Interrupting, Patronizing and Silencing in the Series *Teen Mom 2* – Re-evaluating the Stereotypes

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Abstract

Today’s western society sees women as powerless and incapable and men as dominant leaders in any given situation. These stereotypes of men and women are often reflected as expectations of how men and women should behave and carry themselves. Women are expected to stay quiet and men are expected to take charge regardless of the situation at hand. These expectations further prevent opportunities for both men and women in working life, for example. They also cloud people’s ability and willingness to look at people as individuals. The purpose of this current study is to question these stereotypes that are based on gender and show that gender is only a social role people play in everyday situations. This study will examine the conversational behaviour of men and women from Teen Mom 2 in conflict situations with the help of transcriptions.
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1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how stereotypes of male dominance between heterosexual male and female couples in fights, disputes and conflicts hold true in the TV-series Teen Mom 2. I examined the following stereotypes: males interrupt females more, men silence women and men patronize women. My research questions were whether these stereotypes hold true in my data. I also wanted to question the findings of earlier research. I will analyse whether and how these gendered stereotypes unfold in a reality TV show through the actions of interrupting, silencing and patronizing. My goal is to not merely identify these stereotypes but to also show that they are not defined by gender alone.

One of the most researched topics in gender discourse is by far interruption. It is widely assumed that in mixed gender conversations men interrupt women more than women interrupt men. However, at the same time it is claimed that women talk more than men. Men are thought to be the more dominant speaker and that they present this quality by interrupting and silencing women. While these stereotypes are often supported by earlier research and the assumption of society, I wanted to conduct a research of my own to see if these stereotypes hold true in a modern TV-series portraying young adults.

One of these supportive researches was conducted by Pamela Fishman (1983) as stated by Eckert and MacConnell-Ginet (2003): “Pamela Fishman’s study (1983) of the private conversations of several graduate student heterosexual couples stands as a landmark in the study of male conversational dominance. This study depicted men dominating their partners through the strategic use of both silence and interruption. The men not only interrupted their partners during conversation; they also did not take up their partner’s topics in conversation” (p.113). It is good to note that researches often focus on young adults in their 20’s and 30’s. I also wanted to examine if women “behaved like men” as argued by these stereotypes. I will try to find the reasons behind the fact that earlier research support these stereotypes later on in my paper.

2. Background

2.1 Gender

In this section I will present earlier research and the background reading I did for this paper regarding gender. First, I will introduce the concept of gender in its social context and what the general assumption of male and female communication is. Gender is separated from sex in the
Sex refers to an individual’s anatomy of their reproductive system. Gender, on the other hand, is a social role.

As I said in the introduction, it is a common assumption that men are the dominant participants in conversations. Women, on the other hand, are thought to be powerless and the agreeing participants. Lakoff (1973, taken from Tannen 1996) even suggests that such thing as “woman’s speech” exists, characterised by tag questions, for example. There are noticeable differences in the way men and women converse, but the differences are not clear cut nor purely founded on gender. Tannen (1996) argues that “males and females learn their styles of talking in sex-separate peer groups. In this sense, they grow up in different cultural environments” (p.89). In her book *Men and Women in Interaction: Reconsidering the Differences* (1996) Aries states that “Women tend to interact in more roles that elicit supportive, cooperative behaviour, men in roles that elicit dominant, directive behaviour” (p. viii).

Gender is, in fact, a role people play in their daily lives. It cannot be assumed to tell the whole truth about people’s behaviour. Quite often people feel normative pressure to behave in a way that is characteristic to their gender. Nevertheless, in a heated argument this pressure to behave in a certain way is usually forgotten or disregarded and people are more likely to behave in a way that is true to their character and personality. This is the reason why I decided to narrow my topic down to communication happening while fighting. Aries (1996) continues on saying “we find contexts in which men and women both display feminine behavior, contexts in which they both display masculine behavior” (p. 16). This reinforces the fact that gender is a social role. There is no one correct way to behave. Tannen (1996) argues that it is “tempting to assume that whatever women do results from, or creates, their powerlessness and whatever men do results from, or creates, their dominance” (p. 31).

### 2.2 Stereotypes of Men and Women

In this section I will introduce the stereotypes that I focused on in this study that are thought to embody male dominance. Earlier research (such as those of Zimmerman and West) support the view that men are dominant. However, many of these studies were conducted in the 1970’s, so, naturally people’s behaviour has changed. Especially women feel more comfortable and encouraged to deviate from social norms that earlier held them from behaving “unladylike”. Coates (1999) states that “it is undeniable that one of the burdens of being born female is the imperative to be nice. The ideal of femininity, established in the nineteenth century, is the ‘perfect wife and mother’” (p.
Women are not allowed to behave “badly”. Although this continues to be a problem in today’s society, women’s conditions have improved since these earlier research were conducted and as a result, women are less afraid to break these “rules”.

2.3 Men interrupt women more

Firstly, interruption is the most researched subject out of the ones I studied. Zimmerman and West (1975) have defined interruption as “a violation of the turn exchange system” (taken from Tannen 1996, p. 57). “Interruption” has negative connotations, it can be described as a “conversational bully” (Tannen, 1996 p.58). A lot depends on whether or not a speaker feels interrupted. A common assumption is that an interruption is a hostile act and that the one who gets interrupted is the victim of this horrendous act. (Tannen, 1996 p. 55) While sometimes interruptions are used to silence the speaker and taking the floor, this is not the whole truth. Interruptions also play a role in supporting what is being said. Other people engage in the conversation as well by providing their own views of the topic, for example. Another example is when a conversation is going on in the dinner table and someone interrupts the speaker by offering more salad. This certainly is not a hostile act, but rather functions as a “metacomment”. These can be considered as “overlaps” which I will explain in more detail next.

Interruption can be separated from overlap, which is a far more neutral term. Zimmerman and West (1975) call overlap a misfire in the turn exchange system. For instance, if a second speaker begins talking in a place of a conversation where a transition is possible even when the first speaker has not finished their turn yet, this is called an overlap rather than interruption. “Active listening can lead to simultaneous talk without being interruptive” (West and Zimmerman, 1983 taken from LaFrance 1992 p. 498). However, if the second speaker began talking in a place where a transition would seem unnatural and the first speaker is unable to finish making a point, it would be considered an interruption. It is important to remember that if the first speaker does not stop talking, no interruption occurred.

It is sometimes suggested that women “ask for” discriminatory and even brutal treatment by men (West, 1979). This suggestion relates to the conception that women “invite” men to rape them by dressing in a revealing way. Do women play a part in inviting men to interrupt their utterances? West (1979) has interpreted that “females engage in a form of silent protest against male intrusion into their turns” (p. 81). It is not the case that women depict powerlessness, but they depict their own view of dominance by self-silencing. LaFrance (1992) noticed in her study that when a woman
interrupted a man it was seen as a far more disrespectful act than the vice versa. “When a woman interrupted a man, the pair was rated significantly more disrespectful and assertive than either of the two same sex pairs” (p. 497). This result supports the view that women are still expected to behave “nice” and “ladylike”.

2.4 Men silence women

This section will focus on the concept of silencing. To silence someone is a common way to control them and show dominance and power. It can be done in a very obvious way by, for instance, saying “Shut up!” or in a more subtle way such as simply not letting someone talk by constantly being the one talking and not creating a place for a turn at talk to happen. A further way of silencing is topical avoidance which according to Benjamin and Barash (2004) is “actively refraining from raising an issue for conversation”. As such, silencing can act as a way to avoid disputes (p. 271). Disputes are avoided for a number of reasons. In the context of a marriage, couples might avoid certain topics to maintain the stability of the marital relationship (Askham, 1985). Benjamin (1998) suggested that topical avoidance plays a part in couples’ power relations.

Traditionally women are thought to be on a lower level hierarchically compared to men in a marriage. Benjamin and Barash (2004) argue that a married woman must follow the accepted ways of talking within her marriage in order to live in a conflict-free marriage. If she deviates from these accepted ways, “she runs the risk of marital risk” (p. 267). A woman is not allowed to complain. Basically a man controls the marriage and the wife has no other choice other than to follow his lead and obey his rules. Many women still to this day live under such expectations in different cultures.

Zimmerman and West (1975) found in their study that in cross-sex segments each female exhibited the most silence, but in same-sex conversations the distribution of silence was more equal. They argued that the female’s silence “followed upon three types of events in the preceding turns: (1) a delayed ‘minimal’ response by the male; (2) an overlap by the male; and (3) an interruption by the male”. I am sure this is also connected to the fact that women had to act “ladylike” during the time this study was conducted. This discovery might also show that silencing is not always a deliberate action with which the “silencer” tries to control the other speakers.
2.5 Men patronize women

Lastly, I will explain what patronizing means in the context of my study. According to Gervais and Vescio’s (2012) definition patronizing is a “praise paired with a devalued position that did not provide an opportunity for monetary rewards” (p. 479). As women are stereotypically perceived to be incompetent and pitied, men act in condescending and paternalistic ways toward women (p. 480). This is what Gervais and Vescio call benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism might be seemingly kind, but it has differential effects on men and women (p. 480).

They further explain that “patronizing behavior serves as a situational cue that undermines control for women, but not men” (p. 482). The underlying problem is that men do not necessarily consider women as their equals but rather as somebody they need to help and pity. The help does not come from a place of respect. As Vescio and Gervais (2005) have pointed out, “being the recipient of the patronizing behaviors of powerful others may be anger inspiring” (p. 669). I also interpreted that patronizing is treating someone like a child, being disrespectful and condescending.

3. Theory and Methodology

In this section I will define the theory of Conversation Analysis and explain why and how I used it. I chose to apply Conversation Analysis for this research paper as this theory has its base on the fact that interaction between speakers is not based on coincidence but is an organized activity (Hakulinen, 1997). Every utterance happens for a reason and gives hints about who the speaker is (gender, age etc.). The speaker creates his or her identity through talking. A researcher making analysis tries to make observations from the data that can be generalized culturally (Hakulinen, 1997). Next, I will define the theory a little further.

Conversation Analysis (CA) has its roots in Harvey Sacks’ series of lectures held from 1964 to 1972. Harvey Sacks again learned from Harold Garfinkel who was the founder of ethnomethodology. According to Garfinkel the meaning of an utterance is built on the recipient’s gathering process and the cooperative action of expression and context (Hakulinen, 1997). The basic idea of CA is to find out every possible thing a turn at talk can make. Kitzinger (2013) explains that “CA offers a rigorous method for the analysis of actual recorded human interaction (rather than second-hand reports of it) with a commitment to understanding participants’ own orientations and actions” (p. 4).
Naturally occurring speech is the subject of study in CA. For example, phone calls between friends can be recorded and then analysed. The speaker in any situation is referred to as “current speaker” and the listener is referred to as “recipient”. The situations need to happen in their own way and that is why the researcher cannot stimulate or manipulate the situation in any way. This is somewhat problematic for my data because it is not necessarily so that the conversations or even the situations in the series happen completely naturally. However, the show does feature real people with their own children and the events in their lives have purpose. *Big Brother* is an example of a reality show that would not be applicable for CA’s purposes since the producers of the show control what happens in the house and how the “competitors” should act. I am aware of the problems my data holds but I am confident that applying CA is of value for my study.

The first step in CA is to collect data and then formulate it into something that can easily be interpreted, in this case, transcribe. The conversations are audio recorded or videotaped after which they are transferred to paper. In general it is important to include everything from the records to the transcription, such as laughter, coughs and pauses because the idea is to give as true as possible an image of what really happened on the recordings. I have not included coughs or laughs since I am not an expert in doing transcriptions and it would have been far too time consuming. It is not possible to make a completely accurate and objective transcription since the purpose of the study directs the things that end up on paper (Seppänen, 1997). The transcript techniques applied in my study can be found in section 9 Appendix.

Every conversation is managed by an underlying set of norms that generally speaking every person obeys unconsciously. The norms adapt to every situation and they describe who can speak and when. People know when it is acceptable for them to take part in a conversation without having to think about it. Zimmerman and West (1975) suggested that Sacks’ turn-taking system “can be viewed as a representation of speakers’ methods for achieving a preferred organization of their conversational interaction” (p. 111). In arguments, however, these norms do not apply as easily. Sacks (1974) suggested that a speaker had a right to one utterance at a time and after this there is a possible transition (“transition relevance place”) when another speaker can begin speaking (Hakulinen, 1997). As I pointed out earlier, Zimmerman and West had a similar idea of a place in conversation when it is natural for someone else to step in.

The beginning and ending of an utterance are some of the key elements. Especially the beginning of an utterance gives hints to the other(s) whether the first speaker will continue or another speaker can begin with their turn (Hakulinen, 1997). For example, a particle, such as *but* implies that the speaker
has something more to say. The main idea is that the turn taking system is built into the utterances themselves (Hakulinen, 1997).

Here, I will introduce the concepts of “affiliation” and “alignment” as they too describe the ways with which people build interactions. Steensig (2013) argues that people will invariably indicate whether they cooperate with aspects of the utterances they respond to when they respond in interaction. There is no need to say whether or not a speaker agrees or disagrees because the stance is built into the utterances themselves. Stivers, Mondada and Steensig (2011, taken from Steensig 2013) describe “alignment” being the “structural level of cooperation” (p. 20). “Affiliation” is “the affective level of cooperation” (p. 21). A speaker’s responses are affiliative when they match the prior speaker’s evaluative stance or display empathy (Stivers et al. 2011). Next, I will continue with introducing my data for this thesis.

4. Data: Teen Mom 2

In the following paragraphs I will discuss the data I examined. My research material for this thesis was a reality TV-series called “Teen Mom 2” which is a spinoff of the documentary series “16&Pregnant”. The show aired in the United States for the first time in 2011 produced by the MTV Networks. The series follows the lives of four women who have had children at the age of 16 and now struggle with combining being a mother, going to college, having a job and their romantic and other relationships. It is said that the series along with its spinoffs (“Teen Mom 3”) have drastically decreased the number of teen pregnancies in USA as its target audience is adolescents. According to the show’s senior vice president Lauren Dolgen the show represents the lives of these young women ”as cautionary tales about the consequences of unprotected sex, and the reality of becoming a parent too early” (CNN Why I created MTV’s 16&Pregnant). The show also spreads important information regarding safe sex and contraception.

For my research, I looked through the latest season, season six, and then watched again the episodes where most of the fighting between the couples happened. After this, I chose to analyse eight fights that I thought would best fit my topic as they represent some of the “ugliest” fights ever happened in the series in the sense that they involved a lot of yelling, cursing and emotional behaviour. The topics of the fights varied from jealousy to lack of trust and from accusations of cheating to overall unhappiness in one’s marriage. Three (Leah, Jenelle and Kailyn) out of the four women are in a serious relationship, both Leah and Kailyn are married and Jenelle is engaged,
therefore I focused only on them and chose to leave the fourth woman, Chelsea, out. Each episode is about 42 minutes long. I transcribed all eight fights for this thesis, but I did not include all of them in their full length to section five, since less amount of data seen here is enough evidence to support my arguments. Here is just one example from season six of Jenelle and Nathan fighting in the kitchen. Jenelle is about to go out with her friends and Nathan confronts her. The conversations quickly turns into a fight.

Excerpt 1: Interrupted by a woman

1 Nathan: You constantly do things out of revenge you’re like “hey, I’m going out”
2 Jenelle: No, Nathan. You, you take off. You go stay at a hotel for [two days. God knows what you’ve been doing
3 Nathan: and it, and it was the best two days of my entire life] because I heard no yelling no fighting
4 Jenelle: I just care that you’re leaving your son behind that you supposedly care about.
5 Nathan: Yeah
6 Jenelle: Who I
7 Nathan: I’m trying ((repeats many times, Jenelle over powering him))
8 Jenelle: Who I’ve been taking care of at night.
9 Nathan: That I’ve been trying to
10 Jenelle: You’ve been out at a hotel with god knows who doing god knows what
11 Nathan: Stop playing the victim card! So fucking sick of you acting like “oh, pity me, oh, pity me” Why you in this relationship?
12 Jenelle: Because I wanna make it work for our family
13 Nathan: OK
14 Jenelle: [but all you wanna do is leave leave leave
15 Nathan: Let me] I’ll just ask you one question.
16 Jenelle: [If you wanted to work on this relationship you would stay.
17 Nathan: See, you won’t let me talk.]

18 Nathan: You’re a bitch, end of story. Bottom line. That’s why all you’re relationships until you wake up get some counselling get some help, all of them are gonna

19 Jenelle: [That’s why all

20 Nathan: Can I get my ring back?]

21 Jenelle: No it was a gift.

22 Nathan: I don’t wanna be with you Jenelle.

((Jenelle leaves the room while Nathan continues on yelling slurs.))

I chose this particular TV-show, because I have watched it ever since the very beginning when the “teen moms” were first introduced in another program called “16 and pregnant”. Since then, it has been interesting to watch the struggles of these young parents and see how much having a child at such a young age ads stress to any relationship, let alone a romantic one. I have been noticing how awful the fights and arguments have been between the couples and became interested in if any stereotypes could be found in the couples’ communication. As my results show, many stereotypes did indeed come up, but more importantly many were rejected.

The episodes can be found online through many channels, but I chose the website Watch Series (2015). I found this way to watch the episodes to be the quickest and easiest to get hold of the data as I have already used this website many times earlier. The episodes can be watched online or they can be downloaded on a computer. I chose to watch them online since I felt that it would be less time consuming. Now, there is an ethical issue here since watching the episodes online for free is illegal. However, so many people around the world download series and movies constantly that it has, in a way, become a norm for today’s society. DVD’s are hard to find these days and unfortunately the show does not air on Finnish television at the moment.

Another issue with this type of data is that it is a reality TV-show. Often times reality shows are at least in part if not completely scripted. There is no way of absolutely knowing if this show in particular represents the real world or if the “teen moms” are, in fact, payed actors. I, however, do think that the show gives a somewhat real representation of the women’s real lives. Of course, some
situations have to be created in order for them to get captured on camera. Section 5 will show my analysis of the actions of silencing, patronizing and interrupting.

5. Analysis of the actions of silencing, patronizing and interrupting

5.1 Silencing

This section will focus on my analysis and discussion of the data. As I have said earlier, I applied Conversation Analysis to help with my interpretation. I will present the fights as transcriptions and discuss each of them separately. Nonetheless, I will not present each fight in their entirety since there is so much material that everything will not fit here. I will first take a look at the act of silencing.

An example of a woman silencing a man can be seen in this fight between Leah and her husband Jeremy in season six. They are having dinner at a restaurant and a seemingly harmless conversation turns into a fight. Leah complains how Jeremy is not home enough and that all he cares about is his job.

*Excerpt 2: Silencing as a way to control the dispute*

1 Leah: Feels good to have dinner with you because it may be another three weeks before I see your hind end.

2 Jeremy: I mean it’s not really easy being gone six seven nights a week.

3 Leah: Not to mention it’s been like a crazy what? four months, court, rumours people, you know just individuals saying `oh he cheated she cheated` umm like I feel like we can trust each other but at the same time I want us to go to therapy and stuff and.. I hope with your work (1) schedule we can make it happen.

4 Jeremy: It just [depends I mean …. we have to be able to eat (--)]

5 Leah: [You have to set your work aside … psst psst ((closing hand gesture to silence Jeremy)) You have to set your work aside and put your family first for once.]

6 Jeremy: “Seriously (-) just quit my job?"

7 Leah: No I don’t at all. I’m just saying that counselling like that’s all I’ve ever said counselling would help us understand each other’s like point of view
8 Jeremy: Holy fuck I wake up every morning [at 4.30 and go to work

9 Leah: You did that before you met us] you did it before

10 Jeremy ((overlapping)): No! Because before I looked at everybody like ((raises his middle finger)) fuck ya’ll I’m going home. I quit. (--) I didn’t have a wife, I didn’t have three kids, I didn’t have a home, I didn’t have all these payments blaah blaah blaah [sorry I won’t lay around on the couch

11 Leah: I don’t I don’t expect you to]

12 Jeremy: getting fat

13 Leah: but you would throw us aside before too. I feel as if you had like the most money in the world like you would still put like put your job before us

14 Jeremy: Fuck this ((gets off the table and leaves))

The most obvious indication of silencing is when Leah makes a hand gesture on line five that compels Jeremy to stop talking. The hand gesture combined with “psst!” make it seem like Leah is almost attacking Jeremy. She does not want to hear anything Jeremy has to say rather only wants her own opinion to be heard. She is depicting the dominant role by leading the conversation the way she wants to and refusing to listen to anything that interferes her take on the issue. Jeremy does not want to fight so he is merely defending himself and not attacking back.

Leah is making accusations toward Jeremy by implicating he does not put his family first. She is not making wishes for Jeremy to change his way but rather making orders. These actions of accusing and ordering Jeremy around indicate Leah’s dominance in this dispute. Leah is by no means applying topical avoidance. She is comfortable with fighting with Jeremy and not concerned with whether or not she follows the “accepted ways” of talking in a marriage.

Another dispute between Leah and Jeremy shows once again Leah’s tendency to silence Jeremy. They are driving with Leah’s two daughters in the back. The car is overwhelmingly full of all sorts of things and this upsets Jeremy.

Excerpt 3: Female silencing

1 Leah: Why would you even say such a god damned thing? No, that’s [fucking creepy.

2 Jeremy: No, no look in the back.}
Leah: I lost her hairspray. I hope it didn’t fall out of the car.

Jeremy: My God, look at the amount of crap. You can’t even see out of the rear-view. If a cop would pull up on your ass and see all that shit back there.

Leah: You know how many people can’t see out of their rear-view? You can’t deal with coming home. [You cannot deal with coming home.

Jeremy: This is fucking utterly ridiculous.] I’m not dealing with it.

Leah: I will clean it! It just fucking happened Jeremy.

Jeremy: It was like this last week.

Leah: Leave me alone.

Jeremy: You don’t care about what this looks like?

Leah: Can you shut up? God, you don’t know what it’s like, you don’t know.

Jeremy: Okay, I’ll take a week off and I’ll take care of the kids. And you see how chaotic my life is.

Leah: You know what? Fuck you.

Jeremy: I’m simply thinking about getting there on fucking time, Leah. Something no one else does. This is fucking ridiculous.

Leah: Shut up!

Both directly and indirectly, Leah is telling Jeremy to stop complaining about the on-going situation as well as about the general problems they have in their marriage. She is yelling “Shut up!” and “Fuck you.” She is also “asking” him to shut up.

Another example shows a man’s action of silencing in this fight between Kailyn and her husband Javi in season six. Kailyn and her friend Sterling are planning to go to a concert with her friends but Javi is not comfortable with the idea. He is accusing Kailyn for infidelity and does not trust her to go on this trip.

Excerpt 4: Female silencing 2

Kailyn: But you’re ruining everybody’s time
2 Javi: Okay so go get Isaac from school

3 Kailyn: No Javi you don’t understand, we can ((Sterling yelling something over on top of them))

4 Javi: This is Kail’s responsibility as well so it’s between me and you (--) ok so you fucked up.

5 Kailyn: I didn’t fuck up I didn’t do anything wrong. What I’m saying to you is if we wait until Isaac gets out of school

6 Javi: So go get him right now

((The argument goes on until Kailyn leaves the room upset. A few minutes later Kailyn returns to the living room))

7 Kailyn: Javi, I’m not texting him about anything I shouldn’t be texting him about

8 Javi: It’s not a onetime [thing

9 Kailyn ((yelling over Javi banging her hands together)): Why are you so insecure about my guy friends?]

10 Javi: The only time

11 Kailyn: Why are you so insecure?!

12 Javi: I’m just trying to (--)

((Kailyn keeps repeating the same question while Javi is talking to his sister who is sitting next to him))

13 Kailyn: But why are you so insecure about it?

14 Javi: Get out of my face.

15 Kailyn: How can you talk to somebody like that?

16 Javi: The conversation is done, leave the room

17 Kailyn: You know what? You’re right ((she leaves the room and the argument ends))

Javi is showing dominance towards the end of the fight by saying “Get out of my face” and “The conversation is done, leave the room”. He is silencing Kailyn by implying his disinterest to continue. To him it does not matter if Kailyn wanted to continue with the conversation because in his mind the situation is over and done with. Kailyn, on the other hand, is very interruptive. She
does not respect Javi’s turn. She demands answers from Javi by asking him repeatedly with aggression “Why are you so insecure about it?” When Javi does not give her a straight answer, she gets even more aggravated.

Kailyn is not displaying affiliation nor alignment as her responses are not affiliative, they do not match Javi’s evaluative stance nor display empathy. When Javi is trying to reason why he is jealous and insecure 8 “It’s not a onetime thing” and 12 “I’m just trying to” Kailyn, first of all, does not let him finish and, secondly, she is not cooperating with Javi’s utterances.

Repetition can be seen as a way to take control over the other participant in this example. By repeating the same question over and over “Why are you so insecure?”, Kailyn prevents Javi from defending his stance. She simply does not create room for Javi to participate.

This next example comes from Jenelle and Nathan. Jenelle is waiting for Nathan to get in the car so they can drive to an important meeting with Jenelle’s lawyer.

Excerpt 5: Equal silencing

1 Jenelle: Dude, I’m gonna be late. I’m so pissed off, dude. My day’s already fucking ruined.

2 Nathan: Dude, [I’m staying home

3 Jenelle: Are you serious?]

4 Nathan: I’m not fighting [with you

5 Jenelle: Are you serious?! Seriously again,] Nathan?!

6 Nathan: I told you.

7 Jenelle: C’mon Nathan!

8 Nathan: Go by yourself

9 Jenelle: No c’mon! Oh my god, dude! Here we fucking go again, dude! I’m so sick of this ((follows Nathan back inside the house)) Let’s just go I have an appointment, Nathan! This means a lot to me! This is for my son! And I want [you there for support!

10 Nathan: Oh my gosh!]

11 Jenelle: C’mon Nathan! I’m begging you for your fucking support!

12 Nathan: No, I’m done!
13 Jenelle: Please just go with me!

14 Jenelle: Oh my god, dude! This is for my son.

15 Nathan: Your son, yup, not my problem.

16 Jenelle: First of all, you’re gonna sit there and step up for Jace to be a father figure and now you’re gonna sit there saying he’s not even your son. Whatever, Nathan.

17 Nathan: You’re dumb, Jenelle. You’re a bitch!

18 Jenelle: I don’t even know if it’s even worth getting him back because if he’s gonna come home to this. Kaiser is already going through

19 Nathan: That’s your control once again.

20 Jenelle: Stop acting like a bitch! You do this [all the time!]

21 Nathan: And, and still support me] and act like a team. [Shut up! Shut up!

22 Jenelle: and yelled at me]

23 Nathan: No, I didn’t

24 Jenelle: Yes, you have!

25 Nathan: I swear to God I didn’t!

26 Jenelle: Okay, Nathan. Shut up, Shut the fuck up. Oh my God, dude are you serious?

Both Jenelle and Nathan use very direct ways of silencing each other “Shut up, shut the fuck up!” Cursing makes these actions more hostile and serious. Both of them are also equally interrupting each other, talking over one another. Neither of them, however, agree to stop talking and let the other one have the floor.

Repetition of “Shut up!” makes the “command” more powerful. Unlike in excerpt 1, Jenelle does not use repetition to control the floor but rather tries to get through to Nathan. She is letting him know that she does not want to hear his side of the argument. So, repetition can be used to display many functions in conflict situations. The above section has focused on examining the silencing actions of the couples. The examples show that the men were not alone displaying this behaviour. In fact, the women seemed to behave more in this manner. Next, I will move on into analysing patronizing behaviour.
5.2 Patronizing

This section is devoted to the analysis of the patronizing actions. Earlier, in Excerpt 1 I introduced Jenelle and Nathan’s argument. Both of them act in a very hostile manner yelling, cursing and patronising each other. Nathan patronizes Jenelle by yelling “oh pity me” (treating her like a child and humiliating her) as if this is what Jenelle wants Nathan to do. He also accuses Jenelle of “playing the victim card”. He does not think Jenelle has the right to open up about her feelings and tell him what is bothering her.

Jenelle and Nathan both talk over each other constantly as if they are carrying out monologues instead of having a conversation with each other. It is clear that both of them only want their own voices to be heard without taking into consideration what the other one is saying. The couple is interrupting and not overlapping, since there clearly is not a natural place of transition occurring anywhere. However, neither of them are affected by the other one’s interruption as they do not stop talking.

Nathan depicts this same type of behaviour in this next extract taken from season six:

*Excerpt 6: Patronizing as a way to humiliate*

1 Jenelle: What? What are you talking about? I haven’t [talked to anyone,

2 Nathan: Yes you have]

3 Jenelle: I’ve been completely faithful. You saw my phone as soon as you came home.

4 Nathan: You’re so fucked up in the head, dude. Why have all your other relationships failed?

5 Jenelle: Because I loved them and they didn’t [Nathan: ooooohh] and even, and even Gary said Jenelle is the best girlfriend I’ve had.

6 Nathan: You have problems. You do.

7 Jenelle: (--)

8 Nathan: I fucking I fucking went to war and [back and you have fucking problems.

9 Jenelle: That’s why you have problems.]

10 Nathan: No, you have fucking problems.
11 Jenelle: You need to go to counselling you need to seek medication.

12 Nathan: You fuck, wait a second you have problems, dude.

13 Jenelle: Here’s some more, buddy. ((pointing to the alcohol bottles on the kitchen table)) look, you’re almost finished with them. You can fucking drink all of them. That’s all you ever do.


15 Jenelle: Leave me alone

((Nathan in child-like voice mimicking Jenelle)) Leave me alone, like a 12-year-old. “I don’t know how to deal with problems, leave me alone.” Fucking waste of life, dude ((he leaves the room))

Patronizing on Nathan’s part happens with this last turn of talk. Again, he is putting words into Jenelle’s mouth and at the same time humiliating her. He makes it seem like he is the king of the hill and Jenelle is nothing next to him. Therefore, he is clearly showing dominance and power. At the same time, however, Jenelle is also practising patronizing when she “encourages” Nathan to drink all the alcohol on the kitchen table. Both of them claim the other one to have “problems” and that counselling with medication is needed, clearly exaggerating.

Cursing is a way to overpower and dominate someone. In both of these extracts on Jenelle and Nathan, Nathan is the only one cursing and yelling. He fulfils more of the male stereotypes with his behaviour than the other two men - Javi and Jeremy - I have examined.

In my analysis, I did not notice any examples that would support Gervais and Vescio’s (2012) definition of patronizing “praise paired with a devalued position that did not provide an opportunity for monetary rewards” (p. 479). None of the men nor women fulfilled this type of behaviour. They did humiliate each other and act in a condescending way. Patronizing in the form of sexism did hold true as Nathan treated Jenelle as being on a lower level hierarchically and thought her to be incapable.

5.3 Interrupting

This section is devoted to the analysis of interruptive actions. This next excerpt indicates Kailyn’s interruptive behaviour. Again, Kailyn is dominating the conversation this time by constantly interrupting Javi.

*Excerpt 7: Interruption as a way to dominate*
The couple is in the car and Kailyn asks Javi’s opinion about going to a trip with her friend Sterling.

1 Kailyn: I’m gonna be honest with her so tell me what your honest feeling is. Like, just to me I just think let it go.

2 Javi: I have been letting it go. Like, I’m not gonna be like “oh my God please come.”

3 Kailyn: So, no, the answer is no then. ((Javi mumbling))

4 Kailyn: No, the answer is no then.

((They are driving to a drive through diner))

5 Javi: Do you want something?

6 Kailyn: No, nothing.

7 Javi: Oh God ((places his order)) Sure you don’t want anything?

8 Kailyn: Just take me home. Now I’m pissed off.

9 Javi: You’re pissed off but you asked for my honest [opinion so I gave you

10 Kailyn: because you’re saying you let go of it but you’re saying you’re still not a fan of her and it’s still gonna be uncomfortable.]

11 Javi: Yeah I just said it’s[...

12 Kailyn: Because are you embarrassed of yourself?] Is that what it is?

13 Javi: No, I just don’t wanna hang out with her.

14 Kailyn: Why?

15 Javi: Coz I just told you I’m not a fan. If you want my honest opinion tell her she can do whatever she wants. Explain (--)?

16 Kailyn: No, I’m telling her you’re gonna be uncomfortable. So, no don’t come.

17 Javi: Don’t ask for my honest opinion and then get mad.

18 Kailyn: So, basically you didn’t let go of anything.

19 Javi: I did [(--)]

20 Kailyn: Take me home. I’m not,] I don’t wanna do this today.
Kailyn is initiating all of the overlapping talk. Kailyn is “self-selecting” (Zimmerman and West, 1975) herself to talk. Self-selecting in itself is not “wrong”, it represents natural behaviour in conversations, but Kailyn does not wait for a possible transition place to occur. Kailyn’s actions are considered interruptive since Javi is unable to finish making a point and Kailyn is making statements rather than questions (LaFrance, 1992).

This next example is from season six where Kailyn and Javi have a fight over Javi’s jealousy.

Excerpt 8: Mutual interruption

1 Kailyn: I have nothing to hide from you Javi
2 Javi: Ok, so if we have nothing to hide we’ll delete all the pass codes, we’re gonna [know each other’s pass codes]
3 Kailyn: no I’m not gonna, no that’s crazy. That is crazy. [I’m sorry I’m not gonna give up all my privacy because you’re insecure]
4 Javi: How is that crazy? How is that crazy?] because you’re texting all these dudes behind my back
5 Kailyn: You can have my phone. Behind, [behind your back? Ok, no
6 Javi: You’re texting], yes
7 Kailyn: My bottom line is I’m not gonna give up a hundred percent of my privacy to make you feel secure because you’re acting crazy.

This time both of them are interrupting each other fairly the same amount. Although Javi is presenting a question “How is that crazy?”, Kailyn has not paused her utterance or indicated that she is finished, therefore Javi is interrupting her. The same situation happens when Kailyn interrupts Javi, in the first place. When Javi is not ready with his utterance, Kailyn begins to make her statement: ”That is crazy”. They are interrupting each other back and forth shamelessly.

As I mentioned this excerpt in section 4 already, Excerpt 1 shows a fight between Jenelle and Nathan again. They have a conflict in the kitchen over jealousy.

1 Nathan: You constantly do things out of revenge you’re like “hey, I’m going out..”
2 Jenelle: No, Nathan. You, you take off. You go stay at a hotel for [two days. God knows what you’ve been doing

3 Nathan: and it, and it was the best two days of my entire life] because I heard no yelling no fighting

4 Jenelle: I just care that you’re leaving your son behind that you supposedly care about.

5 Nathan: Yeah

6 Jenelle: Who I

7 Nathan: I’m trying ((repeats many times, Jenelle over powering him))

8 Jenelle: Who I’ve been taking care of at night.

9 Nathan: That I’ve been trying to

10 Jenelle: You’ve been out at a hotel with god knows who doing god knows what

11 Nathan: Stop playing the victim card! So fucking sick of you acting like “oh, pitty me, oh, pitty me” Why you in this relationship?

12 Jenelle: Because I wanna make it work for our family

13 Nathan: OK

14 Jenelle: [but all you wanna do is leave leave leave

15 Nathan: Let me] I’ll just ask you one question.

16 Jenelle: [If you wanted to work on this relationship you would stay.

17 Nathan: See, you won’t let me talk.]

18 Nathan: You’re a bitch, end of story. Bottom line. That’s why all you’re relationships until you wake up get some counselling get some help, all of them are gonna

19 Jenelle: [That’s why all

20 Nathan: Can I get my ring back?]

21 Jenelle: No it was a gift.

22 Nathan: I don’t wanna be with you Jenelle.
((Jenelle leaves the room while Nathan continues on yelling slurs.))

Nathan clearly indicates rightfully that it is his time to talk “Let me just ask one question”. Asking a question is an acceptable way to self-select. Jenelle ignores this and continues with her turn. Nathan even says himself “See, you won’t let me talk” Nathan tries to start his utterance with the help of repetition “I’m trying”, but Jenelle, again, pays him no attention and continues with her utterance.

All of the examples in this section show that the men and women are interrupting rather than overlapping each other’s talk. To my consideration no self-silencing occurred.

In this section, I have questioned the stereotype that men interrupt women more. My examples clearly show that this is not the case with these couples. Jenelle and Kailyn are completely overpowering their partners by interrupting. Next, I will discuss the results I have made from my examples.

6. Discussion of the results

The purpose of my study was to question the validity of stereotypes that are linked to male dominance in conversations. I focused on a specific topic of fights and disputes to narrow down the field of conversation. My study has shown that both the men and women in Teen Mom 2 depict these stereotypes that are usually only linked to men’s behaviour. I was surprised to see that the women were so overpowering and sometimes aggressive, although they did also show some features that are more connected to women’s behaviour such as crying and getting emotional. I would like to point out that none of the three men indicated “female” behaviour. Both genders interrupted, silenced and patronized one another, at times very rudely. What I did expect to see was indeed that the stereotypes of silencing, patronizing and interruption as masculine actions did not hold completely true. The sampling of this study is, of course, quite small but it does support my arguments to the extent that I can make the conclusion that are presented in section 7.

The couples I examined clearly displayed both feminine and masculine behaviour regardless of their gender. I was able to show that behaviour is not always linked to one’s gender. I also proved that the women in this series are not powerless participants in a given conversation and only follow the man’s lead. Also, the men are not dramatically more dominant than the women. In the cases of
Leah and Jeremy, Leah showed much more dominance than Jeremy. With Jenelle and Nathan, Jenelle was often aggressive and hostile as she talked down on Nathan and cursed.

None of the women were afraid to confront their partner and “run the risk of marital risk”. They behaved “badly” and “unladylike” just as I expected. At least in these eight examples, the women were not concerned with what society might think of their “unladylike” behaviour, after all, they are filmed and basically everyone has the opportunity to watch them. Topical avoidance was not relevant for the women nor men of this series.

Altogether I would say this study was a success. I was able to make the transcriptions in a way that indicated my analysis objectively. Some of the examples might be better if watched on tape rather than reading the transcriptions, but the transcriptions do give an idea to the reader of what was going on in the disputes and fights.

7. Conclusions

This study is only a representation of male and female behaviour and should not be taken as something that reveals a universal truth about men and women. I am aware that my examples come from very special situations, but my work is not about any universal characteristics of male and female interactions. There are major differences in behaviour depending on time, culture and expectations of the surrounding society. It would be important to conduct more of similar types of studies with a larger sampling in the future to prove that stereotypes of any kind should not be considered to necessarily hold truth.

I believe that blindly trusting in stereotypes and expecting people to act accordingly clouds our judgement – we lose the ability to look at people as individuals. This has had a huge impact on the way society treats people. Especially women’s position would improve if society stopped expecting them to be powerless and incapable and put them on the same starting line with men. There is clearly need for further research regarding this area.
8. Bibliography


9. Appendix

Transcribing conventions

The transcript techniques were applied according to Tainio, L., Hakulinen, A., Londen, A., Raevaara, L., Sorjonen, M., Routarinne, S., et al. (1997). Keskustelunanalyysin perusteet.

[ the beginning of an overlap

] the end of an overlap

(-) an unclear word that could not be transcribed

(-- multiple unclear words

(( ))) my comments of what is happening in the situation