



The Use of Taboo Vocatives in Japanese Teenagers

Vania Ardyna Sudarmadi and Nuria Haristiani*

Japanese Language Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia
nuriaharist@upi.edu

Abstract. Swearing, as a form of verbal expression, not only reflects the emotions and feelings of its speakers but also illustrates the social and cultural norms in which the language is used. Vocatives are the main thing that often appears in conversation as a form of call between the speaker and the partner to attract the attention of the speaking partner in direct lingual interaction. This research is related to swear words used as vocatives, usually called taboo vocatives. This research focuses on understanding the meaning and function of taboo vocatives in an anime called *Haikyuu!!*. The method used in this research is a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. The data was analyzed using the theory of taboo vocatives and the description of its functions by Martinez (2021). The data sources used are the dialogues and monologues in *Haikyuu!!* That contains taboo vocatives. Based on the analysis results, it can be understood that the more intimate the relationship between teenagers, the more taboo vocatives are used. Furthermore, even though taboo vocatives seem more insulting than swear words because they are used to call someone, taboo vocatives apparently have the same usage as the original swear words since they can be used both for negative and positive meanings. Also, based on the analysis of the function of taboo vocatives, it can be concluded that the function of taboo vocatives is not attached to the type but to the context and the relationship between users.

Keywords: Swear, Swear Word, Taboo, Taboo Votive, Votive.

1 Introduction

In early education, to make children learn and develop effective language skills, it is very important to use polite language and avoid disrespectful speech (Anggraini, 2020). Anggraini (2020) stated that language politeness is defined as the psychological, moral, and behavioral traits that distinguish them and are evaluated based on social norms. In language, there are ethics related to the selection of language codes, social norms that apply in society, and the cultural system (Chaer & Agustina, 2014).

Swearing, as a form of verbal expression, not only reflects the emotions and feelings of its speakers but also illustrates the social and cultural norms in which the language is used. Swear words or dirty words appear as a familiar greeting for teenagers when calling or addressing their friends (Saleh & Nasrullah, 2019). In everyday conversation, swearing is often considered rude and inappropriate in certain situations. Swear words, although often considered taboo in society (Martinez, 2021), are one of the important

things whose use is often difficult to avoid in daily interaction life. Swear words generally have a derogatory meaning (Martinez, 2021), so they go against the norms of society and are often considered disrespectful. However, the meaning of swear words expanded, so they have more than offensive meanings. Swear words do not only have negative connotations, but they are sometimes used to express praise and amazement, create an atmosphere of familiarity in certain cultures, strengthen the bond between speakers, and even convey affection (Wijana & Rohmadi, 2006; Martinez, 2021). Swear words come in many forms, and as times change, communication styles also change, and so do swear words, especially among teenagers. Teenagers experience changes in their language use norms. They use swear words even when they do not want to be mean to someone (Kurniadi, 2018). One form of swear words that rarely gets the spotlight is swear words in the form of greetings that are often found in communication between teenagers (Martinez, 2021).

Vocatives are the main thing that often appears in conversation as a form of call between the speaker and the partner to attract the attention of the speaking partner in direct lingual interaction (Suhandra, 2014). Humans, in general, must have a variety of vocatives thrown by different people. Despite having the same nationality, a person may receive different vocatives depending on gender, age, occupation, social status, kinship, and blood relations (Tanaka & Tanaka, 2003). The function of vocatives is as a marker of respectful relationships, a marker of familiarity, a marker of affectionate relationships, and affirmation (Suhandra, 2014). Among teenagers, there is a swear word in the form of a vocative called a taboo vocative (Martinez, 2021).

As language develops, studies have been conducted to find out the use of swear words in everyday life. Saleh and Nasrullah (2019) revealed teenagers' familiarity with calling or greeting their friends in the form of verbal violence as a cause of conflict among teenagers in a multicultural society in South Sulawesi consisting of various ethnic and religious backgrounds. Helmiyanti (2020) identified the form and function of swear words to familiarize the atmosphere used by university students. Swear words among university students no longer carry negative connotations when used between close individuals but rather to create a familiar atmosphere during conversations, as well as promote intimacy and closeness between friends (Helmiyanti, 2020). Furthermore, Akbar (2023) identified swearing in the form of grammatical units and types in the comment section of the game called *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*. In contrast to Helmiyanti (2020), Akbar (2023) found that profanity found in comments, whether in the form of words, phrases, or clauses, is considered insulting, which aims to degrade the target by associating it with negative connotations or behavior. Fauziah and Nugroho (2021) explored the form and function of swear words as affective words in Japanese and found that swear words are not only used with negative connotations, but can also have positive connotations to show affection, concern, and advice (Fauziah & Nugroho, 2021).

Based on the studies found on swear words, they generally discuss swear words that are used daily and there are still few that specifically discuss swear words as vocatives. Martinez (2021) has discovered the concept of the use and function of so-called taboo vocatives or swear words as greetings (e.g. dickhead, you bastard, bitch) in the language of London teenagers. The concept of taboo vocatives, as proposed by Martinez (2021),

is deemed suitable for further exploring the use and function of taboo vocatives in this study, which focuses on Japanese to analyse how Japanese people express things through swear words as vocatives. In addition, this research can also help in understanding the impact of swear word use on social relationships and communication dynamics in Japanese culture. By understanding these aspects, we can see how language plays a role in reflecting and shaping social interactions.

With regard to this, the author examined the use of taboo vocatives in the lives of Japanese teenagers, especially those used in the anime called *Haikyuu!!* (2014), specifically in *Haikyuu!!* Season 1 episodes 1-12 because the anime is considered able to represent the actual interactions among Japanese teenagers, especially high school teenagers.

2 Method

The method used in this research is a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. Qualitative descriptive research is considered suitable for this type of research to be carried out, especially in describing taboo vocatives. The data source is the anime *Haikyuu!!* Season 1 episodes 1-12 which were released in 2014. The reason why *Haikyuu!!* was chosen because this anime uses various swear words in various situations. *Haikyuu!!* also has a Japanese school setting so this is in line with the fact that taboo vocatives are commonly used by teenagers (Martinez, 2021). *Haikyuu!!* is also one of the anime that won many awards and this anime is also considered to represent the life of Japanese high school teenagers because of the setting used. *Haikyuu!!* Season 1 episodes 1-12 also contain various situations, ranging from introductions between characters, and building familiarity, to meeting students from other schools because this study aims to understand the functions, situations, and relationships between users of Japanese taboo vocatives.

In analysing the data obtained, we used the following methods: (1) collect dialogues that contain taboo vocatives; (2) record the characters involved in the dialogues, their relationship, their roles in the anime, and the situations where the dialogues are conducted; (3) analyse the function of Japanese taboo vocatives according to the theory of taboo vocatives and the description of its functions by Martinez (2021); and (4) Make conclusions from the research results.

3 Findings and Discussion

3.1 Taboo Vocatives' Usage Frequency

Based on the data obtained through data collection of taboo vocatives in the anime *Haikyuu!!* Season 1 episodes 1-12, there are 20 kinds of taboo vocatives and appear a total of 86 times with *boke* 9 times, *aho* 1 time, *baka* 3 times, *baka yarou* 6 times, *kono yarou* 5 times, *noppo yarou* 1 time, *kuso* 4 times, *hetakuso* 2 times, *kuso namaiki* 1 time, *kora* 22 times, *temee* 13 times, *chikushoume* 1 time, *saitei* 1 time, *hentai* 1 time,

yakutatazu 1 time, *konjounashi* 3 times, *chibi* 5 times, *chinchikurin* 5 times, *chibikko* 1 time, and *hage* 1 time (see Table 1). In addition, the use of those taboo vocatives tends to be prevalent in episodes 7 and above.

Table 1. Frequency of occurrence of taboo vocatives

No.	Taboo Vocatives	Episodes											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.	ボケ <i>Boke</i>			1			2	4			1	1	
2.	アホ <i>Aho</i>								1				
3.	ばか <i>Baka</i>	1							1			1	
4.	ばかやろう <i>Baka yarou</i>	1	1				1		1		1	1	
5.	このやろう <i>Kono yarou</i>		2	1					1				1
6.	のっばやろう <i>Noppo yarou</i>					1							
7.	クソ <i>Kuso</i>		1					1			1	1	
8.	へたくそ <i>Hetakuso</i>		2										
9.	クソ生意気 <i>Kuso namaiki</i>							1					
10.	コラ <i>Kora</i>		3	3		1	1	3	3		1	3	4
11.	てめえ <i>Temee</i>		1	1	1		1	1	2	1	1	4	
12.	ちくしょうめ <i>Chikushoume</i>										1		
13.	最低 <i>Saitei</i>					1							
14.	変態 <i>Hentai</i>					1							
15.	役立たず <i>Yakutatazu</i>						1						
16.	根性なし <i>Konjou nashi</i>								3				
17.	チビ <i>Chibi</i>	1	1	1			1	1					
18.	ちんちくりん <i>Chinchikurin</i>										5		
19.	ちびっこ <i>Chibikko</i>										1		
20.	はげ <i>Hage</i>					1							
Total		3	11	7	1	5	7	11	12	1	12	11	5

Based on Table 1, it can be understood that the use of taboo vocatives tends to be prevalent in episodes 7 and above. In the *anime Haikyuu!!* In season 1, each character initially does not know each other at episode 1 and as the episodes continue, the relationship between the characters becomes closer and closer as a teammate because the story progresses throughout their volleyball matches and practices history. Therefore,

it can be understood that the use of taboo vocatives tends to be more frequent when the relationship between users is familiar, and taboo vocatives tend to lose their original meaning, which was to insult or degrade someone because taboo vocatives' usage frequency is high at episode 7 or above but there were only a few conflicts happened. That alone confirms the theory that said swear words can tighten bonds and elevate the harmony in the group (Martinez, 2021; Stapleton, 2020; Finn, 2017) considering that taboo vocatives' usage in episode 7 or above are not used as a way to insult in conflicts, but for strengthening the bonds between teammates. This taboo vocative's function can also be validated through the data in Table 1 since a very degrading word *hetakuso* (lousy), only appeared in episode 2 when it is used for negative purposes when the characters still have a rival relationship.

3.2 Meanings and Functions of Taboo Vocatives

Martinez (2021) explains the functions of taboo vocatives used in everyday conversation. Based on the data obtained, I will describe the functions of taboo vocatives found in accordance with the functions of taboo vocatives proposed by Martinez (2021).

Offensive. The use of taboo vocatives as offensive is a use that is intended according to the actual function of the swear word, which is to insult or offend the interlocutor (Martinez, 2021). Consider the following examples of Data (1) and (2).

Data (1)

お前がちゃんと取らないからだ、へたくそ！何が去年とは違う？ふざけんな。期待して損した。クソが。

Omae ga chanto toranai kara da, hetakuso! Nani ga kyonen to wa chigau? Fuzakenna. Kitais-hite sonshita. Kuso ga.

It's because you didn't return the serve properly, you lousy! What is so different from last year? You got to be kidding me. I'm wasting my time expecting something from you. Damn.

(Haikyuu!! episode 2, 08:35-08:42)

Data (1) is a speech uttered by a character named Kageyama to his ex-rival, who has now become his teammate. The use of the taboo vocatives *hetakuso* and *kuso* in the sentence is used to convey the speaker's annoyance and disappointment with his teammate. The taboo vocative is also deliberately used with the intention of offending his teammate, who he expected to be good at volleyball but turned out not good at playing it. This taboo vocative is also used with the intention of strengthening the message to be conveyed (Martinez, 2021) because the speaker hopes that the interlocutor can improve his volleyball skills. This is also used as an emotional relief to show unhappiness and anger, as stated by Babushko and Solovei (2019). Based on this, we can see that the situation was a bit tense, so the taboo vocatives he used here are considered as an offensive thing or to intentionally insult the other end. Also, consider the following Data (2).

Data (2)

何やってんよ、たなか?! 変態! ばっかじゃないの?! 最低!

Nani yatten yo, Tanaka?! Hentai! Bakka janai no?! Saitei!

What are you doing, Tanaka?! You pervert! Are you stupid?! You're the worst!

(Haikyuu!! episode 5, 21:21-21:27)

Data (2) was uttered by a girl who was surprised by a character called Tanaka because he was wearing only shorts outside the club room. She uses the taboo vocatives *hentai* and *saitei* when she sees Tanaka as a form of offense and deliberately offends him for being shocked by his appearance. The girl, who appears to be Tanaka's friend, says this because Tanaka did something wrong so it was intentionally insulting and being offensive. In addition, there is also the taboo vocative *konjounashi* or 'coward' found in the following Data (3).

Data (3)

にしのや : あの根性なし!

Nishinoya : *Ano konjounashi!*

That coward!

たなか : コラ、のや! 先輩はそんな風に言うんじゃないねえ!

Tanaka : *Kora, Noya! Senpai wa sonna fuu ni iun janee!*

Noya, damn it! Don't talk like that about your senior!

にしのや : うっせえ! 根性なしは根性なしだ! あさひさんが戻らないなら、俺も戻んねえ。

Nishinoya : *Ussee! Konjounashi wa konjounashi da! Asahi-san ga modonnai nara, ore mo modonnee.*

Shut up! A coward is still a coward! If Asahi-san doesn't come back, I won't come back either.

たなか : おいコラ、のや!!

Tanaka : *Oi kora, Noya!!*

Oi damn you, Noya!!

(Haikyuu!! episode 8, 02:37-02:52)

Data (3) shows that Nishinoya's use of the taboo vocative *konjounashi* is a form to be offensive even though the person he offended is not in the conversation. The taboo vocative *kora* is also offensive because it tries to attract the attention of the interlocutor and tries to offend the interlocutor, as stated by Martinez (2021), to stop talking badly about his senior but is unsuccessful.

Arguments and Disagreements. Taboo vocatives can be used in arguments and disagreements when the speaker has no other arguments that can be used against the argument at hand. In *Haikyuu!!* there is Data (4) as follows.

Data (4)

ひなた : 俺より小さい!

Hinata : *Ore yori chiisai!*

You're shorter than me!

にしのや : はあ?! てめえ 今なんつって コラ!!

Nishinoya : *Haa?! Temee ima nan tsutte kora!!*

Huh?! What did you just say, damn it!!

(Haikyuu!! episode 8, 00:22-00:27)

The scene (4) is a conversation between characters called Hinata and Nishinoya. Nishinoya used this on his teammate that also his junior after being called “short”. The use of *temee* as a taboo second-person pronoun and *kora* which is offensive and draws the attention of the interlocutor to focus on the question asked and is willing to not discuss the topic anymore, shows that he cannot argue with his junior’s speech anymore because it is true that he is shorter than the said junior. This can be considered as a way of emotional relief too as stated by Babushko and Solovei (2019) because Nishinoya felt angry at Hinata because Hinata called him “short”. *Temee* here is considered to be a sign of disagreement and looks like the start of an argument, but the *kora* here is just a form of snarling to show that he is older. His using the “I am older than you” card can be seen as a way to actually want to argue but cannot because he knows the fact that he is shorter than Hinata.

To Reinforce Bonds and Create Solidarity and Comradeship. Through the data that has been collected, I found quite a few scenes of the use of taboo vocatives to strengthen bonds and create solidarity. For example, consider the following Data (5) to Data (8).

Data (5)

それにあいつはなあ、烏野で唯一天才と呼べる選手だ。ま、今はクソ生意気なかげやまが入ってきたから、唯一じゃなくなったけどな。

Sore ni aitsu wa naa, Karasuno de yuiitsu tensai to yoberu senshu da. Ma, ima wa kuso namaikina Kageyama ga haittekita kara, yuiitsu ja nakunatta kedo na.

Other than that, he’s called the unique genius of Karasuno. But he’s not unique anymore anyway, because now we have the cocky Kageyama.

(Haikyuu!! episode 7, 21:10-21:21)

Data (6)

時間だ。戻るぞ。アホ、遅刻する。

Jikan da. Modoruzo. Aho, chikoku suru.

It’s time. We have to go back. Fool, we’ll be late.

(Haikyuu!!!, episode 8, 21:30-21:36)

Data (7)

おい! 今なんでそこに飛んでた、ちんちくりん?

Oi! Ima nande soko ni tondeta, chinchikurin?

Oi! Why did you jump there, midget?

(Haikyuu!! episode 10, 05:18-05:24)

Data (8)早く来い、ボケ。*Hayaku koi, boke.*Hurry up, stupid.

(Haikyuu!! episode 11, 06:53-06:54)

The speech in Data (5) was uttered by Daichi, a 3rd-year team captain. He was saying this in front of the person he used the taboo vocative for, which is Kageyama, a 1st year, to attract his attention to join the ongoing conversation. Even though this taboo vocative *kuso namaikina Kageyama* really looks like an insult, if we look carefully, Daichi's whole speech actually looks like praise, which probably shows that he is proud of Kageyama, the 1st year, who joined his team this year. Therefore, this taboo vocative can be considered as a way for Daichi, the team captain, to reinforce bonds and create solidarity and comradeship between his team because he wanted to include Kageyama in the conversation (Martinez, 2021; Stapleton, 2020; Finn, 2017), especially the new recruit, Kageyama, by catching his attention and inviting him to the conversation. Sentence (6) is also uttered when the interlocutor is reluctant to return to class even though the bell has rung, so the speaker must remind him not to be late by attracting his attention. This speech was uttered by Kageyama to his closest teammate as a form of care. This form of care is also what makes sentence (6) belong to this function. Then, sentence (7) is spoken by a coach to a volleyball player whom he wants to chat with because he is interested in the playing technique used by the player. The coach had not joined the team before, and he said this on the first day of joining the team. This can be considered as a way the coach wanted to get close to the team by attracting one of the team member's attention. Sentence (8) also has a situation of close solidarity because, despite using the taboo vocative *boke*, the speaker is waiting for the interlocutor to put on his shoes and then jog together. This speech is also uttered by a close teammate.

Through the examples of Data (5), (6), (7), and (8), it can be understood that the use of taboo vocatives in familiar situations —especially when the speakers feel close to their interlocutors or want to get close to their interlocutors— can increase the solidarity of a group of teenagers.

To Express Affection. This function is the opposite of the offensive function, where the taboo vocative has a positive function as a means of conveying affection. Consider the following Data (9).

Data (9)

ひなた : か! かつこいい!!

Hinata : *Ka- kakkoi!!*

S-so cool!!

にしのや : ば、ばかやろう! そんなはつきり言うんじゃねえよ、このやろう!Nishinoya : *Ba- baka yarou! Sonna hakkiri iun janeeyo, kono yarou!*Y-you moron! Don't say it blatantly like that, bastard!

(Haikyuu!!, episode 8, 09:17-09:24)

In Data (9), Nishinoya feels happy because he is praised by Hinata. However, he does not say thank you but says *baka yarou* and *kono yarou* instead, which are taboo vocatives that are usually used for degrading someone. Considering the situation he was in and his happy mood after being praised, the *baka yarou* and *kono yarou* do not mean to insult. Instead, it means to show affection because he was too flustered to say thank you. It can also show his emotional relief (Babushko & Solovei, 2019) as an expression of embarrassment when praised but still thankful to the one who praised him.

Expression of Contempt and Envy. There are several scenes that show expressions of contempt and envy conveyed with taboo vocatives. Consider Data (10) and (11) below.

Data (10)引っ込め、役立たず!!*Hikkome, yakutatazu!!*Get out of here, you useless!!!

(Haikyuu!! episode 6, 07:18-07:19)

Data (11)おい、あのチビ速攻あんのか。*Oi, ano chibi sokkou anno ka.*Hey, that short guy can do a quick attack apparently.

(Haikyuu!! episode 6, 15:55-15:57)

Data (10) and (11) show taboo vocatives being used as insults, both ability insults and physical insults, as a form to express contempt. Scene (10) shows the humiliation of ability because the sentence is aimed at the main character, who is so nervous in his first match that he makes many mistakes. Scene (11) is also a taboo vocative aimed at the main character who is short compared to the other volleyball players so he is often made fun of because of his height. Then, there are also taboo vocatives used as an expression of envy, such as Data (12) and (13).

Data (12)ミドルブロッカーって、のっぽやろうつきしまと同じポジション？*Midoru burookkaatte, noppo yarou Tsukishima to onaji pojishon?*Isn't that middle blocker in the same position as that tall bastard Tsukishima?

(Haikyuu!! episode 5, 14:43-14:47)

Data (13)一ヶ月ぶりでもタイミングばっちりだな、ちくしょうめ!*Ikkagetsu buri demo taimingu bacchiri dana, chikushoume!*

Even though they haven't played volleyball for 1 month, their timing is still perfect, these bastards!

(Haikyuu!! episode 10, 06:21-06:24)

The speech in the Data (12) is uttered by Hinata, a 1st year, to his seniors, but the taboo vocative was meant for his teammate named Tsukishima. Hinata has a short height for a volleyball player, while Tsukishima is very tall. So, this *noppo yarou*, a taboo vocative used as a way to address Tsukishima, is a form of contempt and envy of Tsukishima's height compared to his own height because in volleyball, height plays a great role and in terms of height, Tsukishima gets more advantage in the team. Unlike Data (12), Data (13) does not have a contempt intention because the character who said it (Tanaka) is happy to see his teammates who have not been active in the club for a month are still unified. However, there is a sense of envy in Tanaka because he is not playing on the same team as his teammates, there is a slight feeling of jealousy, but he is still proud that his teammates are playing together with unified even without him.

Badinage (humorous and witty). Taboo vocatives are often used in humour and jokes between people in close relationships (Martinez, 2021). Based on the data collected, there are several scenes where taboo vocatives are used as humour and jokes, including Data (14)-(16).

Data (14)

男性A : マジっすか、期待してまーすはははは

Dansei A : *Majissuka, kitai shitemaasu hahahaha*

Seriously, we are looking for it hahahaha

男性B : 小学生はははは

Dansei B : *Shougakusei hahahaha*

He looks like an elementary school kid hahahaha

男性A : ばか！ははははは！

Dansei A : *Baka! Hahahaha!*

Hey, idiot! Hahahaha!

(Haikyuu!! episode 1, 06:06-06:11)

Data (15)

きのした : ぬぐな、はげ！

Kinoshita : *Nuguna, hage!*

Don't undress, baldy!

たなか : 今普通に悪口混ぜたの誰だ、コラ！

Tanaka : *Ima futsuu ni waruguchi mazeta no dare da, kora!*

Why are you all insulting me like that, damn it!

(Haikyuu!! episode 5, 02:56-03:20)

Data (16)

今度は逃がさねえぜ、ちびっこ！

Kondo wa nigasanee ze, chibikko!
 I won't let you escape this time, kid!

(Haikyuu!! episode 10, 18:16-18:17)

Data (14) is a scene where members of the opposing team mock the main character, who looks like an elementary school kid. *Dansei* A uses the taboo vocative *baka* to praise his teammate's (*Dansei* B) joke and laugh at his joke. Then, Data (15) is a speech uttered by Tanaka's teammate when he saw Tanaka remove his jersey to celebrate his victory. This teammate and Tanaka have a very close relationship as teammates, so the taboo vocative *hage* is used in a badinage situation as a way to make fun of their fellow team members as a joke. It also can be considered a joke because Tanaka's response to it was also joking, and no one got hurt or felt insulted afterward. Tanaka's response using *kora* is also a humorous response because it is done in a joking context. Also, the speeches that follow do not show any fights or arguments, so it can be understood that the taboo vocatives do not mean to hurt anyone, rather, they build a fun and goofy situation and relax the tense situation during the volleyball match. Furthermore, Data (16) is aimed at the main character for having a short height. This taboo vocative is not considered an insult because it was uttered by an alumnus who is a former member of the team and was coming to help them practice. The interlocutor also does not feel angry at the alumni, and the speech also makes his teammate who hears it feel more motivated during the match to take down the interlocutor.

4 Conclusion

Based on research conducted on taboo vocatives found in the anime *Haikyuu!!* In season 1 episodes 1-12, the taboo vocatives used have both negative and positive functions. It can also be concluded that the use of taboo vocatives in Japanese also increases in frequency when the relationship between teenagers becomes familiar. The more intimate the relationship between teenagers, the more taboo vocatives are used and the more they lose their insult and degrading function. Furthermore, even though taboo vocatives seem more insulting than swear words because they are used to call someone, taboo vocatives have the same usage as the original swear words since they can be used both for negative and positive meanings. Then, based on the function's analysis of taboo vocatives, it can be concluded that the functions of taboo vocatives are not attached to the type but to the context and the relationship between users. For example, the taboo vocative *kora*, can function offensively but also humorously when used in a familiar environment. This study takes data on sports genre anime whose characters are mostly male and, in a sports environment, so the conclusions drawn have limitations. Further research needs to be done on the use of taboo vocatives in real Japanese situations with interactions from both genders.

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