

Aina Saarikallio

Gender on YouTube: A Comparison of Comments to Male and Female Presenters

Aina Saarikallio
Pro gradu-avhandling i engelska
språket och litteraturen
Handledare: Brita Wårvik
Fakulteten för humaniora,
psykologi och teologi
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Ämne: Engelska språket och litteraturen	
Författare: Aina Saarikallio	
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Handledare: Brita Wårvik	Handledare:
<p>The focus of this thesis is on language and gender in YouTube comments. The purpose of the study is to compare attitudes towards female and male presenters of TED Talks. The research question is:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Does gender have an effect on how TED presenters are received on YouTube, and if so, what are the differences in comments to male and female speakers?</p> <p>The data consists of 180 comments on YouTube videos of three female and three male presenters, to which two separate methods are applied. The first method divides the data into supportive, critical, neutral or irrelevant categories, and reviews the topic of the comments. The second method is applied to a subset of the data and compares the politeness strategies used when addressing male and female presenters.</p> <p>In the comparative study it was found that women received more supportive comments than men, and overall, men received more critical comments than women, but criticism concerning the speaker personally was evenly divided between the genders. Women received more positive politeness than men, and men received more violations of positive politeness.</p> <p>The findings revealed both consistencies and inconsistencies with earlier studies. The framework of politeness strategies could be applied to a larger data in order to receive more reliable results. The presentation topics should be considered carefully in order to create a comparison from which conclusions can be drawn on the basis of gender.</p>	
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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2	Theoretical background.....	5
2.1	Gender and society.....	5
2.1.1	Language and gender	7
2.1.2	The gender of the interlocutor	10
2.2	Politeness, impoliteness and face	12
2.2.1	Politeness according to Brown and Levinson	12
2.2.2	Impoliteness	14
2.2.3	Politeness and gender	15
2.2.4	Compliments	16
2.3	Computer-mediated communication	17
2.3.1	Behavior in computer-mediated communication	18
2.3.2	Trolling.....	18
2.3.3	Flaming	19
2.3.4	Spamming.....	19
2.3.5	YouTube.....	19
2.3.6	Politeness and gender in computer-mediated communication	21
2.3.6.1	Objectification in computer-mediated communication	24
2.3.6.2	Self-disclosure.....	25
3	Material and methods.....	26
3.1	Material	26
3.2	Methodology	30
3.2.1	Types of comments	30
3.2.2	Politeness analysis.....	35
4	Results.....	37
4.1	Types of comments	37
4.1.1	Support	38
4.1.2	Criticism.....	39
4.1.3	Neutral and irrelevant comments	43
4.2	Politeness framework	43
4.2.1	Expressions of positive politeness.....	43
4.2.2	Expressions of negative politeness.....	46
4.2.3	Violations of positive politeness	46
4.2.4	Violations of negative politeness	49
4.2.5	Not applicable comments	49

5	Discussion	51
6	Conclusion.....	56
7	Swedish summary	60
7.1	YouTube ur ett genusperspektiv: En jämförelse av kommentarer till kvinnliga och manliga presentatörer på TED Talks.....	60
8	References	64
8.1	Primary sources	64
8.2	Secondary sources.....	64

1. Introduction

There are general notions about how men and women should behave, and stereotypes are often so deeply rooted in society, that it may be difficult to recognize them as such. Norms have an impact on the way men and women behave, but norms may also influence attitudes and behavior towards either gender. A discussion of gender and power relations have in recent years re-emerged, and this thesis takes part of the dialogue concerning these topical issues.

This thesis is oriented towards language and gender combined with the field of computer-mediated communication. The aim of the study is to compare and point out possible differences in comments to male and female TED speakers and discuss underlying reasoning to how the speakers are received. In addition, the aim is to discuss in what degree gender is a factor in the YouTube comments to TED speakers. The research question for this thesis is:

Does gender have an effect on how TED presenters are received on Youtube, and if so, what are the differences in comments to male and female speakers?

A comparison of comments to male and female presenters on TED Talks is conducted, and factors which are considered in the comments are supportiveness and critique, as well as different topics covered. In addition, the purpose of the study is to compare the politeness strategies used when addressing men and women as presenters.

The data consists of comments posted on the YouTube videos of TED Talks presented by three women and three men. A categorization where the comments are labeled as supportive, critical, neutral, or irrelevant is made. In addition, the comments are divided on the basis of their topic, more specifically, whether they focus on the contents of the presentation or the presenter. After the categorization of different types of comments, an analysis of politeness strategies is applied to a subset of the data.

The theoretical background includes earlier research in the fields of gender studies, language and gender, behavior on the Internet, and a narrower field of pragmatics, politeness. York (2011) discusses gender norms and power relations in society, which build the basis for this study. The premise is that men and women are not equal, and that the structure in which the inequality is rooted is an extremely complex one.

The presentation of earlier studies in the field of language and gender gives an overall image of the kind of differences there are in the language use of men and women. It also points out issues that have been in focus in research and which features have been given less attention. Jennifer Coates (2004) and Janet Holmes (1998) are two authors whose works and findings will be presented. Many of the earlier studies have focused on differences in the language use of men and women, and the motivation and the aims of interacting in different ways. Several studies imply that the gender of the interlocutor has an impact on the way one communicates, and these findings are quite relevant for this thesis study. In addition, the views of Sara Mills (2003) provide fresh perspectives and criticism on some issues in earlier findings.

Stereotypes related to gender norms in society are related to both the language use *of* men and women, as well as the attitudes and language use *towards* the different genders. The latter perspective is the one in focus in this thesis, as the comments to different presenters are studied. Sometimes there can be a relation between these two perspectives, and thus earlier studies with both perspectives will be introduced in the theoretical background. The language use towards men and women has not been studied as widely as the language use of the genders, which is one of several justifications for this study.

David Crystal's (2001) work provides a thorough introduction as well as a deeper understanding of language use and different phenomena on the Internet. Susan Herring's (2003, 2012, 2013, 2018) wide involvement in research in computer-mediated communication offers an insight of several perspectives in the field, and perhaps most importantly, gender.

The use of different kinds of polite language is often a part of one's everyday communications. The politeness strategies presented in this thesis reveal a more complex side of these features. Politeness and impoliteness have been studied by several authors, and there are various different views that could be applied to this thesis. Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1987) provide an extensive theory of politeness, and the framework applied in this thesis study is based on the model developed by them. The parts of Brown and Levinson's theory that are essential to this study will be introduced in detail. These include different politeness strategies, especially positive and negative politeness and violations of them. In addition, Brown's research on politeness and gender will be introduced.

Herring and Kim (2018) describe earlier research in computer-mediated communication, and explain that Brown and Levinson's framework has been applied to other studies in the field, for instance discussion forums, computer bulletin boards, email communities and social media. However, studies that have applied their framework to comment sections are relatively few. This observation is quite recent and contributes to the topicality and justifications for this thesis.

As mentioned, many of the earlier studies on language and gender have focused on the way men and women speak. Squires (2016) notes that gender has received attention in earlier studies on computer-mediated communication, but mostly in discourse-analytic or pragmatic frameworks, and Jones (2016) describes the strong interest in detecting gender or other latent variables in online environments. Many studies point out that men and women use language differently online (Danet & Herring, 2003), which indicates that online environments and anonymity do not necessarily change one's behavior. Even though one can make assumptions about gender and other sociolinguistic factors based on the language that is used, Cutler (2016) reminds that especially on YouTube it is not possible to ascertain factors such as gender, nationality, ethnicity or age of a person who posts a comment, because people may not represent themselves truthfully on the platform. The study conducted in this thesis has a different approach to gender and communication online, because it is the gender of the addressee that is considered as a possible factor to impact the language use of the commenters.

YouTube is a website commonly used for sharing and viewing videos online, and it is overall one of the most popular social media platforms (Johansson, 2017). In addition to user-generated contents, which YouTube is probably best known for, one can find professionally produced videos, such as music videos and news. According to Johansson (2017), a large part of YouTube, such as its videos and comment sections, offer important research topics in the field of pragmatics. Even so, the contents of YouTube have so far not been a frequently seen subject of study in pragmatics compared to other social media platforms, which have been studied a bit more. YouTube thus provides this thesis with suitable material to study. As a platform for different kinds of communication, it is logical that YouTube has developed guidelines for appropriate behavior. Whether or not these guidelines are followed, and how the interaction is monitored, are questions which will be discussed in more detail further on in the thesis.

Wotanis and McMillan (2014) study gender on YouTube in the article titled “Performing gender on YouTube”. Their framework is applied to this study.

In addition to the framework of Wotanis and McMillan, another framework by Kim and Herring (2018) presented in their article titled “Is politeness catalytic and contagious? Effects on participation in online news discussions” is applied to the data in this thesis. Both studies and their frameworks are described in detail further on in the thesis.

The framework by Kim and Herring (2018) is based on Brown and Levinson’s linguistic theory of positive politeness and negative politeness. Kim and Herring motivate the application of this framework to a study on online interaction:

“[Brown & Levinson’s] theory is well suited to research on computer-mediated communication (CMC), given that people perform face-work with considerable frequency in online environments, as they do in face-to-face settings” (2018:1956).

Kim and Herring also note that the politeness theory developed by Brown and Levinson has been applied in numerous CMC studies, but only a few studies have applied the framework to comment sections.

Other studies on gender in online environments, even gender on YouTube, have been conducted, but to my knowledge there are no studies using the data that will be used in this study. The comments may give us insight of how male and female speakers are received in an online environment, but in the professional context of TED Talks.

There are some restrictions to the study, and they are related to the material. Gender is the main focus of the study, but there are other factors which may impact the results, and these factors have to be considered. The main restriction concerns the presentation topics, which are in direct relation to the reaction of the participants in the comment thread. Drawing conclusions based on gender is complicated by other factors, and these issues are considered thoroughly in the discussion.

The thesis is organized and structured in the following way. The theoretical background presents earlier studies which are relevant to this thesis and which support the study and a discussion of findings. An introduction of the material and the methods used then follows. The collection of data and the methodology are described in detail in the chapter of material and methods. After that chapter, the results of the study are presented. The

chapter of results is followed by a discussion where possible parallels or distinctions between earlier findings and the ones of this study are observed, and then some final conclusions are made.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Gender and society

A definition of the term *gender* ought to be given before diving into different aspects of language and gender. Gender usually refers to either the female or male identity of a person, although there are exceptions to the binary view of gender identity. Some of these exceptions are agender and gender-fluid, which are defined as not identifying with any of the gender binaries, and identifying as female or male or something in between, depending on the day. Bing and Bergvall mention hermaphrodites, transsexual, transgender and androgyne identities (cited in Mills, 2003). Information and discussion about the complexity of gender identities is continually increasing and thereby understanding of gender increases, but also new issues in research arise.

For the current thesis, the male and female genders are in focus. Sex refers to the physical aspects of a person, whereas gender involves a lot more. According to Talbot (1998), sex is all about hormones, genes and gonads, and she further explains the concepts of sex and gender:

[...] what have been called sex-exclusive and sex-preferential differentiations are in fact ways of doing gender. They are part of behaving as ‘proper’ men and women in particular cultures. If they were genuinely matters of biological sex, they would not display the extraordinary diversity that they do. They would be the same everywhere. (Talbot, 1998:7)

Gender is what people identify with on a personal level, and it is shaped from the inside, as a part of one’s identity. Often the social and cultural environment one lives in has a strong impact on how people express their gender. Herring and Kapidzic (2015) study teenagers’ self-presentation on social media and focus in the research on gender differences. They note that it can be difficult to determine people’s biological sex or gender based on their online presentation. In addition, Herring and Kapidzic describe the complexity of the terms: “gender and sex exist along a continuum, and intermediate realizations of both are possible” (2015:2). Gender in online environments is relevant for the current thesis, but the perspective on gender is a bit different. It is the aspect of TED speakers’ genders that will be considered, and the speakers are visibly identifiable in the

YouTube video clips. They are identified as either men or women for the purpose of comparing the comments they receive, although one can still not claim to know how the speakers identify themselves.

Gender roles are shaped by culture and society, and they involve different norms for men and women. These roles involve certain unwritten rules and expectations for how the different genders should behave. What is usually seen as feminine or masculine in a culture may transform and fluctuate with time, but certain stereotypical qualities that are viewed as belonging to either the female or male gender change quite slowly.

York (2011) discusses the masculine and feminine gender roles in a patriarchal society. She describes the socialization of men and women from childhood, and how there are different expectations of girls and boys: girls are socialized to be submissive, cooperative and docile, as well as value relationships and consequently also emotions. Boys, on the other hand, are socialized to value thinking and performance and are supported to prefer competitive and aggressive behavior. As a product of the socialization men and women *do* or *perform* gender, in other words, respond to the expected gender role assigned to them. Any divergent behavior can trigger harsh judgement and exclusion. For instance, if women express their sexuality openly or initiate sexual interactions, they may attract certain labels, such as being called a whore. Another example that York mentions is that when women behave aggressively in a manner which would be acceptable for men, women might be called bitches. But men are punished too for acting contrary to what is expected from them, they may be labelled as weak and feminine and their sexuality may be questioned (York, 2011).

York describes the patriarchy as a male-dominated, male-identified and male-centered society. Male is *the normal* and female is *the other*. The socialization of men and women often happens unconsciously, but in some cases the teaching of gender roles can be intentional as well. However, York refers to Johnson in the description of maintaining a patriarchy, and states that it is not merely supported by vicious individuals but instead it is deeply rooted, and a widely accepted part of the institutions in a society (Johnson, 1997 cited in York, 2011).

Wareing (2004) discusses power relations and sexism in society, and for instance whether or not sexist language against men has the same effect as it has when used against women. She argues that the issue is debatable because men still hold more power in society than

women do. She describes how power and inequality are visible in the high-status occupations that are more often held by men; there are for instance more male politicians, judges, company directors, and surgeons, and men own more property and earn more money than women do (Wareing, 2004).

Objectification of people is often related to attempts to misuse or gain power. Both men and women can be objectified, but similarly to the use of sexist language, the impact is not necessarily the same when a woman is objectified by a man, and vice versa. Objectification, especially in online environments, will be discussed in more detail in the chapter of computer-mediated communication.

Wotanis and McMillan (2014) note in their study of gender on YouTube that the imbalance of men and women in leading positions in society is visible on YouTube as well. According to statistics from 2012, only 18 percent of the top most-subscribed channels feature females, and the authors state that such “consistent imbalances suggest widespread issues” (2014:924). In addition to these statistics, the study conducted by Wotanis and McMillan indicate that YouTube is a more hostile environment for women than for men, which supports their statement about widespread issues.

2.1.1 Language and gender

There are various stereotypes revolving around language and gender, and many of the features that are believed to belong to either the language of women or the language of men have been the subject of linguistic studies.

For the purpose of comparing the language use of the genders, the labels *women’s language* and *men’s language* will be used. Holmes (1998) states that there are several wide-spread beliefs about how women and men use language. One of these beliefs is that women speak a lot more than men do, and this idea exists in various different cultures, though it does not necessarily portray the reality. This interesting point prepares for one of Holmes’s questions: “Is it possible to formulate sociolinguistic universals or at least identify universal tendencies relating to women’s talk?” (1998: 461) There is no direct answer to this question, but Holmes builds on some studies in the field and formulates several generalizations. She claims for instance that “Women and men develop different patterns of language use”, and explains that there are large numbers of linguistic studies that justify this statement. The statement reflects the social and cultural impact on people’s language use instead of claiming that there are permanent differences from the

beginning. It is an initial and quite general statement to describe the overall idea of differences in language use, but it is followed by several other generalizations. The statement below is a bit more detailed and refers to somewhat more specific ways of communicating:

Women tend to interact in ways which will maintain and increase solidarity, while (especially in formal contexts) men tend to interact in ways which will maintain and increase their power and status (Holmes, 1998:472).

At the end of her paper, Holmes discusses the potential reasons to these widely accepted differences between women's and men's language use. She presents three explanations to the "potential sociolinguistic universal tendencies" (1998:476) she identifies for men and women in her article. The potential explanations are based on cultural factors including different patterns of socialization, power and status, and especially the subordinate status of women, and lastly biological factors.

The first explanation is based on the view that men and women are socialized differently from the very beginning as girls and boys. Holmes points out the positive and the negative aspects in this view:

It is a convincing account of *how* females and males develop different patterns of interaction, but it does not explain *why* the socialisation of women leads them to behave in supportive, affiliative, context-sensitive ways which focus on maintaining and enhancing solidarity, while that of men leads to competitive, unsupportive verbal behavior which makes few concessions to the addressee, and seems aimed at maintaining power and enhancing status. (1998:477)

The second explanation Holmes discusses is the power relations that men and women display. She states that in most speech communities men adopt a more dominant position in interactive situations, and women in turn adopt a subordinate one. This is because men more often hold the social and political power and are therefore in control, whereas women are not in control and have to be "supportive and non-aggressive and must be linguistically flexible in order to survive" (1998:477). This view could explain parts of the differences in language use, but similarly to the first explanation, it does not account for why these power relations are divided as they are. The third explanation is based on biology, and is quite controversial in its main reasoning. Holmes introduces an argument by Chambers, that females have "an innate neurological advantage" (1998:478), which is based on brain lateralization differences, and which gives females a head-start in developing their verbal skills (Chambers, 1992 cited in Holmes, 1998). Holmes notes that

this particular difference is a rather small one, but it still might have some sort of an effect on the linguistic behavior. Based on this, one might question how the head-start in verbal skills for females agrees with their subordination, but Holmes suggests that it could be the subordinate position that induces the stronger development of verbal skills. As a conclusion Holmes argues that it is possible that all of the above mentioned explanations could have an impact on men's and women's language use, and the different patterns that studies have shown.

Holmes mentions a few features of which some are said to appear more frequently in women's language use, and some of them more frequently in men's language use (1998).

Hedges, or pragmatic particles as Holmes chooses to call them, are linguistic features, which a number of studies show are more often used by women than by men. Some examples are tag questions such as *isn't it* and *haven't you*, and other short phrases such as *you know*, *maybe* and *kind of*. Holmes makes the choice of calling them pragmatic particles instead of hedges because contrary to what some earlier studies have pointed out, they are not always used to signal uncertainty. Pragmatic particles can just as well function as signals of a friendly and informal concern for someone, or a shared feeling about something. In addition, tag questions are often applied at the end of a sentence to invite the interlocutor to join a conversation (Holmes, 1998). Therefore, it is important to look at the context of a studied feature before making conclusions. Holmes refers to a couple of her earlier studies which indicated that men actually used tag questions more often to signal uncertainty than women, and women used tags in equal amounts to signal uncertainty and friendliness or confidence.

Coates (2004) lists a few linguistic features that have been studied through a gender perspective. She points out that research on minimal responses seems to agree on the point that women use them more than men. Minimal responses are short conversational features such as *mhm*, *right*, *okay* etc. Coates also mentions a few studies on the use of questions in conversation, and notes how the studies show that women ask more questions than men do. However, she also points out that when the context has high status, men ask more questions than women.

In addition to the above mentioned features, Coates describes the different usages of directives and commands between men and women, and swearing and taboo language. She states that women tend to use mitigating directives, while men tend to use aggravating

directives more often. According to Coates, there are widespread expectations of men to swear and use taboo language more than women. Although some studies agree with this stereotype, Coates explains that “the stereotypes of the tough-talking male and the pure, never-swearing female are false” (2004:98).

2.1.2 The gender of the interlocutor

Coates (2004) presents studies on the language use in both same-sex groups and mixed groups. Various studies show that the gender of the interlocutor(s), not only the speaker, may have an impact on the language that is used, and the role one adopts in a conversation. She notes for instance that giving compliments varies depending on the genders of both the speaker and the addressee, and she refers to a corpus study by Holmes (1988 cited in Coates, 2004). In the study 51 percent of the compliments were given by a woman to another, while only 9 percent were given by a man to another. In contrast, 23,1 percent of the compliments were given by a man to a woman and 16,5 percent by a woman to a man. Gender seemed to have an impact on the topics of compliments as well.

Holmes (1998) points out that compliments can be experienced as face-threatening in certain situations, for instance when a compliment is given on someone’s possessions or appearance. She highlights that a compliment of this kind given from one man to another in American culture is rather unusual, and may quite likely be experienced as embarrassing and therefore face-threatening.

The use of taboo language and swearing is likely to change depending on which gender the interlocutor(s) belong to, according to Coates (2004). She describes her own study on narratives in everyday life, which shows that the use of taboo language in a group with men only was very common, and in a group of women taboo language was rare. Interestingly, the use of taboo language in mixed groups changes:

In mixed contexts, however, male and female speakers seem to accommodate to the perceived norms of the other gender: the narratives produced by male speakers in a mixed context contain far less taboo language than in a single-sex context, while the narratives produced by female speakers in a mixed setting contain far more (Coates, 2004:98).

Coates presents different studies on the use of interruptions *by* men and women, as well as the interruptions *of* men and women. As with many of the studies presented, the results are not always consistent, but some general similarities can be pointed out. Several studies show that men interrupt more than women do, and that they actually interrupt women more than other men. The same applies even when a woman is in a higher position than

the interlocutor; Coates mentions studies including doctor-patient discussions, where the norm would be that the doctor interrupts the patient more than the other way around; however, when the doctor was female and the patient male, the doctor was interrupted more than the patient. The same pattern was repeated in a study on a work place environment; even there a woman in a high-status position was more likely to be interrupted by a male subordinate than the male subordinate to be interrupted by the female superior. It seems that women also interrupt other women more than they do men, but not in as large a scale as men interrupting women (Coates, 2004).

The above mentioned features represent merely a few examples of what has been studied through a gender lens. Even though studies show certain tendencies in male and female language use, one should be careful with making generalizations and assumptions. In most cases the culture, context, and the relations between the people communicating have a significant impact on the kind of language that is used. Mills states that

[...] gender ought not to be seen as a factor which determines the production or interpretation of speech in any simple way. That is not to say that gender is not important, as hypothesised stereotypes of feminine and masculine behaviour obviously play a role in the production of what participants see as appropriate or inappropriate speech (2003:235).

She continues to explain that the decisions of behaving more or less according to hypothesized stereotypes are made strategically along the interaction, and various issues, other than gender, can have an impact on the behavior. Mills states that one can not assume that men and women speak in different ways, or that women speak and behave in powerless ways, and objects therefore to the early studies by Robin Lakoff, which describe women's language as powerless and subordinated and men's language as dominant. Additionally, Mills states that "gender is indeed something which participants perform and interpret in the context of hypothesised gendered stereotypes within a community of practice" (2003:235), and therefore it is important not only to study individual utterances, but to include the social context and interaction since these may very well reveal more information about the chosen behavior.

Mills (2003) describes Lakoff's feminist studies in the 1970's as an important part of a dialogue, where certain dominant and powerless language use was seen with a new perspective. The studies questioned the beliefs that interruptions and directness would be a natural part of male behavior and that submissive behavior would be a natural part of being a woman (Lakoff, 1975 cited in Mills, 2003). However, Mills mentions that the

studies focused on a stereotypical language use of white, middle-class Anglo-Americans. Therefore, any generalizations made about male and female language could be quite misleading.

Mills further explains the different views of how important it is to consider the impact of power relations in society, when language is studied. Some scholars seem to avoid considering the impact of status in language, but one should not assume that the society and relations between people are equal. And as mentioned, some language features have in some studies been assumed to stand for tentative language, although the actual function might be of a completely different character.

2.2 Politeness, impoliteness and face

2.2.1 Politeness according to Brown and Levinson

Brown and Levinson (B&L) describe positive politeness, negative politeness, and face as some of the key concepts in their politeness theory. They define negative face as “the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others” and positive face as “the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others” (1987:62). Their view here is precisely that there are universal wants among people, and that these wants are detached from for instance culture.

As the concept of face is divided into positive and negative types, so is politeness. As described above, positive face refers to the want of a person that his/her wants be desirable to some other people as well, and thus positive politeness is an act that supports the positive face of the interlocutor by for instance indicating mutual wants. Negative politeness is perhaps a bit more complicated. Negative face involves the want to maintain self-determination and personal territory and negative politeness is the act of supporting the interlocutor’s negative face, but only partially. At the core of negative politeness is the avoidance of any possible conflict or intervening with the interlocutor’s negative face, as well as keeping one’s own wants hidden, and only revealed indirectly.

B&L introduce fifteen strategies for positive politeness. The strategies in themselves include different ways of executing a strategy. Strategies for positive politeness are for instance to attend to the addressee’s interests and needs, seeking common ground and agreement, joking, and expressing sympathy and cooperation. B&L introduce ten strategies for on-record negative politeness, as well as fifteen more for off-record actions. On-record strategies are often characterized as being direct, but also conventionally

indirect, whereas off-record strategies are always indirect. Some strategies for on-record negative politeness include using questions and hedges, being pessimistic, minimizing the imposition, giving deference and impersonalizing speaker and addressee. Off-record strategies include being ambiguous, over-generalizing, giving hints and association clues, using metaphors and rhetorical questions, being ironic and using contradictions. The strategies are complex and the theoretical process of how one chooses to use a specific strategy is unfolded in detail by B&L (1987).

After defining face, rationality and different types of politeness, and describing the assumed universality of these concepts, B&L introduce face-threatening acts. They use the term *intrinsic face-threatening act*, since certain acts will “by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker” (1987:65). B&L make two types of distinctions to the concept. First, they distinguish between threatening positive and negative face, and secondly, they distinguish between threatening the addressee’s and speaker’s face. In addition to these distinctions B&L present several different strategies for threatening positive and negative face, and they also note that certain acts intrinsically threaten both faces. There are different strategies for threatening the addressee’s and the speaker’s face as well, but they are less relevant for the current study.

Some acts that threaten positive face are for instance disagreement, expression of disapproval, criticism, insults and irreverence towards the addressee. Some acts that threaten negative face are acts that put pressure on the addressee such as orders, requests and advice. Additionally, threats, warnings and expression of strong, often negative emotions threaten the addressee’s negative face. In the lastly mentioned the positive face may also be threatened (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

B&L’s (1987) definition of face is often brought up by scholars as they discuss the phenomena of politeness, impoliteness or face; for instance Culpeper (2011) compares B&L’s and Goffman’s (1967) views on the term. Commonly, the notion of face might be connected with the concept of losing face, especially in Chinese culture, in other words to lose gained respect or to be profoundly humiliated. B&L make the same connection, and note that their idea of the concept has also been inspired by Goffman’s (1967) notions around the concept. B&L underline that people in general cooperate in maintaining each others’ faces, because through helping someone keep their face, one is more likely to keep their own face. B&L describe the term as “basic wants, which every member knows every

other member desires, and which in general it is in the interests of every member to partially satisfy.”(1987:62)

Culpeper (2011) questions the view of B&L and their portrayal of face as universally generalized wants of individuals. He claims that their definition is in some senses simplified. For instance, in his comparison of Goffman’s and B&L’s views of face, he notes that B&L do not incorporate reflections of one’s own face to how one’s face is perceived by others. Goffman, on the contrary, includes these reflections to other people’s views on one’s face in his definition.

2.2.2 Impoliteness

There is no universal definition of the concept of impoliteness. One of the reasons, according to Culpeper (2011), is that determining something as impolite usually depends on the situation. Certain behaviors are categorized as impolite more often than others, but even then the behavior can be interpreted in various ways by different people.

Culpeper introduces a number of definitions of *impoliteness* and finishes with an updated definition of his own. Culpeper notes that the definitions contain differences, but most of them seem to include two common features; the mention of *face* and *intentionality* (Culpeper, 2011). Culpeper presents a definition of impoliteness he has used earlier:

Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2) (Culpeper, 2011:23).

But he notes that his own definitions of the term have evolved during his work in linguistics and he therefore presents another definition, which just by the length of it indicates the complexity of the term.

Impoliteness is a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and /or beliefs about social organisation, including, in particular, how one person’s or a group’s identities are mediated by others in interaction. Situated behaviours are viewed negatively – considered ‘impolite’ – when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be. Such behaviours always have or are presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, that is, they cause or are presumed to cause offence. Various factors can exacerbate how offensive an impolite behaviour is taken to be, including for example whether one understands a behaviour to be strongly intentional or not (Culpeper, 2011:23).

The concept of face is, as mentioned, a relevant part of defining impoliteness as a phenomenon, but as Culpeper notes, the concept of face is controversial and there is not one comprehensive definition to it. This increases the difficulties in defining the term impoliteness. Face could be described as one's self image in relation to how one is perceived by others. Culpeper explains that the concept is often in some sort of relation to for instance reputation, self-esteem and prestige. The definitions of face seem to differ on the point of how much of the concept is defined by an individual view of one's own face and how much of the concept is defined by reflections of one's face in relation to how it is perceived by others.

2.2.3 Politeness and gender

As might have become clear, there are various stereotypes and beliefs about the behavior of men and women. Sometimes there might be some sort of truth to the beliefs, other times they could not be further away from reality. Coates (2004) claims that it is part of folklinguistics that women are more polite than men, and that this belief has long been verified by linguistic researchers. Next some research around politeness and gender will be discussed.

Brown (1998) describes her study on politeness and gender in the article "How and why are women more polite", which is a study conducted in a Mayan community called Tenejapa, in the central highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. Women in this community traditionally take care of the home and the children and other domestic work, while men's work is most often in the field or the market, outside the home. There are some strict hierarchical structures in the community; men commonly beat their wives, and can give them clear commands in the home, and men also make political decisions that affect the entire community.

Brown describes the Tenejapan women's behavior in a general sense: "Women appear to be highly deferent to men, but are extremely warm and supportive to other women" and she continues to explain that women use both positive and negative politeness when they communicate, whereas "men's speech and demeanour tend to be baldly on record to a much greater extent" (1998:87). Some of Brown's findings show that women are indeed more polite, both negatively and positively towards both men and women. She draws links between the women's and men's behavior and the social structures in the community and the different statuses of men and women. On the basis of this, Brown argues that it is possible to predict certain characteristic language in specific situations:

It allows us to predict universals in linguistic usage based on universals in the position of women cross-culturally; to the extent that women occupy similar social-structural loci with similar social-structural constraints on behaviour, women will behave similarly at the strategic level (1998:97).

The quote above reflects the impact of the social and environmental structure and conditions on the behavior of men and women. But similarly to Holmes, Brown attempts to make some generalizations in language use. Mills (2003) objects to the grounds on which these universals are made. She highlights the importance of not generalizing and drawing conclusions based on stereotypes. Even though this might seem as an obvious issue to avoid, Mills states that several researchers do rely to some extent on stereotypes in their research (2003). Perhaps the question here is: what can be classified as factual results of studies, and what is merely a stereotype or a folklinguistic belief? Mills argues for instance that even though Brown's hypothesis is not proven in some instances in her study, she still asserts that there are major differences in politeness use among men and women.

Even though there are differences between the stereotypes of women's and men's language, and the language they actually use, speakers may still be evaluated on the basis of stereotypical expectations of their gender. Mills (2003) mentions that women speaking in public environments have in some cases adopted what has been seen as the masculine style, direct and assertive language, and their choice of language has then been harshly judged. This reflects the common idea of what kind of language should be used in public spheres, and as an example Mills mentions language trainings organized for women in the 1980's and 1990's where women were taught a more assertive style for public speaking.

2.2.4 Compliments

Politeness can be expressed in various forms, and compliments can function as a sign of positive politeness. However, compliments can have several other functions as well. Holmes (cited in Mills, 2003) describes the different ways in which compliments can be used, and how they can be interpreted; ironic, sarcastic, flattery, patronizing, admiration, envy etc. Compliments can be given with the intention of being polite, but still they can be interpreted in different ways, for instance as harassment or inappropriate intrusion, and therefore as face-threatening (Mills, 2003). Mills criticizes Holmes's study on compliments (1995 cited in Mills, 2003), and points out that Holmes assumes that the compliments function as polite, even though she also considers that functions may vary.

Mills also notes that Holmes does not consider the responses to the compliments in her study, and therefore her conclusions may be misleading.

2.3 Computer-mediated communication

David Crystal's book *Language and the Internet* describes phenomena and different perspectives on language and the Internet. Even though the book was published close to two decades ago, it still contributes with relevant views on the field. Crystal himself underlines the following:

Any attempt to characterize the language of the Internet, whether as a whole or with reference to one of its constituent situations, immediately runs up against the transience of the technology (Crystal, 2001:224).

He continues to explain that the chapters in his book would soon be outdated as the language used online constantly needs to adapt to new situations and contexts, and he predicts the following decades to generate "yet more sophisticated forms of digitally mediated communication" (Crystal 2001:224), which one can easily agree with. Crystal published a second edition of the book only five years later.

Crystal introduces five situations on the Internet where the language use is in some way distinctive; these are email, chat groups (synchronous and asynchronous), virtual worlds and the World Wide Web.

One factor that plays an important role in the communication online is the fact that the Internet enables people from different parts of the world and various different cultures to communicate with each other. In other words, the language used is not necessarily bound to, and therefore not characteristic of, a specific location or culture. Instead the online environment where people communicate (chat groups, comment sections, email etc.) often defines the kind of language that is used. Here the five Internet situations introduced by Crystal, and mentioned above, are quite relevant. On the other hand, Crystal also notes that most of the time we communicate on the Internet it is not with millions of people all over the world, but it is more likely that we communicate with a friend, or a small group of people through for instance messages, emails or discussion forums. The communication on YouTube differs in many ways from for instance chats and emails, which are often regulated by rules and models. The factors that impact the language use on YouTube will be discussed in more detail further on.

Squires (2016) describes the role of the English language on the Internet. She notes that English has played a major role in computer-mediated communication (CMC), but that

there is also a wide range of other languages used in online interaction. Crystal (2001) discusses the role of English as well. He points out that the Internet has its roots in the US and was therefore in its entirety English in the very beginning. Crystal refers to a few different studies from the mid 1990's, which portrayed English as the major language (approximately 80% of the Net was in English) used on the Internet. After noting the English-speaking origins of the Internet Crystal continues to describe how the Internet is actually becoming more and more multilingual. In 2003 approximately two thirds of the Internet users were other than English speakers but still a large part of the linguistic research of CMC has focused on English (Danet & Herring 2003).

The focus of this thesis study is on politeness and gender in the English language, and though there were a few instances of other languages in the comment threads on YouTube, English was clearly the prevailing language, and only English comments were included in the data.

2.3.1 Behavior in computer-mediated communication

The following chapter will introduce some phenomena of behavior associated with CMC. The concepts are relevant to this study in that they provide a basis for understanding what kinds of factors may have an impact on behavior and language use online and they support the interpretation of the data.

2.3.2 Trolling

Online trolling can appear in the form of pranks, aggressive or antagonistic behavior or even cyberbullying. However, these sorts of behavior can also be separated from each other and the difference in meaning is not always clear. According to Phillips (2015:2), the purpose of trolling is "to disrupt and upset as many people as possible, using whatever linguistic or behavioral tools are available." Phillips discusses the origins, the purpose and the implications of trolls. She explains that trolls can disrupt a conversation, or they can start one, depending on the audience. Often trolls are supposed to shock the audience and through that start or disrupt the ongoing interaction. Trolls can sometimes start spreading on the Internet, and grow larger in size while receiving more visibility. Phillips presents an example where the media picked up on a troll and spread a story as real news when in fact it was a hoax, and there was no truth behind the story. The interesting question concerning trolls is in what scale they are planned, and how far the purpose of the troll has been contemplated before the execution.

2.3.3 Flaming

The term flaming refers to aggressive behavior, which is usually a reaction to a specific topic, and directed at another person. Flaming can sometimes be difficult to define, especially in cases where the ones actually practicing flaming do not view their own behavior as flaming (Crystal, 2001).

There are differing opinions on the term and its usage among scholars too. Lehti et al. (2016) compare the views of Danet and Moor et al.; Danet deals with flaming as a concept that belongs to online interaction, whereas Moor notes that though flaming is more common in CMC, it can also appear in face-to-face interaction (Danet, 2013 and Moor et al. 2010 cited in Lehti et al. 2016).

Lehti et al. also note that flaming and trolling can sometimes be confused with each other. The fundamental idea in trolling is the insincerity of the action, and this can be difficult to recognize. When an insincere comment is interpreted as sincere, it might actually be a troll confused with flaming, which is often the aim of trolling. It seems that the aim of flaming is not necessarily antagonistic although it may first seem so. Danet points out that much of the past research has viewed flaming as a negative phenomenon, although the purpose may sometimes be to create a sense of solidarity (Danet, 2013). Yus (2011) gives a general definition of flaming which incorporates the relation to politeness:

There is no absolute agreement on the definition of this phenomenon, although all authors consider that it is an unacceptable communicative attitude that prevents normal polite communication on the Internet (Yus, 2011:265).

2.3.4 Spamming

Spamming was first used for email situations where a message was resent several times to different recipients, usually advertisements. Later on, it came to describe the act of sending several messages to the same recipient. In a simple sense, it refers to unwanted text, often in large amounts. Spamming can be playful or pernicious, and sometimes similar to face-to-face harassment and in these cases flaming can be included as well. There are also cases of ambiguous spamming when the aim behind the spam is unclear. The reactions to these sorts of spams are often diverse (Crystal, 2001).

2.3.5 YouTube

Concepts related to CMC, such as the ones described above, can be found in the communication on YouTube. It is a website where communication takes different forms,

and several factors may have an impact on participants' behavior. YouTube serves as a good example of the phenomenon of Web 2.0. Herring (2012) describes the concept as a new form of using online technology, and a notable part of the concept is the interaction, communication and information sharing, which appear in shapes characteristic to Web 2.0. Other examples of websites or platforms that illustrate the concept of Web 2.0 are Wikipedia, Facebook, and Twitter, all of which in one way or another fit in with the characteristics of Web 2.0. The website's regulations and censorship directly impact which contents are shown, and these factors are introduced in this section.

YouTube has certain policies regarding their contents. The website bans for instance pornographic or certain sexually explicit contents and videos instigating hate or violence towards individuals or groups of people based on religion, race or ethnicity, gender, gender-identity, age, sexual preferences, handicap etc. Guidelines also state that bullying, stalking and spamming, among several other things, are not allowed. However, YouTube supports freedom of speech and encourages users to voice their opinions even in matters that are controversial and when opinions are less popular in the mainstream masses ("Hate speech policy").

Regulating the contents on the most popular video sharing site in the world is not a simple matter, and YouTube has been criticized for its censorship practices. The website relies on users to report inappropriate videos and comments, and for the users to label their posts correctly so that the website can algorithmically classify contents and scan titles and video contents. They encourage their users to report contents when they are experienced as inappropriate and to use the flagging feature, which will submit the material for a review by the YouTube staff. In the Community Guidelines, YouTube states that they review flagged material 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to determine whether or not violations of the guidelines have been made ("Community Guidelines").

At one point, a restricted mode was created for schools and parents to be able to regulate what children encounter on the website. However, enabling the restricted mode led to the automatic censoring of certain videos including contents regarding sexual minorities, which immediately evoked a large critical response from users. Additionally, it seems the censoring does not always work in a consistent manner, and the enormous size of the platform is part of the problem. Hern states in his article dealing with critique towards YouTube's censorship system that every minute 300 hours of video are posted, and "at a

certain size, it's impossible to run a censorship regime that won't produce a steady stream of errors indefinitely" (Hern, 2017).

In the article "Performing gender on YouTube" Wotanis and McMillan (2014) studied the comments that two popular YouTubers, one female and one male, received on their top-ten videos, as well as the performance strategies of the female YouTuber. In order to study the character of the comments, they arranged the comments into three categories; supportive, critical/hostile and omitted from analysis. Comments could belong to more than one category, in cases where the contents of a video were criticized but the performer was supported. Comments that could not be understood or that were difficult to categorize were put in the category of omitted comments. Wotanis and McMillan (2014) also coded comments according to sexist, racist, sexually aggressive contents or comments on the performer's physical appearance. They found that the female performer received more negative responses on her videos than her male counterpart, and the negative responses contained for instance harsh criticism and sexually aggressive remarks. However, they also found that the female performer used successful performance strategies to negotiate the hostile environment on YouTube.

YouTube's set of rules and regulations for the allowed behavior on the platform apply to the content of videos as well as the language used in comment threads. Something that separates the comment threads under public videos from for instance chat groups is the public nature of the environment, which may often have an effect on impolite strategies used by participants (Yus, 2011).

2.3.6 Politeness and gender in computer-mediated communication

If one looks at politeness in computer-mediated communication as a whole, are there any consistencies that can be found in the politeness strategies used? Computer-mediated communication comprises versatile environments and situations, so it may be difficult to treat it as a whole, but politeness in different online environments can be studied separately.

Brown and Levinson note that face can sometimes be ignored, for instance in order to be as efficient or quick as possible, and in some cases consciously, in an impudent manner. It is easy to think of situations of this kind when communication happens through mobile phones or computers. At the very beginning of *Language and the Internet* (2001) Crystal mentions some concerns that have been raised about the effect technology has on

language. One of these concerns is the short messaging on mobile phones and the new kind of impoliteness that appears in messages. If one were to compare text messages to spoken language or for instance emails which perhaps can be viewed as more polite in their greetings and farewells (Crystal, 2001), text messages will most likely seem impolite. However, the people taking part in the messaging would probably disagree. The language use is simply different in order to make the communication as smooth as possible considering limitations such as the small keypad, limited character space and small screen sizes, although some of these do vary depending on the device that is used (Crystal, 2001). The fast development of technology has made sure there are endless numbers of applications and services which similarly represent a different kind of language use than the one that happens in face-to-face interaction.

Even though some CMC may seem impolite when compared to face-to-face interaction there may be specific kinds of politeness strategies used online, and existing politeness theories can be useful for CMC studies. Park describes application of politeness theories to CMC:

Linguistic politeness theory is well positioned to provide a framework for an analysis of social interaction and interpersonal variables among discourse participants inasmuch as it is applicable not only to face-to-face social interactions but also to those interactions undertaken through online communication (2008:2051)

Although politeness in CMC may be different from politeness in face-to-face interaction, Yus (2011) states that it is no less important, and in fact, it is common and even compulsory in many online environments. Netiquette is a term sometimes used for politeness on the Internet, and Yus describes the different forms in which it appears. If one were to compare for instance email communication and chats, the netiquette would appear quite different. In some cases the politeness strategies are chosen by the users without a distinct set of rules which ought to be followed, and in other cases, such as certain newsgroups, a moderator might set the rules for acceptable and unacceptable behavior. On one hand the interaction and politeness online may be strictly instructed by a moderator in for instance discussion forums, but on the other hand, the absence of physical co-presence can also cause “uncontrolled conversational strategies, the so-called flaming” (Yus, 2011:265).

Park (2008) also looks at the communication in online situations, and points out the constraints there; the lack of contextual cues can cause confusion and misunderstandings.

The combination of these restrictions will naturally have an impact on how smoothly interaction happens and the politeness strategies used.

As mentioned, Brown and Levinson's framework of politeness strategies have been applied to many studies in the field of CMC, and as examples of such studies Yus (2011) mentions research on requests and textual markers of positive and negative politeness in online communication. The politeness strategies used in email, chats or public forums differ for several reasons. One factor is the relationship to the other participants, and a possible sense of community which is more common in some environments than others.

Similarly to what Danet (2013) notes about the use of flaming to communicate solidarity, Yus explains that flaming may be used to express camaraderie and admiration when direct flattering or praise would seem too soft or weak in the particular environment: "speakers will choose instead more "manly" insults which convey the intended emotional load" (Yus, 2011:266). Yus's choice of describing the particular behavior as "manly" reflects the stereotype of the restricted range of emotions that men are supposed to express. Flaming may be an online behavior that follows the traditionally masculine gender norms in the verbally aggressive forms it takes.

Herring and Kim (2018) mention that previous research indicate that men flame more than women do, and that that women value polite behavior higher than men do, who instead violate politeness norms more often. However, Herring and Kim (2018) found in their study of politeness strategies in news discussion forums that although women tend to use positive politeness in CMC more often than men do, women are not always polite. The politeness strategies used in the study depended on who the addressee was. The methods and findings of the study are described in more detail further on in this chapter.

One may assume that the norms that steer people's behavior in face-to-face communication do not have an impact on people in an online environment where one's identity may be at least partially unknown, but several studies prove otherwise. Danet and Herring discuss language use and behavior online and point out for instance that gender differences are visible in the language used online, in that men and women use different "discourse styles" (Danet & Herring, 2003), which might reflect how deeply gender norms are rooted. They also mention that flaming and other face-threatening acts are often evident on the English speaking Internet, which is not always the case in face-to-face communication.

In the chapters dealing with gender and language use, it was mentioned that in mixed groups of both men and women the use of taboo language was accommodated according to the expected gender norms. Herring and Kim mention a similar finding in a CMC environment, and point to a study that showed that the overall language style used in a discussion forum was determined by the predominant gender, which in practice meant that female participants were more contentious in a discussion forum numerically dominated by male participants, and male participants tended to be less contentious in a forum numerically dominated by women (Herring, 1996 cited in Kim & Herring, 2018).

Kim and Herring (2018) studied how politeness strategies used in a South Korean online news discussion impact other participants' strategies, and the gender of commenters was one of the possibly influencing factors they took into consideration in the analysis.

Their framework consist of four types of politeness strategies; positive politeness (+P), negative politeness (+N), violations of positive politeness (-P), and violations of negative politeness (-N). In addition, a category of not applicable comments (N/A), was assigned in cases where "an utterance did not use any of the other politeness strategies" (Herring & Kim, 2018:1958). This categorization is based on Brown and Levinson's linguistic theory of positive politeness and negative politeness.

Kim and Herring found that when the discussion was numerically dominated by men, comments with positive politeness received more replies with violations of positive politeness than any other types of comments. In contrast, when women numerically dominated the discussion, comments using violations of positive politeness attracted comments using the same politeness strategy. Positive politeness was used the most in female-dominated discussion, but only when addressing the first commenter in a comment thread who received the comment that was most replied to. When replying to other commenters in the thread, women violated politeness frequently (Kim and Herring, 2018).

2.3.6.1 Objectification in computer-mediated communication

Objectification is not a phenomenon characteristic to CMC specifically, but this chapter will discuss the forms it takes in some online environments. Both men and women are objectified, and both men and women objectify others. However, there are certain differences in the manner in which objectification happens. Nussbaum (2010) discusses different aspects of objectification, and a couple of the topics she deals with are

objectification on the Internet, and objectification of famous women. She claims that “much of the damage done by the spread of gossip and slander on the Internet is damage to women” (2010:68), and in cases of male objectification of famous women there is often a certain “pornographic delight in the misadventures of female celebrities” (Nussbaum, 2010:76).

The term objectification is defined as the treatment of a person as a thing or an object. Nussbaum adds to this simple explanation that the term should be treated as a cluster concept, since there are various ways in which a person can be treated as an object. She counts seven ideas of objectification: instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership and denial of subjectivity (2010:69-70).

Levmore (2010) claims as a conclusion to his article that personal identification on websites should distinctly reduce certain hurtful behavior, such as “comment on a professor or classmate’s anatomy or alleged promiscuity” (2010:67), and he anticipates that more and more entrepreneurs online will limit participants or require identification. It seems logical that when one participates in some sort of interaction with one’s own name, one might be more aware of the things one says and the image the other participants will receive. On the other hand, Bradshaw and Saha present several examples of bullying on social networking sites, such as for instance Facebook, where participants indeed are required to identify themselves before joining. Perhaps bullying takes another form, but it is not eliminated on the sole requirement of identification. Bradshaw and Saha (2010) discuss online bullying and its relation to academic environments and the impact on students and professors. They compare the traditional academic setting and the online setting of a social networking site, and state that positive social norms that exist in the offline setting are lacking in the online setting and this explains why participants feel free to treat students and faculty abusively.

2.3.6.2 Self-disclosure

Anonymity in online interaction surely has some sort of impact on people’s behavior. The differences can be vast concerning the depth of self-disclosure and the topics one feels comfortable discussing in online environments and face-to-face situations. Lakoff claims that “[because] the net combines the immediacy of talk and the distance of traditional writing with the anonymity of chatrooms, bad behaviour flourishes online” and these factors she says “encourage violations of politeness” (2005:32). This seems logical; the distance and anonymity must have a major impact, but as Bradshaw and Saha argue, the

reasons for a different behavior online compared to face-to-face situations may be the result of non-existing, or at least different, norms on social media.

Furthermore, online environments may encourage people to supportive and empathic behavior that they necessarily would not display in other situations. For instance, by liking someone's picture on a social media platform, such as Facebook or Instagram, one can show support without an effort. Commenting on images and blogs and showing support on social media may sometimes feel easier than doing it face-to-face, especially when the receiver is a stranger or an acquaintance, instead of a close friend.

Scott and Qian (2007) found that discursive anonymity, not visual, was related to self-disclosure on blogs. Bloggers who refrained from revealing identification information about themselves would more likely opt to self-disclose more on their blogs. Opening up about personal issues may be easier online and anonymously. It can be an effective way of seeking support and finding other people who can relate to the issues.

As YouTube offers the possibility of communicating both in the shapes of videos and anonymous comments, a notable contrast in identification and self-disclosure of participants is sometimes present. For instance, vloggers on YouTube may be open about various issues concerning personal information and experiences, whereas commenters may be completely anonymous and insincere. In such cases, vloggers are in quite a vulnerable position where they are dependent on the politeness of other participants on the website.

3 Material and methods

This section introduces the material and methodology applied in the study. As mentioned, the aim of the study is to compare comments posted to male and female TED speakers. In order to do this, certain influential factors had to be considered.

3.1 Material

The material consists of comments posted on six videos. The videos are available on TED's official YouTube channel. The videos include presentations which are organized and executed in collaboration with TED. TED is an abbreviation of Technology, Entertainment and Design (Anderson, 2016), and it was founded in 1984. TED is a non-profit organization which aims to present and spread ideas and knowledge most often in the form of short, approximately 20 minute speeches. Technology, entertainment and design were indeed in focus when TED Talks first began, but since then the variety of

topics has widened, and the speeches can basically cover any topic in the world (“Our Organization”).

The 30 most recent comments were collected from six videos of TED Talks on YouTube. The videos were all posted in a range of approximately four years, between 2014 and 2018. On YouTube the comment thread is located underneath the video, and it is possible to view the comments sorted either by the time they were posted, *newest first*, or by the likes a comment has received, i.e. *top comments*. Before collecting the comments, they were sorted by time of posting instead of by the number of likes, so that the data would not only consist of certain kinds of comments, such as ones making jokes or pointing out interesting facts or moments in a video, which might receive a large number of likes. The top comments in a comment thread may not include critical or antagonistic comments, unless they are for instance formulated in a humorous way that may attract likes from others. The 30 newest comments from each video were copied into an Excel-file, where the categorizations and the analysis were conducted.

Talks with similar topics were chosen, so that the comparison would be more balanced, and the topics would not have a major effect on the nature of the comments. The talks chosen represent three different topics, and for each topic a male and a female speaker were chosen. The topics are futurology, biology and economy. The topics represent different fields of science which in their subject area are as neutral as possible in relation to gender issues. For instance, a female presenter dealing with specific feminist views might attract more responses with extreme opinions, which would add another dimension to the study. All six presenters discuss ideas and findings in their own professional field of work, which most likely provokes a different kind of reaction in the audience than presentations dealing with tough personal experiences. Choosing pairs for each topic enables a comparison with fewer factors that may or may not affect the content of the comments, and allows a comparison with possible gender issues to be in focus.

The presenters are Anab Jain, Robin Hanson, Karen Lloyd, Ed Yong, Kate Raworth and Dan O’Neill. The comments on Anab Jain’s talk and Robin Hanson’s talk were collected in May 2018, and the comments on the other four talks were collected in November 2018. Only comments that were directed at the videos were included, no replies to other comments in the comment thread were included. Only comments that were in their entirety in English were included in the data.

All speakers held their talks at official TED conferences, except for O'Neill who held his during a TEDx Oxbridge event and Karen Lloyd who held her talk at a TED Institute event which was organized in collaboration with Boston Consulting Group. TEDx events are independently organized local events, which are arranged according to certain regulations set by TED ("What is a TEDx event?"). All videos are available on YouTube, and full references to the videos, as well as the abstracts of the presentations, are available in the reference list.

The data consists of comments on YouTube videos, which means that the website's censorship has a direct impact on the data, although it is difficult to know if some comments have been removed or not. The possible impact of the censorship on the data and the results of this study will be considered in the discussion.

A short introduction of the TED Talks included in the study will now follow. The official YouTube channel for TED Talks include short abstracts for each talk, and these will be presented here to illustrate the topics.

Anab Jain and Robin Hanson both present their work and ideas in the field of futurology. Anab Jain is a futurist and a designer, and in her TED Talk, titled "Why we need to imagine different futures", she describes her work and gives concrete examples of the different kinds of futures she and her co-workers imagine:

Anab Jain brings the future to life, creating experiences where people can touch, see and feel the potential of the world we're creating. Do we want a world where intelligent machines patrol our streets, for instance, or where our genetic heritage determines our health care? Jain's projects show why it's important to fight for the world we want. Catch a glimpse of possible futures in this eye-opening talk. ("Why we need to imagine different futures").

The futurist Robin Hanson's talk is titled "What would happen if we upload our brains to computers?" and the abstract describes his talk as follows:

Meet the "ems" -- machines that emulate human brains and can think, feel and work just like the brains they're copied from. Economist and social scientist Robin Hanson describes a possible future when ems take over the global economy, running on superfast computers and copying themselves to multitask, leaving humans with only one choice: to retire, forever. Glimpse a strange future as Hanson describes what could happen if robots ruled the earth ("What would happen if we upload our brains to computers?").

Karen Lloyd is a marine microbiologist and her TED Talk is titled “This deep-sea mystery is changing our understanding of life”. Lloyd has studied microbes in the sea floor, and she discusses the different ways in which it could be possible to make use of the information that the microbes reveal:

How deep into the Earth can we go and still find life? Marine microbiologist Karen Lloyd introduces us to deep-subsurface microbes: tiny organisms that live buried meters deep in ocean mud and have been on Earth since way before animals. Learn more about these mysterious microbes, which refuse to grow in the lab and seem to have a fundamentally different relationship with time and energy than we do (“This deep-sea mystery is changing our understanding of life”).

Ed Yong is a science writer and his talk is titled “Suicide wasps, zombie roaches and other parasite tales”, and the abstract for his talk takes a brief look at his topic, but also the entertaining approach he has:

We humans set a premium on our own free will and independence ... and yet there's a shadowy influence we might not be considering. As science writer Ed Yong explains in this fascinating, hilarious and disturbing talk, parasites have perfected the art of manipulation to an incredible degree. So are they influencing us? It's more than likely. (“Suicide wasps, zombie roaches and other parasite tales”).

Kate Raworth and Dan O’Neill have the same core idea in their speeches, a stable economy whose purpose is not a constant growth. However, their approaches on the matter are a bit different. Raworth’s talk is titled “A healthy economy should be designed to thrive, not to grow”, and her talk is described:

What would a sustainable, universally beneficial economy look like? "Like a doughnut," says Oxford economist Kate Raworth. In a stellar, eye-opening talk, she explains how we can move countries out of the hole -- where people are falling short on life's essentials -- and create regenerative, distributive economies that work within the planet's ecological limits (“A healthy economy should be designed to thrive, not to grow”).

Dan O’Neill’s talk is titled “The economics of enough”. His talk is held at a TEDx event, but otherwise it does not differ from the other presentations in any considerable manner:

Is economic growth always a good thing? Why are people in countries like the US and UK not happier or working fewer hours when GDP has tripled since 1950? Dan O'Neill's thought-provoking talk exposes the pitfalls of economic growth and hints at alternative ways to measure progress (“The economics of enough”).

3.2 Methodology

Two different frameworks were applied to conduct two analyses of the data. The first framework was applied to the entire data, and the second framework was applied to a subset of the data. Examples of comments will be presented in this chapter, as well as further on in the results, and the comments have been copied as they are, which means that they include errors which have not been corrected.

3.2.1 Types of comments

After collecting the total of 180 comments, a similar framework to that of Wotanis and McMillan (2014) was applied to the data. At first, the comments were categorized in either supportive or critical comments. If they belonged to neither one of these two categories, they were put in a neutral category, or in a category of irrelevant comments which could consist of incomprehensible remarks or comments on something irrelevant to the context.

Once the comments were placed in the supportive or the critical category, they were also categorized according to where their focus lay; either the contents of the TED talk, or the speaker and their appearances, manners of speaking etc.

Comments that were labeled as being supportive of the contents had to include some sort of a reference to the topic covered in the TED talk, and a positive or supportive reaction to the talk. This appears in the forms of praise, compliments, clearly agreeing with the presenter's ideas, and pointing out that what the talk covers is interesting and important. The following comment on Karen Lloyd's talk shows an extremely positive attitude towards the presenter and her talk, and in addition points out that the Lloyd has made a great discovery:

[Example 1] This was an excellent Ted Talk, outstanding speaker! This is such a cool and awesome discovery!!! To grow them just increase the atmospheric pressure to mimic their natural habitat! :)

Another, slightly less enthusiastic comment, shows support in noting that Lloyd's work is useful somehow:

[Example 2] We could use it to extend our own cells thus living longer

Comments that show support simply through agreeing with the presenter's ideas can be illustrated with the following comment on Kate Raworth's presentation on an alternative to the economic model centered at continuous growth:

[Example 3] Perpetual and infinite growth is an insane economic policy.

Comments that defended the presentation in some way were also labeled as supportive, and the comment below is one made on Dan O'Neill's presentation:

[Example 4] I hate how people just try to disagree with him because of different opinions, but while doing so they don't say anything against his arguments, they just... complain for the sake of disagreeing with different views, no matter how clever those other views are.

This commenter expresses sympathy towards O'Neill as well as implies that his views are clever, even though not all participants in the comment thread seem to think so.

That leads us to the category of critical comments. Content critical comments include expressions of disagreement, accusations of corruption or propaganda, questioning the presenter's ideas and knowledge, and claiming the presenter of being unrealistic or delusional. The following comment to O'Neill expresses criticism in that his theory is not realizable in practice, but also makes a remark about greediness in people, which gives a hint of agreement on some points of O'Neill's view.

[Example 5] Never Gonna Happen Get the top 5% to give up generations worse of accumulated power & wealth so that humanity can try a different way? Nice dream brah, not in the foreseeable generations though. Some peeps simply can't do without owning 3 of everything in the world.

Below are two comments to Anab Jain. Both suggest that her views are biased and therefore not worthy. Even though both begin with pointing out that the theory could be interesting, the main point is quite clearly that Jain's views are not unbiased science.

[Example 6] Don't get me wrong I love making future predictions however nobody finds it odd that all her future predictions are politically left of center? That's not very scientific.

[Example 7] It's all interesting until the leftist propaganda starts.

Karen Lloyd received the following comment, which begins with a polite greeting, but goes on to question the methods she used in the research, as well as pointing out that her study is simply not approved by the commenter.

[Example 8] Dear Ms. Lloyd,

can you be sure that the behavior observed in a laboratory in a dish reflects the microbes behavior at depth and under pressure and at temperature matching the life's habitat?

Just say'n I do not like the experiment as described here.

thanks chuck

Kate Raworth received the comment below, which expresses disagreement and disapproval in a rather sharp manner:

[Example 9] Another declinist. Disappointing analysis. What a sparse vision. Another Utopian uncoupled from the realities of marginal analysis.

The commenter begins with labeling the speaker and then criticizing both her analysis and ideas, and ends with a judgement of her knowledge and ability to grasp economic facts.

As mentioned and illustrated above, some comments evaluate both the presentation and the presenter; however, some focus specifically on the presenter's appearance or the manner of speaking. Some of the criticism that focuses on the presenter include derogatory labels, ridiculing the presenter or their ideas, and racist or sexually oppressive utterances. The following comment is one of several that portray Robin Hanson as an insane scientist:

[Example 10] Another psycho-scientist with grandiose ideas. What makes him and his ilk think we'd want to upload ourselves to a computer? These people are SICK in the head.

Both Anab Jain and Ed Yong received racist comments. The first example is a comment on Jain's talk, and it states quite explicitly a vicious and racist view on Indian people, both related to appearance and character:

[Example 11] Imagine a future where r Indians genetically modified so they are so ugly and overbearing no more.

The comment made on Yong's talk is perhaps not as explicit as the one to Jain, but the note that it is Yong's British accent in relation to his appearance that makes him likeable is highly questionable:

[Example 12] I love an asian who speaks with an impeccable British accent.

Support that concerns the presenter specifically includes comments on the presenter's manner of speaking and the way they communicate their presentation. In some cases the focus is on appearances and the presenter's voice, as well as the presenter's intellect and perceived personality. The following comment is one to Ed Yong, and similarly to the example above, it makes a remark concerning his accent. However, this remark is a simple and clear compliment:

[Example 13] I like his British accent

Ed Yong's presentation provoked fascinated reactions in some commenters, and the example below gives him several compliments with detailed motivations:

[Example 14] I keep coming back to this talk after years. Yes, this isn't a topic that will immediately influence my life, nor does it suggest mind blowing alternatives for humanity. But the speaker is so damn good. at what he does. He has a clear intro, a grasping presentation and a chilling conclusion where he's not trying to convince the audience to believe the same thing that he does, but rather invites to explore possibilities. He's also succinct and has excellent speaking pace as well. What an example of oral presentation.

The following comment to Karen Lloyd gives her credit for expressing passion for her work:

[Example 15] I like how you can see the love and passion in her face and body language for her profession and field of study. Really good speaker.

When relevant, comments were put in more than one category. The following example is supportive of both the speaker, in quite a personal manner, and the contents of the presentation.

[Example 16] I love your speech ♥ i am indian i never believe my country woman speech in TED and about future technology. Today i am proud of my country.

Another comment somewhat agrees with Jain's work, but leans towards a more critical view:

[Example 17] I feel like at its core it's a good idea to plan for future scenarios, but it seems like a bit of a waste of time and budget to create these experiments. Were the dead frozen mice from Ebay really necessary?

This comment was placed in both the category for supportive comments, as well as the one for critical comments. The number of comments that were placed in more than one category is quite small.

In addition to the evidently supportive and critical comments, the data includes several instances of partially unclear cases or borderline cases, which have still been categorized as either supportive or critical. The following comment to Karen Lloyd does not show signs of strong criticism but it is clearly questioning her work, and therefore it was classified as a critical of the presentation:

[Example 18] were the conditions the same - what about the pressure on the surface where everything is being tested was it the same pressure as under the ocean?

There was only one comment to Ed Yong which was classified as being critical of the contents of his presentation. This comment does not reveal what it is about the presentation that is wrong, but insinuates that it does not receive the commenter's approval. The tired looking emoticon confirms that the purpose is critical.

[Example 19] people actually pay good money for talks like this =_=_

The example below is one that Kate Raworth's talk received. Similarly to the presenter, it communicates a critical stance on the capitalist society, but it also leans towards a critical approach on Raworth's presentation in pointing out that changing the current system is unrealistic and that everyone is responsible for it.

[Example 20] we all promote and support this thousand-headed monster called capitalism, we dont own the system, the system owns us

The example below is a comment on Karen Lloyd's appearance. The intentions of the commenter is difficult to know; the comment may be a sincere compliment, but it is not relevant considering Lloyd's presentation and work. Though *cute* is easily used in a positive sense, it may also be interpreted as a bit derogatory.

[Example 21] she is so cute

Comments that were not clearly supportive or critical, or when the commenter's intention was unclear, the comments were labeled as neutral. Comments discussing the contents of the presentation and comments expressing opinions or views were labeled as neutral as long as there was no clear sign of supportiveness or criticism towards the presenter or the contents of the speech. Such a comment is the following on Karen Lloyd's talk:

[Example 22] The Word is extremophile , life finds away

Likewise, from the following comment on Robin Hanson's talk it is difficult to know what the commenter's sincere intentions are:

[Example 23] We are living in a virtual reality. The world we experience is just our brains predictions of what the world looks like based on the sensory input it receives.

In addition to the neutral category, a category of irrelevant comments was created. The difference between neutral and irrelevant comments is that the neutral category consists of relevant remarks that address issues from the speech or issues that in some way relate to the speech, but which discuss the matter in a neutral tone. In contrast, the irrelevant category consists of notes on for instance people in the audience, missing subtitles, links

to other websites, money fishing, replies to comments without using the reply feature, incomprehensible remarks. A large part of these comments could be labeled as spam. An example of an irrelevant comment is the following from the comment thread for Dan O'Neill's talk, which is a reply to another comment:

[Example 24] @Learn Social Justice: you too are on you tube. watch the self righteous finger pointing.

Another comment that was classified as irrelevant is the following on Anab Jain's talk:

[Example 25] Good luck with that Eliot

This one may be a response to another commenter, but it is not as clear a case as the above comment which includes the user name of the addressee of the response. On the other hand, there is no clear reference to the presentation or the presenter either, and the meaning of the comment is incomprehensible.

3.2.2 Politeness analysis

In addition to studying different types of comments, a closer analysis of a subset of the data was made. The politeness strategies used in the comments were analyzed using the methodology of Herring and Kim (2018), who adapted the politeness theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The aim was to study the politeness strategies used when addressing male presenters versus female presenters on TED Talks, and the framework was applied to a subset of the data which only includes the comments that refer to the presenter by using their name or a title such as *scientist*, or for instance *this woman*, *this guy* or *the presenter*, or third person pronouns. Also two comments in which the reference is general, *women* and *Indians*, were included because the reference clearly concern the presenter.

+P stands for positive politeness and is described by Herring and Kim as “satisfying the addressee's desire to maintain a favorable self-image and obtain approval from others” (2018:1958). These sorts of strategies could include expressing appreciation, compliments, approval and support. +N stands for negative politeness and is defined as “respecting the addressee's desire to maintain their autonomy without impositions from others” (2018:1958) and could include hedged requests, offering choices, apologies, pre-inquiries and respecting and acknowledging the addressee's view. -P and -N are violations of the above, in other words, -P is defined as challenging the addressee's desire for closeness and approval with others, for instance through flames, insults, jokes,

sarcasm, bald disagreements etc. -N is the symbol for impositions targeting the autonomy of thinking and behaving of the addressee, for instance through commands, requests and ignoring or overriding the addressee's preferences. When comments were not identified as to belong to any of the above mentioned categories they were placed in the not applicable (N/A) category.

The comments had to include either a clear reference to the presenter in forms such as *the speaker*, *this guy*, *this woman* or third person pronouns, or alternatively they could directly address the presenter. A total of 57 comments were included, and they were almost evenly divided between the female and male presenters; the comments to female presenters included 30 references of this kind, and the comments to male presenters included 27 references.

An example of a comment which clearly uses positive politeness is the following compliment to Kate Raworth:

[Example 26] what a talk! she speaks out of my mind!

The comment below is referring to Dan O'Neill, and it is an example of negative politeness in that it defends and respects the presenter's view.

[Example 27] I hate how people just try to disagree with him because of different opinions, but while doing so they don't say anything against his arguments, they just... complain for the sake of disagreeing with different views, no matter how clever those other views are.

The following comment is a clear case of a violation of positive politeness. It is an insulting remark referring to Robin Hanson.

[Example 28] The type of a.i. he's thinking of making, would be insanely miserable

A case of violating negative politeness is displayed in the example below. The commenter addresses Dan O'Neill directly, and gives him an unfriendly command.

[Example 29] why don't you go to a hamlet in Africa and live. The Soviet union did that and what we saw was rationing

As mentioned, in cases where the commenter did not use any of the other politeness strategies, the comment was labeled as not applicable. The comment below is an example in which the commenter's purpose is unclear. It could be interpreted as sarcastic, or as a

genuine compliment, but because there is not a definitive sign pointing in either direction, the comment is labeled as not applicable.

[Example 30] Hmmmmmmph...very interesting these guys have worked really hard explain this.

4 Results

In this chapter the results of the study will be presented, and the presentation will be done in two parts. First, the categorization of the comments into supportive, critical, neutral or irrelevant will be outlined, and secondly, the results of the politeness analysis will be introduced.

4.1 Types of comments

The categorization of comments into different types reveals that there are some differences in the commenting to male and female TED Talk presenters. Some of the categories do not differ from each other very much in their numbers, but others differ clearly.

Table 1. [Types of comments]

	Female	Male
Supportive of contents	29	19
Supportive of speaker	8	4
Total supportive	37	23
Critical of contents	22	31
Critical of speaker	9	9
Total critical	31	40
Neutral	21	20
Irrelevant	9	10

Table 1 shows the number of supportive and critical comments to male and female presenters, as well as what the supportiveness or criticism is focused on, i.e. the contents of the speech or the presenter. Some comments include both support and criticism, and may concern the contents of the speech and the speaker personally, and appear in more than one category when necessary, however this concerned only a few comments in the data. The categories represented in Table 1 consist of various types of support and criticism, and these will be looked at more closely.

4.1.1 Support

Support of the content was in many cases expressed with adjectives such as *great*, *interesting*, *fascinating*, *incredible*, *best*, *amazing*, *excellent*, *enjoyable*, *informative* and *awesome* in feedback to both male and female presenters. Table 1 shows a clear difference between men and women in the number of supportive comments concerning the contents of the presentation. One explanation is that there was one single comment of that kind for Robin Hanson, whereas the number ranged from 6 to 14 for all of the other presenters.

There are a few supportive comments to both men and women that briefly compliment the presentation, but more commonly the commenters describe in detail what they enjoyed. The topic of the presentation has a clear influence on the kind of comments that are elicited. Especially Raworth's and O'Neill's presentations inspired discussion, but what is noteworthy is that though their core ideas about economics were very similar, O'Neill received eight supportive comments and Raworth fourteen. Yong's presentation on parasites seemed to awake inspiration and his presentation skills were complimented in most of the supportive comments. Lloyd also received compliments on her talk, but her presentation also elicited comments that noted how useful her research is.

Support that focuses on the presenter includes remarks on presenting and speaking skills, the presenter's passionate attitude, and the presenter's appearances. An interesting difference between the presenters is that Robin Hanson and Dan O'Neill received no comments of this kind. Ed Yong is the only male presenter who received comments that supported him personally. One of them is a supportive remark on his British accent, and the other three comments complimented him as awesome, smart and a great writer. One of the comments goes into depth about his presenting skills:

[Example 31] I keep coming back to this talk after years. Yes, this isn't a topic that will immediately influence my life, nor does it suggest mind blowing alternatives for humanity. But the speaker is so damn good. at what he does. He has a clear intro, a grasping presentation and a chilling conclusion where he's not trying to convince the audience to believe the same thing that he does, but rather invites to explore possibilities. He's also succinct and has excellent speaking pace as well. What an example of oral presentation.

None of the male presenters received any positive remarks on their appearances. The female presenters, on the other hand, all received at least one comment that was supportive of their personal traits. Anab Jain received one such comment [example 16] which is inspired by the fact that Jain is, similarly to the commenter, from India. Karen

Lloyd received four comments of this kind of which one [example 15] admires the love and passion she expresses for her work, and notes that she is a really good speaker as well. The comment [example 21] briefly stating that Lloyd is cute could, as mentioned, be interpreted in different ways. Considering the context of a professional presentation, being called cute is probably not expected or regarded as relevant. The two remaining comments include remarks on her great presenting skills as well as her articulation and enthusiasm. Kate Raworth received three comments supporting her personally, one of which briefly states that she speaks well, one remarks on her great insight and evaluates her as one of the best economists, and the last compliments her speech and voice in a peculiar manner:

[Example 32] Her voice is like sweet and warm chocolate. Great speech.

The number of comments in this particular category is quite small, so drawing conclusions may be difficult. However, a small scale comparison is possible. The only male presenter that received any comments of this kind got remarks on his professional skills and the quality of his speech and contents of the presentation. In addition to these types of feedback, the female presenters received supportive comments focusing on their appearance, voice and attitude. It seems as if the female presenters are more likely to be evaluated on the basis of more than just their professional skills, although these are merely the supportive comments. Next a closer look will be taken at the different types of critical comments.

4.1.2 Criticism

The category of comments that are critical of the contents of the presentations vary between the presenters. One could assume that the presentation topic has some sort of impact on the kind of responses that are evoked, and this might be an explanation to the variation.

Raworth's and O'Neill's topics evoked discussion and criticism, whereas Lloyd's and Yong's topics did not provoke a similar reaction in the audience. Similarly to the comments that are supportive of the contents, there is noteworthy difference in the number of critical comments concerning the contents of Raworth's and O'Neill's presentations. Raworth received nine comments that were critical of the presentation, whereas O'Neill received nineteen such comments.

As mentioned, Raworth's and O'Neill's topics differ clearly from the others in that they elicited quite a lot of criticism, but also discussion. A feature that could be recognized in the critical comments to their presentations was the motivation of raising discussion, while also expressing their own critical view. Seven of the nineteen critical comments O'Neill received contained questions, which could be attempts to activate other commenters, although in most cases it seems as if the aim is to simply question the presenter's theory. One comment included a link to a paper concerning the subject, and a couple comments suggested specific reading of the opposing view of the presenter. Raworth received one critical comment containing a question which could be interpreted as trying to keep a discussion going. Four of the critical comments on Hanson's presentation contained a question, but only one of them seemed to question his theory and attempt to take part of a discussion. The other questions either ridiculed his presentation or criticized his ideas, such as the following:

[Example 33] Another psycho-scientist with grandiose ideas. What makes him and his ilk think we'd want to upload ourselves to a computer? These people are SICK in the head.

Two of the critical comments to Jain contained questions, and especially the following example seems to address other participants in the comment thread.

[Example 34] Don't get me wrong I love making future predictions however nobody finds it odd that all her future predictions are politically left of center? That's not very scientific.

Lloyd received two content critical and Yong only one content critical comment. The comments Lloyd received questioned her research methods, and the one Yong received was merely a general complaint which might have been more difficult to categorize without the tired-looking emoji at the end:

[Example 35] people actually pay good money for talks like this =_ =

Hanson, Raworth and O'Neill all received a few comments that were clearly longer and more detailed than the average comment. These comments contained criticism and a personal, opposing view of the topic. The tone of these comments is rather assertive and definite. It seems that the topics of these presenters may have provoked comments such as the following to Hanson:

[Example 36] you cant upload your "brain" to a computer. the brain is made of neurons. neurons produce thoughts. even if one day we build a quantum computer the best scenario is to replicate its ABILITIES. you can not

transfer "consciousness" whatever that is. and this is part of the point. you need to be exact in definitions. what EXACTLY is consciousness ? does it include memories and/or perception ? If you are born deaf, dumb and blind AND ne feeling of any senses like physical pain, touch, or any of our 5 (or more) senses, then are you really conscious ? when did it first start ? were you always conscious ? if not, it had a starting point. when you were born ? beore ? how long ? EXACTLY when ? your brain is not static... it changes and makes and breaks connections all the time. motivation + desire. These 2 things are what drive us and make us who we are. and without these, we have no personality. Motivation and desire are built from our senses and perceptions. neurons produce thoughts. consciousness arises from the flesh. When your brain dies, so do you.

Comments that are critical of the presenter are unevenly divided between the presenters. The presenter that received most critical comments directed at him personally, eight comments to be exact, is Robin Hanson. Karen Lloyd received five comments, and Anab Jain received three. Both Kate Raworth and Ed Yong received one each and Dan O'Neill received none, which is an interesting contrast to the plenteous critical feedback on the contents of his presentation.

The three critical comments that Anab Jain received all somehow focus on her origins. The first one is not as direct as the two others, but it seems to have a certain distrust in her based on her last name:

[Example 37] Jains are the richest in India. They contribute a disproportionate amount of taxes to India (willingly). Ask yourself why

The two other comments are antagonistic and unquestionably vicious:

[Example 38] worries about being judged on her genetics, lives in a caste system

[Example 39] Imagine a future where r Indians genetically modified so they are so ugly and overbearing no more.

The aim of the commenters is unknown; it could be perversely humorous, or trolls, but what is visible to the viewer is plain racism. The second of the comments above refers to all Indians, including Jain in that group indirectly in a sense, and makes hostile remarks on both her appearance and character. As the presentation seems perfectly polite and not overbearing in any sense, one can not but wonder about the reason and motive for this type of response.

The one comment to Ed Yong [example 12] that was categorized as critical of him personally, is perhaps a border line case in that it is not directly criticizing him, but what

is most clearly recognizable in it is prejudice and a need to label the presenter according to his appearance. The fact that Yong has a British accent because he actually is British seems to not have occurred to the commenter.

In addition to the racist responses to presenters, there are also sexually hostile or harassing comments to some presenters. Robin Hanson received one of these:

[Example 40] Was this guy jerking off before he came onstage ?

There is a slight sense of Hanson being out of breath during his speech, which probably gave rise to several comments that remark on his breathing and speaking.

Karen Lloyd received one comment with clear sexual harassment and objectification:

[Example 41] I would bang her in my Nautilus

In addition to the above, she received three other comments that evaluate her based on her appearance and gender, of which one is the following:

[Example 42] I liked oceanography when I was a kid but now I wonder about why women bare their arms in public and why for men this would seem strange and provocative. Are women flirting?

Similarly to a few other examples presented above, these are not necessarily criticizing Lloyd, but are rather contradictions to the supportive responses, and are most likely experienced as discouraging.

The remaining comments that are critical of Robin Hanson either harshly criticize his ideas and work and accuse him of insanity, or remark on his speaking in a negative tone, as for instance the following:

[Example 43] Needs to chill out. Sounds like he just got done doing sprints back stage.

The two examples below criticize Hanson and his work by ridiculing his intellect and mental health:

[Example 44] Another psycho-scientist with grandiose ideas. What makes him and his ilk think we'd want to upload ourselves to a computer? These people are SICK in the head.

[Example 45] This guy says he spent 4 years on this but I think what he means is he spent 4 years getting super high. Every few statements he says something illogical.

In total there are four comments on his speaking pace or breathing and four comments accusing him of lunacy or being on drugs.

4.1.3 Neutral and irrelevant comments

The numbers of neutral and irrelevant comments to male and female presenters were quite even. Female presenters received 21 neutral comments, and the male presenters received 20. The number of irrelevant comments was 9 for women, and 10 for men. Lloyd’s and Yong’s presentations received the highest number of neutral comments, 10 for Lloyd and 11 for Yong, which is perhaps not a surprise since the number of critical comments to them was quite low. Overall, the number of irrelevant comments was quite low. Raworth received no such comments, but otherwise the number ranged from three to six.

4.2 Politeness framework

This chapter will present the results of the analysis conducted by applying the politeness framework to a subset of the data, as described above. The analysis provides another perspective with supplementary information on the attitudes towards male and female presenters on YouTube alongside the categorization of comments into different types. The results will be studied in detail, and the different kinds of politeness strategies occurring in the comments will be compared with the presenter’s gender in mind. Table 2 shows the division of the data into the different politeness strategies:

Table 2. Politeness strategies on YouTube

	Female	Male
Positive politeness (+P)	12	5
Negative politeness (+N)	1	2
Violations of positive politeness(-P)	10	16
Violations of negative politeness(-N)	2	2
Not applicable (N/A)	5	2

4.2.1 Expressions of positive politeness

Table 2 shows a clear difference between female and male presenters in the number of comments including positive politeness that they received. Although the data sample is quite small, the difference is apparent, especially considering that four out of all five +P comments the male presenters received were comments to the same person, Ed Yong. One of them was to Dan O’Neill. The division of +P comments between the female

presenters was a bit more even, Anab Jain received two, and Karen Lloyd and Kate Raworth both received five. Ed Yong's topic seemed to provoke a positive, fascinated reaction in the commenters, but the topic is not the only aspect of his presentation that received compliments. His way of speaking and giving the presentation received praise, and in addition, the comments convey that he seems a very likeable person, and good at his profession:

[Example 46] I love this guy, smart great science writer

Why it seems that Yong is more likeable than the other male presenters is an interesting question. The one comment to Dan O'Neill in this category was short and clear in its focus:

[Example 47] Loved the start of his speech! Very polished.

The comment is not very personal, and it briefly points out something the presenter did well. Although the commenter expresses that they *loved* the beginning of the speech, it does not go into more detail about how well O'Neill succeeded.

One of the comments Ed Yong received was clearly more detailed than the others:

[Example 48] I keep coming back to this talk after years. Yes, this isn't a topic that will immediately influence my life, nor does it suggest mind blowing alternatives for humanity. But the speaker is so. damn. good. at what he does. He has a clear intro, a grasping presentation and a chilling conclusion where he's not trying to convince the audience to believe the same thing that he does, but rather invites to explore possibilities. He's also succinct and has excellent speaking pace as well. What an example of oral presentation.

The other +P comments to Ed Yong were concise and expressed in a few words, eight words at the maximum, what he did well. One of these comments is the following:

[Example 49] I like his British accent

It is a clear compliment, but considering the context, one has to question its relevance. One of the comments to a female presenter, Karen Lloyd, was labelled in a similar manner:

[Example 50] she is so cute

This is definitely a border line case in that it is irrelevant, and it could even be interpreted as slightly demeaning considering the context where Lloyd presents findings of her research.

The +P comments the female presenters received were in general a bit more detailed than the comments to male presenters. The average comment contained 20.83 words. Many of the comments begin with a general compliment on the presentation, and then continue with some more detailed feedback, or alternatively, they begin with a note on something that was specifically good about the presentation or the speaker, and conclude the comment with a general compliment. The following comments represent one of each:

[Example 51] Great talk, she's very articulate and her enthusiasm is clearly genuine. I hope she does talks at elementary school levels; inspire those kids!

[Example 52] I like how you can see the love and passion in her face and body language for her profession and field of study. Really good speaker.

The commenters clearly describe which details they enjoyed about the presentations. Karen Lloyd received compliments on her speaking and the passionate attitude she seems to have for her work, and it seems that the contents of her presentation were experienced as interesting and inspiring by the audience as well. The following comment conveys the fascination for Lloyd's work:

[Example 53] This was an excellent Ted Talk, outstanding speaker! This is such a cool and awesome discovery!!! To grow them just increase the atmospheric pressure to mimic their natural habitat! :)

Although the comments include compliments on the contents of the presentation, they also focus on the presenter's way of speaking, the presenter's body language, and voice. The following comment is an example of the feedback Kate Raworth received. Although it portrays Raworth's voice as enjoyable to listen to, one must question the intense tone of it, as well as the relevance considering the context.

[Example 54] Her voice is like sweet and warm chocolate. Great speech.

In some cases the integrity of the commenter can be questioned. Kate Raworth received a comment which begins with compliments on the presentation and ends with a suggestion to look into the Zeitgeist Movement:

[Example 55] This is brilliant and likely one of the best ted talks. We need a scientific revolution that applies decentralized technology to face the challenges which capitalism cannot account for. This system she is

describing is almost identical to a well established economic system called a Natural Law Resource Based Economy. For more information I would look into the work of Peter Joseph and the zeitgeist movement

4.2.2 Expressions of negative politeness

There are not many instances of negative politeness in the data, only two such comments to men and one to women. All of the comments in this category defend the presenter's ideas in some way, i.e. respect and acknowledge the addressee's view, as described above.

[Example 56] Debt based Fiat currency is the fuel for the insane suicidal growth of GDP. People have been saying what this guy is saying for a long time and nobody in power gives a damn. And those not in power seem to be brainwashed and beat down to give a damn.

A possible reason for the low number of comments including negative politeness is the context itself. As negative politeness includes for instance hedged requests and offering choices, it might be more probable to occur in a conversation between two people when the other one makes a request. The data used for this study is perhaps not from a context that generally includes such language.

4.2.3 Violations of positive politeness

As the difference between male and female presenters was notable concerning the frequency of positive politeness, so is the difference concerning violations of positive politeness. Although the difference in numbers is not major, 10 for female presenters and 16 for male, it raises some questions. There is a similar feature in the positive politeness and violations of it; depending on whether it is directed at male or female presenters, the contents and the focus of the feedback may differ. Additionally, there is a distinct difference between the presenters of the same gender, which signals that other factors, such as the topic, quite possibly have an impact on the type of feedback the presenters receive.

Robin Hanson received six comments with violations of positive politeness, including for instance bald disagreements, sarcasm, and cruel jokes, as well as an instance of sexual harassment:

[Example 57] Was this guy jerking off before he came onstage ?

He was called *insane*, a *psycho-scientist* and *Mr "futurist" brainiac*, in three different comments, all which clearly ridicule him and his presentation. The instance of sexual harassment in the example above along with another comment make remarks about his

breathing. Hanson sounds slightly out of breath at the beginning of his speech, which probably provoked these comments.

Dan O'Neill received eight comments that contain violations of positive politeness. All of these comments include expressions of bald disagreements. The commenters either state that what O'Neill says is untrue, that it is complete nonsense, or socialist propaganda. An interesting feature in all of these comments is that they do not simply point out that he is wrong, they also include motivations and descriptions of the commenters' own views on the issues. All comments are not as comprehensive as the following, but none of them contain less than 20 words.

[Example 58] Pure socialist propaganda: there are so many holes in what he is saying. Not the least of which is ethical considerations: I certainly don't agree with 'his' philosophy on what is right and what is wrong. Fuc* equality. We have never been equal along any measurement nor dimension; in addition to this, I strongly believe socialist policies degenerate a society. The minute a politician in a socialist society moves to cut 'ANY' social benefits, massive SJW riots take place on the streets, full with Molotov cocktails, and throwing rocks at the police. They are nothing but a bunch of degenerates.

All eight comments violating positive politeness include disagreement in some form, and most of them are bald disagreements. In addition, several of the comments include insults and personal attacks on O'Neill. Three different comments include statements such as: *Look at the crowd even they know he's full of crap* and *You're a moron. I think less of TED now for having you* and *Nice dream brah*.

The following comment was one that Ed Yong received, and it is the only comment in the category of –P comments directed at him. It could perhaps be seen as a border line case in that the purpose of the commenter is a bit unclear, and the interpretation of the comment may vary. Although the commenter does not directly criticize Yong personally, the comment can be experienced as insulting. The commenter draws conclusions, perhaps on the basis of Yong's appearance and name, and labels him thereafter:

[Example 59] I love an asian who speaks with an impeccable British accent.

The comments including violations of positive politeness to female presenters are a bit different in their focus depending on which presenter is in question. In total there are ten of these types of comments. Kate Raworth received three of them, and all of them express disagreement with her. The following comment is a clear case of violating positive

politeness because in addition to expressing bald disagreement concerning ideologies, it is insulting and disrespectful as well:

[Example 60] Another declinist. Disappointing analysis. What a sparse vision. Another Utopian uncoupled from the realities of marginal analysis.

In contrast, the following comment to Raworth agrees with her ideas, but claims that the presentation is *insufficient* and that it will not change anything. The commenter also claims that because she is not an engineer or a physicist, she does not have all the necessary knowledge.

[Example 61] Financial and political power will do everything to keep this status quo that killing our Planet. They are so confident in their power that they allow Kate to talk about destroying the status quo. And again, she is an economist, not an engineer or physicist who know the natural laws and how to apply them. She says right things but it's insufficient. Consumerism can be dematerialized only so much, so, Earth population too must be controllably and naturally (not thru wars and catastrophes) multi-fold decreased. Bottom line is: it's just another talk with no actual result, just like Age of Reason Guidestone in the State of Georgia, U.S. erected 50 years ago.

Anab Jain received four comments violating positive politeness, of which two focus on the contents of her speech and two are racist and insulting to her personally.

Karen Lloyd received three comments that include violations of positive politeness, and two of them focus on her personally instead of the presentation. The example below is however one that criticizes her work. The interesting point is that it has a clear format, a polite greeting and a closing, but the matter itself is of critical quality. At first the commenter merely questions Lloyd's method, but the last remark expresses strict disapproval towards Lloyd's work.

[Example 62] Dear Ms. Lloyd,

can you be sure that the behavior observed in a laboratory in a dish reflects the microbes behavior at depth and under pressure and at temperature matching the life's habitat?

Just say'n I do not like the experiment as described here.

thanks

chuck

One of the two comments that attack Lloyd personally is a short insult, with no motivation to this particular view of her:

[Example 63] Annoying bish

The second one is a bit more elaborate, but quite peculiar. Lloyd wears a sleeveless dress, and this has clearly caught the attention of the commenter:

[Example 64] I liked oceanography when I was a kid but now I wonder about why women bare their arms in public and why for men this would seem strange and provocative. Are women flirting?

It seems that Lloyd's research and presentation are ignored because her clothing is interpreted as inappropriate by this particular commenter, who in addition, seems to have quite a vivid imagination.

4.2.4 Violations of negative politeness

Similarly to the occurrence of negative politeness, there are only a few instances of violations of negative politeness in the data. There are two comments to each gender including such language. These comments express requests and commands, and clear instances of ignoring or overriding the addressee's preferences, for instance in the following manner:

[Example 65] why don't you go to a hamlet in Africa and live. The Soviet union did that and what we saw was rationing

Dan O'Neill received the comment above, which ignores his entire presentation and makes a clear request. Karen Lloyd received a comment which not only ignores her preferences but sexually objectifies her:

[Example 66] I would bang her in my Nautilus.

4.2.5 Not applicable comments

There are only a few comments that were not applicable to the framework. Comments that did not include clear expressions of any of the politeness strategies above were placed in the category of not applicable comments. Women received five, and men two of such comments. An example of a comment put in this category is the following to Karen Lloyd:

[Example 67] she's kinda hot

The purpose might be to compliment the speaker, but *kinda* in the middle gives an uncertain image of the commenter's view. In addition, it is completely irrelevant to the context and has a sexual tenor to it, which causes difficulties in the interpretation and categorization considering the context.

Kate Raworth received two comments that were categorized as not applicable to the framework, although they seemed to take a critical stand to her presentation. The first one expresses an opposite view of economics, but not in a particularly extreme or aggressive manner.

[Example 68] Economics is measured in money, which isn't real, but a belief system. So measured economic growth have no other limits than our imaginations. Besides that, most people can't buy what they need, and powerful people will never allow that to happen. We can chose between leving most people in poverty, continue economic growth or leave todays economic system and it's measurments. Sadly this woman propose the second alternative

The second one of the not applicable comments to Raworth disagrees on how realistic her ideas are in practice, but the criticism is mostly directed elsewhere. It is perhaps a borderline case in that it could be interpreted as a bald disagreement, but because of the uncertainty and the sense that the commenter might actually agree with the core ideas of the presenter, it was marked as not applicable.

[Example 69] She's forgetting one crucial element, and the reason why this will never happen without a cataclysmic event: THE VAST MAJORITY OF PEOPLE IN POWER, CEOs, POLITICIANS...ARE EXTREME NARCISSISTS, SOCIOPATHS & PSYCHOPATHS. Not to mention, the vast majority of lower and middle class persons are sorely uneducated, uninterested, tuned out, or plugged in to absolute rubbish.

The following comment has an assertive tone, but it is not hostile and it does not insult the presenter. The criticism is directed more generally at the whole political system than specifically the system O'Neill speaks for. Especially the end of the comment and *his scheme of things* gives an unclear impression of what the commenter's view on the presentation is. *Scheme* could be interpreted as a devious plot but also as a genuine plan. The commenter notes that O'Neill does not mention population growth, but also considers limitations and the possibility of him mentioning it in another context. Because of the different possibilities of interpreting the comment, and the unclear purpose of the commenter, the comment was labeled as not applicable.

[Example 70] you need growth to keep Ponzi schemes going, which is what our left wing government programmes and right wing banking systems have become..this is where the left and the right join hands to unite in the folly which will destroy the environment...the speaker doesn't, in this clip anyway, address the issue of population growth and how that fits into his scheme of things

5 Discussion

The research by Wotanis and McMillan (2014), which provided a suitable framework for this thesis, found in their analysis of two popular YouTubers that the platform is a more hostile environment for women than for men. In their comparison, the female counterpart received more critical feedback than the male counterpart, and of the critical feedback most consisted of hater commentary and explicit sexual remarks. The results of this study do not entirely support these findings. Female presenters received more supportive feedback both concerning the contents of their TED Talks as well as them personally. In total, the difference in supportive feedback was 37 comments for female, and 23 for male presenters. Male presenters received more critical feedback concerning the contents of their presentations, 31 critical comments to be exact, whereas the corresponding number for women was 22. However, the number of critical comments concerning the presenter personally is even between the genders, nine comments for both parts.

As one takes a closer look at the topics of the comments, differences become clearer. One of the female presenters received a comment questioning her clothing and her bare arms in example 42, as well as another one stating that “she’s kinda hot” in example 67, along with another sexually objectifying comment in example 41. Another one of the female presenters received a comment that compared her voice to sweet and warm chocolate in example 32, which is a compliment of questionable topic.

One of the male presenters received a sexually explicit comment, displayed in example 40, but the tone of the comment was perhaps more ridiculing than objectifying. The impact of ridiculing comments should not be neglected, the effect may be different, but no less damaging. The interpretation of comments can of course be debated. As Wareing (2004) noted, the effect of sexist language towards men and women is not necessarily the same because of the imbalance in power relations in society.

One of the differences between this study and the one Wotanis and McMillan conducted is that they focused on one female and one male YouTuber. These performers post material regularly on YouTube and make a living out of their entertaining videos. The TED Talks included in this study are presentations on the speakers’ research and findings, or their visions in their own professional field. These factors quite probably have an impact on the kind of response the videos receive.

Herring and Kim (2018) studied politeness strategies in a news discussion forum, and considered gender as a possible factor. They found that both polite comments and comments that violated politeness, in a discussion dominated by men, received harsh replies, clearly violating politeness. Positive politeness was uncommon in these discussions. In discussions dominated by women, positive politeness was only used when addressing the first commenter of a thread, but otherwise, when addressing other repliers, women violated politeness heavily.

The study by Herring and Kim is perhaps not directly comparable to this study in that their focus was on the gender of the commenters, and they looked at what kind of responses different politeness strategies elicited. However, the results of this study show that female presenters received more comments with positive politeness and less comments with violations of positive politeness than male presenters did, which could be paralleled to the differences in politeness strategies used in male and female dominated discussions.

The results can also be compared to earlier research on language use in mixed groups of men and women. As mentioned, women received more comments with positive politeness than men did, twelve comments to be exact, whereas the correspondent number for men was five. Eleven of the twelve comments to female presenters included at least one compliment. All of the five comments to men included at least one compliment as well, which shows that positive politeness can often be expressed in this particular form. In addition, these results support the findings of earlier studies in that women receive more compliments than men do.

As mentioned earlier, the comments with positive politeness were much more elaborate in what they liked about the presentations to female presenters than to male presenters. The men did not receive any compliments concerning their appearances, whereas women received a few concerning body language, cuteness and a chocolaty voice.

The number of comments with negative politeness and violations of negative politeness was low, and quite similar for men and women. There was only one instance of negative politeness to a female presenter and two such comments to a male presenter. All of these comments included attempts to defend the presenter's ideas. It is perhaps not a surprise that there were not more instances of these politeness strategies as they may be more common in interactive communication than in a comment thread.

Herring and Kim (2018) mentioned a study conducted in a CMC environment, which showed that women tended to be more contentious in a forum dominated by men, and men tended to be less contentious in a forum dominated by women, compared to how the representatives of each gender usually behave. This could indicate that men and women adapt to the perceived norms of the opposing gender. A similar effect was found in a study on the use of taboo language by Coates (2004).

The violations of positive politeness included several instances of bald disagreements and some insults which could be interpreted as contentious. The male presenters received six more comments violating positive politeness compared to the female presenters, which could indicate a similarity to the studies mentioned above. Although the gender of the commenters was not considered here, and this study is not completely identical with the two other studies described above, the results show that there is a difference in the response men and women receive on YouTube.

If one takes a closer look at the violations of positive politeness, it becomes evident that the comments men received were more contentious than the ones women received, especially concerning the presentation topic. As mentioned, Hanson received comments with insults, and remarks stating that his ideas are crazy and miserable. O'Neill received comments stating that his presentation was socialist garbage and propaganda, and that he is full of crap, and that parts of his presentation are untrue. These comments to male presenters represent clear cases of flaming. The most contentious comments to women included one to Raworth stating that her vision is sparse, her analysis is disappointing, and that she is a Utopian, all which are insulting but perhaps not as hostile as the several remarks to men. Lloyd received one comment calling her an "annoying bish" which is more of a personal attack and a case of flaming, similar to some of the comments men received. Jain also received two racist comments, which were evidently aggressive and insulting. Concerning her presentation topic, Jain received a comment pointing out that all her future predictions are left of center, and that it is "not very scientific". Raworth received a comment about how she says the right things but it is insufficient, and that she is trying to describe a new economic model which already exist, i.e. socialism. Once again, noting that Raworth and O'Neill covered a very similar topic, it is interesting that the response to O'Neill was much more aggressive.

Could it be that commenters view it as more acceptable to post contentious remarks that violate positive politeness to men than to women? And if so, why would that be? Does

the stereotype of the polite woman steer commenters' behavior towards women? Perhaps it could explain the differences, at least partially. Considering that women also received more than twice as many comments with positive politeness, it is possible that the results indicate a difference in commenters' attitudes towards men and women. The reason or origin of these differences can not be explained in any simple way, but certain expectations and prejudice that root in gender roles and social norms could provide a foundation for explaining the issues.

As described earlier by York (2011), women are socialized to behave in a more docile and cooperative manner than men, whereas men are socialized to act in a more aggressive and competitive manner. These form parts of the norms that are viewed as behaving as proper men and women, and in addition to the pressure these norms set on men and women themselves, they also cause people to expect certain behavior of the different genders. Although good manners and politeness are expected from both men and women, docile and cooperative behavior goes hand in hand with being polite, whereas aggressive and competitive does not. Perhaps it is viewed as more acceptable for men to violate politeness, because it is seen as a natural part of masculine behavior. Stereotypically, it is more acceptable for women to express a wide range of emotions, which could explain the difference in the amount of positive politeness in the comments to women. Not only did women receive more comments with positive politeness than men, but the comments were also longer and more detailed to women.

A limitation here is that the politeness framework was applied to a mere subset of the data, which consists of comments that refer to the presenter directly, as described earlier. This means that the size of the data is rather small, and the application of the politeness framework to the complete data of the study might show different results.

Another factor that has an impact on the comments is the YouTube censorship. As described earlier, YouTube does not accept pornographic or sexually explicit contents, or contents that instigate hate or violence towards individuals or groups of people based on religion, race or ethnicity, gender, gender-identity, age, sexual preferences, handicap etc. YouTube explains in their Community Guidelines that they also ban for instance bullying, harassment and threats, but labelling contents is not a simple task. As YouTube relies on their users to report inappropriate contents, subjective views probably challenge their work. Contents that are experienced as hurtful by one user, may be experienced

completely differently by another. Although harassment is prohibited, it has to cross a certain line before it is taken seriously:

It's not OK to post abusive videos and comments on YouTube. If harassment crosses the line into a malicious attack it can be reported and may be removed. In other cases, users may be mildly annoying or petty and should be ignored ("Community Guidelines").

Simultaneously, YouTube encourages their users to voice their opinions even in controversial issues, which seems to be realized quite well considering comments in the threads for Raworth's and O'Neill's videos in particular.

In addition to the reliance on users to report inappropriate material, YouTube also relies on users to give their posted contents appropriate titles, which will aid in title scanning and algorithmic classification of contents. It is difficult to say how much attention comment threads are given in the censoring process, and how much work the censoring of actual videos require. As mentioned in the introduction and noted while studying the data, YouTube's censorship does not work in a consistent manner. There were no instances of inciting violence towards presenters, but insults and harassment were evident in the data. Several comments to Hanson were antagonistic and even sexually harassing towards him, and Jain received evidently racist and malicious comments. These cases clearly cross a line, and should not be classified as mere teasing or annoying comments. However, it may simply be that these comments have not been flagged by any users, and have not been reviewed by the staff. It is impossible to know whether or not the data used in this study has been the subject of any reviews.

As described in the chapter of material and methods, three pairs of presenters with similar topics were chosen so that the presenters would be more suitable for a comparison concerning gender. The responses to presenters with different topics are quite distinguishable. It seems that Raworth's and O'Neill's topic concerning economics, which is related to certain structures in society, provoked various responses of the opposing view. As the presentations dealt with national economics, and a system which is in direct contrast to the current one, it is understandable that the comments include various expressions of opinions.

Although Jain's and Hanson's presentations dealt with futurology and their own professional views of what the future might look like, the response they received was somewhat different. They received the same number of critical comments concerning the

contents of their presentation, but Hanson received more critical comments directed at him personally. One factor that may have an impact could be that Jain's topic was a bit more general; she presented several different alternatives of future challenges and possible solutions, whereas Hanson spoke about a specific innovational theory concerning artificial intelligence and the human brain. Still, if Jain's and Hanson's topics were interchanged between the two of them, it is quite possible that the reactions would be different.

Yong and Lloyd differ from the other presenters in the low number of critical comments on their presentations. Their topic of specific biologic research clearly did not provoke heated expressions of opinions, instead both of them received more neutral comments. Their topics consisted of new information, which is not based on subjective views, and this is most likely one of the reasons to the mild criticism. However, Lloyd's methods were questioned and she received personal criticism and hostile comments, which Yong did not.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to compare the attitudes towards female and male presenters, and the study was conducted through studying comments on YouTube videos of six TED Talks.

The thesis began with an introduction of the main contents and previous studies. Then a theoretical background followed, which consisted of earlier studies that support the current one. The background began from a general perspective on the thesis topic with gender in society and language use. Then politeness theories were introduced with the model developed by Brown and Levinson in focus, which was followed by a presentation of certain behavior and language use on the Internet.

The chapter of material and methods introduced the data used for the study and two frameworks that were applied. The data used for the study consisted of the 30 most recent comments on six videos of TED Talks on YouTube. The six videos included three female presenters and three male presenters, and the presentations covered three topics with a female and a male presenter dealing with a similar topic.

Two frameworks were applied to the data. The initial framework by Wotanis & McMillan (2014) consisted of a categorization of the entire data of 180 comments into supportive, critical, neutral and irrelevant comments. In addition, the supportive and critical

comments were categorized according to the topic of the comment into either concerning the contents of the presentation or the presenter personally. The second framework by Herring & Kim (2018) was applied to a subset of the data consisting of 57 comments collected from the original data. Comments that clearly referred to the presenters were included in the subset data.

As a conclusion of the categorization of comments into different types, one could mention that the female presenters received more supportive comments concerning both them personally and the contents of their presentations. As a plausible consequence, the male presenters received more critical comments, but only concerning their presentations. The amount of criticism of the presenters was evenly divided between the genders. The number of neutral and irrelevant comments were quite evenly divided as well. However, there were great differences between the presenters of the same gender as well, which indicated that factors other than gender had an impact on the response. The division of supportive and critical comments according to the topic showed that women received more remarks on their appearance, and in fact there were no critical or supportive remarks on the appearance of male presenters.

The second analysis consisted of a framework of politeness strategies which was applied to a subset of the data. The results showed a similar pattern as the categorization of different types of comments: female presenters received more positive politeness than male presenters, and male presenters received more violations of positive politeness.

In the discussion some links were drawn to earlier research on language and gender as well as the overall role of gender in society. One could state that the results indicate a more polite attitude towards women than towards men, and that traditional norms including separate expectations of men and women may have an impact on the behavior and language use to the different genders.

There are some limitations to the study. Even though other influential factors than gender were determined and when possible excluded, one can not ignore the impact of certain factors. Evidently the presenters' public speaking skills and experience have an impact on the entire presentation and the response of audience. The topic of the presentation clearly had an impact on the comments. A fascinating presentation about parasites in animals clearly received different feedback than a presentation on a controversial view of

national economics. The more similar the topic of the female and male presenters are, the easier it is to make conclusions about the influence of gender.

The subset of the data to which the framework of politeness strategies was applied was limited by the size of the data. Even though clear differences were found in the politeness strategies used, a larger data sample could provide more reliable results.

Stricter criteria in the categorization of different types of comments would have made the classification of comments simpler. Certain comments could be interpreted as supportive in one context and irrelevant or hurtful in another. The context of professional presentations on TED Talks was slightly different from the YouTubers that were studied in the article by Wotanis and McMillan (2014). In this study the context was considered as a factor in the classification of comments.

Issues that should be considered in a possible future study of a similar kind are strict criteria in categorization of comments. For instance, clearly defining what is supportive in the particular context would be helpful. Does a comment have to compliment the presentation in order to be labeled as supportive, or is it enough with a comment of a neutral tone that simply participates in the discussion? In this study, the first mentioned option was applied, but the latter one could be a criterion worth a try. Presenters with topics as similar as possible, as the presentations of Raworth and O'Neill, are recommended to make the comparison worthwhile.

The application of the politeness strategies of Herring and Kim (2018) could be recommended for a future study with a larger sample of data. However, in a YouTube comment thread under a video, it is not always clear who the comments are directed at. They may be addressing the person in the video, or other commenters, or they may simply make general remarks in hope for a large number of likes and visibility. The subset of data was separated from the rest of the data by choosing comments that referred to the presenter clearly. This verified who or what the comment concerned.

Although the study focused on a relatively small sample of data from an online environment, and the results can not be directly paralleled with the language use elsewhere, the study may still reflect some social issues.

The politeness strategies could be applied to a research on replies to comments in a YouTube comment thread, similarly to the data of Herring and Kim (2018), but a

limitation in that case would be the anonymity and the impossibility of verifying commenters' gender. Instead, the politeness strategies could be studied in comment threads to different YouTubers, such as the ones Wotanis and McMillan (2014) studied. This could provide more information about attitudes, expectations and prejudice towards the different genders, and contribute with valuable views to an important discussion of gender norms in society.

7 Swedish summary

7.1 YouTube ur ett genusperspektiv: En jämförelse av kommentarer till kvinnliga och manliga presentatörer på TED Talks.

I denna sammanfattning ges en helhetsbild av pro gradu-avhandlingen ovan. Det mest relevanta innehållet och begreppen redogörs för gällande teori, material och metoder, resultat av studien och diskussion med avslutning.

Syftet med avhandlingen var att jämföra attityder gentemot kvinnliga och manliga talare på YouTube. Jämförelsen utfördes genom att studera kommentarer till filmer av talare på plattformen TED Talks. I avhandlingen analyseras språkanvändningen i datormedierad kommunikation ur genusperspektiv.

Kapitlet med teori utgör en grund för själva studien och i den behandlas bl.a. begreppet genus, samt traditionella kvinno- och mansroller i samhället. Därtill presenteras genus i språkanvändning, artighetsstrategier, samt språk och beteende på nätet.

Eftersom genus är ett centralt begrepp i avhandlingen är det viktigt att definiera termen grundligt. En persons genus bildas som en del av identiteten, men ofta har samhället stort inflytande på hur man uttrycker sitt genus. Genus är inte ett binärt begrepp, med andra ord identifierar sig inte människor alltid som antingen man eller kvinna, och ens kön och genus kan vara i konflikt med varandra. Kön syftar till den fysiska och biologiska kategoriseringen av en person som man eller kvinna.

York (2011) förklarar hur könsroller bildas i samhället och hur män och kvinnor socialiseras till ett visst sorts beteende. Enligt traditionella könsnormer förväntas kvinnor vara samarbetsvilliga, känslösa och lugna, medan män förväntas vara mer tävlingsinriktade, aktiva och aggressiva. Könsnormer i samhället är en del av ett ytterst komplext system, och därför ändras förväntningar på och attityder gentemot män och kvinnor långsamt.

I samband med genus och språkanvändning presenteras några särskilda drag i språket som studerats av bl.a. Coates (2004). Dessa studier syftar på att män och kvinnor använder sig av språk på aningen olika sätt; skillnader i användning av t.ex. frågor, avbrytanden och artighet har fått en hel del uppmärksamhet av flera forskare. Ett perspektiv på språkanvändning som är mer relevant för själva avhandlingen är genuset av samtalspartnern, d.v.s. den person man tilltalar. Coates (2004) förklarar hur en del studier syftar på att både män och kvinnor anpassar sin språkanvändning enligt genuset av

samtalspartnerna. Studier syftar på att kvinnor avbryts mer, speciellt av män, och att kvinnor både ger och får mer komplimanger än män. En studie som fokuserat på datormedierad kommunikation har bl.a. visat att kvinnor är mer stridslystna i en miljö där det finns mer män, och män är mindre stridslystna i en miljö med mer kvinnor jämfört med hur genusen generellt sätt brukar ta sig i uttryck.

Den teoretiska delen av avhandlingen ger även en introduktion till beteende på internet. I behandling tas t.ex. anonymitet, artighet, objektifiering och *flaming* d.v.s. förolämpningar och aggressivt språk, i elektronisk kommunikation.

Artighetsteorin utvecklad av Brown och Levinson (1987) är av betydande roll i avhandlingen. Teorin baserar sig på positiv artighet och negativ artighet samt människans sociala ansikte. En grundläggande tanke i teorin är att alla vuxna människor har ett behov av att kunna handla obehindrat av andra (negativt ansikte) och att människor har ett behov av att känna gemenskap samt att känna sig accepterade (positivt ansikte). Positiv artighet innebär artighetsstrategier som stöder samtalspartnernas positiva ansikte, medan negativ artighet innebär artighetsstrategier som stöder samtalspartnernas negativa ansikte.

Som tidigare framkommit består studiens material av 180 kommentarer på YouTube-filmer, de 30 nyaste kommentarerna på sex TED Talks. I hälften av filmerna är presentatörerna kvinnor, och i den andra hälften är presentatörerna män. I presentationerna behandlas tre olika ämnen; biologi, ekonomi och framtidsforskning och för varje ämne valdes en kvinna och en man som talare. Genom att välja par med samma ämne skalades en del andra faktorer bort som möjligtvis kunde påverka kommentarerna och på detta vis kunde genus ges en större roll i jämförelsen. Dessa tre ämnen valdes på basis av att de är relativt sett neutrala ämnen, speciellt i relation till genusfrågor.

I studien används två olika metoder. Den första innefattar en kategorisering av kommentarerna i första hand som uppmuntrande, kritiska, neutrala eller irrelevanta. Sedan delades de uppmuntrande och kritiska kommentarerna i två kategorier beroende på vad som kommenterades i dem; antingen något gällande innehållet av presentationen eller själva presentatören. Denna metod baserar sig på en metod använd av Wotanis och McMillan (2014).

Den andra metoden tillämpas i en mindre studie på endast de kommentarer som klart hänvisar till talaren i fråga med t.ex. *this woman, the speaker, he, she* etc. Sammanlagt består materialet av 57 kommentarer. Denna metod baserar sig på Herring och Kims

(2018) metod som fokuserar på artighetsstrategier. Kommentarererna delades i kategorier enligt den artighetsstrategi som användes i dem; positiv artighet, negativ artighet, brott mot positiv artighet, brott mot negativ artighet och inte applicerbart.

Tabellen nedan tydliggör resultaten av den inledande kategoriseringen av kommentarererna. Sammanfattningsvis kan sägas att de kvinnliga talarna fick mer uppmuntrande kommentarer både gällande innehållet av sina presentationer samt gällande dem personligen. Män fick mer kritisk respons gällande innehållet av presentationen, men könen fick samma antal kritiska kommentarer riktade mot dem som person.

Tabell 1. [Kommentartyper]

	Kvinnor	Män
Uppmuntrande mot innehållet	29	19
Uppmuntrande mot talaren	8	4
Uppmuntrande sammanlagt	37	23
Kritiska mot innehållet	22	31
Kritiska mot talaren	9	9
Kritiska sammanlagt	31	40
Neutrala	21	20
Irrelevanta	9	10

Den andra tabellen visar antalet kommentarer som använde sig av de olika artighetsstrategierna. Resultaten visar att de kvinnliga talarna fick mer kommentarer med positiv artighet och de manliga talarna fick mer kommentarer som innehöll brott mot positiv artighet. Antalet andra strategier som användes var rätt lågt och jämnt fördelat mellan män och kvinnor.

Tabell 2. [Artighetsstrategier]

	Female	Male
Positiv artighet (+P)	12	5
Negativ artighet (+N)	1	2
Brott mot positiv artighet (-P)	10	16
Brott mot negativ artighet (-N)	2	2
Inte applicerbart (N/A)	5	2

Sammanfattningsvis kan sägas att kvinnorna fick mer kommentarer gällande utseendet, och män fick mer kommentarer som innehöll *flaming*. Likt en del av de tidigare studier som gjorts på språkanvändning och genus visar resultaten av denna studie att kvinnor får mera komplimanger än män. Antalet kommentarer som innehöll *flaming* visar också på samband med tidigare studier. Skiljaktigheter finns också: studien av Wotanis och McMillan (2014) tyder på att YouTube är en mer fientlig miljö för kvinnor än för män, vilket inte syns i resultaten för denna studie.

Något som klart påverkade kommentarerna var presentationernas ämne och själva talaren. De kritiska kommentarerna som gällde manliga talare personligen var nästan alla riktade mot samma person. En annan av de manliga talarna fick också betydligt mer kritiska kommentarer på sitt innehåll. Detta tyder på att många andra faktorer, som t.ex. sättet att tala, utseendet och ämnet, påverkade reaktionen hos tittarna. En intressant skillnad var ändå responsen som en av de kvinnliga och en av de manliga talarna fick, fastän de behandlade nästan identiska ekonomiska teorier. Den manliga talaren fick lite mer än dubbelt så mycket kritik gällande innehållet, och den kvinnliga talaren fick klart mer uppmuntrande kommentarer.

En av de begränsande faktorerna i studien gäller storleken av materialet. Speciellt den andra metoden som tillämpades på endast 57 av totalt 180 kommentarer, kunde ge tydligare resultat med ett större material och mer trovärdiga slutsatser kunde dras. Studien visar även hur stor betydelse presentationernas ämnen har för kommentarerna, och att det är viktigt att ämnena är så lika som möjligt för att man skall kunna dra slutsatser på basis av genus.

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