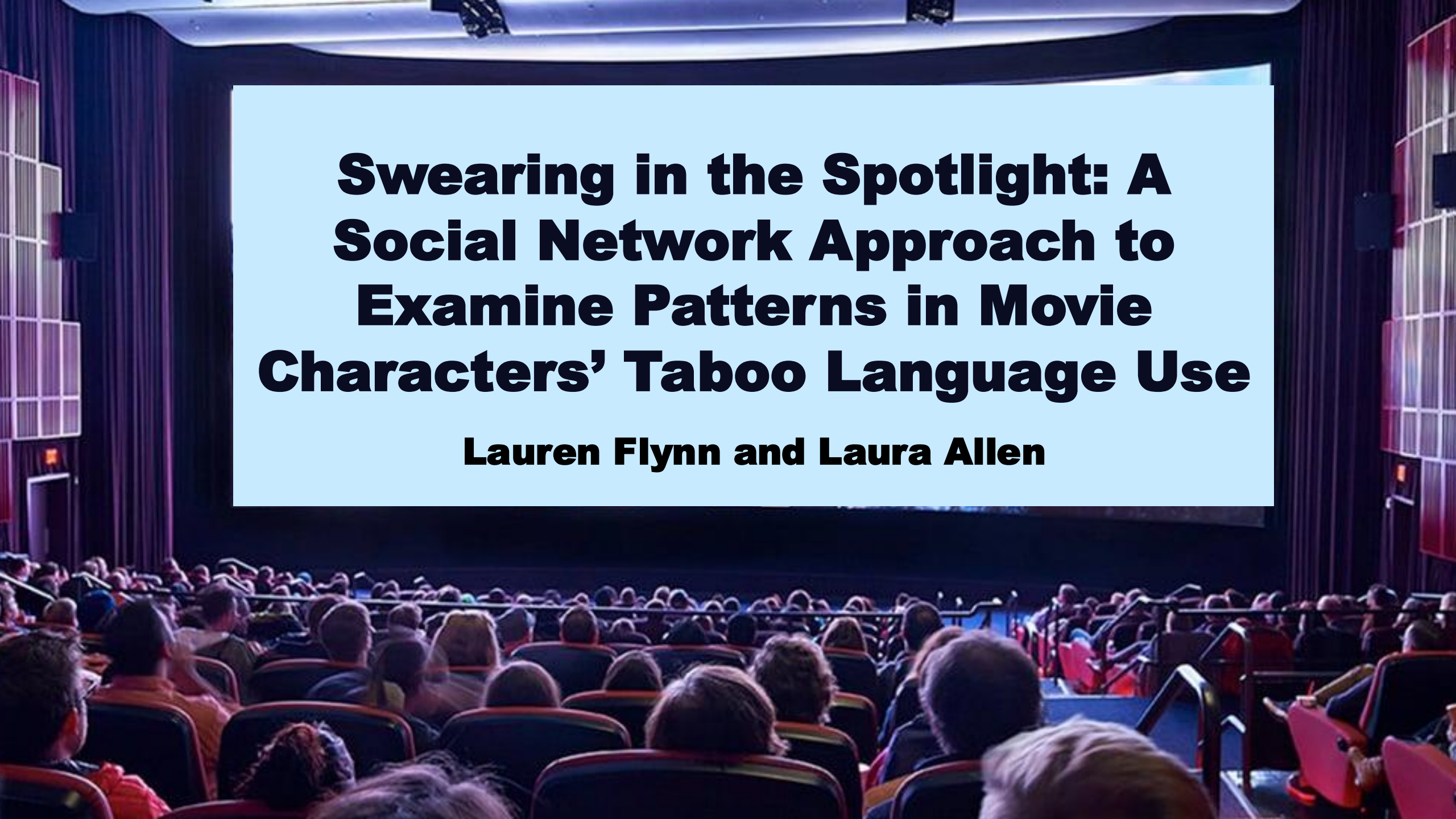
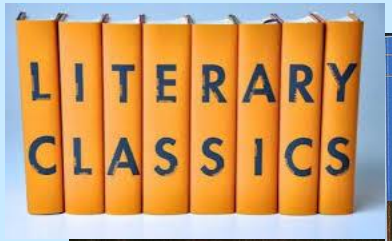


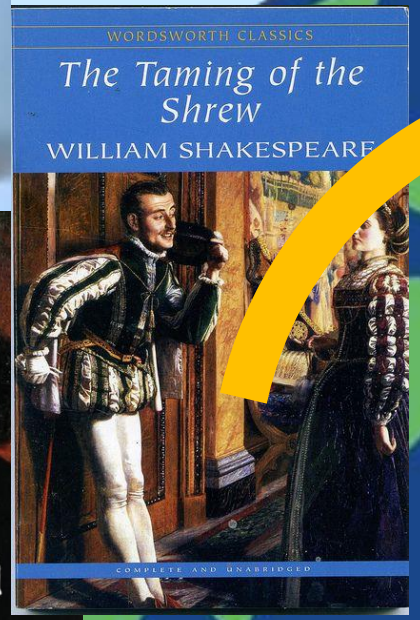
Swearing in the Spotlight: A Social Network Approach to Examine Patterns in Movie Characters' Taboo Language Use

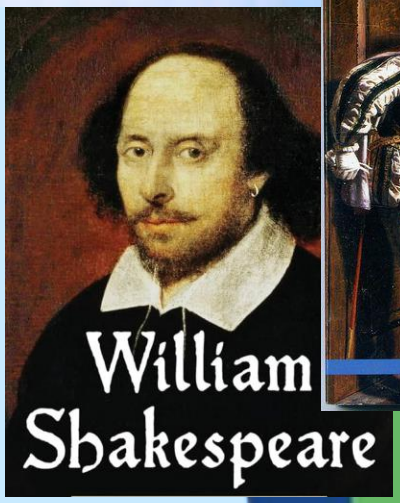
Lauren Flynn and Laura Allen

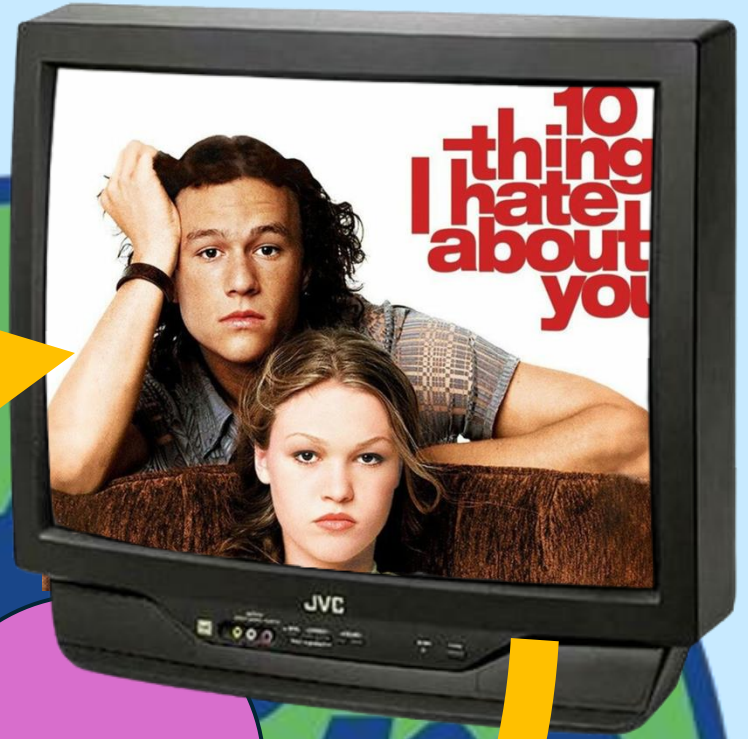
telecinematic discourse

- fictional worlds are embedded within our real world (McQuail, 1992; Riegel, 1996)
- the world around us inspires the media we consume (Newman & Girvan, 2004)
- popular media then influences our reality--normalizing the behaviors, attitudes, and language exemplified (Sapolsky & Kaye, 2005)
  - including gender norms (Schofield & Mehr, 2016)





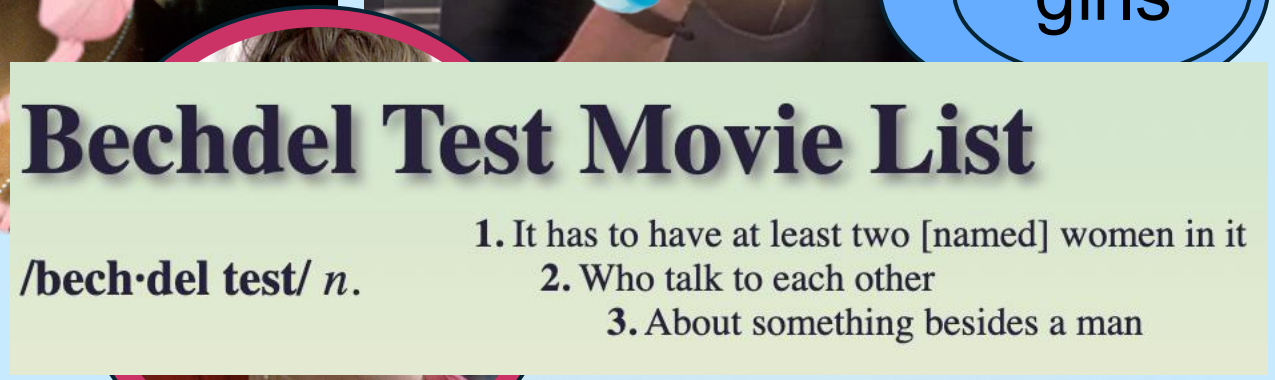




Fiction

discourse & gender

- male characters have more primary roles and speak more (Mulvey, 1988; Lauzen, 2018)
- gender archetypes used to quickly elicit stereotypes (Schofield & Mehr, 2016)
  - e.g., polite vs. explicit language (Lakoff, 1973)
- communication expectations driven by gender stereotypes (Schofield & Mehr, 2016)
  - e.g., discourse content
  - e.g., use of profanity

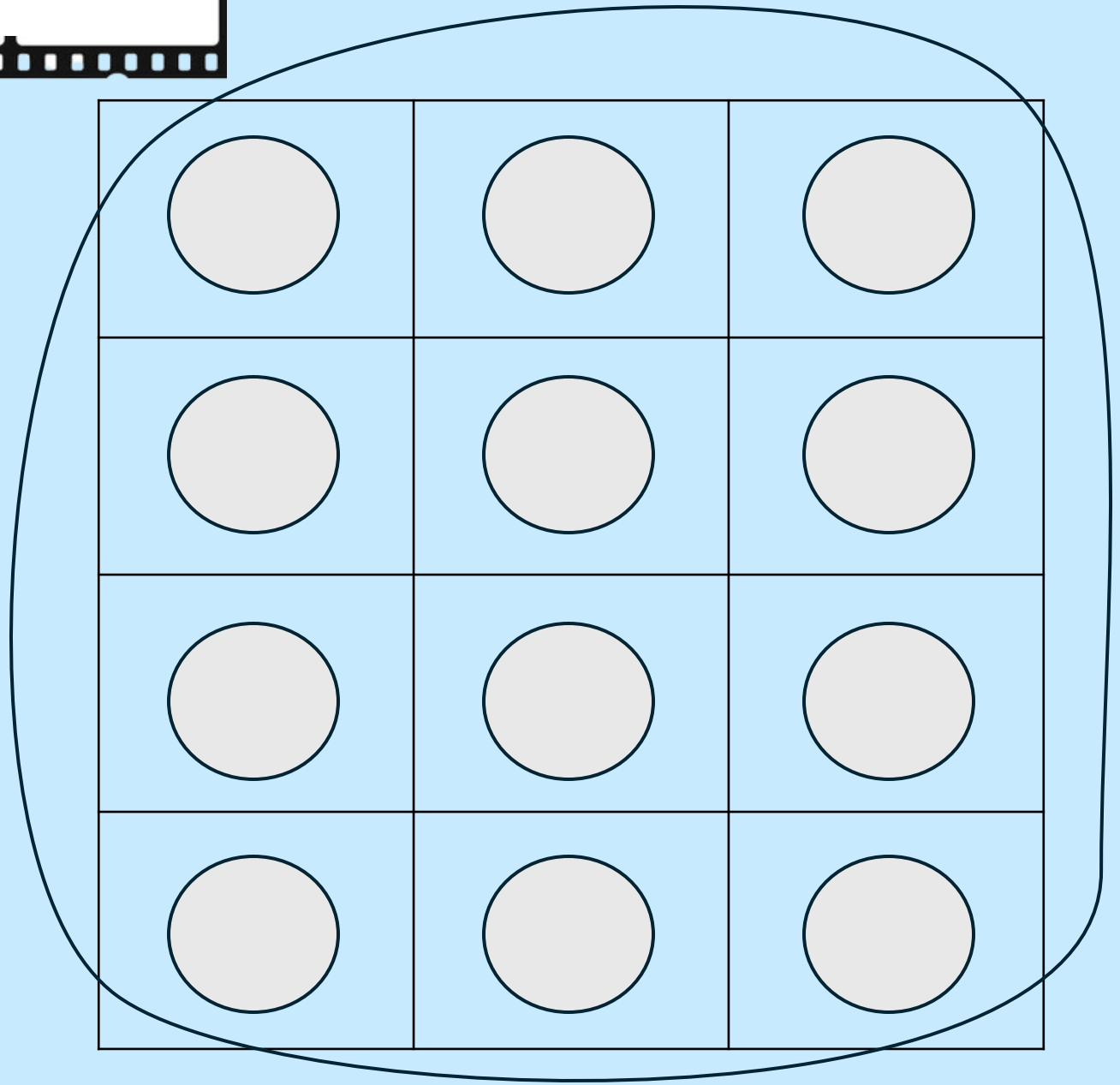


swearing dynamics

- taboo language has been broadly studied and known to vary both in real life and fiction by gender (Foote & Woodward, 1973; Wood, 1994)
  - aids in identity-building and gaining power (Cressman et al., 2009)
  - females have more consequences when swearing and socialized to be more accommodating (Jay, 1992)
- other contextual factors: formality of setting, relationship between speakers, gender of listener, etc. (Bayard & Krishnayya, 2001; Jay, 1992, 2000, 2009; Stapleton, 2003)
- most often occurs when in the presence of males (Sapolsky & Kaye, 2005)
- investigating gendered swear use as a proxy for social power can be examined using social network analysis (SNA)

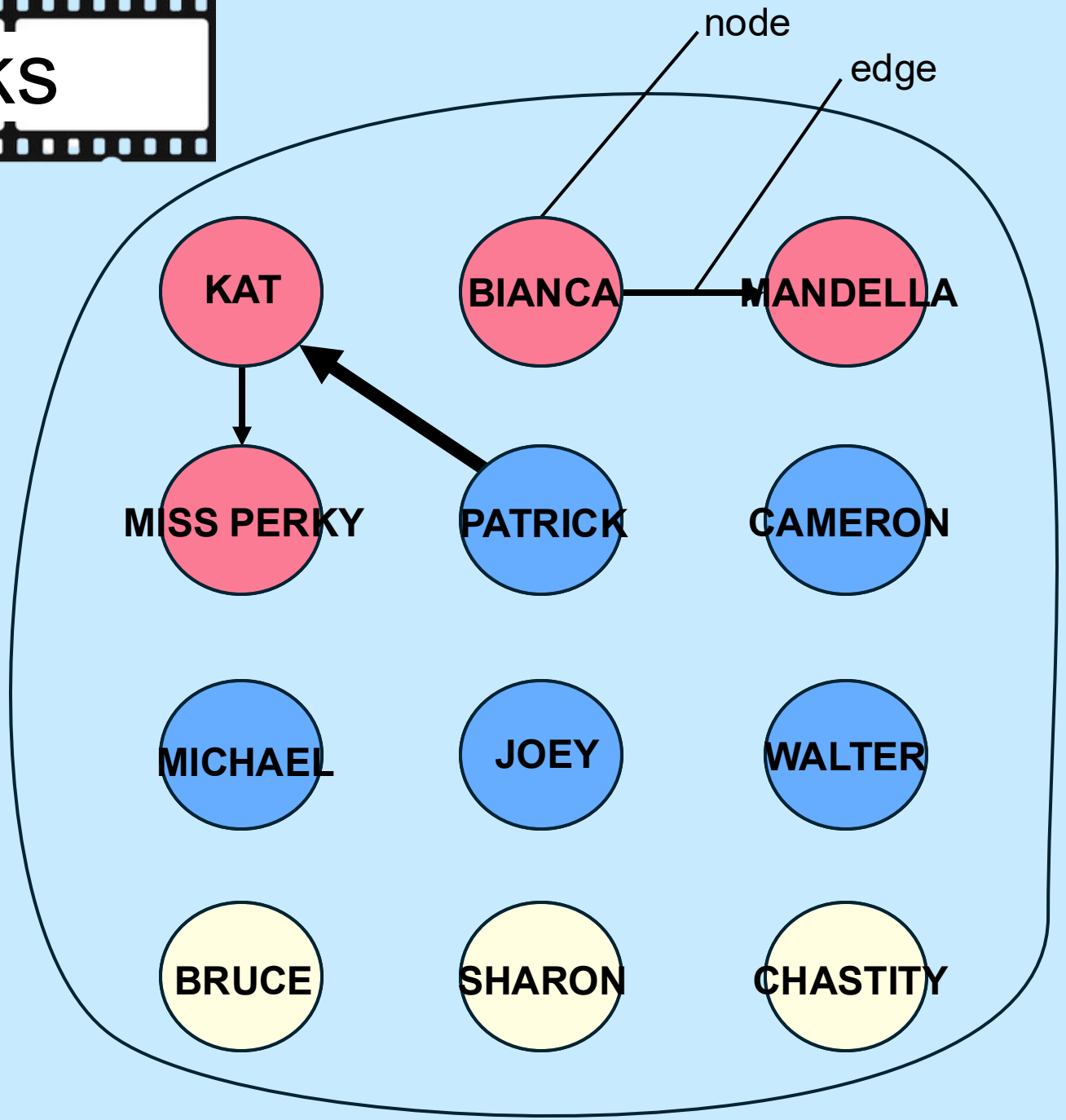
social discourse

- discourse is inherently social and involves the co-construction of dialogue based on characters' shared contexts and meanings (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984; Cazden, 2001; Gee, 2012)
- language is embedded in the social interactions in which it is used (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984; Gee, 2012; Street, 1984)
  - speakers implicitly enforce their shared norms and expectations on each other (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu et al., 1990; Goffman, 1959)
- instead of focusing on separate individuals, the focus is on the interdependence of characters (Kadushin, 2012; Knoke & Yang, 2008)



SNA character networks

- SNA produces social networks that consist of nodes and edges (Carolan, 2024)
  - each node = specific character (colored by gender)
  - each edge/tie = shared interaction between connected characters (weighted by frequency of interaction)
- here, social networks represent the conversational interactions between characters within each movie (Elson et al., 2010)

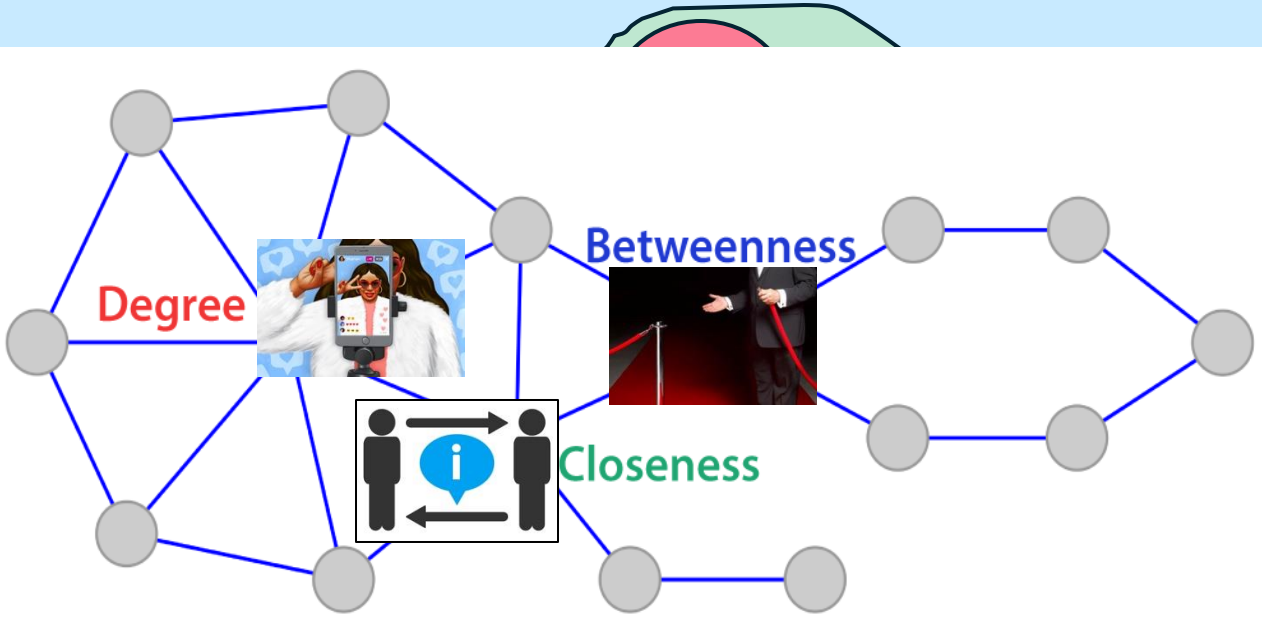


current study

1. How does the structure of taboo interaction networks differ from the overall network of movie interactions?
   - # of nodes (characters)
   - # of edges (lines)
   - # of communities

   } do these replicate?
   - network density
   - network reciprocity
2. How does gender interact with graph type (i.e., overall vs. taboo networks) in predicting measures of character importance (i.e, social power)?
   - strength (weighted degree) = network influencers
   - betweenness = network brokers/gatekeepers
   - closeness = information exchangers

Network 1: Overall Speech

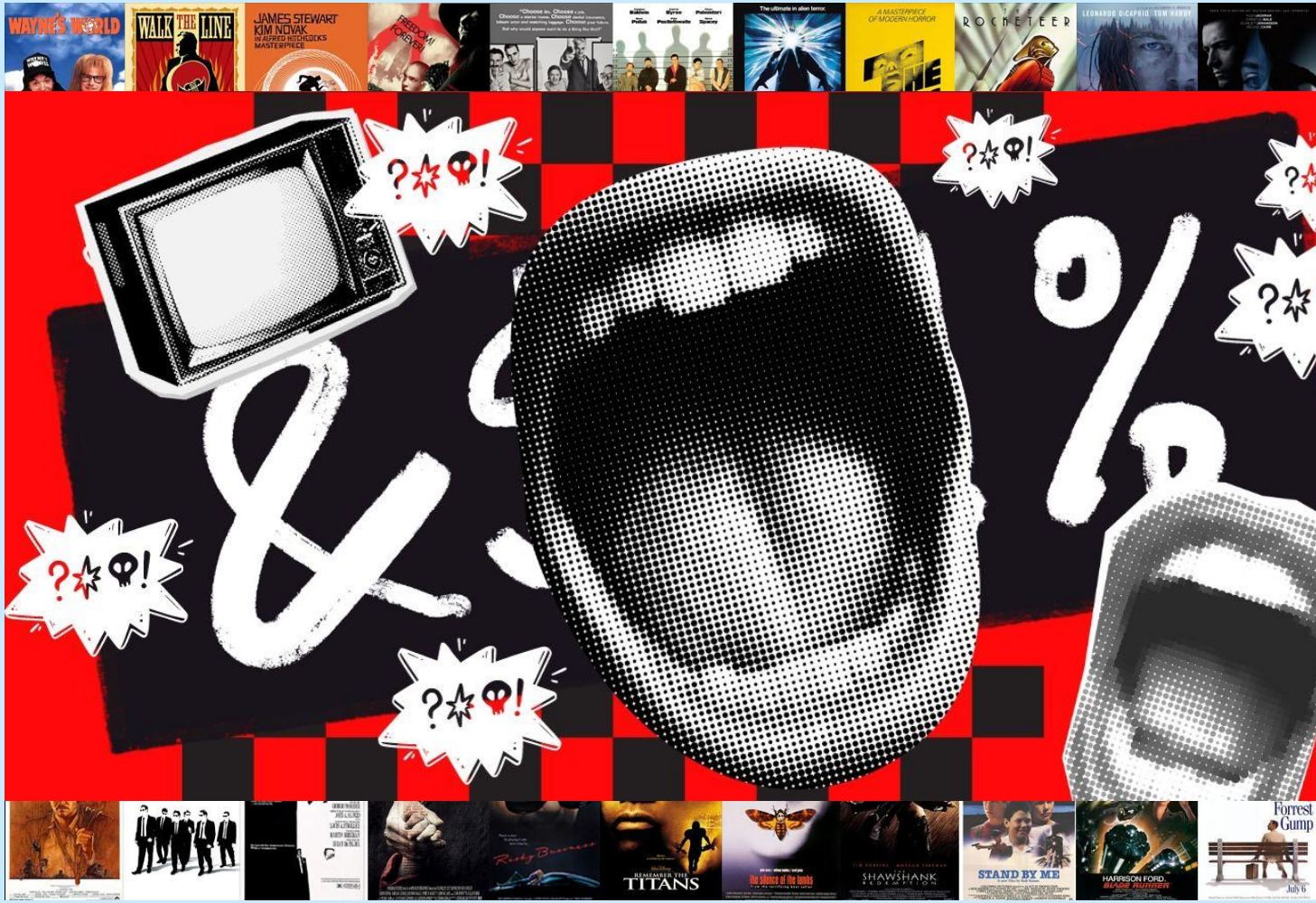


- **Weighted Degree (Strength)** = sum of edge weights connected to node
- **Betweenness** = influence of node in the flow of information
- **Closeness** = closeness of node to other nodes

data sources

1. **Cornell Movie Dialog Corpus (Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil & Lee, 2011):**
   - 576 movies
   - across 24 genres
   - released between 1927-2010
   - avg. # of taboo words = ~25

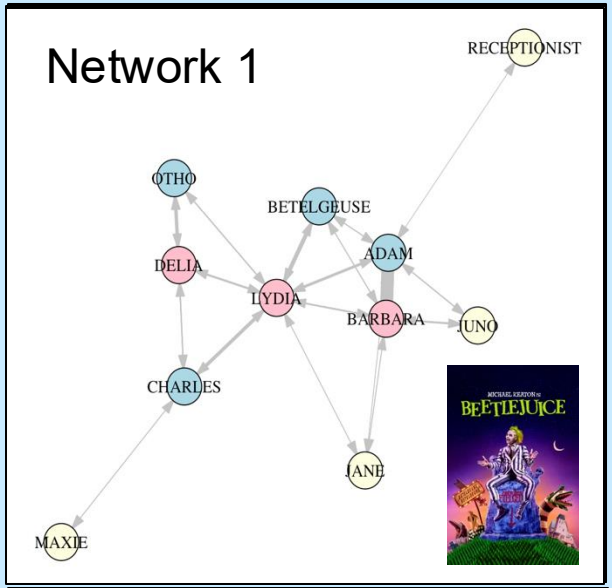
2. **Taboo Norms (Janschewitz, 2008):**
   - set of 92 taboo words rated on a 9-pt. Likert scale for degree of *tabooness*

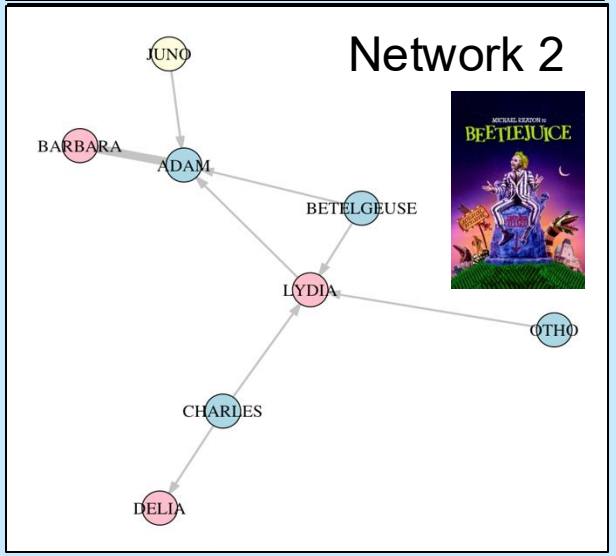


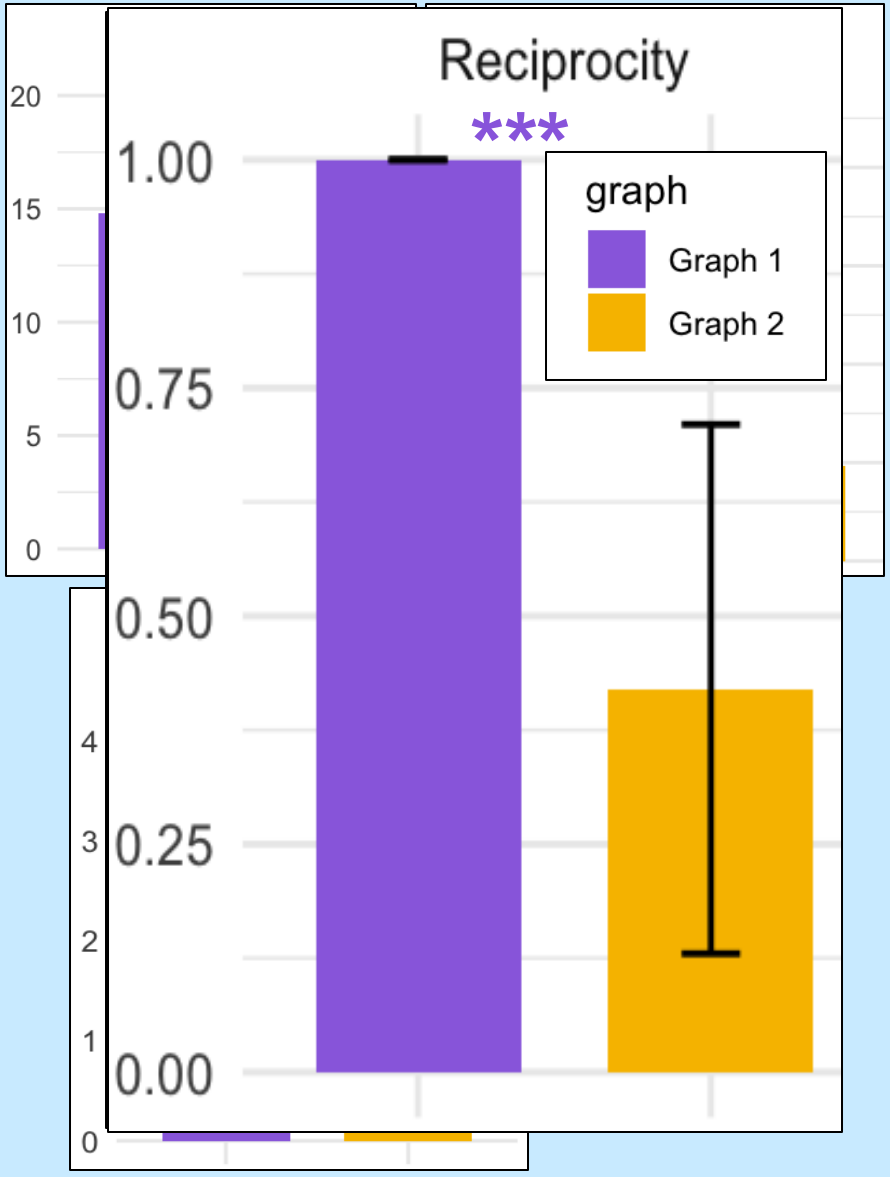
results: RQ#1

1. How does the structure of taboo interaction networks (graph 2) differ from the overall network (graph 1) of movie interactions?

- confirms/replicates that frequency indices (# of nodes, edges, communities) in the swearing network are only a fraction of the total network
- higher density in swear graphs
  - fewer weak ties (swearers tend to swear with other swearers)
  - swearers are more interconnected
- character speech is reciprocated but swearing is reciprocated less than 50%
  - most people speak when spoken to
  - swearing at someone doesn't guarantee they'll swear back







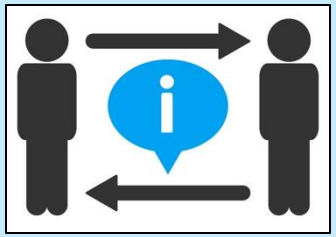
results: RQ#2

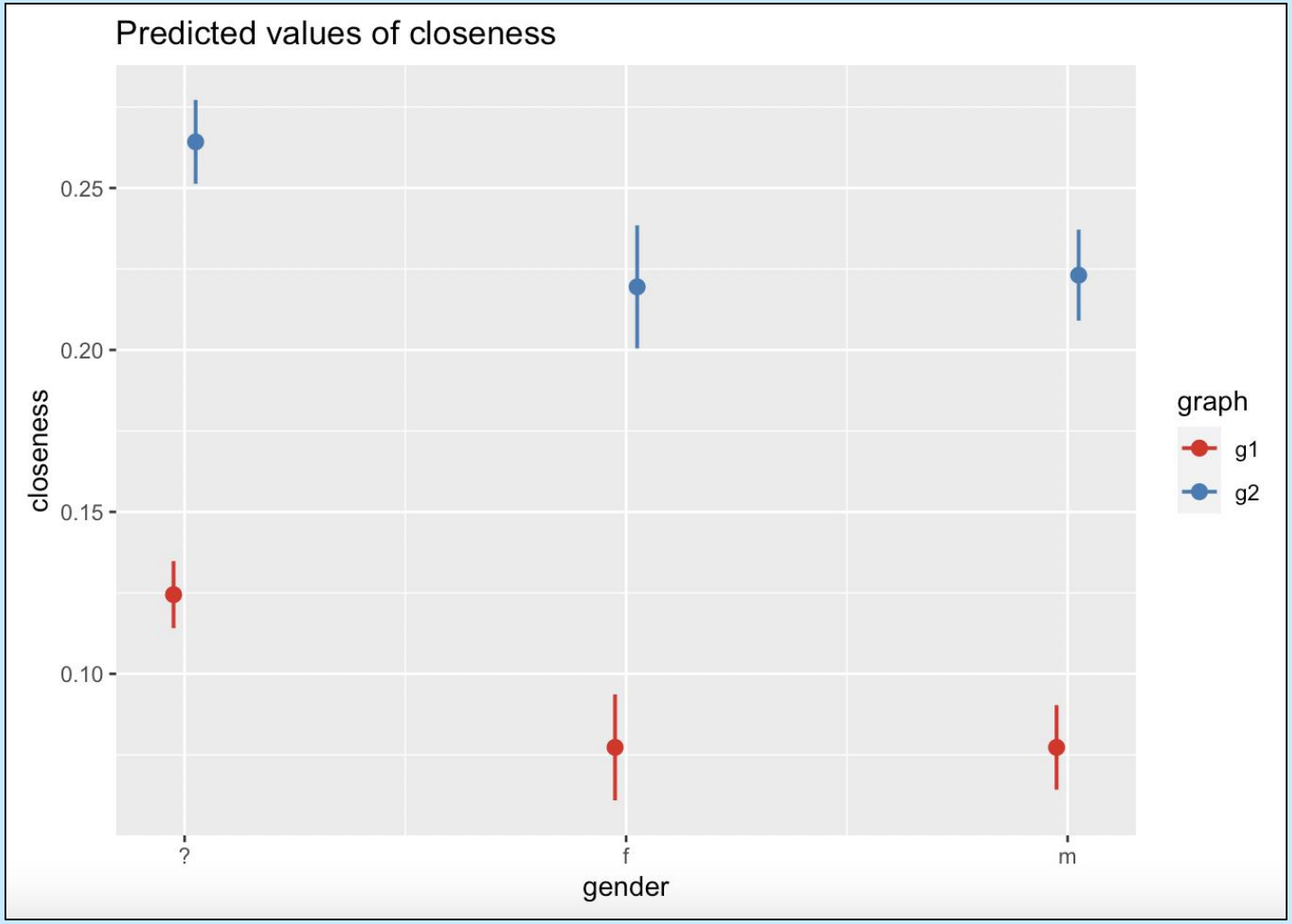
2. How does gender interact with graph type (i.e., overall vs. taboo networks) in predicting measures of character importance?

- **strength:** male characters involved in sig. more social interactions and have more lines with swears

- **betweenness:** male characters play more central movie roles and exchange more information (including explicit) than females

- **closeness:** main effects found for both gender and graph type but no interaction



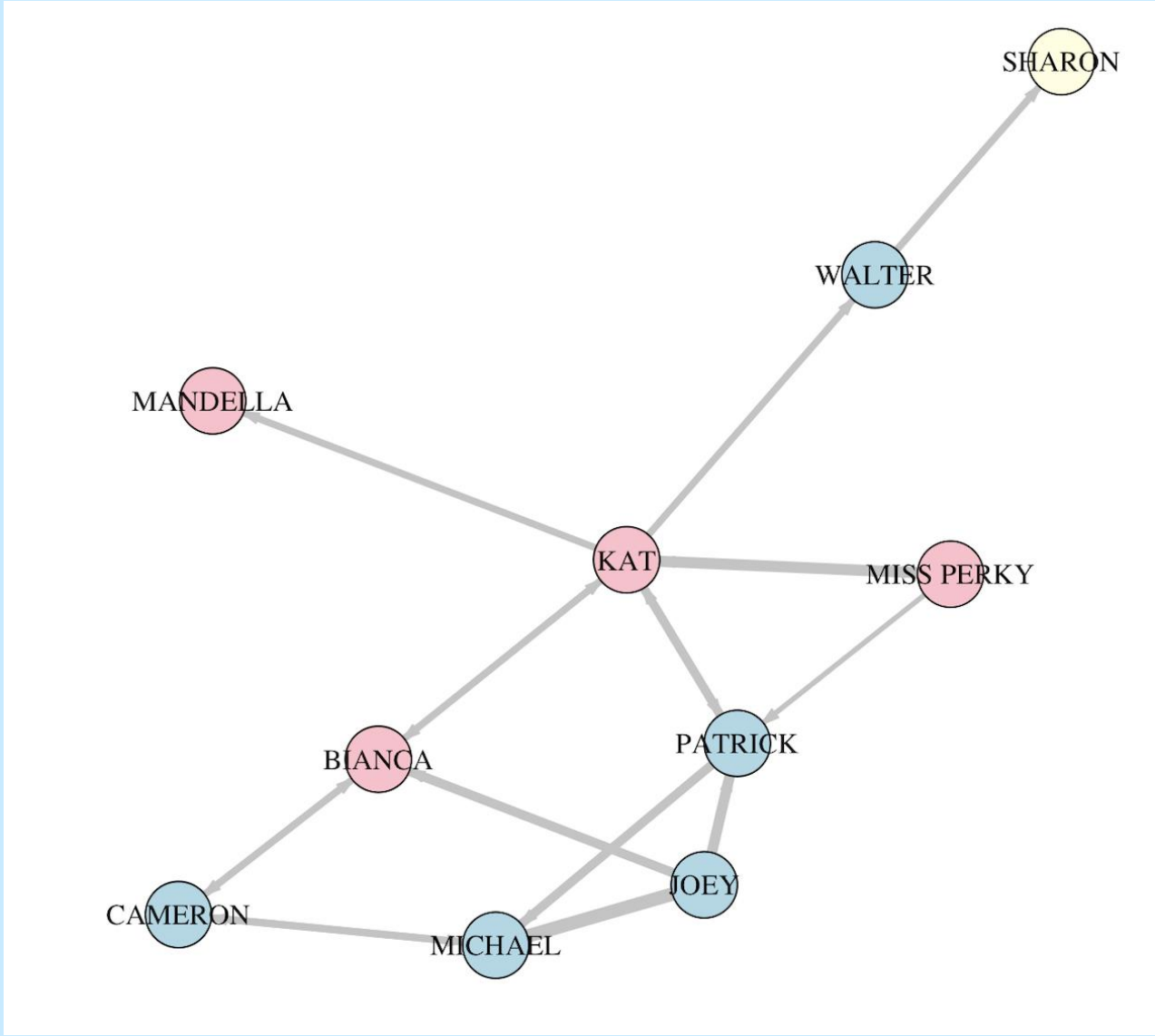


discussion

- replicates previous findings of a primarily male-centric film perspective
- swearers tend to be more interconnected
- male characters hold the most powerful central roles within social networks
  - network influencers
  - network brokers (information gatekeepers)
- males continue to dominate positions of social power and control the spread of information across discourse

future work

- limitations to address:
  - gender isn't binary
  - language use may differ by genre
- future extensions:
  - look at swearing dynamics amongst other contexts (e.g., genre, setting, character relationship)
  - explore use of gendered swearing across different discourse functions (e.g., humor, eliciting emotion)
  - dive deeper into which taboo words are most central & what kinds of characters use them
  - can investigate other indicators of social power through dialogue (e.g., tabooness of swears used, self-disclosure, giving instruction/making demands)




Thanks for watching!