LARA

**LEARNING AND
RESIDENCE ABROAD**

UNIT SIX

Gender Relations

CONTENTS

SECTION ONE

1. Introduction

> CATHY   He thought it was terrible, the idea of women shooting at each other. Shooting each other's pretty little legs off. It is terrifying. It terrifies me because I would hate to lose my legs. But it terrifies men for a different reason …. You know, on the anti-aircraft units the ATS girls are never allowed to fire the guns. Their job is to work the range-finder. If the girls fired the guns as well as the boys … if girls fired guns, and women generals planned the battles … then the men would feel there was no … morality to war, they would have no one to fight for, nowhere to leave their … consciences … war would appear to them as savage and as pointless as it really is. The men want the women to stay out of the fighting so they can give it meaning. As long as we're on the outside and give our support and don't kill, women make the war just possible ...something the men can feel tough about.
>
> (McEwan, I (1981) *The Imitation Game.* Picador: 142)

As is the case with Families and Households (Unit 5), Gender Relations is a diffuse and overarching area of enquiry that lends itself well to ethnographic and cross-cultural research.   All societies make distinctions between the sexes, assigning to them different roles and responsibilities.   Women and men are routinely perceived and symbolised in different ways and these cultural constructions of gender have been of great interest to anthropologists. As with other conceptual units, 'gender' needs to be relativised.   Are there subtly different ways in which women and men interact and represent each other in what seem like very similar societies in urban western Europe?

Students will be aware of a number of the debates and theories surrounding gender since these are currently all pervasive and are regularly highlighted in the media as well as in many programmes of study at university level. This unit provides an opportunity to 'make strange' and examine critically our evolving assumptions about gender roles by introducing students to an anthropological perspective on gender. It also provides some research methods for analysing micro data on gender as it is practised and reinforced in particular contexts and in the small details of everyday interaction.   In addition, issues of language and representation considered particularly relevant to language students are included, and some basic sociolinguistic approaches and discourse analysis are introduced to encourage students to reflect on examples of the relationship between language and cultural meanings.

Students should find plenty of opportunities for studying gender relations for their ethnographic project. If attached to a university, they can study a group of students, as school assistants they can study gender in the classroom or staff room or, in the workplace, the sexual politics of the office.

2. Links with other units

Students will find many conceptual links between this and other units. Issues of socialisation (see Units 5 and 7) and the cultural construction of identity are often returned to throughout the course, as is the notion of shared cultural knowledge (Unit 4). All these are interwoven with the idea of learned gender roles.

Unit 3 has already examined some gendered aspects of non-verbal communication and approached the issue of different communicative styles, notably through the Kingswood Comprehensive video. It has also shown, in the main student reading by Anne Sutherland, how symbolic spatial orders are sometimes created along gender lines. Unit 5 also overlaps in its exploration of the family as a cultural construct and a place for primary socialisation which includes socialisation into gender roles.

Further links may be drawn with later units. Language and Social Identities (Unit 14) pursues sociolinguistic approaches to the presentation of the self. Local Level Politics (Unit 15) deals with exchange, reciprocity, reputation and power as manifested in the small politics (including gender politics) of everyday interactions. Belief and Action (Unit 16) focuses in part on conceptions of the body and of bodily adornment as part of the symbolic ordering underpinning a culture.

Methodologically, the unit requires students to collect and analyse their own naturally occurring data which helps them relate the concepts discussed to everyday, lived interaction as seen in their own lives. Finally, the main student reading for this unit (Pamela Fishman's 'The Work Women Do') requires students to focus on the validity of a variety of data collection techniques, thus contributing to the ongoing interrogation of, and practice with, a variety of research methods.

3. Background notes

This unit concentrates on two related ideas: that gender is culturally constructed, and that it is routinely accomplished through everyday interactions. In this way, it is very similar to the main themes of Unit 5. It draws on anthropological concepts concerning the ways in which men and women are perceived and symbolised. It also introduces sociolinguistic aspects of gender and how power relations between men and women are realised through language in two ways. Firstly, it looks at female/male interactions and how power is acted out in ordinary conversations. Secondly it takes the idea that language reflects and recreates male/female roles in society, including power relations. Like the previous unit on Families, Gender Relations allows us to examine some of the ways in which socialisation works to shape patterns of belief and attitudes.

As has been suggested, the topic of gender relations is far from new to students of language and culture. Recent decades have seen the expansion of feminist theory, the introduction of 'Women's Studies', and a flood of critical theory and courses for students within Cultural Studies which focus on aspects of gender identities. Important work on gender and sexuality has also emerged in psychoanalytical studies, history, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and so on. A major theme in much of this thinking has been the growing critical awareness of the politics of gender and sexuality as

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something which is socially constructed, forged by a range of historical factors and manifesting differentials in social power.

This unit attempts to complement the more theoretical and text-based sources with which students may already be familiar by taking a more focused and emic, or insider, perspective to explore how gender constructions are realised in everyday language and interaction. It does not endeavour to cover all aspects of the debates on gender, particularly as there does not seem to be one overarching 'theory' of gender, but to explore some of the connections between gender, power and the social/cultural ordering of society, in selected contexts.

Anthropological perspectives on gender are underpinned by the basic tenet that while maleness and femaleness are biological facts, male and female roles differ from society to society, as do notions of what are characteristically 'male' and 'female' behaviours and responsibilities. Thus anthropologist Anne Sutherland (1997) surveys the position of women in a wide range of cultures and historical periods to conclude that 'it is no longer possible to assume that any social activity [...] or in fact any kind of behaviour or personality is *exclusively* male or female.' Sutherland shows that the way the body is adorned, what garments are worn, what are considered 'natural' tasks for women or men in the public or the private domain (e.g. the labour market or the domestic sphere), what is considered attractive or erotic in either sex, etc. are clearly not 'natural' but culturally constructed and widely divergent from society to society. In addition, within a given culture at a given period, there may be differing expectations of a gender according to what Sutherland calls 'ranked categories'. In the nineteenth century, for example, middle class Western European women were expected to be 'idle and sickly' (and therefore feminine) whereas working class women were expected to engage in hard manual labour.

The only inevitable elements in gender roles appear to be the bearing of children by women, and the fact that 'whatever is highly valued in a society tends to be in the hands of men'. This issue is in fact demonstrated by the androcentric bias of anthropological research which, until recently, concurred in this assumption by focusing predominantly on the activities of men and often relying on mainly male informants (Delamont: 1995.180). For example, in most classic ethnographies, such as Evans-Prichard's *The Nuer,* a culture is studied as if it is comprised only of men.

Thus, in many though not all societies, women tend to be associated with naturally endowed *ascribed* status (they are 'naturally' mothers and wives) while men have socially *achieved* status and 'learn' to become men. This kind of distinction carries a powerful normative value in terms of the symbolic classification which has traditionally seen men as creators of culture and women as associated with nature, disorder and therefore pollution. While these ideas have been widely debated within contemporary anthropology (e.g. Sutherland: 1997; Douglas: 1966), it is important to consider that women's roles are as much 'learned' as men's are. The essentialist notion that women are 'naturally' carers is part of the contested area of debate, in anthropology and other disciplines too. As Deborah Cameron has suggested, 'Gender should not be used as a bottom-line explanation because it is a social construction needing explanation in itself' (1992). Many of our notions about gender are learned or acquired though socialisation at home, at school and within the peer group. They are then further reinforced and re-enacted throughout our adult lives. Thus the dimension of gender as it is lived in

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particular situations by the individual or group can be examined in relation to discourses and ideologies surrounding sexuality and gender roles. Students should therefore be led not only to interrogate the association of a particular set of roles or behaviours with one gender, but also subsequently to examine the much more productive question of how specific practices and processes reproduce gender roles. For example, in some societies, drinking coffee in the local café is associated with idle gossiping women. In other societies, sitting around a coffee in the local bar is what men do and is not given the same negative connotations at all.

Sociolinguistic approaches to analysing how gender is realised through communication and interaction are particularly useful to language students, and the observation and analysis of interaction carried out by sociolinguists has usefully illuminated some of the relevant issues such as power relations and socialisation. As language is the main symbolic system within a culture, it is also a useful key into cultural representations of gender differences. For example, male/female talk and its modalities has been the subject of numerous studies and provides an accessible field for students to work in when abroad. Most people have an intuitive idea of what sounds masculine and feminine in speech, even if they cannot identify exactly what the distinguishing features are (pronunciation differences, differences in vocabulary items, etc.). The term 'genderlect' was used, in the early studies of language and gender, to refer to the varieties of speech distinguishing the sexes but more recent studies suggest that asserting such a clear divide between the way women and men speak, certainly in the languages of western Europe, is too simplistic. Nevertheless, there are identified patterns of interaction which suggest that, in some domains, women and men communicate differently.

While men and women begin life with the same linguistic resources, social attitudes learned from an early age encourage them to use these resources differently. Instead of seeing language as a more or less transparent representation of 'natural' categories, the focus here is on how social relations are expressed through language. Studies of children as young as three, for instance, have shown how playground conflicts are typically negotiated differently according to gender. In a study by the sociolinguist Deborah Tannen (1991), the girls tended to rely more on compromise and evasion to resolve conflict than did the boys. Tannen concludes that in these interactions the girls were bartering popularity while the chief 'commodity' for boys was hierarchical status.

Research on communication amongst adults includes Dale Spender's informal study of a teacher's conference (1980). Spender observed that, although the male participants talked almost twice as much as the females, most of the participants later believed that women had talked twice as much as men. These perceptions may be accounted for by a range of factors such as the traditional association of women with the private rather than the public sphere, or another common perception of women as deploying indirect communicative styles, and sometimes characterised as garrulous. This episode, like many in the workplace, illustrates some of the problems faced by women who work in a male-dominated forum. Spender goes on to develop the more fundamental political argument, which has also been made forcefully by certain contemporary French feminist writers such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, that because language is 'man-made', women must recreate their own language in order to express their realities.

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Deborah Tannen, who has popularised many of her research findings on male-female interaction takes a less overtly 'political' view than writers such as Dale Spender. Tannen argues that, since girls and boys are socialised with different role expectations and are trained in differing conversational styles (girls learning to be 'co-operative' and boys to be 'competitive', for example), what results is 'cross-cultural communication' between the genders. If, as Tannen suggests, women and men are literally speaking different varieties of the same language and using different linguistic styles and interpretative frames, this can often lead to misunderstandings.

Pamela Fishman, on whose work the student assignment for this unit is based, has also described some important features of communication between men and women in terms of recurrent patterns of communicative style. In an extended study of ten couples, she found that women did more 'maintenance' work than men, through use of questions or 'active listening' (e.g. the use of 'uh-huh' to encourage) while the men made more categorical statements and exerted greater control of topic. For example, women often offered topics to men who only responded when they considered the topic was worth talking about. In this article, Fishman suggests that: 'socially structured power relations are reproduced and actively maintained in our everyday interactions. Women's conversational troubles reflect not inferior social training but inferior social position'.

Thus women use support strategies creatively to exert some control over men by obliging them to talk. Such features of communicative style are 'naturalised' (e.g. participants in this research said there was little of interest happening in the tapes they provided). Deborah Cameron, in discussing this article, suggests that perhaps rather than being coerced into doing what Fishman calls the 'shitwork' of conversation management, women may be using these strategies for their own equally valid interactional or social goals. Furthermore, Cameron argues that, although women's relation to language may not be the same as men's, 'The difference cannot be located in the meanings language itself makes available. Rather it lies in the social practices through which language use in certain contexts is regulated' (1985: 193). In other words, choice of topic, silences, interruptions etc. do not have a fixed meaning in themselves. But they are meaningful in the way they help to construct and reinforce differences in female/male relationships.

Although the findings of Fishman's article have been widely contested (see also Lakoff and Coates), it is useful for students to read and discuss, for its accessibility and the issues it raises. While it is sociolinguistic rather than 'ethnographic' it provides an interesting starting point for examining the social construction of gender in our everyday lives. The critique of Fishman by Cameron would provide an interesting basis for research projects by students who might record some language and observe the social practices through which it is 'regulated'.

Turning now to how language represents gender difference, terminology used to refer to each sex is also a productive area of study. Many terms have different or extra connotations according to the gender to which they refer, and the more negative meaning usually belongs to the female reference. Likewise, pairs of terms which should be equivalent are not. Take the examples of a 'loose' woman or a 'career' woman; we do not usually refer to 'loose' men or 'career' men. Similarly there is inequality between the terms 'bachelor', with its connotations of freedom and glamour,

and 'spinster', which somehow calls to mind loneliness and failure in the marriage stakes. More recent examples such as 'new man', 'lad' and 'girl power' may be added to the list, and students can analyse such terms in the target language as well as in their own as one method for eliciting information about perceptions of men and women. An optional exercise in this unit uses American examples of slang terms used to refer to men and women but it can easily be adapted using another range of terms. The recommended further reading 'Ladies, Flirts and Tomboys' is also useful for looking at the ways in which women are categorised.

The study of discourses used in different contexts can, by looking beyond the level of individual utterances or actions, illuminate recurring themes and meanings to explore broader issues relating to the representation of men and women within a society. This can be observed for example in media portrayals, or in advertising, which can reveal many unquestioned assumptions about gender lying behind words and images, and which to some degree reinforce the roles assigned to men and women. Another of the optional activities teachers may choose in this unit involves analysis of an advertisement, drawing on critical linguistics (as developed by Kress, Fairclough, etc.). Such approaches have emphasised the process of how meaning is realised in the interaction between the text and the reader who draws on existing ideas and schemas to interpret the text. The language used in advertising and the media relies to a degree on readers as members of interpretative communities responding in wider sociocultural contexts. In other words, the discourses employed and our interpretations are socially and culturally constructed. This offers a further avenue through which students may explore issues of gender in the target culture.

Finally, this unit provides students with a good opportunity to practise the art of reflexivity, of suspending judgement and maintaining cultural relativity. As Sarah Delamont (1995) points out in a chapter on sex and gender in contemporary Europe, there are a number of difficulties in researching and discussing gender, particularly as the ethnographer's own gendered self is part of the social world they are studying. These are relevant to this unit, to the prior knowledge students bring to the sessions, and to future ways in which they may incorporate data concerning gender relations in their projects:

> The whole issue of relations between the sexes is personal and emotional, and very hard to think about objectively. Equally, these issues are hard for anthropologists to research properly, and often difficult for informants to talk about. Then the whole area is complicated by the ways in which informants may tell the researcher what *ought* to happen, or what they *wish* did happen, rather than what actually goes on. Men and women may have different understandings of how their society works, and where the power lies. (172)

> [...] please suspend any ideas you have about women's equality or 'modernity', and concentrate on understanding the belief systems anthropologists have discovered. Remember that Switzerland, a 'modern' country, only gave

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women the vote in 1971. On Tory Island off the coast of Ireland it is common for married couples to live apart, each staying in their childhood home. Of fifty-one married couples in 1963, ten were still in their natal homes. This was seen as entirely sensible, because the two families were not disturbed by a 'child' leaving or a spouse moving in. Fox (1978) obviously found this odd – he had the idea that getting married involves living in the same house – but the Tory Islanders did not, and it was their island and their lives.

(177)

Students have drawn on the ideas presented in this unit in numerous and very varied ways for their own ethnographic research both at home and abroad. Some projects have focused on specific gender issues raised here, such as responses to the representation of women, men and families in advertisements, or interaction, hierarchy and power in the workplace (a subject which also draws heavily on the unit on Local Level Politics). Even if gender is not the primary focus of research, it remains an important consideration for fieldwork. Whatever the research topic and whatever the research situation, it is likely that issues of gender will impinge in some way, and an awareness of this should inform students' increasingly reflexive attitudes.

Research conducted by one student amongst the *Carnavaliers* in Nice examined the paradox that whilst the title of *Carnavalier*, handed down from father to son, was once revered, the younger generation of men no longer appeared particularly interested in perpetuating the tradition. Whilst there were a number of local women keen to contribute to the Carnival, the patriarchal tradition militated against their integration as fully-fledged *Carnavalières*. The student explored their exclusion from many aspects of Carnival activity, finding that her (generally male) informants were reluctant to discuss the issue of role allocation along gender lines, or to see the greater involvement of women as a way of injecting new vigour into this important expression of local identity. A still more ambitious project, which drew on Garfinkel's study of a transsexual called Agnes (1967) involved a study of transvestite prostitutes in Cadiz. In both the above projects, the student ethnographer had to be particularly reflexive about how their own gender might be influencing the research situation and the data they were able to elicit from their informants. They had to be alert to their own deeply ingrained and naturalised assumptions about gender (and in the latter case about prostitution) in order to ensure that these were not underpinning their interpretations of informants' lives.

References

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♦ Douglas, M (1966) *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

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SECTION TWO

1. Outline of a session

1. Introduction to the study of gender relations.

2. Assignment feedback

3. Discussion of Pamela Fishman reading, 'The Work Women Do'

4. Analysis of media discourses around gender (optional)

5. Sex differences in language use (optional)

6. Discussion of Kristen Yount recommended further reading, 'Ladies, Flirts and Tomboys' (optional)

2. Description of a session

2.1 Introduction

An enjoyable way of embarking on the topic is to present students with a blatant and contemporary instance of gender stereotyping (for example, 'Why is it men do interesting things like 'discuss' and 'debate' and women just 'gossip'?' (*Desmond's*, ITV, 25 January 1993)). Explain that one of the aims of the session is to question the notion that particular roles or types of behaviour necessarily belong to one gender and remind students that the term 'gender' is commonly used, as distinct from the term 'sex', to refer to a social/cultural phenomenon rather than to a biological fact, i.e. that gender is culturally constructed.

The introduction should be interactive. It should be based on the main concepts in the background notes, introducing basic tenets such as the fact that gender is conceived of differently in different social / cultural contexts and that gender has symbolic significance. Draw on illustrative examples where possible (students will almost certainly have their own to contribute to the debate). A particularly useful example to illustrate how gender is both culturally constructed and interactionally accomplished is that of 'Agnes', a transsexual studied by Garfinkel (see bibliography). In addition to her physical sex change, Agnes had to re-socialise herself and reproduce all the details of being a woman once she had decided to live as a woman. This conscious process of learning by an adult highlighted the many minute yet significant elements involved in our 'unconscious' socialisation into gender roles which come to appear natural. For example, from our first hours, adults admire us as 'pretty girls' or 'big boys', etc.

Point out briefly some of the links to other units already studied in order to give a sense of continuity.

2.2 Assignment Feedback

The assignment aims to help students think about the details of interaction in female/male conversations.

Students (in threes or fours) compare their findings based on notes taken whilst observing a mixed-gender conversation. They should concentrate on looking for patterns and analytical leads beyond the purely anecdotal. Tutors may put the following areas for discussion on an OHP to help students focus their ideas for feedback to the class:

♦   Differences in style

♦   Differences in topic

♦   The politics of everyday interaction (interruptions, topic control, turn taking, etc.)

♦   Language as a cultural resource

♦   Are men and women socialised into styles of communication (e.g. are women more supportive and co-operative)?

♦   Can we speak of male and female language?

♦   What other factors impinge on conversational style? (e.g. age, occupation, class, personality)

After drawing out patterns, it is worth raising issues of reflexivity, i.e. to what extent did students' own presuppositions about male and female talk enter into the analysis?

2.3   Discussion of Pamela Fishman reading, 'The Work Women do'

This is the key item in this unit for discussing how gender is accomplished through interaction. Ask students to relate their findings from the assignment to Fishman's conclusions in order to compare not only the findings but also to discuss methodological issues (advantages and disadvantages of different types of data collection). For example, the tutor can ask students to consider how they could follow up a study such as this to make it more ethnographic, i.e. by finding out more about the couples as representative of a group, their values, attitudes, belief systems and so on. Consider briefly how data for this follow-up study could be collected (as a prelude to Units 8-12).

2.4   Analysis of media discourses around gender (optional)

The study of the changing representation of women and men in society through the media can provide an illuminating means of uncovering assumptions, stereotypes and recurring themes. Students will probably have studied representations in advertisements before, but they can be reminded of a number of general questions which may usefully guide their analysis. For example:

♦   What products are targeted at men and women and how?

♦   Is an advertisement working to reinforce assigned gender roles? (Goffman suggests that 'by imagining the sexes switched and imagining the appearance of what results, one can jar oneself into awareness of stereotypes'). Another

way of jarring oneself into awareness is by taking a classic movie such as 'Gentleman Prefer Blondes' – in which Marilyn Munroe plays a vamp out to get a rich husband – and cast Marilyn's role as a male part.

♦ Can women and men in advertisements be considered as 'typical'? (i.e. to what extent do ritualised behavioural practices found in a variety of contexts in real life come to be employed in a 'hyper-ritualised' form? A nurse in an advertisement, for example, is an idealised depiction. Goffman points out that a real nurse in a real hospital would not be considered by an advertising agency as a satisfactory model for their purposes. In other words, role and image need to be idealised in order to facilitate an easily accessible interpretation. (Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* is a very useful source of ideas for this part of the session, despite the fact that it is now definitely dated).

One advertisement teachers of this unit have used for analysis was an advertisement for a maternity bra, which was suggestive in its articulation of competing discourses on the category of 'woman'. Here, image and text worked together to create an (uneasy) alliance between the sexual image of woman as object of desire and the asexual image of woman as agent of reproduction and domestic labour. In the photograph, the new mother was ironing, wearing her underslip and maternity bra, and standing in front of a tropical paradise background. She was smiling seductively into the camera.

Whatever the advertisement chosen, students should work in groups to read between the lines in a simple discourse analysis. The following generic questions can be provided on an OHP:

♦ What is the message of this advertisement?

♦ Who is addressed?

♦ How do text and image work together?

♦ What do you 'read into' it?

♦ What kind of cultural knowledge would be essential to understanding its message?

♦ What does the advertisement say about women in general?

One advantage of doing this exercise in the native language is that students are able to draw on their own interpretative schema as cultural insiders and can reflect on the richness of lexical items and syntactic/semantic relations which draw on shared cultural knowledge, in order to make them more aware of the potential for doing this kind of work in a foreign language. Through their own debates and disagreements about the multiple meanings that can be found in advertisements, they can be sensitised to the dangers of 'reading off' generalised values and beliefs in an unproblematic way.

Through examining the chosen advertisement students, should be led to consider how language items resonate differently for a cultural insider. They may consider

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the possibility of using texts such as this with informants, eliciting their responses and discussing variations in meaning with a native speaker. This can help students language development and provide a rich source of ethnographic data for projects.

2.5   Sex difference in language use (optional)

This exercise can be introduced with reference to the background notes. It can be done quite quickly and easily in small groups or pairs. Students are provided with a list of terms commonly used in American English for men and women (see handout in Section 3). They are asked to draw out the connotations and values associated with these terms by placing them within particular categories such as animal, object, food, etc. The ensuing class discussion can then explore some of the variations and students can perhaps think of different categories. The exercise can be adapted using terms from the target foreign language if students within the group share the same one.

2.6   Reading: 'Ladies, Flirts and Tomboys' (optional)

This recommended further reading may be discussed in class, or simply mentioned by the teacher and then read in the students' own time. It is an example of an ethnographic study which deals with the dynamics of gender interactions in the workplace, and the strategies developed by women to manage sexual harassment in a male-dominated environment (in this case an underground coal mine). The article shows how several approaches adopted in this unit (e.g. looking at the terminology used to refer to women) can form an important part of a piece of ethnographic writing.

3.   Advice and comments

Gender relations is one of the units that students tend to find most accessible and easy to relate to, as it is so all-pervasive. For teachers, it is something of a minefield given the sheer volume and variety of theory currently available, and given the tendency of many students to discuss gender-related incidents more anecdotally and emotively than analytically. However, gender relations are a common choice for student project research abroad, so it is intended that this brief introduction will provide them with:

♦   research methods for investigating gender issues in a more focused way than is the norm;

♦   approaches to considering gender issues as they arise from naturally occurring data;

♦   some basic concepts that will help them in formulating research questions.

Maintaining a balance between the anthropological and the sociolinguistic perspectives in this unit is more difficult than in others, and we have provided a number of optional activities from which lecturers may select according to their students' needs and time constraints. This unit in particular, while necessarily brief

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can be referred back to in almost all subsequent units where there are plenty of opportunities for reinforcement of notions introduced here.

A final comment: when comparing the findings for their assignment with Fishman's findings, students quite frequently present the group with disconfirming evidence (i.e. the conversations they are analysing seemed to be female dominated). This allows students to consider how their own data can contribute meaningfully to ongoing academic debates and encourages them to relate their findings to secondary literature as part of the analytical process. Such challenges to more orthodox views may also help students to think about the *context* in which these conversations are played out. A student conversation in a coffee bar may show many fewer gender differences than a workplace meeting or the sexual politics between a married couple. This is a useful reminder that the search for more general patterns should not replace sensitivity to context and its specific effects on interaction.

Student Comment

> The session was very relaxed to-day and we discussed very informally the ways in which men and women may talk in different ways. Tho I found from my study of two students in the common room that there were not so many differences between the female and male and this was counter-intuitive.

SECTION THREE

1. Assignment

Observe a mixed-gender conversation for ten minutes (e.g. in the student common room) and take notes.

1. You might find the following aspects of particular interest:
2. Who initiates/changes the subject of conversation?
3. Who do you think does most of the talking?
4. Who is doing the listening?
5. Who is maintaining the conversation?
6. Do men/women interrupt more?
7. Are there any differences in pitch/loudness?
8. Are there any differences in the way men and women use social space?
9. Any other observations about how men/women participate in the conversation in different ways?

N.B. REMIND YOURSELVES OF SOME OF THE POINTS MADE ABOUT THE STAFF ROOM MEETING IN THE VIDEO OF KINGSWOOD COMPREHENSIVE IN UNIT 3.

Handout 1 – sex difference in language use

A close look at terms of reference for women and men will reveal some interesting patterns connected to the connotations and values associated with the two sexes. In the two lists below, mark each word according to the 'features' characterising its meaning as follows: A = animal, O = object, F = food, S = explicitly sexual, Y = young, E = elderly, N = neutral connotations, P = positive for personality, activity and intelligence, and D = derogatory. Some words will have more than one feature assigned to them. When you have finished, compare the features for men and women and see if any noticeable differences can be found. Also, if any additional frames of reference occur to you, then ass them to the appropriate list and evaluate them in the same way.

1. Terms for men

man	bloke	jerk
gent	bozo	nerd
boy	chap	stud
guy	geezer	sport
lad	schmuck	wimp
dude	m... f...	creep
bastard	prick	asshole
son-of-a-bitch	redneck	

2. Terms for women

woman	biddy	sugar
lady	girl	girlie
lass	lassie	sister
broad	chick	babe
baby	dame	doll
dish	honey	miss
pet	skirt	toots
wench	whore	hag
tramp	bitch	tease
darling	sexpot	bunny
pussycat	vixen	peach
witch	tart	sweetie

mama	**kitten**	**belle**
vamp	**squaw**	**angel**
nymph	**cookie**	**hussy**
dog	**dumpling**	

(Adapted from material lent by Marc Bergman)

UNIT 6 – Gender Relations

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

◆ **Yount, K.R. (1991) 'Ladies, Flirts and Tomboys in** *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, **Vol.19, no.4, Jan.1991, pp. 396-422.**