Abstract

This study examines the use of euphemisms in relation to gender and motherhood using publicly available video blogs submitted by three groups consisting of: two males, two females and two mothers. A list of commonly used swear words was used to examine the absence or presence of euphemisms, along with a list that includes various types of euphemisms. Results indicate that mothers are far more likely to use euphemisms and their use of swear words was non-existent in the chosen videos. The use of euphemisms amongst the other groups was relatively rare, except for one instance where a man used several euphemisms during a conversation with his girlfriend, which might be explained by the fact that they were having a light-hearted argument. This small study has indicated that there are some differences in the use of euphemisms and mothers in particular seem to be far more likely to use them. These results encourage further research into the use of euphemisms and in the future I recommend performing the study with more subjects and longer video blogs.
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Abstract

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1. Introduction

In today’s world, saturated with the media always present at our fingertips, it is hard to miss the euphemisms that are littered all over. Phrases like “sleeping together”, “going to the toilet” and “fudge” can all be considered euphemisms when inserted into the right context and chances are that most people will encounter one or two euphemisms daily, even if they go unnoticed. Euphemisms fall under the category of politeness, after all they mask truths that are found to be unpleasant to some extent. Politeness is one of the most commonly used communicative strategies when it comes to discourse. Sociolinguists have studied this strategy for decades and many theories have arisen from those studies that attempt to explain the politeness phenomenon. The most well-known theory was developed by Brown & Levinson, which suggested that politeness strategies were used to keep a positive image in social situations (1987). However, when searched, I could hardly find any studies on euphemisms with reference to gender. Having heard on countless occasions that women have a tendency to be more polite than men, I wondered if the use of euphemisms would be more prevalent amongst women than men. This lack of material influenced me to take a look at this subject myself. Considering what I already know about Sociolinguistics, I expected that women, particularly mothers, to use euphemisms more than men.

One of the biggest problems with study of euphemisms is that they are constantly changing and sometimes they become the unpleasant truth that was being avoided in the first place (Allan and Burridge 1988; Mcglone, Beck, and Pfiester, 2006). This is a variable that it hard to keep track of, since it is clear that there is no rule as to when a euphemism no longer holds its original function. Another problem that was encountered during this study was the fact that while there were many articles about gender differences in politeness, only one study had actually looked at gender differences in euphemisms. In a 2003 study, McGlone and Batchelor were looking to see if the use of euphemisms was more likely to occur within email when the speaker thought that they would see the person they were writing to. A brief section of the paper goes over the use of euphemisms, finding no specific difference between the genders. The lack of research done on euphemisms and gender is something that should encourage-more research into the subject.
This study examines video blogs of six different people; two men, two childless women and two mothers. With a reference list at hand, I listened to the videos and recorded euphemistic phrases, as well as a lack of them, in the speech of the bloggers. There is no definite answer as to how many phrases are or are not present, since euphemisms take on many different forms and have a tendency to change over time, but even accounting for that flaw this study should at the very least indicate the frequency of euphemisms between genders and parenthood. While care was taken to insure that they were in the same country, chances are that things like geolocation, ethnic background and political standing affect the frequency of euphemism use. After all, would it not be expected that a conservative would be more prone to the use of euphemisms as opposed to a liberal? The results of this study might be able to indicate and encourage further investigation, as it barely scratches the surface of euphemistic use.

In the next chapter I will do a literature review and discuss politeness and important studies and material relating to the topic. I will go on to take a look at politeness and gender. Then we will move onto the topic of euphemisms, then following with euphemisms in the context of gender. Chapter three will discuss the study, methodology and provide an overview of the results. Chapter four is the discussion section which will be followed by the conclusion.
2. Literature Review

It is generally accepted that there are many factors that influence how we talk. These are, but not limited to: socioeconomic status, cultural background, geographical location and gender (Herk & Katamaba, 2001). Pennebaker and King (1999) found that linguistic styles can be gleaned from texts by individuals. Even if two people come from a similar area, share a similar cultural background and went to the same school, their linguistic style and language use might very well be different simply because of differences in their personalities. One of the factors in how we talk is how we wish to present ourselves. Politeness is a tool that we use to maintain a positive light on ourselves in social situation. This is the general topic of this thesis, specifically the euphemisms we use in order to avoid offending others or bother our own conscience by the way we express ourselves. This chapter provides an overview of the research available on the topic of politeness and use of euphemisms and their use, by men and women. There will be a special focus on gender differences in the use of euphemisms and whether or not motherhood and the responsibility of linguistic upbringing may affect the amount and type of euphemisms that a speaker uses.

2.1. Politeness

There are many theories as to why we make an effort to be polite when we speak. Perhaps the most general idea as to why we deploy politeness strategies is because we supposedly feel uncomfortable talking about certain subjects acting in a certain way or we do not wish to offend the people we are speaking to. Brown and Levinson (1987) presented a theory of politeness that is still widely accepted today. They talk about the notion of face, which is a term for your social role. Face, as it is used in this context, is coined by Goffman (1967). While it might be intuitive to consider face as pertaining to a person, Goffman says that face is only relevant during social interaction and is therefore more focused on “moments and their men.” (p. 3) When Brown and Levinson (1987) consider face in their theory of politeness they talk about two different types of face: positive face: the desire to appear in a favorable light to others, and negative face, which is the desire to do as one wishes regardless of others’ opinions. While this theory is appealing, Vilkki (2006) rightfully points out that this theory would not work as well in cultures where people feel that they are members of a group, rather than represent just themselves. This
applies to many English speaking cultures where children are taught at a young age that they should aim to be polite and that politeness is a virtue. Not following the rules of politeness might elicit negative reactions from those around you. This so-called negative face is where one wishes to be unhindered in their communications. Positive face is the other side of the coin, the desire to be approved of and maintain an attitude approved by the society. When someone decides to be impolite, it is believed that they are attacking face. Generally people like to preserve their face, so having someone directly attack it will lead to friction and conflict. Since most people value politeness to some extent, a person who is continually impolite might find themselves ostracized. On the other hand, a person who is always polite might wind up allowing others to walk all over them.

2.1.1 Gender & Politeness

The notion that women are more polite than men is widespread. Many studies have been presented in an effort to try to demonstrate and explain why women speak differently than men. Lakoff (1975) made an attempt to explore why women seem generally more polite than men using Tiger’s *Men in Groups* (1969) theory about male bonding. The main idea is that in the hunter-gatherer society men had to work together and develop a way of communication that suited them as a group, while women were on their own. The grouping of the males resulted in male bonding, things like horsing around and backslapping amongst some example, which occurred even when they disliked each other. Since women were often alone or with their children in hunter-gatherer societies they did not learn how to show camaraderie in a similar way. Miller (1967) has a list of three rules of politeness, two of which cannot stand together as they contradict each other, 1 and 3, the rules are:

1. Formality: keep aloof.
2. Deference: give options.

(Miller, 289-290)

Lakoff notes that female politeness usually consists of rule 1 and rule 2, which suits the theory of hunter-gather society. Examples of such behaviors are: “deferential mannerisms coupled with euphemism and hypercorrect and superpolite usage.” (Lakoff, 71) The first
rule, to keep aloof, would certainly seem to apply with euphemisms. After all, euphemisms are effectively putting distance between the speaker and the taboo concept. Considering this we should expect to see that women have a higher use of euphemisms or otherwise polite mannerisms. Herk and Katamba (2011) observed that women were more likely to “use language to build and maintain relationships” (509), which is called a rapport style, while men were more likely to use language to convey information, which is also known as the report style. Considering that politeness is a face saving strategy, it seems logical that women might be more likely to deploy face saving strategies, since they are used to keep one in a socially positive light. Since women are often, although not always, the main caretaker of children, it is natural to assume that they would try to pass on their politeness to their children. After all, it is normal for parents to want to pass on their own ideals to their children and if a women is a primary caretaker of a child she is likely to try and instill some politeness values in the child.

It is widely believed that women use a form of English that is closer to the standard form than men do. Trudgill (1972) found that women often perceived themselves as having higher prestige in language, while men were more likely to aim for lower, covert prestige. This would indicate that women are more likely to use a better form of language, since it seems that they in the very least aspire to speak a more standard form of English. It is worth noting however that this is not always true. Arnbjörnsdóttir (2006) found that when researching North American Icelandic that is a certain stigmatized phonetic change, did not have any noticeable difference in use between genders, even if it is generally considered to be an undesirable way of speaking. So while there might be some less prestigious ways of speaking that are more common amongst men than women, it is clear that this is not an unbreakable rule.

The same conventions seem to apply when men and women communicate over the internet. Savicki, Kelley, and Lingenfelter (1996) conducted a study on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), focusing particularly on the use of language in emails between three different groups: all male, all female and mixed. Their results were interesting and at least slightly supportive of the theory that women are more polite than men. The three groups were given a scenario to evaluate and each group was supposed to assign characters in ranks according to the morality of their action and discuss it amongst themselves via email. Out of all the emails that were sent, abrasive language was used nineteen times, thirteen of the incidences occurring in the all-male group (Savicki, Kelley,
and Lingenfelter, 1996). However, some of the results contradicted what one would have expected if Lakoff’s interpretation of Tiger’s theory were true, particularly about cooperation. The men were far less likely to change their opinions after discussion and in general the all-male group was the least satisfied with how the discussion had gone (p. 219). There are two possible reasons for this: the theory that men are better at showing camaraderie is untrue, or perhaps the fact that there was no physical presence had an effect on how they communicated. After all, a large part of communication in everyday life is the use of body language along with spoken language and since CMC has an obvious absence of body language, the results might have been skewed. One thing is clear however; women were less likely to use offensive language, which reinforces that they deploy different strategies while communicating with others (p. 220). Palomares (2008) conducted a similar study, this time focusing on intra- and intergroup communications. The results of her study were interesting: when women were under the impression that the email they were replying to was written by a woman they were far more likely to talk about emotions. When gender salience was low, there was no notable difference between the sexes. The amount of gender salience did have an impact as well; women that had high gender salience were more likely to reference emotions in an intergroup setting, more so than women with high gender salience did within intragroup settings (p. 276). Using this recent study as a basis, it seems that women that are speaking to a wider range of audiences, that have high gender salience as well, are far more likely to reference emotions. In regards to deference there was no difference between the genders, which is on par with Lakoff’s theory that people use either a combination of rule 1 and 2, or rule 2 and 3. While women are more polite, these studies indicated that they are not more likely to use submissive language than men are. There are many kinds of politeness strategies available. Among them are omission, deference and even euphemisms which can be considered as a politeness strategy. The nature of euphemism will be discussed on the next section.

2. 2 Euphemism

One of the many forms that politeness takes is in the use of euphemisms. Euphemism, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is “a mild or pleasant word or phrase that is used instead of one that is unpleasant or offensive.” Considering this definition it might seem obvious
that it is a form of politeness but there are those that want to modify the definition of
euphemism. Gómez (2009) proposes that euphemisms and dysphemisms be defined as
“the cognitive process of conceptualization of a forbidden reality.” This definition might
seem rather broad and perhaps a little excessive (are all euphemisms masking a forbidden
reality?) it is inclusive of all forms of euphemism. Euphemisms do not always appear in
lexical form; Gómez mentions that intonation or tone of voice could be euphemistic (i.e.
apologizing with your tone for what you are saying.) This definition is very broad and it
would make it hard to pinpoint every single euphemism but he has a good point: 
euphemisms are not always just phrases or words replacing unpleasant or offensive
words, they can be subtle and hard to pinpoint. However, for the sake of simplicity, I will
focus on the lexical form of euphemisms.

Euphemistic terms are constantly changing as languages evolve. Keyes (2011)
says: “Verbal evasions put a spotlight on what most concerns human beings at any given
time.” (p. 58) This sentence is spot-on, as we only use euphemisms for things that either:
make us uncomfortable, or make society uncomfortable. In Western society money has
been a taboo subject for a large part of the 20th century (Trachtman, 1999). Freud (1908)
linked money to anal eroticism, which indicates that money was a difficult and perhaps
even shameful subject at that time. People are expected to not talk about their incomes,
and money in general appears to be a rather touchy subject. Keyes has a section on ‘money
talk’ in his article where some of the euphemisms available for money related matter are
counted up and it really shows how much of a tendency there is to talk about money
without using the word itself (Keyes, 2011).

Some scholars have noted that sometimes a euphemistic term can become so
strongly associated with an unpleasant meaning that they themselves become taboo
(Allan and Burridge 1988; Mcglone, Beck, and Pfiester, 2006). The title undertaker is a
good example of this, originally it was a euphemistic term and eventually it was to be
replaced by funeral director, which is considerably more pleasant. This could be
problematic in terms of research, since some might consider the euphemisms that have
become too strongly associated with the unpleasant reality as still being euphemistic,
which could result in a misinterpretation in regards to data. Grant (1977) has an interesting
point on this subject. He states that euphemistic use is dependent on a person’s reality,
which suggests that while certain topics are generally considered distasteful to talk about,
there are plenty of topics that might not be unpleasant for the general public that other
groups might find unpleasant. This could result in the use of uncommon euphemisms which would make it harder for someone outside that group to understand what is being talked about. Due to the fear of losing face, the listener might be unwilling to ask what was really meant as euphemisms are not always easy to decipher which might result in miscommunication and general confusion.

Halmari (2011) further supports the idea of euphemisms becoming too strongly associated with the original taboo concept when she talks about euphemisms used for people with disabilities. Words like idiot, imbecile and cripple were once considered politically correct or PC, only to be replaced later with euphemisms such as mentally challenged and physically challenged individuals. Halmari also points out a rather interesting pattern in the use, and non-use, of politically correct terms in the media: when someone with disabilities was a victim of a crime the media would often use non-PC terms which made the crime and news itself seem far more disturbing.

The media is often criticized for using euphemistic terms to veil the truth. Hojati (2012) concludes in his study that euphemisms function as a “double-edged sword.” (p. 560). He found that while there were innocent uses of euphemisms, there were also potentially deceptive uses as well. This deceptive nature of euphemisms has sometimes been referred to as “doublespeak,” which is deliberately similar to the term doublethink from George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four. The association with Orwell’s critical novel, where the government is controlling its subjects to extreme lengths, makes it clear that whoever coined the term doublespeak was not fond of language that is meant to mask reality. Grant (1977) argues that while people might feel deceived by the media thanks to doublespeak, they have no real right to demand that doublespeak cease its existence. Euphemisms are used to mask a reality, usually because the reality makes people uncomfortable. Each person’s reality will be decided on what topics they will deploy euphemisms in. To further clarify the reality opinion that Grant holds, here’s a simple analogy: If Sally finds it uncomfortable to talk about sex, and John does not, John has no right to tell Sally that she cannot use euphemistic terms to talk about sex. John is however under no obligation to use the euphemistic terms to please Sally either. Their realities clash and while they might not agree with each other it is clearly unreasonable to expect one or the other to temporarily change their reality in order to suit the other. Considering this example I find that Grant’s criticism of those that oppose doublespeak is valid and logically sound, even if I do not agree with the use of doublespeak myself.
Other studies have suggested that the use of euphemisms have less to do with personal preference and more with trying to keep face. As discussed before, the term face, in sociolinguistic context, is how we appear to others. Keeping face is a strategy of trying to keep one's social standing as well as keeping relationships. McGlone and Batchelor (2003) conducted a study where they examined people’s use of euphemisms and in order to see whether their participants’ purpose in using euphemisms was to make the speaker more comfortable or to preserve face. Their results suggested that the use of euphemisms was more linked to the act of saving face. These results are interesting, because they indicate that there is less concern for personal comfort and more for how one appears to other people. Bowers and Playdell-Pearce (2011) found contradictory evidence that suggests that we actually do feel uncomfortable with certain words. The results showed that certain words would result in higher levels of stress, which was measured by a monitor, than neutral words, and euphemisms for the negative phrases produced significantly less stress although the levels were still higher than with neutral terms. One reason as to why these two studies produced contradictory evidence could be the difference in the unpleasant terms used. In McGlone and Batchelor’s study the unpleasant realities that were present were related to bodily functions, which are distasteful to talk about in public but are completely natural. Bowers and Playdell-Pearce’s study, on the other hand look at the words ‘fuck’ and ‘cunt’ and their euphemistic counterparts ‘f-word’ and ‘c-word.’ None the less, both studies indicate that there would be a certain level of discomfort when talking to someone about these topics.

So far we have established that euphemisms are ever changing, sometimes even becoming so strongly associated with the original term that they might in the end become taboo. We have also learned from Bowers and Playdell-Pearce (2011) that while euphemisms might also be face saving strategy, there is a certain discomfort that follows when some people use taboo terms. Now that we have discussed euphemisms and established that they are considered to be face-saving strategies that can cause physical discomfort, it is worth considering euphemisms in the context of gender.

2.2.1 Euphemism and Gender

There have not been many studies that look at the use of euphemisms and how they vary with gender. McGlone and Batchelor (2003) examined euphemism but did not find any
notable difference between men and women. If we consider euphemisms as a form of politeness, then we can assume that since women are found to generally be more polite than men, they would have a higher use of euphemisms. Since we have established that euphemisms call forth a physical reaction (Bowers and Playdell-Pearce, 2011) as well as women using relationship building linguistic styles (Herk & Katamba, 2011), along with Trudgill’s findings that women believe that they have higher prestige in language (1972), it makes sense to assume that at least some women are more likely to deploy euphemisms in everyday speech.

### 2.3 Conclusion

Considering all the evidence above, I am expecting women to have a higher use of euphemisms, mostly based on the fact that they are generally considered to be more polite (Lakoff 1975; Trudgill 1972). Women use a combination of formality and deference, as opposed to men’s use of camaraderie, is further support for my conclusions. Considering McGlone and Batchelor’s study, as well as Brown and Levisons theories on face, I expect to see at least some use of euphemisms by men and more so by women and even more frequently by women who have children.

My study examines the relationship between the use of euphemisms, gender, and motherhood. I will examine video blogs by three groups: men, women who do not have children, and mothers. The video blogs are available to the public on YouTube. Considering that politeness is often a face-saving strategy I expect to see at least some politeness being displayed in the videos, particularly by the females considering that they tend to use a rapport style in their communication. However, I do expect that some people are not at all concerned with how they appear to others, so a complete lack of euphemistic language would not be too difficult to imagine, especially when their comfort with the bloggers’ unpleasant terms is reinforced by their viewers that share their opinion.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenge is in determining what a euphemism is, and what is not. Keyes’ article illustrated the sheer amount of euphemisms that are being used, Allan and Burridge, as well as McGlone, Beck and Pfiester demonstrated how some euphemistic terms might themselves become the new taboo term. While I consider myself to be fairly familiar with euphemisms these articles show that euphemisms constitute a vast field and often have phrases or words that fall out of the category. Therefore I choose
to find a list that lists common types of euphemisms. While it does not give me all the euphemistic terms, the list helps me to identify and categorize euphemisms. Since euphemisms are so many and come in different variations, it seemed sensible to have an abstract list rather than a definitive one.
3. The Study

The purpose of this study is to examine whether there is any correlation between the use of euphemisms and gender and between women who are responsible for bringing up children and those who are not. Three groups of speakers were compared in this study: Men, women without children and women with children. Two individuals represented each group. Since it is generally accepted that women are more inclined to use politeness strategies in conversation, it seems logical to guess that women might be more likely to use euphemisms in their speech. My prediction is that mothers will have the highest use of euphemisms of all groups, since the pressure to use euphemisms might be greater if you are taking care of young children. I initially examined several video blogs where the subjects were talking freely to the camera about various topics. All subjects were from North America. It was rather difficult to find all six subjects on YouTube, finding men around the age of 20-30 in North America was surprisingly difficult. I made an effort to find videos where the subjects are talking about similar topics. This was not possible due to difficulties presented when locating subjects. The research methodology will be described below.

3.1 Subjects

There were six subjects in total in this study. Two men, two childless women and two mothers. The age range of the subjects was from 24 to 29 years old. In order to try to minimize the possible effect that cultural differences might have on euphemistic use, I chose subjects that were all from North America and tried to make sure that they were all within ten years of each other’s age. Two of the subjects were of Asian-American descent, three were of African-American descent and one was Hispanic. Four of the subjects were heterosexual while two identified as homosexual. The subjects were found on YouTube, using the keyword ‘vlogs’, which is a compound for video blog, to find suitable videos.

3.2. Method of Observation

Materials used were a computer, a pen and paper. For every subject that I was looking at I found videos that were roughly twenty minutes, give or take a few minutes, in length, which in total was roughly 120 minutes of footage. While watching the videos I wrote
down all possible euphemisms and all instances where euphemisms could be used but were not (mostly words like *fuck*, *shit* and their varieties.) Once the list of words had been compiled I searched the internet in an effort to find out whether a certain phrase was or was not a euphemism. In order to make the process easier I compiled material to help me with coding. I searched the internet for some useful lists to help me with my coding. On Slate’s website (Kirk, 2013) there is an article where the author used a *Facebook* developer tool to find out what the most used swear words are. The article is particularly useful because it not only counts the swear words but also puts them in neat smaller categories, such as top swear words by age group, location, gender and so on. The specific list I chose was the top swear words in the United States and chose to only take into account the top ten swear words as opposed to the twenty that Slate listed. The reason why I chose words from United States was simply because the subjects I am looking at are from the country, and choosing ten swear words rather than twenty was a decision based on the fact that I did not think many of the subjects would use the second half of the twenty most used swear words. In order to know what to look for in regards to euphemistic use, I found a list that describes different kind of euphemisms and used it as a reference in order to determine whether a specific word or phrase was a euphemism or not (Nichol, 2011). This list was posted on the Daily Writing Tips website.

### 3.3 Coding

As I listened to the video blogs I had these two lists at hand which aided me in trying to spot the use and lack of euphemisms. The list of commonly used swear words is as following:

1. Shit
2. Fuck
3. Damn
4. Bitch
5. Crap
6. Piss
7. Dick
1. Abstraction: Some euphemisms serve to distance people from unpleasant or embarrassing truths, as when we say that a dead person passed away or a celebrity who has canceled an appearance is suffering from exhaustion.

2. Indirection: A euphemism may replace an explicit description of an action, as when people speak of going to the bathroom or of others sleeping together.

3. Litotes: Sometimes, euphemism occurs in the form of this rhetorical device in which the gravity or force of an idea is softened or minimized by a double negative, as in the reference to someone as being not unattractive.

4. Mispronunciation: Alteration of pronunciation is a form of euphemism, as when we say frigging or shoot, or jeez or cripes, so as not to offend people by using profanity (figurative or literal). These types of euphemisms, involving rhyme, alliteration, or shortening, are also called minced oaths.

5. Modification: A bluntly offensive noun can be transformed into a euphemism by converting it to an adjective, as in saying someone has socialist leanings rather than labeling them a socialist outright.

6. Personification: One form of euphemism is when things that some people prefer not to mention candidly, such as genitals, are assigned personal names. (I will go beyond euphemism and let readers think of examples on their own.)

7. Slang: Much of slang, derived to produce a vocabulary exclusive to a social group, is euphemism, as in the use of joint for marijuana (itself a slang term, derived from the Spanish names Mary and Juana — closely related to “Mary Jane,” yet another euphemism).

(Nichol, 2011)
So for instance, when one of the subjects said to her husband that their daughter had “left a little gift”, instead of saying that she had pooped, I counted it as the second type of euphemism, indirection, because she is avoiding the literal meaning with a euphemism. In the same video the subject said “holy cow” in lieu of “holy Christ,” and since the latter words both start with a similar sound this phrase is a kind of mispronunciation.

One of the main problems I faced was the classification of some words/phrases. Sometimes the way a word would be used would make it sound like a euphemism for something more shameful, but the word itself was not necessarily a euphemism. For instance, in one of the videos one of the mother’s was talking about disciplining her child. When she was talking about how she had to be with the child she continually used the word “firm.” To me as a listener it sounded as if she meant that she had discipline that child, since it was not behaving, and the use of firm rather than harsh or strict seemed like someone using a softer expression. It could be that the subject does not like to use words like “strict” or “harsh”, having her own preference for the words, but it might very well be that I find those words offensive, and I see the use of firm being euphemistic while the subject might just prefer that word choice to others.

Another instance where the classification of words was difficult was when one of the subjects used the word “bum”. To me it sounds like a euphemism for butt, a nicer word that is foreign to me (since I am more accustomed to the American English rather than the British English), but when I look up the word bum in the Oxford dictionary it is listed as informal, or slang in other words. The problem here is that there might be two different meanings depending on location, and the question of whether the subject meant it as slang or as a euphemism, I cannot tell.

While the coding helps with categorizing whether a word or a phrase counts as a euphemism or not, there is room for both error as well as personal judgment that someone might find themselves disagreeing with. With the help of the lists I have presented and with my knowledge of General American English I will be doing my best in identifying euphemistic words and phrases.

3.4 Results

The results were very straightforward. In total the subjects used euphemistic phrases eighteen times and non-euphemistic 72 times. Out of the non-euphemistic words the word ‘fuck’ and its variations appeared 47 times, the word ‘shit’ 21 times, the word ‘damn’
three times and the word ‘bitch’ once. While at first it might seem like fuck and its variations are far more common than euphemistic phrases it is worth noting that 26 of those 47 come from a single person. Interestingly enough, the person that cursed the most throughout the videos was a woman, contrary to my expectations. However she is the odd one out in this case seeing as only one other woman used profanity, but she only did it twice. The other two women, both of whom were mothers, did not curse at all. They accounted for ten out of eighteen euphemisms. The men both used words like fuck and its variations, as well as shit, without much worry. However, one of them did replace variations of fuck with words like ‘freaking’, friggin’ and other forms of euphemistic mispronunciations.

Below is a table that illustrates the length, of the videos, the amount of euphemisms used and the amount of swear words found. The first two YouTube channels belong to mothers, the second is a childless woman, the third channel that appears twice in the table is a childless woman’s channel but the videos often have both her and her boyfriend which I used in this study and the last channel is an African American childless man.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Euphemisms</th>
<th>Swear Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ItsJudysLife FMo</td>
<td>19:02</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CrazyLightSkinGirl FMo</td>
<td>28:31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platinum D F</td>
<td>21:53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GeovannaAntoinette (Geovanna) F</td>
<td>16:25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GeovannaAntoinette (Bart) M</td>
<td>16:25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corey Pope M</td>
<td>20:04</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FMo stands for female mother, f for female and M for mae. ItsJudysLife had five euphemisms and no swear words. CrazyLightSkinGirl has a total of six euphemisms and zero swear words. Platinum D used no euphemisms, but did use two swear words. GeovannaAntoinette (F) used only one euphemism while using swear words for a total of
34 times. Her companion in the videos, Bart, had seven instances of euphemisms and fifteen swear words. Corey Pope used no euphemisms and a total of twenty swear words. There were two instances of no swear words being used and two instances where euphemisms were not used at all.
4. Discussion

The results support the idea that mothers are more likely to use euphemisms, after all they account for over half of the euphemisms used. It is worth noting that in the video blogs that I watched, the mothers were often, but not always, around their children, which might be a factor in how they choose their language. If that is the case, it would only strengthen the notion that having children affects the way you speak. However, it is worth noting that one of the subjects, Judy, did use euphemistic phrases such as “holy cow” even though the only person present was her husband. However, we cannot forget that even if she is alone with her husband, she is filming a video blog which she eventually shared with the world. Considering the fact that her video channel is focused on both the family aspects of her life, as well as her love for makeup, we can expect that a large majority of her viewers are female. Since Palomares (2008) found out that women tend to speak differently when they are under the impression that they are talking to another woman, it would not be surprising if the use of euphemisms in the context of ‘mommy-channels’ is partially related to that fact.

One of the more interesting trends that I noticed was the high rate of euphemisms between the Asian-Americans. One of them was a mother of three and the other was a man. Together they account for twelve out of eighteen euphemisms used. One of the reasons for this could be that in some Asian cultures, a person represents their group rather than just themselves. I once read an advice column where a Chinese woman was dealing with a politeness crisis. She had overheard her stepfather making fun of her and her husband at a dinner party. Even though the guests laughed quietly or stayed quiet over all, the woman felt that everyone present at the party was an offender. The notion of politeness might be similar, that is politeness being a face-saving strategy, but the concept of face might be different since people seem to be seen more as a part of a group rather than individuals when they take action. Whether or not this is the reason for the use of euphemisms, it is something worth considering.

The Asian-American man, Bart, was speaking alongside his girlfriend, Geovanna, who is Hispanic. Even though he used a significant number of euphemisms, he also used swear words for a total of fifteen times. One of the reasons why this might possibly be is the fact that his girlfriend, who had the most swear words in total, was sitting next to him. Most who have been in a relationship know that we tend to pick up on our significant
other’s behavior over time, which might be the reason why he was more than ready to participate in swearing. It is noteworthy however that the second video that I watched with this couple involved them arguing, although it seemed fairly lighthearted, and that is where he started to deploy the euphemistic phrases. Instead of explaining his use of swear words, this might explain why he used so many euphemistic phrasings. In that video his girlfriend is complaining that he had not been compassionate enough when she was dealing with a health issue. Due to the lighthearted argument the boyfriend might have used euphemistic language in an effort to either avoid offending his girlfriend further or perhaps he was compelled to use more polite language because he did not want to be or appear disrespectful. Considering that all of the euphemisms he had used were in the second video it seems likely that it was a face-saving action.

The second male that I examined, an African American using the name Corey, was diligent in his use of swear words, having twenty instances in the span of twenty minutes. However his use of swear words might be a result of his choice of topic. His video, titled *Black Men are in Danger*, he is ranting about the place of black people in America. Since this is a controversial topic it would come as no surprise that his use of swear words is a result of the topic, but for the most part of the video he is fairly calm despite talking about sensitive issues, so even if some of them were said in the heat of the moment he certainly did not seem to have any second thoughts about calmly using the swear words. On a similar note, my first instinct when thinking about someone talking about a heated subject is that they will use euphemisms to mask the difficulty of the situation, but this is not the case in this video. In his video I encountered the word ‘nigga’ quite a few times and at first I was uncertain of whether this was impolite, but considering that it is used freely between those of African American descent in some parts of the world it seemed natural to assume that this would not qualify as swearing.

The last two videos, one from an African-American mother, Rochelle, and the other from a childless African American woman, Platinum D, were very straightforward. The closest Rochelle got to swearing was by saying ‘grown-ass adult’ but considering that it was not meant as an insult and the fact that ass is not on the list of swear words it seemed trivial to count it as one. Most of the euphemisms she used were in the presence of her daughter. One of the euphemisms she used was the word ‘cray. I consider ‘cray’ to be a mispronunciation of the word crazy. Having heard my younger sister use it, I know that it is used to poke good-hearted fun at someone that is doing something crazy,
adventurous or silly. Deciding whether it was a euphemism or not took a while to figure out but considering the usage I have heard of it, it definitely could qualify as a euphemism, at least in some uses of the word. As for Platinum D, she only had two instances of swear word usage and no euphemisms. It is worth noting that in one instance she was talking about people she knew and the word ‘bitch’ slipped out. She immediately apologized and switched to a less offensive noun before she continued to speak. This self-censoring, especially when talking about acquaintances, reinforces the notion that women tend to aim for a rapport style. After all, I would not have expected her to apologize and correct herself if she was just talking about some random people that she did not know.

The results contradict McGlone and Batchelor’s (2003) findings that indicated that there was no difference in the use of euphemisms between genders, but it should be considered that their study was performed under completely different circumstances and it is natural that different circumstances call forth different reactions. An example of this would be the argument between Bart and Geovanna, where Bart ceased his use of swear words in favor of mispronunciations. In the other video where he is not arguing with her, he uses swear words more freely indicating that the use of euphemisms, much like the use of politeness, depends on the situation. Considering the evidence gathered in this small study, it would be well worth the time to delve deeper into how our language changes when we have children as well as studying the use of euphemisms between different ethnicities. It would also be a worthy endeavor to study how the topics influence the way we speak.
5. Conclusion

The results of this study have reinforced the notion that gender and parenthood might indeed have some influence over the use of euphemisms. Both mothers in this study used less profanity and more euphemisms. This contradicts the indications of McGlone and Batchelor’s 2003 study, however it is useful to remember that both studies made use of different materials which might very well produce different results. Another interesting result was in the matter of the Asian American male. While he did have a higher instance of euphemisms than everyone in total, it seems that the circumstances (lighthearted argument with his girlfriend) might have encouraged his use of euphemisms. This indicator shows promise for a further study into the use of euphemisms in the context of saving-face, as well as being a sign that there are many different variable that influence how we behave and how many euphemisms we use.

There are a few limitations to this study. First of all this study was performed by finding videos on YouTube with different subjects from the same continent. Even though I managed to successfully find enough subjects, it was clear upon watching the videos that these people, while being from the same continent, were from very different places. It is a known fact that geolocation has an effect on how we talk and it is certainly expected that this would influence the way the subjects talk. Another limitation is the matter of ethnicity. The subjects are somewhat diverse ethnically and as with geolocation, ethnicity can certainly affect the way we speak. However, despite these limitations it still seems that the results reinforce the idea that gender/parenthood are variables that affect the use of euphemisms.

This study is small and only begins to the scratch the surface of correlation between gender/parenthood and euphemisms. It is too small to carry much weight but the results should encourage more research to be done into this subject matter. This kind of study would benefit from being performed in a community, as to minimize the effect of geolocation variables. One of the biggest problems that a larger study could include though is the Observer’s paradox. This study used videos that had already been posted onto the internet, so the subjects did not worry about their language for the sake of the observer of the study, but might have self-censored for the sake of their viewers. Even if this is the case, the higher rate of euphemisms amongst the mothers and their near absence
with the other subjects, suggests that self-restraint is not necessarily the default communication method in these videos.
Works Cited


Travis, J. [itsJudysLife]. (2014, November 2). *What he did was NOT Acceptable!* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTJBLDtIxpk
