frequently in RACISM.

Since writing in all capital letters is in itself already a convention that draws attention to itself and emulates shouting in CMC, the use of exclamation marks alongside this strategy is more or less redundant. Nevertheless, it can be used to further emphasize the emotion in the message, be it negative or positive. Among the 9 utterances that include *shout* only (114) employs the use of exclamation marks which may suggest – at least according to the data used in this study – that the majority of writers deem the use of Caps Lock, in combination with other impoliteness strategies, sufficient in conveying their emotional state and do not tend to use it together with exclamation marks.

(114) *GROW THE HELL UP!!!* (male, racism)

(115) provides another example of how punctuation is used with the strategy *shout* in the data. Instead of using exclamation marks to emphasize its message this utterance includes a period after each of the capitalized words to cut the flow of the sentence. In other words, this tactic moves the focus from the utterance as a whole to its individual parts. There is also different kind of connotation that comes with the use of periods, which signify a certain kind of finality. While many of the other examples in this category employ *shout* through the whole sentence and in some cases forego punctuation altogether, this example is more effective in drawing the addressee's attention to a specific part of the utterance. The use of punctuation in this case also contributes towards making the accusation "you are sick" sound more like a statement than the result of an emotional outburst.

(115) *YOU. ARE. SICK. This is such sick racism I can't even look at it.* (male, social justice)

The use of long run-on sentences that lack punctuation entirely is one of the defining characteristics of language used on Tumblr. This is a style that may be laborious to read for those unused to it but, as seen in examples (116) and (117), it also creates a sort of flow in the sentence that coupled with the strategy *shout* creates an impression of someone shouting without stopping to draw in breath. Utterances like these also give an impression that the speaker's emotional state is so extreme they do not have time to stop and consider punctuation.

(116) *BOI WHAT FUCKING REVOLUTION Y'ALL ARE TOO BUSY FUMING ON YOUR IPHONES AND JERKIN TO PICTURES OF TROTSKY TO DO SHIT LMFAO*
(male, politics)

(117) *FUCK YOU MOORE DID NOT WIN I HOPE YOU SHOVE THAT BOTTLE STRAIGHT UP YOUR ASS* (female, politics)

Examples (118)-(121) all use punctuation sparingly and without much concern for grammatical accuracy. They also demonstrate that *shout* is used with a myriad of other impoliteness strategies such, for instance, as *scorn* in (118), *use taboo words* and *express judgement* in (119) and *call the other names* and *disassociate from the other* in (120). *Shout* seems to manifest when the speaker deems the other strategies not sufficient in conveying their message as it can function in various ways. As shown in (115) and also visible in (121) it can be used to draw

attention to and stress a specific portion of an utterance. In addition, it can – in combination with punctuation – boost the impoliteness of an utterance. Typing “CRACKER” creates a different kind of impression from “cracker...” for example. It can also signal that the speaker is chooses to ignore the addressee and in a sense shouts over them. In (121) the speaker has been told by the addressee to not use the insult *cracker* but the speaker proceeds to repeat the offensive term three times in all capitals to express how little the addressee’s wishes matter to them.

(118) *WHAT IN ALL THE SEVEN LEVELS OF THIS HELLSITE IS FUCKING WRONG WITH YOU?* (male, religion)

(119) *HOW FUCKING DARE YOU CALL THE MURDER OF CHILDREN KARMIC JUSTICE, HOW EVIL CAN YOU BE* (male, politics)

(120) *CRACKER CRACKER CRACKER. HONKY. DEAL WITH IT OR BLOCK ME BITCH. GO BACK TO IRONING YOUR BOYFRIENDS KLAN ROBES* (female, racism)

(121) *To suggest by implication that speakers foreign to the Western Hemisphere must be oppressed by virtue of YOUR OWN THOUGHTS ABOUT THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA is Americentric as fuck, spoiled and entitled as fuck, and you can get bent.* (male, racism)

4.11. Disassociate from the other

Disassociate from the other is more common among female speakers who employed the strategy in about 60 percent of all the cases found in the data. RACISM and RELIGION include the largest number of uses of the strategy while the number is lowest in POLITICS. FEMINISM includes zero instances of the strategy.

	Quantity	Percentage
women	14	60.9
men	9	39.1
total	23	100

Table 22. The gender divide in *disassociate from the other*

	Quantity	Percentage
racism	7	30.43
religion	7	30.43
social justice	5	21.74
politics	4	17.40
feminism	0	0
total	23	100

Table 23. The frequency of *disassociate from the other* according to topic

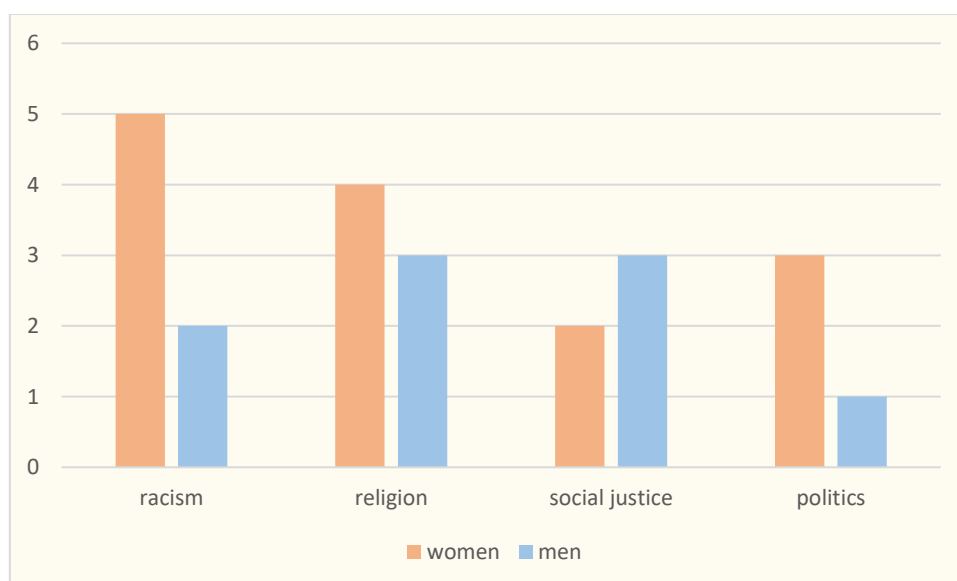


Figure 14. The gender divide according to topic in *disassociate from the other*

SOCIAL JUSTICE is the only topic that has more uses of *disassociate from the other* by men while in all the other topics the strategy is more prevalent among women. Men use the strategy the least in POLITICS whereas the use for women is lowest in SOCIAL JUSTICE. Women employ the strategy most frequently in RACISM.

Since this strategy is most prevalent in the topics of RACISM and RELIGION it manifests in many of the examples as calling attention to the addressee's race or beliefs in a degrading way and the writer disassociating with them based on these attributes. Examples (122) and (123) both employ insults targeted at the addressee's whiteness – *pepper mint patty* and *porcelain penny* – and imply that their opinions have less authority due to their race.

(122) *Whatever pepper mint patty* (female, religion)

(123) *do you ever shut up? like frfr shut the fuck up porcelain penny.* (female, racism)

Examples (124) and (125) focus on the addressee's religion as a negative point and attempt to convey that regardless of their level of education they have no place in the writer's country and society because they believe in Islam.

(124) *Be a doctor, lawyer or drop out in your own land, Camel fuckers!* (male, religion)

(125) *Fuck you even if you are a doctor or lawyer you're still a fucking Muslim!* (male, religion)

Example (126) illustrates a situation where a woman of color is defending a white woman against another woman of color. This differs from the earlier examples in the sense that the writer divulges that they do belong to the same group with the addressee but wish to convey that this is not an ideal state of affairs. In other words, they are saying "this is not how someone belonging to our group should behave" and thus, in a sense, excluding the addressee from their group.

(126) *Making me embarrassed to be a woman of color with your stupid ass omfg leave @[name] alone.* (female, racism)

In a similar fashion the speaker in (127) implies that while they belong to the same group as the addressee – in this case a sexual minority – they are inherently different. While the utterances (122)-(125) attack an aspect of the addressee's identity, (126) and (127) do not insult the addressee's identity but rather imply that their failure is due to something they did or said as an individual rather than as a direct result of an aspect of their identity.

(127) *Reblog to reassure a straight person that you're not a major cunt stain like op over here* (male, social justice)

Though the references to the addressee's race and religion are more common in this category, other factors are also used as a basis for disassociating from the other. In example (128), for instance, the writer clearly states that *being a male does void your opinion*, and thus the writer perceives herself as having more authority on the issue because she is a woman. It illustrates the prevalent attitude on Tumblr and many other venues that based on their identity some individuals have more authority to speak on certain issues. For instance, heterosexual people are often expected to defer to sexual minorities in discussions relating to problems as a minority.

(128) *Dam then u just dumb without a reason :- Being a male does void your opinion dumbass males don't wear hijab but i'm sure you wouldn't know given that you don't know jack shit about the hijab :/* (female, religion)

Moreover, example (129) concentrates on the addressee's nationality rather than their ethnicity. The speaker is basically saying that because the addressee is American they cannot understand the situation as well as the writer who is not American. Being American is also presented as a negative attribute as the speaker refers to the addressee's *dirty american ass*. Lastly, in example (130) the source of the juxtaposition comes from the sexual orientation of the participants. The writer tells the addressee that unlike them she is not straight and then proceeds to make fun of them with *go rub one out to 50 Shades or whatever it is straight women do*, effectively saying that not only do they not belong in the same group, but that they are so far removed they do not even know or care what the addressee's group is like.

(129) *If you'd look beyond your dirty american ass you'd see that these things don't happen in Europe* (female, politics)

(130) *@[name] I'm gay you stupid jackass I don't want a husband or kids? You being woman doesn't change the fact that you sound like a spectacularly ignorant teen son of a deep south pastor who just discovered reddit. You sound like a complete idiot. You're making a fool of yourself. Go rub one out to 50 Shades or whatever it is straight women do.* (female, social justice)

Though POLITICS is the topic under which this strategy is used the least – not counting FEMINISM, which includes zero uses – there are still a few utterances where the writer disassociates themselves from the addressee based on political ideology. In (131) the speaker calls the addressee a “libtard” which is a pejorative term used by conservatives towards people with more liberal political views, often with the implication that the liberal individual has gone too far with their beliefs. In other words, in this example the speaker is identifying as a conservative, perhaps a republican, and disassociating herself from the addressee's liberal views.

(131) *You are not that smart [...] You libtrads don't get it.* (female, politics)

In contrast, the speaker in (132) likens the addressee to a conservative republican in a negative way and implies her beliefs are more modern and most of all, better. In (133) the speaker refers

to the addressee as a *feminazi*, and denounces their stance which he deems too militantly feminist.

(132) @[name] you have no room to talk about violence if youre blaming video games like a fucking 80 year old who only watches fox news (female, politics)

(133) Yeah no, go fuck yourself you feminazi son of a bitch (male, social justice)

4.12. Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic

Be disinterested is one of the strategies that are used more by women than men. Women’s use of the strategy constitutes over 60 percent of all the instances in the data. Out of all the five topics, this strategy appears in only three, SOCIAL JUSTICE, FEMINISM and RELIGION. It is the most prevalent in SOCIAL JUSTICE and only has one use in RELIGION.

	Quantity	Percentage
women	5	62.5
men	3	37.5
total	8	100

Table 24. The gender divide in *be disinterested*

	Quantity	Percentage
social justice	5	62.5
feminism	2	25.0
religion	1	12.5
politics	0	0
racism	0	0
total	8	100

Table 25. The frequency of *be disinterested* according to topic

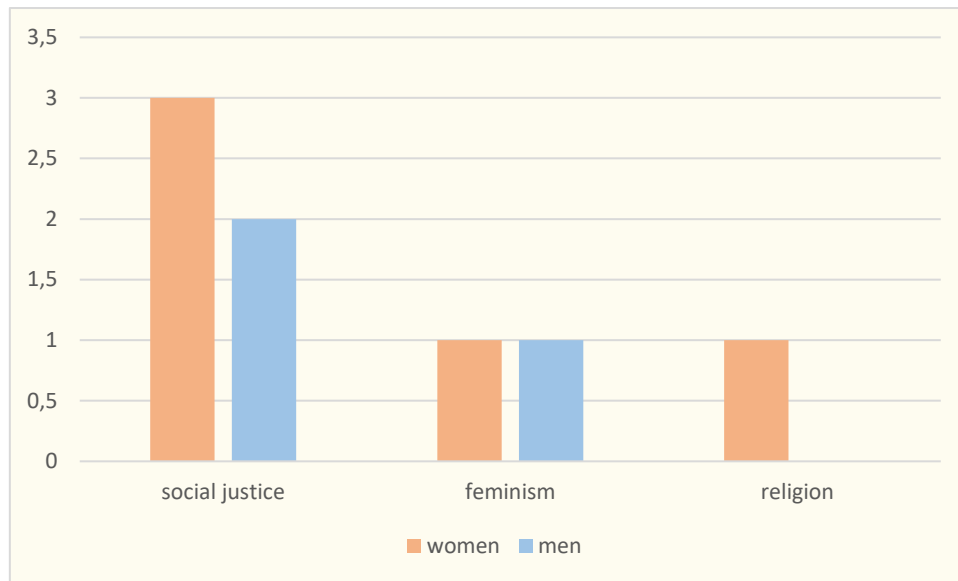


Figure 15. The gender divide according to topic in *be disinterested*

In all three topics women use this strategy more or an equal number of times compared to men. SOCIAL JUSTICE has the most instances of the strategy by both genders while the single instance in RELIGION is uttered by a woman.

Though there are many ways in which the strategy *be disinterested* could potentially manifest in a face-to-face conversation where non-verbal cues play a part in the interpretation of impoliteness, its role in CMC seems to be more limited. As can be seen in the examples above, in the majority of the cases this strategy involves explicitly stating that the writer either personally does not care or thinks that no one cares about the addressee in general or a specific issue that they have brought up. The message of “not caring” is also in all cases emphasized by either the use of a taboo word as in (134) or in the case of (137) by the strategies *call the other names* and *use negative orders*.

(134) **who the fuck cares**. Abuse is abuse no matter the fucking statistics (!?)

(135) You're right, **I don't care** how my words personally affect you. Congratulations retard, you cracked the code. (!?)

(136) **I really don't care** what you do, you drooling retard. (!?)

(137) Shut up mayo boy, **no one cares** about how “oppressed” you are for being white (!?)

This example does not state writer’s lack of care with so many words but nevertheless conveys the same sentiment with *fuck your representation*. In other words, the writer wants the addressee to know that they are unconcerned about something the addressee considers important.

(138) *Fuck your representation. Bitch you played yourself. (!?)*

(139) is the only instance of this strategy found in the data that does not employ the strategies *use taboo words* or *call the other names* and is therefore perhaps the least offensive of all the six examples presented here. Nevertheless, this example is not free of a value judgement either as it does not only state the writer’s lack of “appreciation”, but also proceeds to use the strategy *scorn* in calling the addressee’s opinion *crap*.

(139) *I don’t appreciate you or your crap opinion.. (!?)*

4.13. Express judgement

As Table 26 illustrates, *express judgement* is much more prevalent among male speakers whose use constitutes over 80 percent of all the occurrences in the data. Women employed the strategy in only one instance. Table 27 shows that *express judgement* only occurs under two different topics, POLITICS and RACISM, with over 60 percent of the uses being in POLITICS.

	Quantity	Percentage
men	5	83.3
women	1	16.7
total	6	100

Table 26. The gender divide in *express judgement*

	Quantity	Percentage
politics	4	66.7
racism	2	33.3
feminism	0	0
religion	0	0
Social justice	0	0
total	6	100

Table 27. The frequency of *express judgement* according to topic

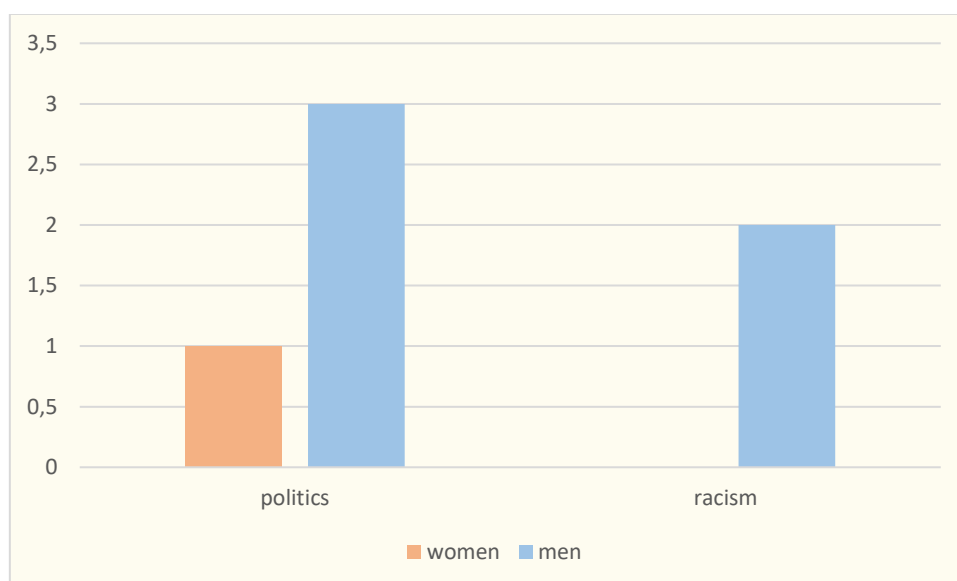


Figure 16. The gender divide according to topic in *express judgement*

The only use of *express judgement* by women occurs in POLITICS while the rest of the uses are by male speakers.

As a strategy, *express judgement* can be similar to *scorn* in many ways. However, whereas *scorn* often involves the speaker expressing their personal distaste towards the addressee *express judgement* is concerned with more universal and moral judgements. Example (140) – coincidentally the only instance of a female speaker employing *express judgement* – illustrates an utterance where the addressee is deemed to be *a bad person*, in other words the addressee is deemed the opposite of “good” and therefore a failure, at least in a moral sense, as a person. Similarly, in (141) the speaker calls the addressee *a shit human being*, a statement that basically judges the addressee to have failed in some way as a human being.

(140) *op is a bad person* (female, politics)

(141) *That you think it is ok to want to retaliate against her only shows that you are a shit human being.* (male, racism)

The most common way of using *express judgement* in the data is to simply call the addressee *evil* as in the examples (142) and (143). This occurs in 50 percent of the cases. The way as example (140) above contrasts “bad” with “good” these two examples contrast “evil” with “goodness”. Essentially, the speakers have an understanding of a “decent” person and the addressees do not fulfil the requirements for that position. It should be noted that in all of these examples the speaker explicitly calls the addressee some variation of “a bad person” rather than just focusing on the problematic nature of their comments.

(142) *Fuck you . You evil piss baby.* (male, politics)

(143) *[name] is one evil fuck. And guess they got too much heat for their fuck ass comments because they deactivated. These punks say slick shit and think folks won't clap back... a tragedy happened and they say it's karma. That's EVIL to think like that!* (male, politics)

4.14. Frighten

This is a strategy that is certainly not unheard of within the context of CMC as many Tumblr users have reported having received death threats and harassment by other users, which has even led to some individuals to attempting suicide. Still, regardless of Tumblr's oftentimes hostile environment the data collected for this study included only one three uses of the strategy. Two of these were made by men and only one by women. Surprisingly, all three the instances of *frighten* occurred under the topic FEMINISM.

	Quantity	Percentage
men	2	66.7
women	1	33.3
total	3	100

Table 28. The gender divide in frighten

	Quantity	Percentage
feminism	3	100
total	3	100

Table 29. The frequency of *frighten* according to topic

Without further context it is impossible to say how serious the commenter is in her intentions as well as who “we” actually refers to. Nevertheless, the statement threatens the addressee with death and is, presumably, not entirely in jest because the original poster is a man making fun of women’s issues. Therefore, one might assume that “we” in the utterance refers to women in general or at least the female users of Tumblr.

(144) *we will kill you next, funnyman!* (female, feminism)

The addressee in both (145) and (146) is a man, which means that all instances of *frighten* are targeted towards male speakers. The utterance in (145) does not explicitly state that something detrimental to the addressee’s health will happen but it still refers to an explicitly violent act towards them and the phrasing - *let’s cut* – suggests participation from the speaker unlike in, for instance, phrases like *kill yourself* or *die*. In (146) the speaker’s threat is conditional but still states that if the addressee performs a certain act the speaker will “break their leg”. Admittedly the case is hypothetical and no one genuinely expects anyone to follow through with their threats. *Frighten* is a strategy that is bound to function very differently in CMC compared to face-to-face interaction. In CMC most of the interactants do not know each other and in many cases they live far away from each other and thus the threat of a physical confrontation often functions more as a way of supporting the speaker’s own ego than as a way to make the addressee feel genuinely unsafe. In face-to-face conversation, the buffer of distance does not exist and the speakers often do not have the possibility to take time to consider their words or to calm down and therefore the threat of violence in such interactions is much more immediate. However, as mentioned before, even within CMC this strategy has the potential to be extremely harmful and despite the distance many Internet users are capable of tracking down people’s addresses and causing them harm in real life.

(145) *Hey OP, I’m a man too, so here’s a fun game: let’s cut your throat open.* (male, feminism)

(146) *I'm an MRA and OP if you kick me in the nuts, I'll get angry, then I'll break your fucking leg.* (male, feminism)

4.15. Additional examples

The additional examples presented here further illustrate interesting and creative ways of using the impoliteness strategies discussed above, particularly the strategy *call the other names*. Examples (147)-(151) are all collected from the same conversations as the other data but because they were uttered by individuals whose gender was impossible to determine they are excluded and only listed in this section. These utterances represent many of the different impoliteness strategies listed in the earlier sections such as *use taboo words*, *call the other names*, *scorn*, *condescend* and *shout* in just the two first examples. However, the most interesting aspect is the way in which these utterances all – apart from (149) – employ the strategy *call the other names* extremely creatively. The speaker in (147), for instance, uses extremely specific and detailed language to insult the addressee in a way that may not even be considered especially offensive apart from the taboo word at the end of the utterance. Similarly, the speaker in (151) calls the addressee an *absolute walnut* demonstrating how *call the other names* can be used without resorting to extreme insults. Furthermore, example (150) employs a very specific insult that seems to insinuate that the speaker is either a “brony” – male fan of the television show “My Little Pony” – or a “neckbeard”, a socially awkward and “nerdy” man often associated with wearing fedoras and being overweight. The speaker in (149) does not use *call the other names* but nevertheless likens the addressee’s knowledge to that of a *hollow coconut*.

(147) *Shame on you ; you little Birkenstock wearing, granola eating, parent funded college educated cunt !* (politics)

(148) *JUST ENJOY THE FUCKING MOVIE YOU ASSHOLE CASSEROLES* (racism)

(149) *Don't come at me when you've clearly got as much knowledge about Islam as a hollow coconut.* (religion)

(150) *Boy if you don't sitcho ass down. That is not a burkah that is a NIQAB and that's like if someone told you your fuckin ponies or fedoras was unnecessary you glitter unicorn worshipping fuck* (religion)

(151) *@[name] fetishization is a form of racism when directed at people of color you absolute walnut* (racism)

Example (152) uses the strategy *disassociate from the other* and was uttered by a woman but collected from a conversation that did not fall under any of the five topics chosen for this study. Regardless, it illustrates another situation – the first is discussed in section 4.10. – where a queer woman attempts to disassociate from another woman based on their sexual orientation. Since minorities are an extremely important part of the Tumblr user base and issues relating to them are widely discussed on the website it is not surprising that many users would rather disassociate from the

(152) *@[name] you're fucking annoying, as most straight women are* (female)

5. Discussion

5.1. Gender differences

All the impoliteness categories identified in the data were used at least once, and in most cases numerous times, by both genders. Out of the 13 different impoliteness strategies found in the data, the majority are used more frequently by men. Men's use exceeds women's in the following eight categories: *use taboo words, call the other names, associate the other with a negative aspect, ridicule, use inappropriate identity markers, shout, express judgement and frighten*. However, it should be noted that men employ *use inappropriate identity markers* in only one instance more instance compared to women, and four occurrences of the identity marker *boy* come from a single male user. Therefore the data do not indicate that this strategy is more prevalent among men, but rather that certain individuals are more prone to using it excessively. The following five strategies are used more commonly by female speakers than by male speakers: *scorn, use negative orders, condescend, disassociate from the other and be disinterested*.

As noted in 2.3, there is a widespread folk linguistic notion that men use more taboo words, as well as stronger expletives, compared to women. This is to some extent supported by the data in this study, as men do employ the strategy *use taboo words* more commonly than women do, and they also use a higher number of the strongest taboo words such as *fuck* and *shit*. Moreover, although there is evidence that both men and women tend to use more taboo language in single sex groups this certainly does not apply in the case of Tumblr, which is not only a mixed-sex environment but sometimes even stereotyped as a platform for young women. Regardless of this, Tumblr is well known for its excessively argumentative users and, as evidenced by the data in this study, their liberal use of taboo and impolite language.

The potential reasons for this are multiple. First, as Mills (2003: 193) points out, the use of stereotypically masculine language may be one way for women to attempt to negotiate a stronger position for themselves in a mixed gender environment. This phenomenon is also noted by Reynolds (1986), cited in Swann (2000:219), when he discusses the language use of Japanese junior high school girls who state that they cannot compete with boys if they use traditionally feminine language and pronouns. Therefore, it is likely that the age of the speakers is a relevant variable as well, since the user base of Tumblr consists mostly of teenagers and young adults. Many scholars have noted that the attitudes and conventions regarding the use of taboo words are changing, and new phrases and conventions often enter the language through the innovation of teenage speakers. Moreover, younger speakers – especially on a socially aware platform such as Tumblr – may be more likely to depart from traditional notions of “proper language” in order to break stereotypes and to create a group identity to set them apart from other social groups.

Second, Mills (2003: 197) argues that “politeness is already gendered, classed, and raced, so that stereotypically it bears a signature of middle-class, white, femininity”. Thus, even if polite language is something typical of and expected from a specific sub-set of women, this expectation cannot be expanded to include all women. Although there is no way to determine the ethnicity, social class or other potentially significant variables of the speakers in this study, there is no question that they come from a variety of different backgrounds. The utterances relating to the topics of RACISM, RELIGION and SOCIAL JUSTICE, for example, demonstrate that many of the speakers are not in fact white or straight or even American or European, and thus do not belong to those groups which have often been associated with polite and “proper” language. In other words, Tumblr is not just a mixed-sex environment but also a mixed environment with regard to social class, religion, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation and so on. Therefore, it is unlikely that, in such a diverse environment women would all act in a similar or

expected manner linguistically. Mills (2003: 234-235) also rejects the idea of a global difference between men's and women's use of politeness and argues that, while gender is important it, "ought not to be seen as a factor which determines the production or interpretation of speech in any simple way".

Third, as noted in 2.4, impolite language is not something that is only associated with masculinity but also with CMC. As Thurlow et al. (2004: 90) point out, the context in CMC plays a significant role in what kind of language is expected and accepted from the participants in an interaction. In other words, impolite language has been found to be more prevalent in group forums than emails, and this is most certainly true of Tumblr. As social media has emerged as a new and predominant part of CMC, it has also enabled people to interact with increasingly large number of strangers from all over the world, which in turn has led to mixed environments like Tumblr where the linguistic conventions and expectations differ from that of any one easily quantified demography.

Additionally, as Thurlow et al (2004: 80) note, the anonymity of CMC can often lead to an increased use of impolite language because there is no fear of any physical counter-attack. However, this anonymity does not only protect the speaker's sense of self-preservation but also prevents them from identifying the people they interact with. In other words, it is not simply the sense of relative safety that may lead to increased impoliteness but also the fact that the addressees are not seen as real individuals with feelings. It is true that in emails, for example, the use of taboo language is usually less common and one of the reasons for this is undoubtedly that in such interactions the speaker and the addressee usually know each other and wish to maintain a civil or friendly relationship. Emails also tend to be sent from one individual to another or from one individual to many. In contrast, on a website like Tumblr the users do not – at least in most cases – know each other and have no true motivation to maintain each other's face even though Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) state that usually the interactants cooperate to do so in a conversation. In the context on Tumblr, however, the anonymity often seems to diminish the speakers' consideration for the addressee's face. What is more, the anonymity of Tumblr may also be a partial reason for women's prevalent use of impolite language specifically because it allows them freedom from the status-based prejudices of gender (Herring 1996: 4) and offers them an avenue to use language in the way of their choosing without fear of judgement regardless of what is expected of them in their community and position in "real life".

Moreover, on websites such as Tumblr the interaction often involves more than just two people and outsiders can easily engage with public posts and thus disagreement is more rampant and opinions tend to get polarized. Thurlow et al (2004: 82) also acknowledge this and state

that in online groups there is a tendency towards extreme views, which are strengthened when individuals receive support from others for their own views. They stress that while finding like-minded people is one of the advantages of CMC, it may also lead to a false sense of security in one's point of view (Thurlow et al 2004: 82). There is also a possibility that the degree of anonymity afforded by the context may play a role in both the polarization of ideas and the amount and type of impoliteness used, which could be an area of interest for future research. Tumblr in particular is somewhere in the middle of an "anonymity continuum" in the sense that it allows one to contact specific users via instant messages and "asks" and every user has an individual username even though it can be changed. In addition, users have the opportunity to disclose personal information on their blog and often do so. However, there are other websites, such as 4chan, which are based on full anonymity and that do not even employ usernames or a way to contact specific users; on the other hand, there are websites such as Facebook, which require the users to disclose their real name as well as other private information.

All in all, it is not very meaningful to try and determine whether one gender is more impolite than the other, because impoliteness is extremely context dependent and, it is impossible to make broad, global generalizations of the linguistic tendencies of a group based on just one variable. However, it is possible to examine the ways in which the use of impoliteness strategies differs between the genders in a specific context.

This study shows that, even if there is a tendency for one gender to favor a specific strategy, none of them are absolutely gender specific. In other words, men may use the strategy *use taboo words* in more occasions than women do but since there are 117 occurrences in the data of women employing this strategy, it clearly cannot be said that women have a tendency to not use it. In this category, the gender differences emerge when one looks into the specific taboo words used by the speakers. As noted in 4.1, the term *fag* – a gendered slur targeted towards homosexual men but also used to imply an individual is somehow feminine or "less than a man" – is the only frequently used taboo word that is employed solely by male speakers.

However, women do not shy away from using other gendered insults. On the contrary, women actually use some gendered insults (e.g. *dick*, *prick*) more often than men, and even the ones preferred by male speakers (e.g. *bitch*, *cunt*, *twat*, *pussy*) are used by women multiple times. It is notable, however, that the gendered insults used more frequently by women are masculine, while the gendered insults used more frequently by men are feminine, and might also be described as more derogatory. While calling someone a *dick* or *prick* is insulting, the intention is generally to convey that the addressee is annoying, rude or insensitive; on the other

hand, words such as *bitch* and *pussy* are used to associate the addressee negatively with stereotypically feminine traits like weakness and cowardice. Moreover, because female sexuality has been, and still continues to be, a taboo topic to a greater extent than is the case with male sexuality, words such as *cunt* and *pussy* are seen as inherently more crude and impolite than *dick* and *prick* even though both refer to human genitalia.

In the category *call the other names*, there are insults used mostly by male speakers that are often used together with *fag* and share implications with taboo words such as *bitch* and *pussy*. These are *beta* and *cuck*, both of which call into questions the addressee's masculinity by speculating about their ability to gain and retain female attention. It seems that *fag*, *beta* and *cuck* are virtually exclusively used by men towards other men. This could suggest that women do not consider such implications as insulting and therefore do not tend to use these specific insults. Especially in Tumblr's famously liberal context, it is not surprising that female speakers do not seem to attach the same kind of negative implication to homosexuality as men do. Among women there is also a clear lack of the notion of a "beta" and an "alpha" individual, and the value of hierarchal order among people of the same sex, whereas among men, *beta* refers to someone who is weak, has no authority and is inferior to "the alpha male".

Interestingly, the relatively new term *incel*, which is often used to mock the addressee's presumed lack of sexual experience and ability to find sexual partners, is only used by women in the data. It could be that insults that explicitly attack the addressee's masculinity are the most effective when they come from someone who has authority in the area, in other words, another male. In contrast, an insult that questions the addressee's ability to succeed in sexual relationships may be more effective when coming from the group the addressee wishes to pursue. To put it more simply, men can tell other men that they are failures in regards to masculinity but it is women who have the authority to tell (straight) men that are undesirable to the opposite sex. Another potential reason for why women tend to use *incel* as an insult is that women are widely disrespected in the incel community, which consists mainly of men. Thus it is likely that many women feel a deep sense of antipathy towards incels and channel it to impoliteness.

Several formal usages in the material show differences in preference between the genders. To return briefly to the category *use taboo words*, women tend to use abbreviations that include the word *fuck* more commonly, and in more varying ways, compared to men. Men use only two different abbreviations, *tf* and *stfu*. Women, however, use six different ones: *af*, *jfc*, *omfg*, *gtfo*, *tf* and *wtf*. The reasons for this can only be speculated about. It could be that such abbreviations are seen as less impolite than the full words. However, it could also indicate

that female speakers browse Tumblr more often on cellphones and use more abbreviations because they are faster to type.

There are seven instances in which the speakers use emoticons. These are not connected to any specific impoliteness strategy, even though in four instances the emoticon is used together with the strategy *condescend*. There seems to be a prevalent idea that women use emoticons more commonly since a simple Google search using the keywords “women use emoticon” and “men use emoticon” will yield such results as “Women use emojis more than men”, “Are emoticons a woman thing?” and “Should grown men use emoji?”. Nevertheless, out of the seven instances where emoticons are used in the present data, men are responsible for three; even though the figures are low, this suggests that, at least on Tumblr, both genders employ them for effect to amplify impoliteness.

Shouting, on the other hand, is a show of aggression and thus associated with the men since aggression is stereotypically associated with masculine style (Mills 2003: 193). Therefore it is not surprising that men also employ the category *shout* more in the data. In the context of CMC shouting does not actually involve the use of raised voices but it rather achieved through the use of all capital letters. Nevertheless, even in the absence of sound this strategy looks more aggressive than lower case writing and thus achieves its purpose.

Mills (2003: 235) states that, while gender plays a role in what individuals deem appropriate or inappropriate in interaction, in the end “decisions about what is appropriate or not are decided upon strategically within the parameters of the community of practice and within the course of the interaction”. In other words, context matters. While women may be slightly more hesitant to use some traditionally masculine impoliteness techniques such as *use taboo words* or *shout*, it is clear that when the situation calls for it they readily employ these strategies as well. Moreover, it is impossible to say whether women use, for instance, the word *fuck* less than men because of some preconceived notion that they should opt for a milder and more “feminine” insult or because they conclude that using the most aggressive style possible is not necessarily the most conducive to a successful interaction. Because the data does include many strategies – such as *scorn*, *disassociate from the other* and *be disinterested* – that are notably more prevalent among women, it seems that at least in the context of Tumblr women do not necessarily use impoliteness less than men but simply favor different, less aggressive and sometimes less obvious, strategies.

5.2. Differences between the topics

Even though all the topics chosen for this study are controversial, and were selected on that basis, the data suggest that the use of impoliteness strategies is not at all equally frequent in all of them.

As many as seven of the total 13 strategies are used most frequently in RACISM: *associate the other with a negative aspect*, *ridicule and shout*, as well as (at a shared first place) *scorn*, *condescend*, *use inappropriate identity markers* and *disassociate from the other*. The latter group are used equally frequently in RELIGION, which also shows the most frequent use of the strategies *use taboo words* and *call the other names*. The topics POLITICS and SOCIAL JUSTICE both show the top frequencies of two strategies. *Use taboo words* and *express judgement* are most prevalent in POLITICS while *use negative orders* and *be disinterested* occur most often in SOCIAL JUSTICE. Rather surprisingly, only one strategy occurs more often in FEMINISM compared to the other topics: this is *frighten*, which is non-existent in all of the other topics.

In topics there are clear discrepancies between the genders. For example, the strategy *condescend* is used more by women under most of the topics and equally often by both genders in one; however, there is a notable spike in FEMINISM, in which men's use of the strategy far surpasses that of the women's. Without further context it is impossible to say for certain whether the gender of the addressee was clear to the speaker when they made their comments, but it is possible that in discussions that focus on feminism, many speakers may at least assume that they are talking to a woman until proven otherwise. Therefore it is possible to tentatively suggest that men here have a tendency to be more condescending towards women compared to when they are talking to other men.

There is another notable spike in numbers in RACISM, under which male speakers employ the strategy *associate the other with a negative aspect* much more frequently compared to women. This indicates that men are more likely to call the addressee out when they exhibit racist opinions. Lastly, in RACISM women employ *use inappropriate identity markers* notably more than men do. Because RACISM is a topic in which many speakers state their race, it is clear that many speakers participating in the conversations are black. However, since there is not definite information on the race of the speakers it is not possible to determine which comments are specifically from them, and thus it cannot be said for certain whether black women may have a tendency to use the strategy more often.

Finally, in some topics there are certain trends that – mostly unsurprisingly – show up more than in others. For example, in RACISM, the use of the insult *cracker* and referring to the addressee’s whiteness occur repeatedly but are non-existent or less prevalent in the other topics. Similarly, calling the addressee “racist” is most prevalent in RACISM whereas all uses of the term *terf* are found in FEMINISM and the word *fascist* is only used in POLITICS. Moreover, the effect of the topic is very visible in the category *disassociate from the other*, in which the speaker tends to disassociate from the addressee, on the basis of on race in RACISM and on the ground of being a Muslim or not in RELIGION. In SOCIAL JUSTICE, the most important factor is sexual orientation, as well as political beliefs, which are also used as a point of contention in POLITICS.

5.3. Positive and negative impoliteness

It is clear that not all views on politeness involve the notion of positive and negative politeness, as shown by Fraser (see 2.1.6.) who lists four different approaches to the phenomenon. Furthermore, even the scholars who include positive and negative politeness in their approach do not all define the terms in the same way. As Fraser (1990: 226) notes, Leech considers negative politeness to involve minimizing the impoliteness of impolite illocutions while positive politeness involves maximizing the politeness of polite illocutions. This differs drastically from the definition of Brown and Levinson (1987). According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 61), negative politeness involves taking into consideration the addressee’s negative face wants and thus minimizing the amount of imposition by apologizing or using one of the other negative politeness strategies that they list. Positive politeness, on the other hand, involves taking into account the addressee’s positive face wants, which involves treating them as a member of the group and making them feel accepted (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61). This can be achieved by using one or more of the positive politeness strategies, which include using in-group identity markers and joking, among others (Brown and Levinson 1987: 102). Culpeper’s (1996: 356) impoliteness framework adopts the notion of positive and negative face from Brown and Levinson’s model and thus to him negative impoliteness refers to acts that attack the addressee’s negative face while positive impoliteness means acts that attack the addressee’s positive face wants.

The impoliteness strategies examined in this study are based on Culpeper’s framework, with a few additions and modifications, and may therefore be divided into positive and negative

impoliteness strategies. However, whether such a division is meaningful in the context of CMC could be questioned. Harris (2001), cited in Mills (2003: 77), points out that positive and negative politeness may be employed at the same time, within the same utterance: such mergers or combinations of positive and negative impoliteness are common in the data gathered for this study. In many of the utterances collected on Tumblr, the speakers constantly use positive impoliteness strategies (e.g. *use taboo words*) together with negative impoliteness strategies (e.g. *scorn, condescend*). Moreover, Holmes (1995: 154) recognizes that it is difficult to distinguish between negative and positive politeness and suggests that “there are very few speech acts that are intrinsically negative politeness speech acts”.

The present study has shown very clearly the problems of distinguishing between positive and negative impoliteness. For instance, Culpeper (1996: 357-358) lists *use inappropriate identity markers* as a positive impoliteness strategy but puts *condescend* among negative impoliteness strategies. However, in the data here analysed, the former strategy functions basically as a sub-category for *condescend*. Simply put, its function is to convey very specific kind of condescension: that of using patronizing or condescending terms of address such as *honey, boy* or *kid*. Therefore it does not seem logical to list these two categories under different types of impoliteness.

It becomes clear in the context of CMC that negative impoliteness is a rather different concept compared to its function in face-to-face interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) define negative politeness as having to do with people’s “freedom of action and freedom from imposition”; however, CMC inherently grants speakers more freedom than face-to-face interaction. In other words, many negative impoliteness strategies lose much of their effect in a context where they have no real power to impose on people’s freedom of action and freedom from imposition. While threatening to slap someone, for example, is considered impolite in most cases regardless of the context, at least when said in a serious manner, it does not carry the same weight in CMC where the speaker and addressee may very well be physically on different continents. In contrast, in face-to-face interaction an utterance like *I will slap you* would probably lead the addressee to genuinely presume they may be in danger of physical harm. In both situations, this utterance would fall under the category *frighten*, but it is doubtful whether it should be considered negative impoliteness in both cases, since in most Tumblr interactions the addressee does not feel genuinely threatened. What makes the utterance impolite is mainly the implication rather than the intent of going through with it.

On the whole, impoliteness strategies that impose on the addressee’s freedom are very easily ignored in CMC and do not impose the same kind of discomfort as they would in face-

to-face interaction. For example, one of the negative impoliteness strategies listed by Culpeper (1996: 357-358) that is not present in the Tumblr data, *invade the other's space*, could hypothetically be used in CMC in a metaphorical sense by asking someone for information which is too intimate given the relationship. While using this strategy in a face-to-face conversation would definitely create an awkward atmosphere and lead to the addressee feeling pressured to reveal information against their will, yet also unable to refuse in a tactful manner, its effects would not be the same in CMC. The reasons for this are numerous. First, in CMC, messages can easily be ignored and in many cases even deleted, and they thus do not impose on the addressee to the same degree. Second, users can be blocked without repercussions, which will immediately end an unwanted interaction without forcing the addressee to reply at all. Third, because of the anonymity of CMC, it is likely that the addressees do not often feel that their face wants are being threatened, because no one knows who they are and it is difficult to impose on someone when both parties in the discussion know nothing about the other and also know that they themselves are equally unknown to the other.

Culpeper (2008: 39) notes that impoliteness tends to be more likely in contexts where there is an imbalance of social structural power. On Tumblr, however, no such discrepancy in power between the users exist, and still the use of impolite language is rampant. Even if the users differ in age and social power, none of this is visible to the other users, and no individual can assume authority over others, at least not authority that would be accepted and respected by the other users in unison. However, there is a tendency for speakers to use their status as an in-group member in specific minorities and oppressed groups in order to gain an upper hand in conversations. In other words, they refuse to let a member of the majority (e.g. a heterosexual person or a white person) to speak for them, because only the in-group members are in the position to argue about a specific issue pertaining to them. This often also leads to the use of the impoliteness strategy *disassociate from the other* in order to convey the sentiment that because the speaker is, for example, a woman and the addressee is not, the addressee has no authority to speak on issues such as feminism.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the specific characteristics of impolite language on Tumblr and the differences between men and women in the use of impoliteness strategies.

Moreover, its purpose was to discuss the ways in which linguistic impoliteness functions in the context of computer-mediated communication and whether the systems designed for face-to-face interaction can be used to study it.

All in all, 13 different impoliteness strategies emerged from the data collected in Tumblr, which shows that impoliteness is used in various ways in this context. Moreover, the strategies were rarely used together, which shows a tendency to merge together different strategies to achieve heightened impoliteness. Impoliteness on Tumblr is clearly very prevalent and visible and the most commonly used strategies, *use taboo words* and *call the other names*, are also some of the most face threatening. Even though research has shown that impoliteness is more likely to happen in an environment where the power structure between the interactants is asymmetrical, Tumblr presents an immense amount of impoliteness regardless of the seeming equality between its users. Some of this can be explained by the anonymity of the platform as well as its young and socially conscious user base.

Moreover, there are certain differences in the choice of impoliteness strategies between men and women as men use such categories as *use taboo words* and *call the other names* more frequently than women whereas women opt for *scorn* and *disassociate from the other* more often than men. Therefore the question is not about which gender is more impolite than the other but rather about the specific differences in their use of impoliteness. These differences are visible, for instance, in the word choices. Men use many insults – such as *fag*, *beta* and *cuck* – that are virtually non-existent in women’s vocabulary. Women on the other hand tend to use masculine gendered insults such as *prick* and *dick* more than men.

Finally, CMC as an environment differs so drastically from face-to-face interaction that the traditional approaches to politeness and impoliteness have to be questioned. Even the most influential theories in the field of linguistic politeness do not properly take into account CMC and thus lack suitable means to categorize and analyze politeness and impoliteness in this context. With this in mind the old theories may be modified or new ones developed to specifically fit the needs of the constantly changing linguistic environment. Additionally, the notions of positive and negative impoliteness lose much of their meaning in a context where the addressee cannot feel as threatened as in a face-to-face interaction and may easily cease contact with the speaker with no repercussions.

Although many people are already doing research on Tumblr, much of the research so far has focused on areas other than the language. However, as evidenced by this study, Tumblr offers a very rich and interesting linguistic environment with ample space for future studies. As suggested before, one area for future study could be the degree of anonymity and its effect on

impoliteness in CMC, which would require collecting material from other websites in addition to Tumblr for comparison. It would also be interesting to try to control the other variables – such as ethnicity and age – and their effect on impoliteness on Tumblr. This, however, would probably require contacting individual users for information and permission to study the material on their blog since many users do not list this information on their blog for everyone to see. Moreover, another approach to studying impoliteness on Tumblr would involve choosing a number of users and collecting a larger number of utterances from each individual unlike in this study in which the utterances were collected from a large number of individuals.

In conclusion, this study has shown that Tumblr is a very interesting and unique environment in regards to linguistic impoliteness and that the old models developed for studying politeness do not readily work with the context of CMC. Therefore there is much potential research to conduct in order to see how linguistic behavior differs between different web based platforms and most of all, to find the optimal ways of conducting research on the language of CMC.

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Appendix

A glossary of Internet language

ace = a phonetic shortening of the word "asexual", often used to refer to individuals who identify as such

af = acronym for "as fuck", used to emphasize a statement as in "OP is basically being homophobic AF"

bc = an abbreviation for the word "because"

beta = a term for men who are perceived as weak and emasculated

brb = short for “be right back”, used to indicate that the user will be gone for a short while

cis = the abbreviated form of “cisgender”, used to refer to individuals whose gender identity matches the sex that they were assigned at birth, the opposite of transgender

cuck = alt-right slang for “cuckold”

edgelord = an individual who posts shocking content or voices controversial opinions in hopes of gaining attention and being perceived as cool and “edgy”

frfr = an abbreviation for the phrase “for real, for real”

hunty = a mix of the words “honey” and “cunt”, a colloquialism especially popular among the drag queen community

idk = an abbreviation for “I don’t know”

incel = “involuntarily celibate”, someone who desires a sexual relationship with another person, but is unable to achieve it. The term is used by the community itself as a term of identification, but also by others as an insult towards individuals who are socially awkward and sexually predatory

jfc = an acronym for “Jesus fucking Christ”

kink shaming = “the act of mocking or criticizing someone’s specific sexual predilections”

kys = an acronym for the phrase “kill yourself”

libtard = the combination of the words “liberal” and “retard”, used as an insult towards individuals with left-wing political views, usually by those with right-wing views

lmao/lmfao = an acronym for “laughing my (fucking) ass off”

mra = men’s right activist, someone who combats discrimination against men

omg/omfg = an acronym for “oh my (fucking) god”

op = original poster, the person who made the original post or initiated a new Internet thread

pc = an acronym for “political correctness” or “politically correct”

POS = an acronym for “piece of shit”

radfem = refers to “radical feminists” or “radical feminism” in general

shitlord = a pejorative often used on the Internet against those who are perceived as racist, sexist, homophobic, fat shaming or otherwise prejudicial

sjw = an acronym for “social justice warrior”, a pejorative term for an individual who promotes socially progressive views

stfu = an acronym for “shut the fuck up”

terf = an acronym for “trans-exclusionary radical feminism/feminist”, a subgroup of radical feminism that enforces the classic gender binary, believing that only real women are those born as women and wanting to exclude transgender individuals from the movement. The term is usually used only by people outside the group.

tf = an acronym for the phrase “the fuck”, as in “tf is wrong with you people?”

thot = originally an acronym for “that hoe over there”, but now often used as a synonym for “hoe” or “slut”

tldr = short for “too long, didn’t read”, can be used by a person replying to a post to signify that the original post is being ignored because of its length. Sometimes also used by the poster themselves to acknowledge the length of their post and used as a means of providing a shorter summary at the end of the text by typing “tldr” before the summary.

troll = internet slang for a person starts fights and tries to upset people on purpose, with the intention of invoking an emotional response and disrupting conversation

white knight = a pejorative term used to describe men who defend women on the Internet with the assumption that they are looking for a romantic or sexual reward in return