

Presenting:

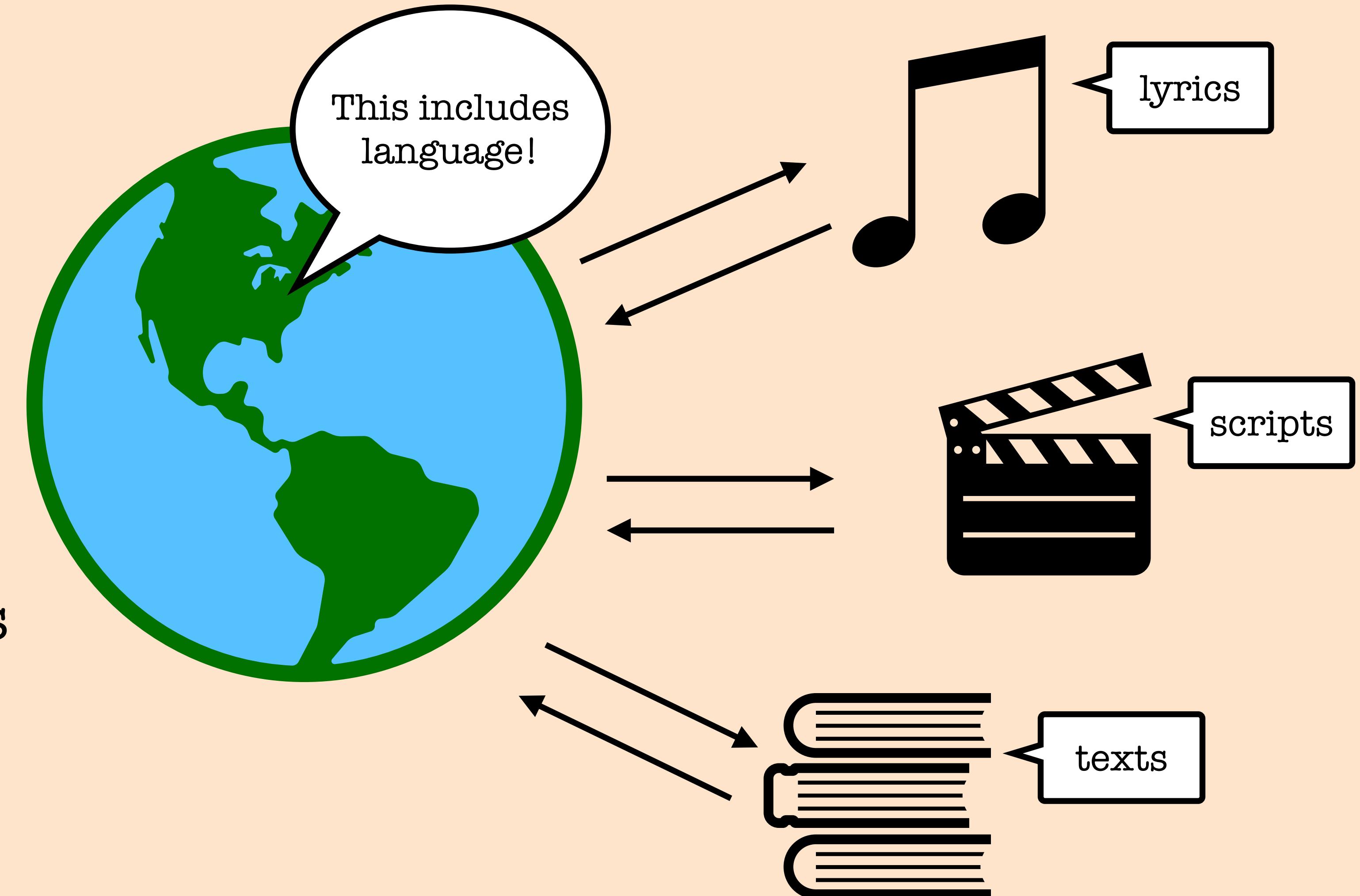
# The Dynamics of Taboo Language in Movie Dialogs

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# The Dynamic Space

The human experience  
inspires the media we  
consume...

...this media  
simultaneously influences  
our society and culture



# The Dynamic Space

relationship between speakers



social/physical setting



Language (e.g., scripts)  
is context-dependent

including the  
use of taboo  
language (e.g.,  
swearing)

nonverbal cues



gender



# Using Taboo Language

- swearing indicates strong emotional, psychological, social, & cultural phenomena (Jay, 2009)
- swearing elicits higher arousal than non-taboo words (Jay & Janschewitz, 2007)
- potential positive social outcomes of using taboo language may include:
  - swear use frequency varies by gender and type of conversation (Bayard & Krishnayya, 2001; Stapleton, 2020)

photograph by Svetlana Kharlamova



# The Current Study

examines fine-grained factors that interact to influence **how** and **when** taboo language is used in fictional dialog

**1.** Does the presence of taboo words differ by social factors (i.e., speaker gender, listener same/mixed gender as speaker) of the conversation?



**2.** How does the degree of taboooness vary by social factors (i.e., speaker gender, listener same/mixed gender as speaker)?

**3.** How do these relationships change over time (i.e., over the course of the movie)?



# The Data

## Cornell Movie Dialog Corpus-

corpus of fictional conversations  
from raw movie scripts  
containing:

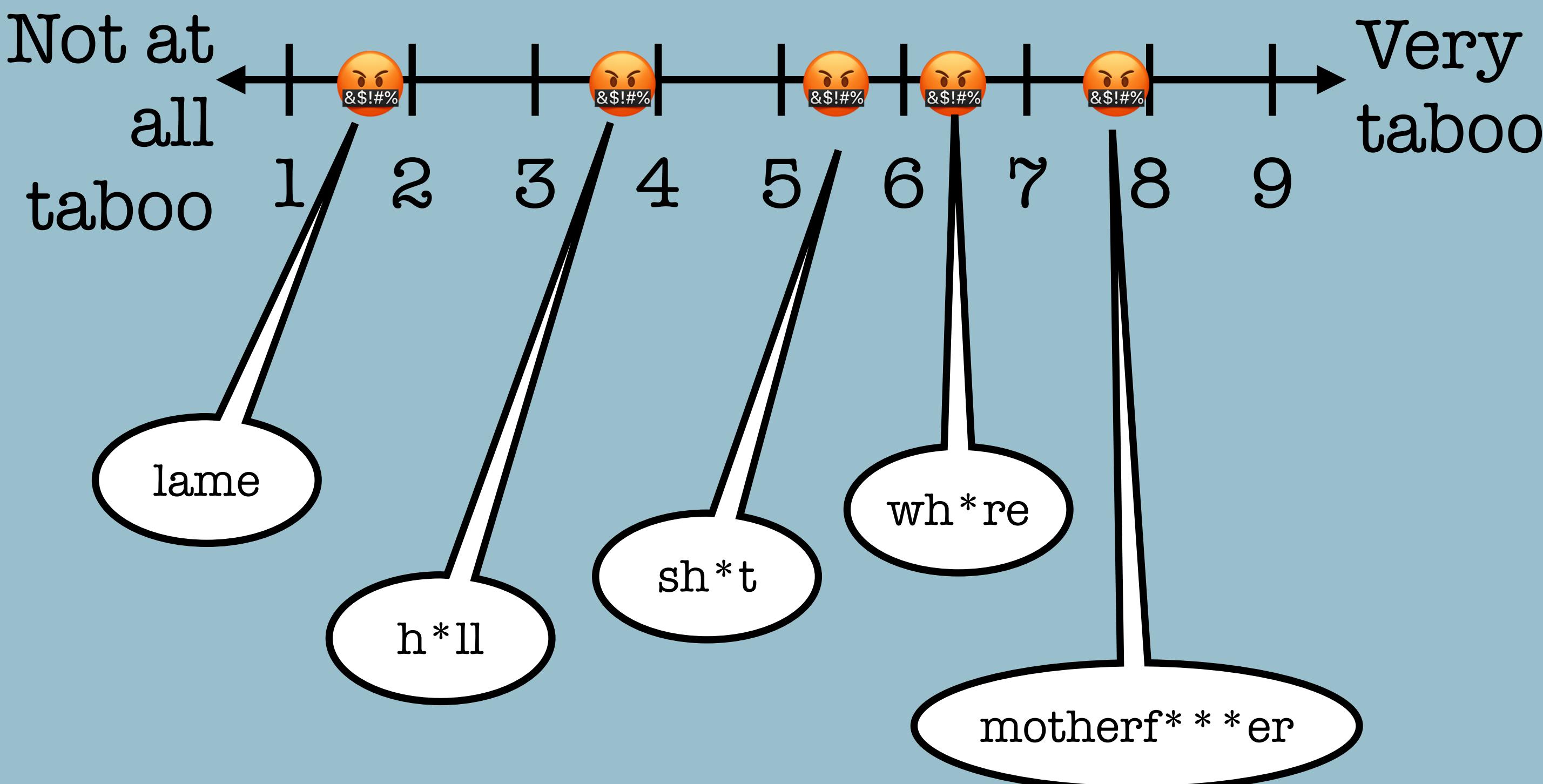
- a huge a\*\* collection of movies (617)
- a s\*\*\* load of characters (9,035)
- a f\*\*\* ton of conversations (220,579)
- and a f\*\*\*ing lot of lines (304,713)

# Taboo Word Norms

**Janschewitz (2008)**- list of 93 taboo words rated on the following scales:

- familiarity
- offensiveness
- **tabooness**
- valence
- arousal
- imageability

**Tabooness:** How taboo or **socially unacceptable** is the word to **people in general**? Imagine the word being used at work, in a classroom, at a religious service, at a cocktail party, with friends, with family, etc. Give a 1-9 rating:



# Analyses

series of linear mixed effect models

1. did gender taboos (i.e., gender

taboo)

3. How do these relationships change over time (i.e., over the course of the movie)?

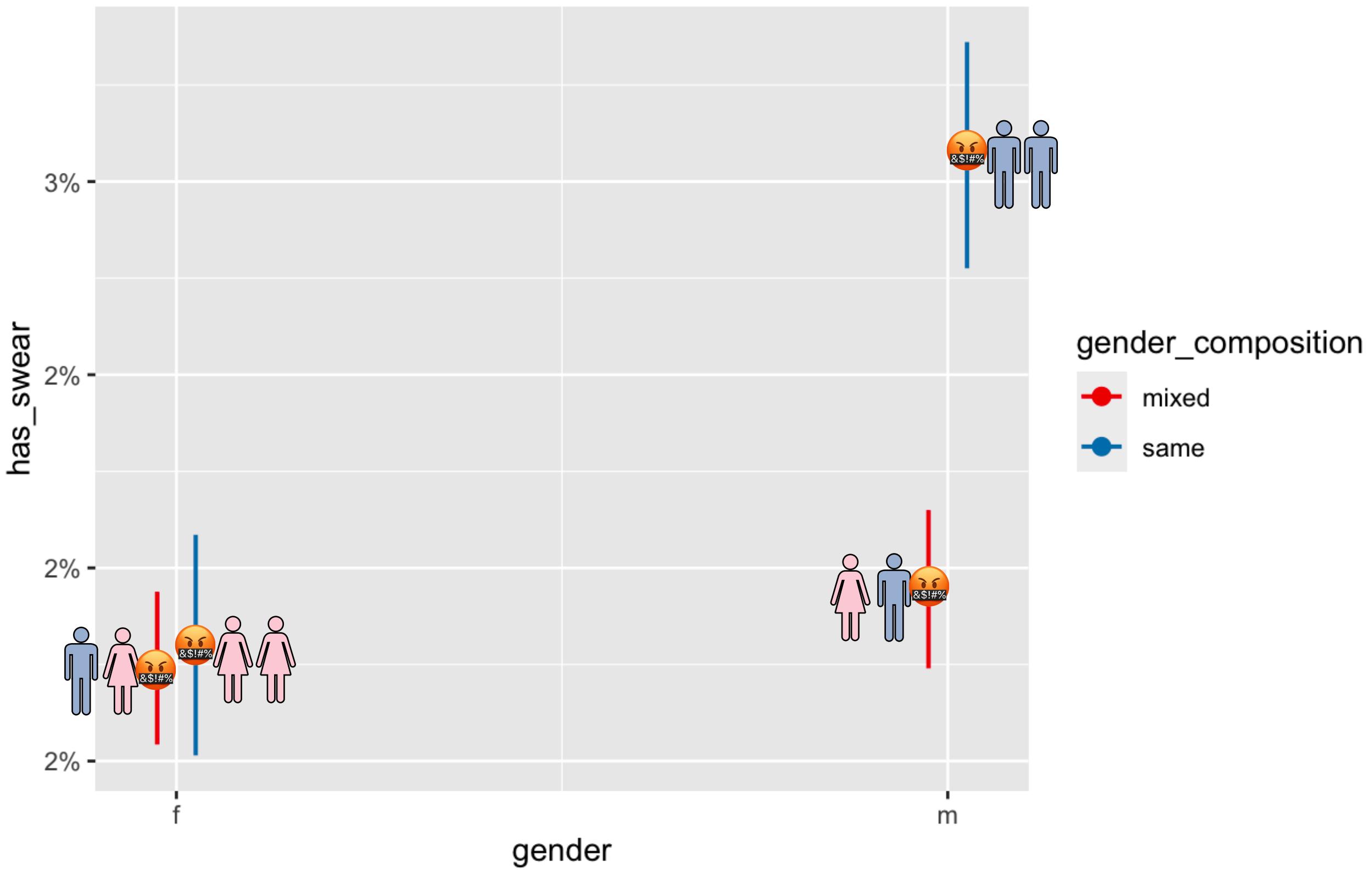
avg.tabby.genders\_in\_composition ~ (1 | movieID) + characterID



movies split  
into 20 bins

controlling for random  
effects of individual  
movies & characters

Predicted probabilities of has\_swear



1. Does the presence of taboo words differ by social factors (i.e., speaker gender, listener same/mixed gender as speaker) of the conversation?

# Results

most lines didn't have taboo language but males appear to have more lines than females

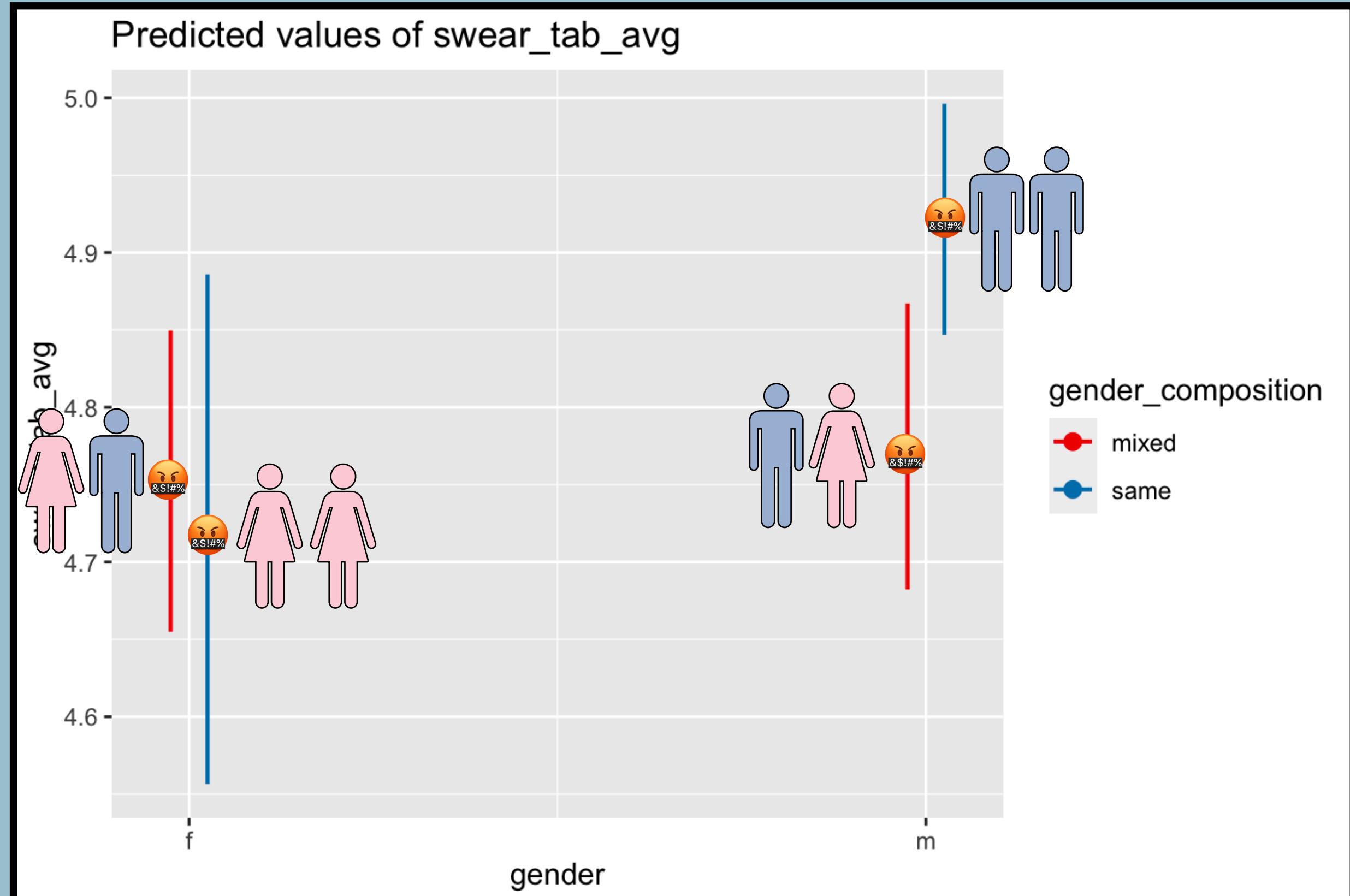
- main effect of speaker gender
- significant interaction between gender and gender composition (if dyad are same/mixed gendered)

# Results

line tabooeness is slightly higher in males than females

- no main effects found
- interaction is approaching significance

2. How does the degree of tabooeness vary by social factors (i.e., speaker gender, listener same/mixed gender as speaker)?



# Results

no significant changes in taboooness over course of movie

- no linear or curvilinear effects over time
- time not significant in binary model either

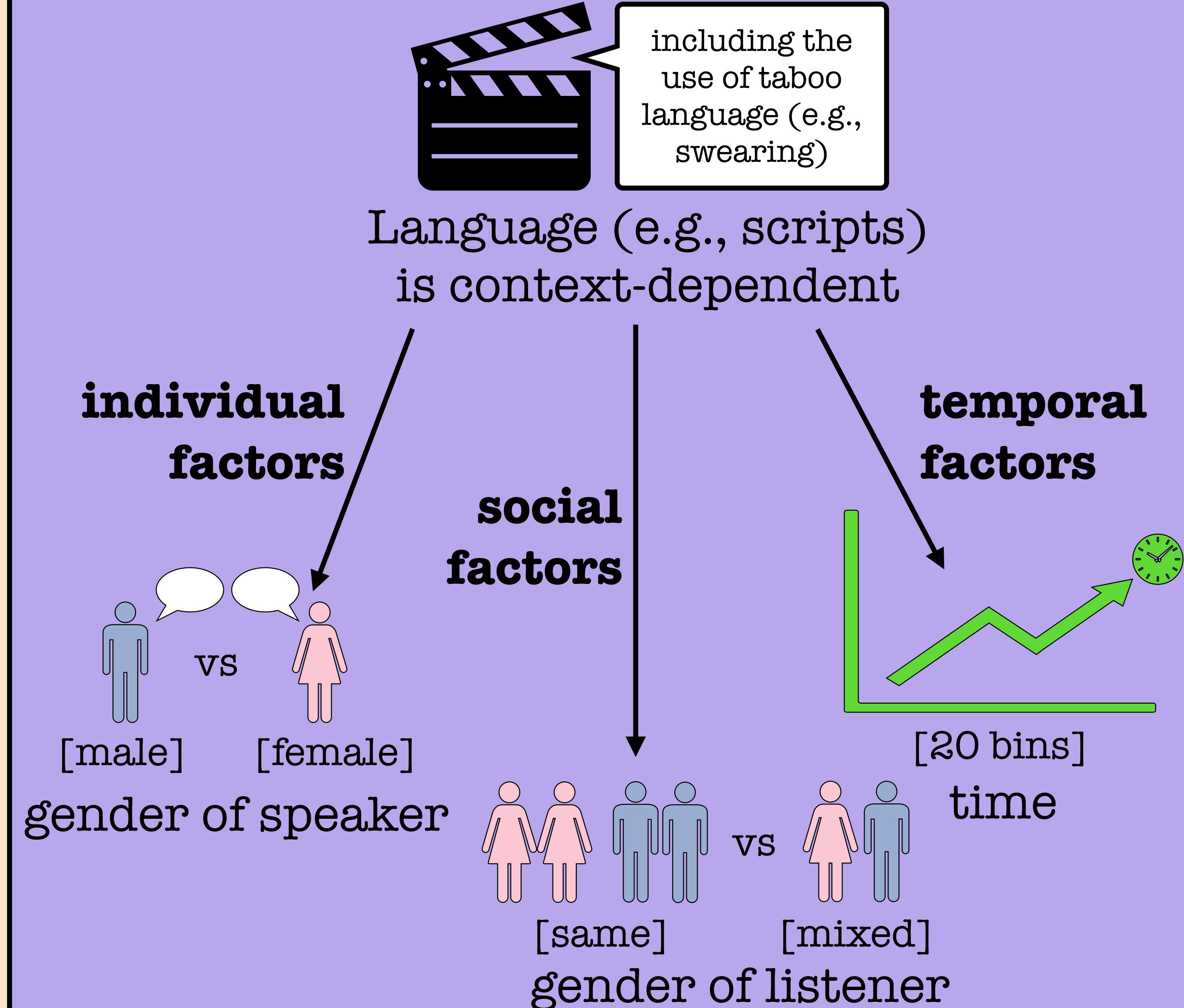


3. How do this relationship change over time  
(i.e., over the course of the movie)?

# Discussion

first study to examine the dynamic factors involved in taboo language within **fictional** discourse

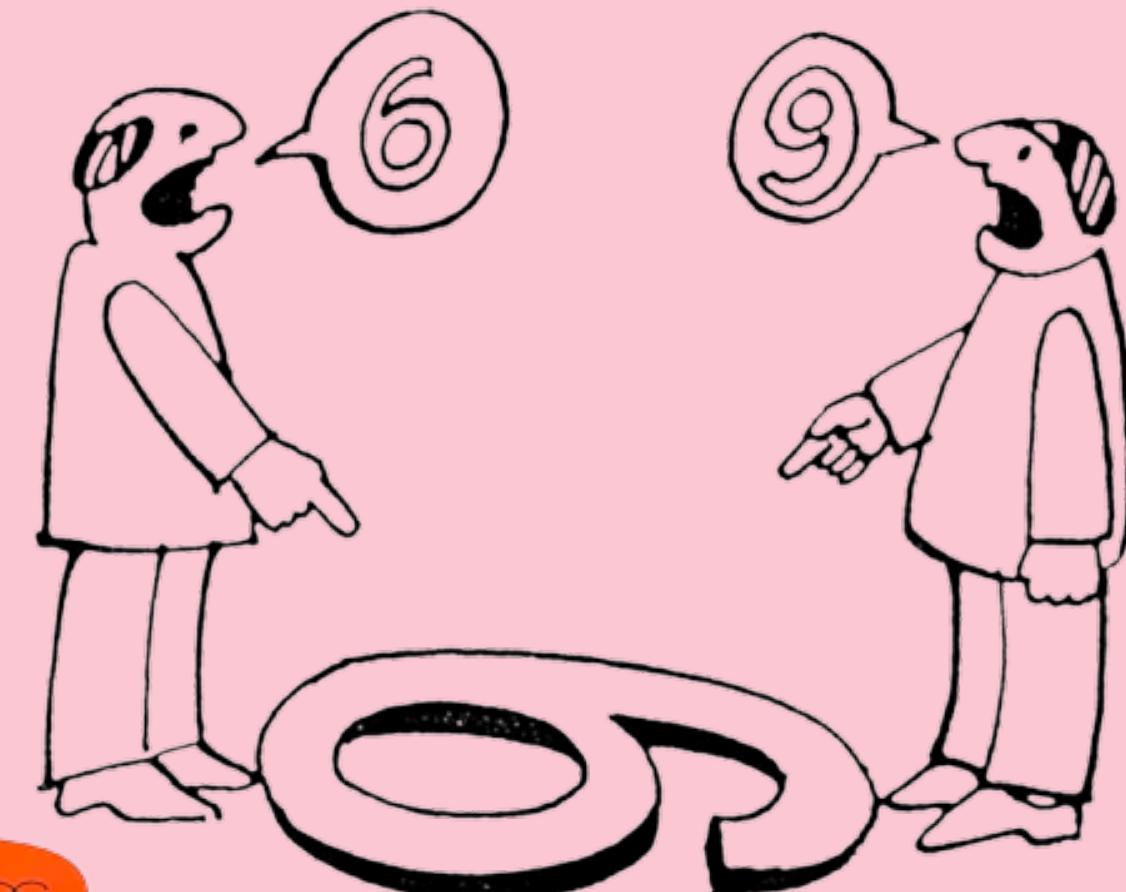
- taboo language represented differently by gender groups (interaction between individual and social factors)
- influences the gender expectations and stereotypes spread



relationship  
between speakers



GENDER ISN'T BINARY



social/physical  
setting



# Limitations

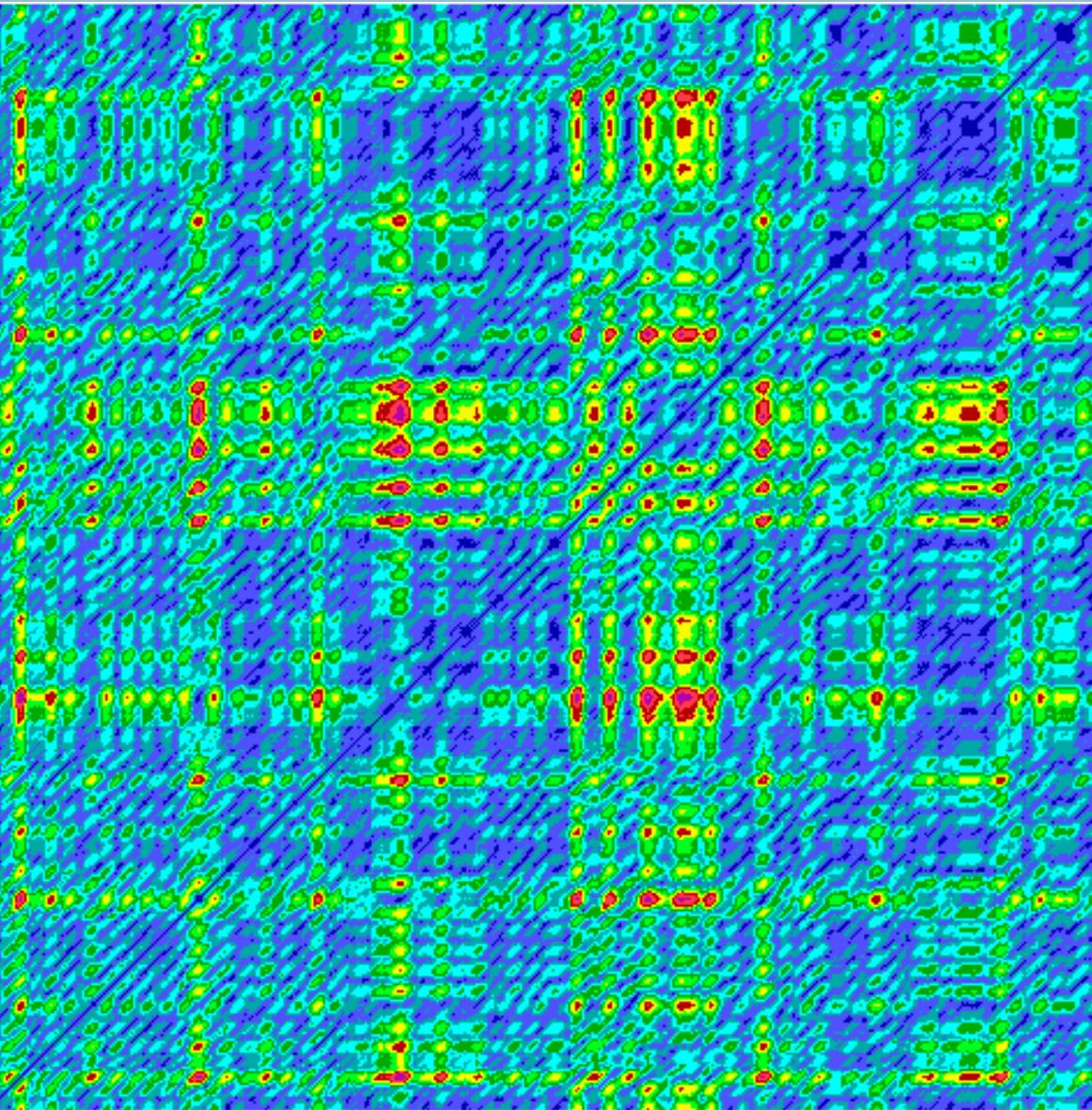
- gender **IS NOT** binary
- only conversations with dyads included in sample (2 people)
- don't have perceptions of taboooness from characters or script writers themselves
- didn't look at other (more complicated) environmental factors such as scene setting or social factors such as relationship between speakers

# Future Work

- directly compare real life conversations with those represented in the fictional discourse we consume
- use a more complex analysis of time
- examine additional factors:
  - genres
  - other forms of media discourse
  - other linguistic properties

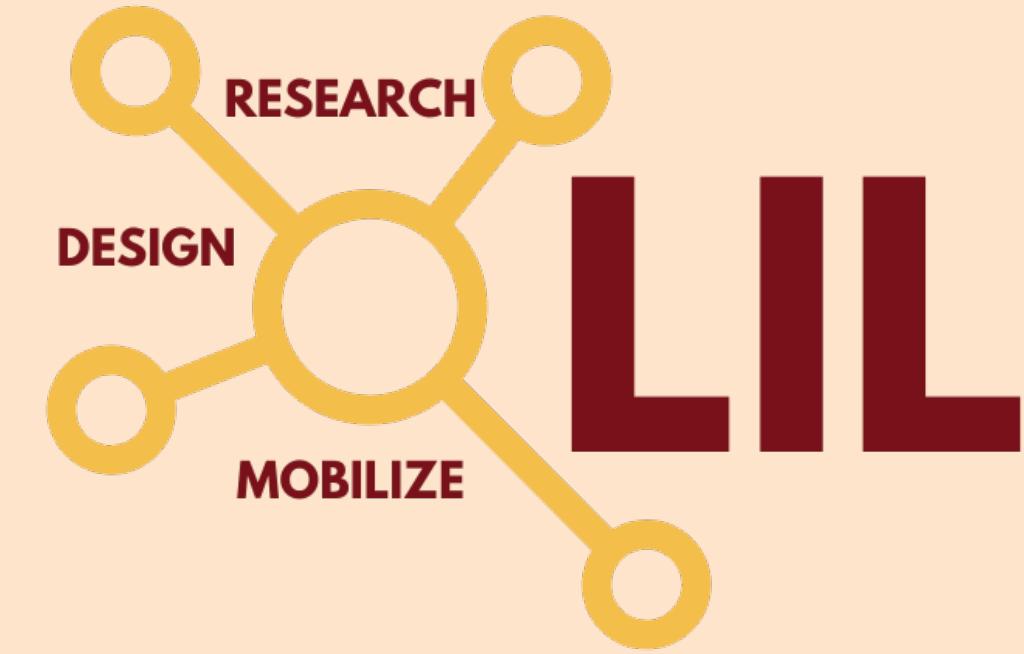


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covar=0.048
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#lines=478
xrecur=100.000
xdeterrm=99.999
entropy=8.901
maxline=479
trend=0.000
```





# Questions?



Contact me: [flynn598@umn.edu](mailto:flynn598@umn.edu)

**Thanks for  
F \* \* \* ing  
Listening!!**

