

Susan and Barbie:
Linguistic constructions of gender in the
television series *Scrubs*

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Södertörn University

Independent project 15 credits

English III HT 2025

Ämneslärarprogrammet med inriktning mot gymnasieskola



Abstract

This study investigates how gender is linguistically constructed in the television series *Scrubs*, focusing on the characters JD and Elliot. Drawing on Butler's theory of performativity and Harré and van Langenhove's positioning theory, the analysis examines dialogue from the first season and aims to reveal how explicitly gendered terms, implicitly gendered language, recurring forms of address, and references to normative behavior function as discursive strategies of identity construction. Through both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study shows how JD and Elliot are portrayed, revealing how sitcom dialogue both reinforces and challenges traditional gender norms. By situating the analysis within the broader context of popular culture, the essay highlights how scripted television dialogue reflects and reinforces cultural ideas about masculinity and femininity, while also offering audiences moments of resistance of gender norms. The findings underscore the pedagogical potential of using popular culture texts to promote critical media literacy, encouraging students to question everyday language practices and recognize the social structures they uphold.

Keywords: *Scrubs*, linguistics, Television dialogue, Gender and language, Performativity, Positioning theory, Popular culture, Critical media literacy

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1. Introduction

Television sitcoms often serve as cultural mirrors, reflecting and reinforcing social norms while simultaneously offering spaces for their contestation via humor. Their dialogue is designed to resemble everyday language, but at the same time it can be stylized for entertainment and narrative purposes. Because language is central to how characters are constructed and negotiated, examining sitcom dialogue provides a valuable insight into how, for example, gender and identity are understood and represented. The ways in which characters speak both reproduce contemporary stereotypes and reveal shifting attitudes toward social roles, capturing everyday talk in dramatized form and making cultural ideas about masculinity, femininity, and interpersonal relationships accessible to audiences.

Studies of television language show how dialogue mirrors authentic usage while also being manipulated for storytelling, character construction, and audience engagement, thereby influencing real-world language practices (Bednarek, 2010; Beers Fägersten, 2016). Scripted dialogue thus becomes a productive site for examining how language shapes identity and both reflects and perpetuates cultural norms. For comedies in particular, language is often manipulated for humorous purposes, such as satirizing social norms or exaggerating character stereotypes (Bednarek, 2018). The representation of gender in television therefore offers an opportunity to explore how language may be used to invoke or undermine gender roles, stereotypes, and identities (Beers Fägersten & Sveen, 2016). This essay proposes that the medical comedy-drama *Scrubs* (2001-2010) provides a rich site for examining how gender is constructed and negotiated through speech. The sitcom's two central characters, John Dorian, usually referred to as JD, and Elliot Reid, are both white, newly graduated doctors in their late 20s, starting new jobs together at the fictional Sacred Heart Hospital. As new doctors and new hospital employees, both characters also struggle with overcoming insecurity, asserting their belonging, exhibiting knowledge and competence, and managing their working relationships with their peers, patients, and hospital staff, particularly more experienced nurses and doctors. Within the fictional context of *Scrubs*, the only significant difference between JD and Elliot is their sex. Their similarities thus allow sex to be isolated as a sociolinguistic variable. The aim of the essay is therefore to examine how language is used to construct and distinguish the characters of JD and Elliot, focusing in particular on language usage that orients to their sex or perceived gender. The analysis targets the first twelve episodes from the first season of *Scrubs* and is guided by theories of performativity and positioning, the former of which argues that gender is not an innate identity but rather a repeated performance enacted through

discourse and behavior (Butler 1988) while the latter theory views identity as discursively negotiated rather than fixed (Langenhove & Harré, 1999).

By applying Butler's theory of performativity and Harré and van Langenhove's positioning theory, this study aims to demonstrate that *Scrubs* simultaneously reproduces and destabilizes traditional gender norms, showing how everyday dialogue functions as sites of both conformity and resistance. The application of these theories to the dialogue of *Scrubs* aims to reveal how gender is linguistically constructed, performed, and asserted in interpersonal communication, so as to evaluate what the series conveys to its audience about linguistic norms of gender.

Scrubs enjoyed a successful nine-season run, airing on ABC from 2001-2010. Production of a reboot of *Scrubs* is scheduled to begin in 2026, which has prompted the series to be re-aired on various streaming sites. In this way, the series is being both rediscovered by former viewers and experienced for the first time by new viewers. A linguistic analysis of the original series can thus expose past practices of linguistic gendering that may diverge from contemporary practices or expectations. In this way, the essay aims to promote critical media literacy, specifically awareness of the relationship between language and gender and of linguistic performativity and positioning. By examining what the language of *Scrubs* conveyed to its audience about gender in 2001, we can raise awareness of how language usage may continue to shape our understanding of gender and identity in contemporary cultural contexts. The essay thus proposes that analyses of television language have didactic application.

1.1 Main research questions

- How is gender invoked by linguistic means in the dialogue of *Scrubs*?
- How are gender norms linguistically represented or constructed via linguistic characterization?
- How does the dialogue of *Scrubs* reinforce or challenge traditional gender stereotypes?

2. Literary review

In this next section, we will examine theories of how gender is constructed through performativity and positioning and discuss why television series dialogue provides a relevant site for studying language and gender.

2.1 Performativity

Judith Butler (1988) argues that gender is not a fixed essence or natural fact, but rather something constituted through repeated acts. These linguistic and embodied practices become a performative act. Such practices are performed individually and collectively, and include bodily gestures and, crucially, speech, which together create the illusion of a stable identity. Because these acts are repeated by many people over time, they eventually result in what appears to be natural categories of how men and women should act. Butler furthermore proposes that this repetition creates norms or conventions that can subsequently be contested or reworked, such that alternative performances or refusals of expected speech acts can destabilize the binary.

Butler invokes John Searle's theory of speech acts, noting that verbal assurances, promises, and declarations do not merely describe relationships but actively constitute social bonds and identities (Butler, 1988, p. 519). Within the context of gender, this means that everyday linguistic acts such as compliments, directives, or evaluations function as constitutive practices that position individuals as feminine or masculine. Butler further emphasizes that failing to "do gender right" leads to punishment or sanction (Butler, 1988, pp. 522), underscoring that gender is maintained through regulatory practices. Linguistic acts are central to this regulation: certain ways of speaking are expected of men and women, and deviation from these norms, such as a woman refusing a compliment or a man adopting a self-deprecating style can be socially penalized. In this way, Butler situates language as a key mechanism through which gender identities are produced, reinforced, and disciplined.

2.2 Positioning

Judith Butler's theory of performativity emphasizes that gender is not a natural essence, but a repeated accomplishment enacted through linguistic and embodied acts, Harré and van Langenhove's positioning theory complement this perspective by showing how such repeated acts function within conversations. Positioning theory defines a "position" as the set of moral and personal attributes that make a speaker's contributions intelligible within a given storyline, and these attributes are assigned and recognized through language (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999 pp. 18–19).

Speech acts do not merely reflect identity but actively locate speakers in moral and social storylines (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, pp. 396–398). For instance, directives or evaluations position one interlocutor as authoritative and the other as subordinate, while repeated acceptance or resistance of these positions reinforces or destabilizes gendered

identities, respectively. Importantly, the same utterance can exert different social forces depending on who speaks and in what conversational role, illustrating that linguistic meaning is inseparable from positioning (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999 pp. 19). The theory further distinguishes between first-order positioning, in which speakers are directly located in moral space, and second-order positioning, in which those locations are resisted or renegotiated (Langenhove & Harré, 1999 pp. 21–22). This highlights how conversational participants are continually positioned by others through the illocutionary and perlocutionary force of utterances, and how they may accept, resist, or reframe those positions. When viewed together, Butler’s performativity theory explains why repetition produces the illusion of natural gender categories, while positioning theory provides the analytic tools to trace how specific speech acts linguistically enact and negotiate those categories in interaction. This combined framework emphasizes that gender is produced through the repetition of positioning acts, making everyday dialogue a key site for the construction and contestation of identity. For this essay, this means that in *Scrubs*, the way JD and Elliot are spoken to, and the way they themselves speak, are not neutral reflections of their identities but performative acts that constitute them as gendered subjects. Their similar professional roles highlight how differences in, for example, pronoun use, directives, evaluations, or conversational positioning linguistically enact gender distinctions.

2.3 Popular culture

While theories of performativity and positioning provide conceptual tools for analyzing how gender is enacted through language, it is equally important to consider where these enactments take place. Popular culture, and television in particular, offers a rich site for observing how linguistic practices circulate beyond academic or institutional contexts and become part of everyday life.

As Brandt (2014) argues, television is not a neutral medium but a cultural arena in which identities are scripted, rehearsed, and made available to audiences as models of social behavior. Sitcoms, with their reliance on dialogue and recurring character interactions, foreground language as the mechanism through which gendered positions are established and maintained (Brandt, 2014, pp. 103-120). Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan (2008) argue that prime-time television systematically constructs gender stereotypes through the assignment of social roles, noting that “traditional portrayals of women thus serve the dual purpose of seeming ‘natural and normal,’ while simultaneously perpetuating the gender hegemony” (Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan 2008 pp. 201). Their study shows that female characters are

significantly more likely to enact interpersonal roles centered on family, romance, and friendship, while male characters are more likely to inhabit work-related roles (pp. 208–209). One of the hypotheses of the study, that female characters' interpersonal roles centered on family, friends, and romance was proven to be very accurate. The study also found that even when women appear in professional contexts, they are depicted performing relational actions such as motivating or counseling, whereas men are shown making decisions and exercising authority (Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan, 2008, pp. 205). These findings demonstrate that popular culture is not a neutral reflection of reality but a powerful site where gender is linguistically and narratively produced, and where audiences learn to interpret speech acts and role assignments as markers of identity. By situating this study within the realm of popular culture, the analysis of *Scrubs* acknowledges that the linguistic construction of gender in media texts both reflects and shapes broader cultural understandings, making television a crucial site for critical literacy.

2.4 Gender and language

Reviews of differences in male and female spoken language provide important empirical grounding for theories of performativity and positioning. Women's speech is stereotypically expected to be more polite and tentative (Haas 1979; Stockwell 2002). Furthermore, women are more likely than men to use compound requests and politeness markers such as *please* and *thank you* (Haas 1979) as well as tag questions, hedges, and backchannels (Stockwell 2002). Women who fail to conform are "apt to be in more trouble than a man who does so" (Haas, 1979, p. 617). Additionally, conversational dynamics such as interruptions or overlaps reveal how men position women as subordinate (Stockwell, 2002, pp. 49-50), while women rarely protest (Haas, 1979, p. 618).

Lexical choices also carry gendered expectations. For example, women are associated with evaluative adjectives and emotional expressions, and men with factual or hostile terms; women's speech contains more words of feeling and self-reference, whereas men's speech more often refers to time, space, quantity, and destructive action; and assertiveness in women's speech is often sanctioned as deviant, while tentativeness, such as the use of tag questions, is stereotyped as feminine (Haas, 1979 pp. 620–622). Notably, even nursery school children perceive competitive and aggressive language as appropriate only for boys, reinforcing the stereotype of female non-assertiveness (Haas, 1979, pp. 622–623). These findings resonate with Butler's claim that failing to "do gender right" leads to social sanction (Butler, 1988, p. 522), and with Harré and van Langenhove's account of positioning, in which

speech acts locate speakers within moral and social storylines. Together, they underscore that linguistic acts, whether politeness forms, interruptions, lexical choices, or assertions, are central mechanisms through which gender identities are produced, reinforced, and disciplined in everyday interaction.

Contemporary work in language and gender shows that speech is a primary tool for the production and contestation of identity. In Hall, Borba and Hiramoto's study (2021) they mention that gender is not directly tied to linguistic forms but emerges through stances and actions that indicate social meaning. This means that conversational choices, whether hedges, tag questions, or direct confrontation can gain gendered significance through context. Their study also highlights how these practices intersect with race, sexuality, and class, showing that dialogue both reproduces normative expectations and provides resources for resistance (Hall, Borba, & Hiramoto, 2021). For television analysis, this underscores that everyday speech patterns are not neutral but central mechanisms through which gendered identities are enacted and made intelligible to audiences. At the same time, language can also operate in explicitly evaluative or hostile ways, directly policing the boundaries of acceptable gendered behavior.

Building on the perspective that language can be explicitly evaluative, Preston and Stanley's (1987) study of college students' perceptions of the "worst" gender-directed insults illustrates how name-calling functions as a linguistic mechanism for enforcing gender norms. Their findings show that women were overwhelmingly targeted with terms implying sexual looseness, such as *slut*, *whore*, or *cunt*, reinforcing a sexual double standard in which female promiscuity is uniquely stigmatized. Preston and Stanley found that insults toward men often implied feminization, most notably through accusations of homosexuality. Terms such as *faggot* and *gay* were cited as the 'worst' insults men used against other men, marking them as insufficiently masculine and therefore feminized (Preston and Stanley, 1987, pp. 213–214).

Taken together, the theories and empirical findings reviewed above establish a coherent framework for analyzing how gender is linguistically enacted and regulated. Butler's account of performativity highlights the constitutive force of repeated acts, while positioning theory demonstrates how conversational roles and directives situate speakers within moral and social storylines (Butler 1988; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). Studies of popular culture show how these mechanisms are reproduced and circulated through television dialogue, and empirical work on gendered language use (Haas, 1979; Preston & Stanley, 1987; Stockwell 2002) illustrates the specific lexical and pragmatic features through which stereotypes are reinforced. This synthesis positions everyday dialogue not as a neutral medium but as a central site where gender identities are constructed, contested, and policed. With this

conceptual and empirical grounding in place, the analysis can now turn to the dialogue of *Scrubs* to examine how gendered is constructed linguistically within the series.

3 Method

This section outlines the procedures used for data collection and the subsequent organization of the material for analysis. Data collection methodology targets both spoken dialogue and its narrative context, ensuring that the data analysis methodology considers not only individual word choices but also the positioning of characters within broader conversational exchanges.

3.1 Data collection methodology

This essay focuses on the first twelve episodes from the first season of *Scrubs*. The dataset was compiled through a close viewing of the episodes in combination with the official transcripts (*Scrubs* 2001)¹. During this process, dialogue was collected for the dataset according to four criteria: 1. Explicitly gendered terms that were used by, about or towards JD or Elliot; 2. Implicitly gendered language that was used by, about or towards JD or Elliot; and 3. Recurring terms of address or reference that were used about or to JD or Elliot, establishing a gender association via repeated practice. This methodology provided quantitative results that are presented in an overview before being subjected to a qualitative analysis.

Keeping Butler's performativity theory (1988) and Harré and van Langenhove's positioning theory (1991) in mind, the data collection process also included extracts of dialogue featuring JD and Elliot for the purpose of performing a further qualitative analysis of how language may not include explicit references to gender, but may nevertheless align with a gendered use of language in the form of normative behavior or linguistic traits that would be socially expected for male and female characters (Stockwell 2002).

3.2 Data analysis methodology

The data analysis methodology included applying the theories of performativity and positioning to the datasets. The data were first identified as examples of performativity or positioning and then sorted into four categories that will be specified below. Some of the data collected contained elements that could be classified into more than one of the categories. In

¹ <https://subscribescript.com/series/Scrubs-285403>

such cases, a judgment was made and the material was placed in the category where it was deemed most relevant.

3.2.1 Explicitly gendered terms

This category includes moments when characters are directly labeled by their sex, such as being called a *man*, *woman*, or *girl*. These terms make their sex or perceived gender explicit in the conversation and show how speakers use language to point out or emphasize someone's identity as male or female.

3.2.2 Implicitly gendered language

This category refers to instances where characters are addressed or described with words that carry implicit gender associations, as opposed to the explicit use of gendered terms. Implicitly gendered language often invokes cultural stereotypes or connotations, signaling femininity or masculinity in indirect ways. They can be used to belittle, mock, or highlight a difference, and in doing so, they reinforce ideas about what counts as appropriate behavior or identity for each gender. Examples of these terms are JD being called women's names and Elliot being called Barbie.

3.2.3 Recurring terms of address

This category covers instances where speakers use recurring forms of address or labels that carry social connotations. Such expressions work to situate individuals within recognizable identities, often drawing on conventional associations linked to masculinity or femininity. They are important because they show how routine word choices help construct character portrayals and reinforce particular social roles within interaction. Mainly the terms "sport" and "sweetheart" occur in this category.

3.2.4 Normative behavior

This category targets extracts of dialogue featuring JD and Elliot in which gender was constructed discursively and interactively as opposed to lexically. The category of normative behavior thus covers dialogue where characters explicitly mention or allude to sexual activity, desire, or intimacy, as well as instances where they linguistically position themselves in relation to gender norms. Such positioning may involve reinforcing normative expectations (for example, through sexist remarks or assertions of heterosexuality) or breaking with them by adopting behaviors or stances that challenge conventional gender roles. By examining these moments, whether they appear as jokes, arguments, flirtation, or norm-breaking acts, the data highlights how gender is actively constructed in interaction. These practices not only invoke sexuality but also function as mechanisms for negotiating or resisting gendered norms.

4 Data analysis and results

The following section presents the analysis of the collected data. To maintain coherence with the structure outlined in the method and data, the discussion is organized accordingly, presenting explicitly gendered terms first, then implicitly gendered language, gendering via recurring address terms, and finally normative behavior. Each category will be examined in turn, with illustrative examples drawn from the dialogue. The analysis will begin with a quantitative overview of the first three categories, highlighting broader patterns across the dataset. This will be followed by a qualitative examination of how these categories appear in the speech of individual characters, focusing first on JD and then on Elliot, so that their linguistic practices can be considered separately before being related to one another. In addition, in the analysis other characters from the series whose interactions are relevant for understanding how gendered identities are enacted and negotiated will be introduced. This structure provides a systematic framework for tracing the linguistic mechanisms through which gender is constructed in the material.

4.1 Quantitative overview

The following section presents the quantitative findings of the study, focusing on the distribution and patterns of terms of address related to gender in the interactions regarding JD and Elliot.

Explicit terms	Man	Boy	Girl	Total
JD	8	3	2	13
Elliot	0	0	5	5
Implicit terms	Girl names	Barbie	Other	Total
JD	8	0	2	10
Elliot	0*	6	2	8
Recurring terms of address	Sport	Sweetheart	Other	Total
JD	8	0	2	10
Elliot	2	4	0	6

*Not counting when Elliot is being addressed by her own name.

Within the explicit category for JD, it is important to note that instances in which his masculinity is directly challenged are included. For example, in episode 2, “My Mentor”, another character tells him: “Geez, JD, would you be a man? Look it, if you can't stick to your convictions, you'll never make it as a doctor.” By contrast, Elliot is most often explicitly

addressed through exclams such as “That’s my girl”, which function as compliments or reassurances that she has acted appropriately.

The most salient difference beyond frequency lies in the implicit terms of address. For JD, these terms contest his gender by positioning him in feminized or diminished roles, mainly by using a woman’s name, whereas For Elliot, this does not become a questioning of her gender, but rather an act of equating her with a doll, an object often associated with superficiality rather than intelligence or professionalism. In both cases, the implicit terms can often be understood to operate as discursive strategies of belittlement and mockery, reinforcing gendered stereotypes through everyday linguistic practices. This category also reveals a relatively modest numerical difference, indicating that both characters are subjected to implicit remarks concerning their gendered identities.

4.2 Qualitative analysis

This next section turns to a qualitative analysis of how gendered identities are enacted primarily through the ways JD and Elliot are linguistically positioned and addressed by others, while also acknowledging instances in which they themselves engage in gendered positioning or enact gendered linguistic practices. The analysis begins with JD and Elliot considered separately, before drawing connections between their experiences. Other characters are introduced as part of this analysis, if their interactions constitute the primary means by which JD and Elliot are linguistically framed and socially situated.

4.2.1 Explicitly gendered terms analysis

This section examines how explicitly gendered terms are used to position JD and Elliot. Direct references such as being called a “man,” “boy,” or “girl” highlight moments where gender is overtly invoked, either by others or by the characters themselves.

One of the first actions performed by JD in the first episode of the series is to look into the mirror and declare to himself, “I’m the man.” This moment is significant because it constitutes the audience’s initial encounter with his character and establishes a tension that will recur throughout the series. While JD verbally asserts a conventional marker of masculinity, the broader portrayal of his character often complicates or undermines such claims. In this initial scene, the phrase functions as a form of self-motivation, an attempt to generate confidence and enthusiasm. The episode concludes with the repetition of the same words but now delivered in a markedly different tone: after walking into a glass door and making a fool of himself, JD again thinks “I’m the man,” this time with irony and self-mockery. The framing of the episode through this repeated utterance can be read as a

deliberate narrative device, setting up JD's character as one who oscillates between aspiring to traditional masculinity and simultaneously undercutting it through comic failure.

This oscillation recurs throughout the series, with multiple instances in which JD is depicted as embodying both conventionally masculine and feminine traits. A central figure in this dynamic is Dr. Cox, who repeatedly positions JD as insufficiently masculine. Dr. Cox himself is portrayed as embodying a stereotypical form of masculinity, reinforced by his senior status as a resident physician, which places him higher in the hospital hierarchy. One instance in which Dr. Cox explicitly frames JD's behavior as feminine or girly is in episode 11, "My Own Personal Jesus," where Dr. Cox questions JD's appearance and, in doing so, once again challenges his masculinity.

Excerpt 1 (Appendix A):

Dr. Cox to JD "Newbie, stay!"

Dr. Cox to JD "Oh, what a good boy you are.... Dear God, Judy, how much product do ya use?"

JD to Dr. Cox "None! It's like this when I wake up."

Dr. Cox to JD "Yeah. Quick tip, there, sports-star -- when you're defensive about your feminine side, it just makes you seem more girly."

This exchange demonstrates how Dr. Cox continues to use feminizing language to diminish JD's professional and personal identity. He begins by addressing JD as "good boy," a phrase that implies that he is an obedient dog, before shifting to the feminized nickname "Judy." Dr. Cox symbolically repositions JD within a feminine category, implying that concern with appearance is incompatible with normative masculinity. His subsequent comment, that defensiveness about one's "feminine side" only intensifies the perception of femininity, further illustrates how masculinity is discursively policed. The humor here relies on equating grooming with femininity, thereby reinforcing cultural stereotypes that associate self-presentation with women and trivialize men who display such traits.

As shown in the quantitative analysis, Elliot is exclusively referred to as "girl" in contexts where the term functions as a compliment or a reassurance that she has behaved appropriately. While this may appear an encouragement on the surface, it simultaneously infantilizes her and undermines her professional authority as a physician.

4.2.2 Implicitly gendered language analysis

This section aims to examine instances where characters are addressed in ways that signal gender without explicitly naming it. In the interactions examined, both JD and Elliot are subject to such forms of address, which often function to diminish their professional standing or trivialize their identities. These terms operate less as neutral nicknames than as discursive strategies that subtly reinforce gendered hierarchies.

One recurring strategy through which the character Dr. Cox linguistically feminizes JD is by addressing him with women's names. For example, in episode 6 he calls JD "Agnes," in episode 8 he refers to him as "super girl" instead of a girl's name, and in episode 10 after a nurse criticizes Dr. Cox for being too harsh on JD, he remarks, "Oh, and Ginger, by the way, just a real smooth move running to your mommy." In this example, Dr. Cox simultaneously and implicitly positions JD as both childlike and feminine, thereby undermining his professional authority and reinforcing gendered hierarchies within their interactions.

Another instance of Dr. Cox's feminizing language occurs in episode 11, when he remarks to JD, "Well, gosh, Marjorie, aren't you sassy today! Did Santa finally bring you the Y chromosome you always wanted?" By addressing JD with a woman's name, Dr. Cox continues a recurring pattern of positioning him as feminine. The choice of the adjective sassy further reinforces this, as it is stereotypically associated with female speech and behavior. Finally, the reference to the Y chromosome makes the implication explicit, directly questioning JD's status as a man. Taken together, this utterance exemplifies how Dr. Cox linguistically undermines JD's masculinity by combining feminization, infantilization, and biological dismissal within a single exchange.

When it comes to Elliot, the character who most frequently employs implicitly gendered forms of address is also Dr. Cox. In her case, he repeatedly uses the term "Barbie" or even sometimes "Doctor Barbie." Unlike the implicit terms directed at JD, which contest his masculinity, "Barbie" does not call Elliot's gender into question. Instead, it trivializes her by implying she is merely a plaything representing a stereotype of a blonde woman preoccupied with appearance. This mode of address undermines Elliot's professional identity as a doctor by reducing her to the figure of "Barbie". The term belittles her through associations with the doll, which is symbolic of superficial femininity and an emphasis on appearance rather than competence. In this way, Elliot is positioned not as a serious medical practitioner but as a stylized representation of femininity, stripped of professional authority.

Excerpt 2 (Appendix B):

Dr. Cox to Elliot “Because you should never, ever jinx a pitcher when he has chance to throw a perfect game! My GOD, Barbie, how do you put your bra and panties on in the morning?! All by yourself! It's...remarkable!”

In this excerpt, Dr. Cox’s remark, framed through the nickname “Barbie”, invokes associations with the doll. His follow-up question about how Elliot manages to put on her “bra and panties” in the morning further reduces her to a sexualized feminine stereotype. The suggestion that Elliot’s ability to dress herself is “remarkable” operates as a direct dig at Elliot’s intelligence and professional competence. The humor thus relies on positioning Elliot as incapable, reinforcing gendered stereotypes that undermine her authority as both a person and a doctor.

4.2.3 Recurring terms of address analysis

This section aims to highlight instances where certain forms of address are repeatedly applied to male and female characters, establishing patterned ways of positioning them within the hospital setting.

For instance, the hospital’s Chief of Medicine, Dr. Kelso, who is portrayed as somewhat older and more traditional, appears to have established a routine of addressing all male interns as “sport,” and all female interns as “sweetheart” perhaps primarily to avoid learning each new intern’s name. When addressing JD, Dr. Kelso remains consistent in his use of “sport.” Unlike Dr. Cox, who rather quickly resorts to feminizing forms of address when speaking to JD, Dr. Kelso’s recurring use of sport functions as a counterbalance to Dr. Cox’s interactions, offering a more neutral, slightly impersonal, mode of address that offsets the repeated positioning of JD as insufficiently masculine.

In parallel to Dr. Kelso’s consistent use of “sport” when addressing JD, he habitually refers to Elliot as “sweetheart.” Whereas JD appears largely untroubled by this form of address, Elliot perceives it as belittling both her personal identity and her professional status as a doctor. In episode 2, “My Best Friend’s Mistake”, Elliot explicitly challenges Dr. Kelso on this practice.

Excerpt 3 (Appendix C):

Dr. Kelso to Elliot “So, what is it sweetheart?”

Elliot to Dr Kelso “It's that, it's the sweetheart thing. It just doesn't hit me right. I'm a doctor, and it seems sort of... disrespectful.”

Dr. Kelso to Elliot “Oh? I've always called the young men "sport" and the young women "Sweetheart".

Elliot to Dr. Kelso “But you called Becky "sport".”

[She directs his attention to a very tomboyish young woman close by]

Dr. Kelso to Elliot “Oh... Well, I am so sorry.... Sport.”

This exchange illustrates Elliot’s resistance to gendered forms of address that undermine her professional authority. Rather than engaging in a substantive discussion about the implications of such language, Dr. Kelso deflects her critique by substituting “sport” for “sweetheart.” His response sidesteps the broader issue of whether these terms function as inherently disrespectful or belittling, thereby reinforcing the normalization of gendered address within the institutional setting.

4.2.4 Normative behavior

This section draws on Appendix D, which is not represented in the quantitative analysis. The appendix compiles instances where JD or Elliot either engage in norm-breaking behavior or are positioned in relation to such acts. It also includes references to sexuality, where the characters are framed in ways that emphasize heterosexuality and, in turn, reinforce prevailing gender norms.

As mentioned earlier, Dr. Cox is one of the characters who most consistently positions JD as feminine. This excerpt below is from episode 2, “My Mentor,” where JD and Dr. Cox treat a patient suffering from respiratory problems caused by excessive smoking. JD attempts to persuade the patient to quit smoking but fails, and he interprets this outcome as a personal shortcoming. Seeking to restore morale, JD later visits Dr. Cox at home, bringing beer and proposing a conversation intended to cheer them both up.

Excerpt 4 (Appendix D):

JD to Dr. Cox “I know that watching Will slowly kill himself hurts you, too. That's even harder if you don't have anyone to talk about it with. So, when I got off work, I figured -- you know -- I was gonna pick up a few cold ones, right, and then maybe you and I, we'll--we'll talk it out, we'll just break the whole thing down. Right? What do you say to that?”

Dr. Cox to JD “Well, actually, you have a point. [He sits on the couch next to J.D.] I guess watching the game by yourself with a scotch isn't, really, the only way to watch a game, huh. I don't know. I just, I've always thought of needing people as a sign of weakness.”

JD to Dr. Cox “It's not.”

Dr. Cox to JD “Then, would you stay... and watch the game with me? Maybe have a slice of pizza?”

JD to Dr. Cox [smiling] “Of course I will.”

Dr. Cox to JD “I can braid your hair. I know the couch isn't very deep, but we can move the back cushion... and spoon.” [Dr. Cox front door opens, and several men happily walk in and greet him.]

Dr. Cox to men “Hey, guys, whatta ya say. Beer and chips in the back.”

Dr. Cox to JD “Just ignore them. Will you tell me the answer to this question: Do you want to be the big spoon, or the little spoon?”

This excerpt illustrates how Dr. Cox responds to JD’s attempt at emotional connection by reframing the interaction through feminizing and homoerotic insinuations. His remark, “I can braid your hair,” positions JD as occupying a stereotypically feminine role, while the subsequent suggestion of “we can move the back cushion... and spoon” invokes intimacy coded as both domestic and sexual. These comments function as a discursive strategy: they simultaneously trivialize JD’s offer of support and reassert hegemonic masculinity by ridiculing vulnerability and closeness between men. The humor here relies on destabilizing normative boundaries of gender and sexuality, while also reinforcing them by marking JD’s behavior as inappropriate or unmanly.

To understand why JD is positioned as feminine, it is helpful to consider moments where his behavior diverges from normative expectations of masculinity. Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan (2008) demonstrate that female characters in television are most frequently portrayed in roles oriented toward friendship and relationships, while male characters are more commonly associated with professional or authoritative domains. In *Scrubs*, however, JD is frequently portrayed as oriented around his relationships, particularly his close friendship with colleague Turk. The two characters begin their internships together after attending the same medical school, though Turk enters as a surgical intern while JD begins as a medical intern. In the opening episode, “My First Day,” JD asks Turk to move in with him, underscoring the importance he places on maintaining proximity to his friend.

Excerpt 5 (Appendix D):

JD to Turk “So, are you gonna--are you gonna move your stuff in or what?”

Turk to JD “That's why I came by. I think it's better if we both branched out a little. What do you think?”

[JD inside his head “Tell him you think that's stupid. Tell him you need him.”]

JD to Turk “Yeah, I... I feel the same way.”

Although JD does not explicitly voice his dependence, the internal monologue reveals his desire for reassurance and closeness. For the audience, this moment establishes JD as the more emotionally reliant figure in the friendship, a dynamic that parallels stereotypical

portrayals of heterosexual relationships in which the woman is depicted as the “needy” partner. In this way, JD’s characterization subtly disrupts conventional gender norms by aligning traits of emotional dependence with a male protagonist.

The dialogue between JD and Turk resumes later in the episode, at which point they revisit JD’s earlier inquiry about whether Turk had felt fear on his first day of internship—a question Turk had initially dismissed. From there, the conversation shifts toward Turk moving in with JD, that Turk also had dismissed earlier.

Excerpt 6 (Appendix D):

Turk to JD “Hey. I lied before, man. I’m scared every second.”

JD to Turk “Really?”

Turk to JD “It’s a good thing they make surgical masks, ‘cause if they didn’t, everyone would know that my face is like this the whole time...” [He makes an exaggerated frightened expression, with mouth agape and eyes wide. JD laughs a little.]

JD to Turk “Well, I think it’s okay to be scared.”

Turk to JD “Well, I need you to tell me that every once in a while, man.”

[**JD in his head** “He needs me?”]

Turk to JD “Anyway, I just came to check up on you; see how you’re doing”

[**JD in his head** “Ask him to move in again.”]

JD to Turk “You know, Turk, the offer still stands if you wanna....”

Turk to JD “Dude, [he holds up a set of keys] I already took the keys out’ your bag”

Turk to JD “I love you.”

[The patient lifts his head, and J.D. looks at Turk quizzically. Turk snickers and walks out.]

This exchange further illustrates how JD is positioned as emotionally dependent within his friendship with Turk. When Turk admits to feeling scared and expresses a need for JD’s reassurance, JD’s internal monologue “He needs me?” reveals his eagerness to be needed, even though he does not articulate this aloud. The audience is thus invited to perceive JD once again as the more “needy” figure in the relationship, a characterization reinforced by his repeated attempts to secure Turk’s cohabitation. While Turk verbally expresses affection by saying “I love you,” his accompanying snigger indicates a self-conscious awareness of the relational dynamic and conveys a nuanced, perhaps ironic, commentary on it.

Later in episode 3, “My Best Friend”, JD begins to perceive a shift in his relationship with Turk. Sensing this change, Turk confronts him:

Excerpt 7 (Appendix D):

Turk to JD “What's goin' on with you, man?”

JD to Turk “Well, we always look out for each other.... I guess I just don't feel like you have my back anymore.”

Turk to JD “You really feel that way?”

JD to Turk “Yeah, I do.”

This exchange foregrounds JD's emphasis on emotional support and relational reassurance, qualities that are culturally coded as feminine. The conversation resumes later in the episode:

Excerpt 8 (Appendix D):

JD to Turk “Look, Turk...”

Turk to JD “Come on man, you know I always got your back”

JD to Turk “I know”

[**JD in his head** “Just tell him how you feel without sounding like a girl, for once.”]

JD to Turk “I miss you so much it hurts sometimes.”

Turk to JD “Okay, um, you've had a rough day, so I'm gonna let that go for now.”

JD to Turk “Thank you.”

Here, the audience is explicitly invited into JD's internal struggle, where he acknowledges the risk of “sounding like a girl” when expressing vulnerability. His subsequent declaration “I miss you so much it hurts sometimes” enacts precisely the kind of emotional openness he fears will be feminized. Turk's response, which downplays JD's confession by attributing it to a “rough day,” reinforces the idea that such expressions are not considered normative within masculine friendship. JD's gratitude for Turk's restraint suggests his awareness of the precariousness of articulating intimacy in a male-male relationship and highlights how the show dramatizes the tension between hegemonic masculinity and emotional dependency.

Another instance that illustrates the dynamics of JD and Turk's friendship occurs episode 8 “My fifteen minutes” in a dialogue following their dispute over JD's decision to allow the hospital to use a photograph of the two of them for promotional purposes. In the hospital's subsequent campaign, Turk's skin color is foregrounded as the central feature of the advertisement, which becomes the source of tension between the two characters.

Excerpt 9 (Appendix D):

JD to Turk “Hey, Turk. Look, I’m really sorry about the whole poster thing. It was racially insensitive of me; I should have been more aware of your feelings before I went ahead and spoke for you.”

Turk to JD “It’s okay; your intentions were good, and there’s never been an issue of race between us. Since the day I met you, you’ve been nothing but a friend to me.”

JD to Turk “I love you, man.”

This exchange depicts JD as mature and emotionally articulate, qualities that, as Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan (2008) claim, are not stereotypically emphasized in male characters. By openly acknowledging the racial insensitivity of his actions and apologizing, JD demonstrates a capacity for self-reflection and affective communication. Turk, in turn, mirrors this openness, responding with reassurance and affirming the strength of their friendship. The conflict is thus resolved in a notably civil and empathetic manner. JD’s declaration, “I love you, man,” further underscores his willingness to verbalize intimacy. The appended “man” can be read as a linguistic strategy that frames the utterance within the register of male friendship, thereby mitigating its potential feminization while still expressing deep emotional attachment.

When considering the numerous instances in which JD is positioned, or performs, in ways culturally coded as feminine, it becomes pertinent to ask how the audience is nevertheless encouraged to perceive him as a heterosexual male. The series accomplishes this through the recurring sexualization of women, which functions as a counterbalance to JD’s non-normative expressions of masculinity. In the opening episode, “My First Day”, JD and Elliot meet as they begin their internships. One of JD’s earliest internal remarks about Elliot “Your butt looks like two Pringles hugging” immediately frames her in sexualized terms. Later in the same episode, JD fantasizes about a romantic future with Elliot, further reinforcing his heterosexual orientation despite the feminized traits he exhibits elsewhere.

Excerpt 10 (Appendix D):

[JD fantasizing about the future with Elliot and their imaginative kid]

Kid to JD “Daddy, why did you marry mommy?”

JD to Kid “Well, Tiger, I gave her an answer during rounds and she screwed my brains out”

Kid to JD “You’re the man!”

Across the twelve episodes examined in this essay, JD and Elliot’s relationship remains primarily framed as friendly. Nevertheless, JD continues to direct sexualized comments toward Elliot, suggesting that the dynamic between them is not entirely devoid of gendered

undertones. In episode 12, “My Blind Date”, Elliot is depicted as actively seeking Dr. Cox’s approval, while Dr. Cox appears to place greater reliance on JD.

Excerpt 11 (Appendix D):

JD to Elliot “Dr. Cox must have my pager on speed dial. He's completely on top of me today.”

Elliot to JD “Oh, do you know how much I wish Dr. Cox was on top of me?”

JD to Elliot “That's naughty!”

In this exchange, JD interprets Elliot’s phrasing through a sexualized lens, thereby reinforcing his characterization as a heterosexual male who readily sexualizes women and their speech. Elliot’s comment is immediately framed by JD as “naughty,” which underscores his tendency to read female utterances in terms of sexual availability. This moment exemplifies how the series sustains JD’s alignment with stereotypical traits of heterosexual masculinity, even though other aspects of his behavior may deviate from normative gender expectations.

Although Elliot is frequently subjected to sexualization and, as the analysis has shown, often positioned primarily in terms of her gender and typically accompanied by forms of diminishment, there are also moments in which she both performs and is positioned as unfeminine. A notable example occurs in episode 9, “My Day Off,” where JD becomes a patient at the hospital and Elliot assumes the role of his doctor, administering a physical examination.

Excerpt 12 (Appendix D):

JD to Elliot “Cold hands.”

Elliot to JD “Suck it up!”

[**JD in his head** “Elliot's exam was frighteningly reminiscent of when my older brother used to beat the crap out of me.”]

JD to Elliot “Ow! “(whimpering)

Elliot to JD “See that wasn't so bad. All done.”

Following this exchange, JD tells others that he felt violated by Elliot. When she challenges this claim, he describes her as “rough” and concludes with, “I just think, you know, you could be more comforting.” The episode then depicts Elliot questioning her patients about whether they perceive her as comforting or personable, only to find that none do. Even her subsequent attempts to adopt a more caring demeanor fail. This narrative positions Elliot as

lacking traits conventionally prescribed to women, such as gentleness and emotional warmth, thereby complicating her characterization and highlighting the instability of gendered expectations within the series.

5 Didactic application

This essay has tried to demonstrate how one can use a television series such as *Scrubs* to teach critical literacy. Drawing on Morrell and Duncan-Andrade's (2005) framework of critical media pedagogy, this didactic approach positions popular culture texts such as the television series *Scrubs* as valuable resources for literacy instruction. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade argue that mass media are not neutral but reproduce dominant ideologies and social norms, and that students must be taught to interrogate these texts critically to develop academic literacies. In line with this perspective, *Scrubs* can be used to illustrate how everyday entertainment reinforces concepts such as hegemony and gendered hierarchies. By analyzing the series with a critical eye, students learn to identify the structures it upholds and to construct counter-readings that challenge dominant narratives, thereby engaging in the kind of critical literacy practices that Morrell and Duncan-Andrade advocate.

Building on Morrell and Duncan-Andrade's (2005) call for critical media pedagogy, this approach also incorporates a linguistic perspective by examining how language itself functions as a site of power. In *Scrubs*, address terms such as "sport," "sweetheart," or "Barbie" are not neutral nicknames but discursive strategies that position JD and Elliot within gendered hierarchies. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, these forms of address illustrate how everyday language reproduces hegemonic norms, while also opening space for resistance when characters contest or reinterpret them. Teaching students to analyze such linguistic choices alongside broader media narratives enables them to see how both discourse and representation contribute to the maintenance of social structures, thereby deepening the critical literacy.

Pedagogically, the findings of the study support the integration of popular culture into literacy instruction as a means of fostering critical awareness. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2005) argue that media texts are not neutral but reproduce dominant ideologies, and that students must be taught to interrogate them critically. By analyzing *Scrubs*, students can learn to recognize everyday linguistic practices such as address terms, nicknames, implicit references and how they carry ideological weight and contribute to the construction of gendered identities. Situating this analysis within the classroom bridges academic literacy with lived experience, enabling students to connect theoretical concepts of performativity and

positioning to texts they already consume. This approach empowers learners to identify and challenge the structures upheld by popular culture, cultivating both academic and critical literacies.

The didactic potential of this approach lies in its accessibility. Television sitcoms are familiar to students and resonate with their everyday cultural experiences. Using *Scrubs* as a teaching resource allows educators to demonstrate how language functions as a mechanism of power, reinforcing or destabilizing norms. Students can learn to question why JD is feminized or why Elliot is sexualized and consider how these portrayals shape audience perceptions of gender. Such exercises not only develop linguistic awareness but also foster critical citizenship, encouraging students to interrogate the media they consume and to recognize its role in shaping social identities.

6 Discussion and conclusion

The analysis of *Scrubs* demonstrates how sitcom dialogue functions as a site where gendered identities are linguistically constructed, reinforced, and occasionally destabilized. In relation to the first research question on how gender is invoked by linguistic means, the findings show that gender is made salient through three interconnected forms of positioning. First, characters are addressed through explicitly gendered references, such as *man*, *boy*, or *girl*, which directly indicate gendered identities. Second, gender is invoked through implicit references, including feminizing or sexualizing nicknames such as “Susan,” “Judy,” or “Barbie,” which rely on cultural associations to position characters within expectations of their sex. Third, gender emerges through repeated linguistic practices that become gendered over time, as recurring address terms and patterned interactions solidify particular identity positions. These mechanisms illustrate that gender in *Scrubs* is not merely referenced but actively produced through routine conversational choices.

The second research question asks how gender norms are linguistically represented or constructed via characterization. Butler’s theory of performativity provides a productive lens for understanding these dynamics. Gender in *Scrubs* is enacted through repeated linguistic and embodied acts that align characters with culturally recognizable norms. JD’s oscillation between conventionally masculine self-assertion and moments where he is positioned as failing to meet masculine expectations exemplifies how gender is performed rather than possessed. His feminization is not a stereotype of masculinity but a punitive response to his deviation from it, revealing how masculine norms are enforced

through ridicule. Elliot's portrayal similarly reflects gendered expectations: she is sexualized, infantilized, or trivialized in ways that foreground her femininity over her professional competence. These repeated acts, assertions, nicknames, evaluations, and corrections constitute gender as something done in interaction, rather than something characters inherently are.

The third research question concerns how the dialogue reinforces or challenges traditional gender stereotypes. The findings reveal a dual dynamic. On one hand, the series reinforces stereotypes by policing masculinity and femininity through linguistic positioning. Dr. Cox's repeated feminizing nicknames for JD position him as subordinate and insufficiently masculine, illustrating how male characters are disciplined for deviating from normative masculinity. Elliot's treatment reflects broader patterns in primetime television, where women are aligned with relational or sexualized roles rather than professional authority (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008). Yet the series also provides moments of resistance, where characters contest or destabilize these positions, thereby complicating the binary. These moments of resistance highlight that sitcom dialogue is not only a site where stereotypes are reproduced but also a space where gender norms can be questioned, resisted, and reworked.

From a theoretical perspective, Butler's theory of performativity and Harré and van Langenhove's positioning theory together clarify how these linguistic mechanisms operate. Butler emphasizes that gender is a repeated performance, and JD's shifting enactments of masculinity and femininity exemplify how repetition both constructs and destabilizes identity. Positioning theory further illuminates how conversational roles situate characters within moral and social storylines: Dr. Cox's feminizing nicknames position JD as subordinate, while Elliot's labeling as "Barbie" positions her as objectified rather than authoritative. Together, these frameworks reveal that sitcom dialogue is not merely entertainment but a discursive arena where gender identities are enacted, negotiated, and policed.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The analysis is based on only twelve episodes from the first season of *Scrubs*, which restricts the scope of the findings and may not capture the full range of gendered practices across the series. Additionally, the categorization of dialogue into "explicit" and "implicit" gendered terms involves interpretive judgment, and alternative classifications may yield different nuances. These limitations suggest that further research, including a larger dataset or comparative

analyses across seasons, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of gendered language in the series.

In conclusion, this study contributes to our understanding of how gender is linguistically constructed in television dialogue. By applying theories of performativity and positioning, it demonstrates that *Scrubs* both reinforces and challenges traditional gender norms through its portrayal of JD and Elliot. The analysis underscores the cultural significance of television dialogue as a site where stereotypes are reproduced and contested, while also highlighting its pedagogical value for teaching critical media literacy. Encouraging students to examine everyday media texts with a critical eye can empower them to recognize the social structures upheld by language and to imagine alternative ways of constructing identity.

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Appendix A – Explicitly gendered terms

Season 1, episode 1, My first day

- 0:24 JD to himself “I’m the man”
- 3:03 Elliot “So, every male in my family’s a doctor. My dad, my granddad, my brother. Guess that's why my dad gave me a guy’s name, made me play sports, date girls. I’m joking”
- 5:42 Kelso to JD “that’s my boy!”
- 6:37 JD fantasising about the future with Elliot and their imaginative kids ask “Daddy, why did you marry mommy?”
- JD “Weel, Tiger, I gave her an answer during rounds and she screwed my brains out”
- Imaginary kid “You’re the man!”
- 6:10 Kelso to Elliot “That’s my girl!”
- 10:57 Dr Kelso to Elliot “That’s my girl!”
- 22:47 JD in his head, to himself “I’m the man”

Season 1, Episode 2, My mentor

- 21:19 Dr Cox to JD “Geez, J.D., would you be a man? Lookit, if you can't stick to your convictions, you'll never make it as a doctor.”

Season 1, episode 3, My best friend’s mistake

- 2:47 Patient to JD “You’re such a girl”
- 18:32 JD to Turk “Look, Turk....”
- Turk to JD “Come on man, you know I always got your back”

JD to Turk "I know"

JD in his head "Just tell him how you feel without sounding like a girl, for once."

Season 1, episode 4, My old lady

2:38 Patient to JD "Make 'em know you're a man, not a boy."

[JD turns to the family.] JD to family members "Uhh... would you guys mind...."

Patient's daughter to JD "I'm fine where I am, thank you."

Patient's son to JD "Make me.

Patient to JD [whispering encouragingly] "Do it."

JD to family members "Everybody outta here, now!"

JD to patient [imitating himself] "Now!" [laughs]

Patient to JD "Well, that was manly!"

JD to patient "Right... that's what I'm talkin' about."

3:46 JD to Turk "I admitted this really neat old lady today"

Turk to JD "Neat? Dude, the 1930s called, and they wanted their lingo back."

JD to Turk "No, we had like this connection, you know?"

Turk to JD "No I don't know. Now Please let me get my sweat on"

JD in his head "Surgeons generally don't like to get too close to patients. Maybe it makes it harder to cut someone open, maybe it's just too risky, I don't know."

JD to Turk "I feel like you are missing out. Like this miss Tanner, she's got this incredible energy and warmth."

Turk to JD "Dude, the league of women voters called, and they want to know where to send your membership info"

Season 1, episode 7, My super ego

15:02 JD in his head “Whether or not Nick knew how petty and jealous and competitive I'd been, I still felt like I needed to step up, lay it out there, and apologize like a Man.

JD to Nick “We cool?”

Nick to JD “Yeah.”

JD in his head “Besides, even if I was the star for a little while, he's the man now.”

Season 1, Episode 9, My day off

2:22 Turk to Carla “So he was up all night with a high fever, cramping and crying.”

JD to Turk “Dude!”

Turk to Carla “Oh my bad not crying. Punching the wall all manly and angry like. You know what I mean?”

Season 1, episode 11, My own personal jesus

1:39 Elliot to Dr Kelso “Dr. Kelso, I need to precept a patient: Nineteen-year-old complaining of abdominal pain -- turns out she's at least eight months pregnant. I'm just gonna let one of the family Practice people handle it.”

Dr Kelso to Elliot “Well, that sounds like a wonderful idea, sweetheart; except I heard your smart-alleck remark a second ago, so why don't you just keep your little pregnant girl. It'll be good practice for you, since you'll probably end up in a female specialty, anyway.”

Elliot to Dr Kelso “What do you mean by that? I'm Internal Medicine.”

Dr. Kelso to Elliot “Well, of course you are. But numbers don't lie, and most women end up in ON-GYN, Family Practice, or Pediatrics. It's like a rip-tide, sweetheart -- pulling and pulling, and you can swim against the current all you

want; but when Mr. Stork comes a-calling, you're not gonna be thinking, "I'm Internal Medicine" -- nope. It's gonna be, "Ohhhh, look at the baby!"

2:54 Dr Cox to JD "Newbie, stay!"

Dr Cox to JD "Oh, what a good boy you are.... Dear God, Judy, how much product do ya use?"

JD to Dr Cox "None! It's like this when I wake up."

Dr. Cox to JD "Yeah. Quick tip, there, sports-star -- when you're defensive about your feminine side, it just makes you seem more girly."

Season 1, episode 12, My blind date

3:26 Elliot to Dr Cox "Whatever you need, Dr Cox. I'm your girl."

19:08 Dr Cox to Elliot "Good girl. Better go get yourself a cup of coffee, new game starts in four minutes."

20:53 Dr Cox to Elliot "You can handle all that, right?"

Elliot to Dr Cox "Yeah"

Dr Cox to Elliot "Good girl"

Appendix B – Implicitly gendered terms

Season 1, episode 3, My best friend’s mistake

16:56 Dr Cox to Elliot “I want you to spread the word, missy”

Season 1, episode 4, My old lady

5:05 Dr Cox to Elliot “Wha now, Doctor Barbie”

5:25 Dr Cox to Elliot “Listen, cookie, you've been here over a month.”

Season 1, episode 6, My bad

21:04 Dr. Cox to JD “Well, geez, Agnes, does the field hockey team know that you're Missing?”

Season 1, episode 7, My super ego

10:47 Dr. Kelso to JD “You see, Dr. Dorian, your problem is...you're a pansy. If you were in my way, I'd throw you off this ledge right now. We're out here alone... No one would ever know.”

14:50 Janitor to JD “Tick-tock Clarice”

Season 1, episode 8, My fifteen minutes

1:29 Dr Cox to JD “Listen, Super Girl:

Season 1, episode10, My nickname

6:30 Dr Cox to JD “Ok Janet, but did you go ahead and fix your beeper so it doesn’t play that annoying song every single time you get paged?”

11:02 Dr. Cox to JD “Sure. Oh, and Ginger, by the way, just a real smooth move running to your mommy.”

Season 1, episode 11, My own personal Jesus

17:30 Dr Cox to JD “Well, gosh, Marjorie, aren't you sassy today! Did Santa finally bring you the Y chromosome you always wanted?”

JD to Dr Cox “What's your problem, anyway?”

18:21 Jordan to JD Excuse me, Sally Sensitive, I don't remember asking you anything. Your mom's aware that she'll eventually have to stop the breast-feeding, right?”

Season 1, episode 12, My blind date

2:06 Dr Cox to Elliot “Because you should never, ever jinx a pitcher when he has chance to throw a perfect game! My GOD, Barbie, how do you put your bra and panties on in the morning?! All by yourself! It's...remarkable!”

3:26 Dr Cox to Elliot “Barbie!”

12:19 Dr Cox to Elliot “Help me to help you, Barbie.

13:35 Dr Cox to Elliot “Barbie! Plates are wobbling everywhere.”

18:44 Dr Cox to Elliot “You know, that's probably the dumbest thing anybody's said to me around here in a long time. There's nothing wrong with a one-hitter, there, Barbie. In fact, it's miraculous. And I won't have you of all people cheapen what should be an endless pursuit of perfection just because you want the world to laugh with you tonight. Now, call it.”

Appendix C – Recurring terms of address

Season 1, episode 1, My first day

- 14:57 Man to Elliot “Hey, Nursie!”
- Elliot to man “I’m a doctor, okay? Stethoscope, beeper, got it?”
- Carla to Elliot “relax”
- Elliot to Carla “I just hate it. I hate the "darlin's" I hate the "sweethearts"..."
- 19:38 Dr Kelso to JD “Bad news though, sport”
- 19:54 Dr Kelso to JD “It’s a teaching hospital, son.”
- 20:03 Dr Kelso to JD “Why sure, sport”
- 20:48 Dr Kelso to JD “Great, sport”

Season 1, episode 3, My best friend’s mistake

- 5:31 Dr Kelso to JD “Atta boy, Sport”
- Dr. Kelso to Elliot “Now, then, what would you recommend the patient stay awayfrom, uh, Dr... [looking at his chart again] Reid?”
- Elliot to Dr Kelso “My first guess would be, uh, shellfish.”
- Dr. Kelso to Elliot “Right you are, sweetheart.”
- Elliot: [whispering] 'Sweetheart'?
- 6:38 Elliot to Dr Cox “On the one hand, I know Dr. Kelso doesn't mean anything by it. And, okay, maybe I am kind of a sweetheart....”
- 8:44 Dr Kelso to Elliot “So, what is it sweetheart?”
- Elliot to Dr Kelso “It's that, it's the sweetheart thing. It just doesn't hit me right. I'm a doctor, and it seems sort of... disrespectful.
- Dr. Kelso to Elliot “Oh? I've always called the young men "sport" and the young women "Sweetheart".
- Elliot to Dr. Kelso “But, you called Becky "sport".

[She directs his attention to a very tomboyish young woman standing in the waiting area, filling out a chart for a patient.]

Dr. Kelso to Elliot “Oh... Well, I am so sorry.... Sport.”

13:38 Elliot to Dr Kelso “Sorry to bother you, sir.

Dr. Kelso to Elliot “Well.... if it isn't "Sport."” How are things? Did you... see Mr. Kavanaugh today?

Elliot to Dr Kelso “Yes...”

Elliot to Dr Kelso “Yes.... I did. Dr. Kelso, [she sits at the table across from him] I just wanted to say that, well, as far as the whole "sweetheart" thing goes, maybe I overreacted.”

Dr. Kelso to Elliot “Are you sure? Because I wouldn't want you to be the least bit uncomfortable.”

Elliot to Dr Kelso “To tell you the truth, I have no idea what possessed me to say anything in the first place.

Dr Kelso to Elliot “Super. Then run along, sweetheart.”

Season 1, episode 4, My old lady

12:21 Patient to JD “Sweetie, I’m 74 years old”

Season 1, episode 5, My two dads

1:29 Dr Kelso to JD “Hey there sport. Got your page”

6:36 Dr Kelso to JD “Hey sport! Or should i say howdy, Mr Pouty?”

Season 1, episode 6, My bad

2:13 Dr Kelso to JD “ You annoy me.

JD to Dr Kelso “Oh, now I get it.”

Dr. Kelso to JD “But you have this nauseating charm everyone else around here seems to respond to. Use it, okay, sport?”

Season 1, episode 8, My fifteen minutes

4:43 Dr Kelso to JD “It's just a pleasantry, sport; let's keep it moving.”

12:01 JD to Dr Cox “ Look, this is so unfair, you're supposed to do my evaluation -- not me. And, you know what? You're gonna do it, buddy-boy.

Dr. Cox to JD ““Buddy-boy”?”

Season 1, episode 11, My own personal jesus

1:39 Dr Kelso to Elliot “Well, that sounds like a wonderful idea, sweetheart

Appendix D – Normative behavior

Season 1, episode 1, My first day

- 3:03 Elliot “So, every male in my family’s a doctor. My dad, my granddad, my brother. Guess that's why my dad gave me a guy’s name, made me play sports, date girls. I’m joking”
- 3:17 Elliot “Anyway, I know what you are thinking”
- JD (inside his head) “Your butt looks like two pringles hugging.” (our loud) “no you don’t”
- Elliot “I’m probably miss hypercompetitive. I mean, it used to be a big problem for me. Used to, past tense.”
- 6:37 [JD fantasizing about the future with Elliot and their imaginative kid]
- Kid to JD “Daddy, why did you marry mommy?”
- JD to kid “Well, Tiger, I gave her an answer during rounds and she screwed my brains out”
- Kid to JD “You’re the man!”
- 11:40 JD to Turk “So, are you gonna--are you gonna move your stuff in or what?”
- Turk to JD “That's why I came by. I think it's better if we both branched out a little.
- What do you think?”
- JD inside his head “Tell him you think that's stupid. Tell him you need him.”
- JD to Turk “Yeah, I... I feel the same way.”
- 12:41 JD to Elliot “I thought we cared about each other...”
- Elliot to JD “Oh please, if you didn't want to sleep with me, you'd have done the Same thing.”
- JD to Elliot “Well, I'll tell you one thing, the last thing in the world I wanna do is sleep wit'cha now!”

Elliot turns to JD, with a smoldering look in her eyes. [huskily] “Do me right here.”

JD to Elliot [leaning towards her] “Okay.”

14:29 Dr. Cox to JD “Look, worst case scenario, you k*ll somebody, and that hangs Over your head the rest of your life.”

Dr. Cox to JD [continuing] “...But that is the absolute worst case scenario. Come on, newbie, look: Just have the nurses do all the stuff you're still too chicken to do, which I assume covers just about everything, and if you have a really rough Admission—”

JD to Dr. Cox “Call you?”

Dr. Cox to JD “No! I was gonna say go hide in the closet again!”

18:31 Turk to JD. “Hey. I lied before, man. I'm scared every second.”

JD to Turk “Really?”

Turk to JD “It's a good thing they make surgical masks, 'cause if they didn't, everyone would know that my face is like this the whole time...”

[He makes an exaggerated frightened expression, with mouth agape and eyes Wide. JD laughs a little.]

JD to Turk “Well, I think it's okay to be scared.”

Turk to JD “Well, I need you to tell me that every once in a while, man.”

JD in his head “He needs me?”

Turk to JD “Anyway, I just came to check up on you; see how you're doing”

JD in his head “Ask him to move in again.”

JD to Turk “You know, Turk, the offer still stands if you wanna....”

Turk to JD “Dude, [he holds up a set of keys] I already took the keys out' your Bag”

Turk to JD [sincere] "I love you."

[The patient lifts his head, and J.D. looks at Turk quizzically. Turk snickers and walks out.]

Season 1, Episode 2, My mentor

2:56 Turk to JD "Okay, dude, why is she here all the time?"

JD to Turk "Just give her a chance, man."

Turk to JD "Ohh... you want to hit that!"

JD to Turk "Nooo..."

Turk to JD "Yeah!"

JD to Turk "No. She's just a friend, man."

Turk to JD "Yeah"

JD to Turk "I think it's healthy hanging out with a girl without the ultimate goal being sex. You know?"

Turk to JD "I'm not following you"

15:30 JD to Dr Cox "I know that watching Will slowly k*ll himself hurts you, too. That's even harder if you don't have anyone to talk about it with. So, when I got off work, I figured -- you know -- I was gonna pick up a few cold ones, right, and then maybe you and I, we'll--we'll talk it out, we'll just break the whole thing down. Right? What do you say to that?"

16:57 Dr. Cox to JD "Well, actually, you have a point. [he sits on the couch next to J.D.]
I guess watching the game by yourself with a scotch isn't, really, the only way to watch a game, huh. I don't know. I just, I've always thought of needing people as a sign of weakness."

JD to Dr Cox "It's not."

Dr. Cox to JD "Then, would you stay... and watch the game with me? Maybe have a slice of pizza?"

JD to Dr Cox [smiling] “Of course I will.”

Dr. Cox to JD “I can braid your hair. Dr. Cox to JD “No, I know the couch isn't very deep, but we can move the back cushion... and spoon.”

[Dr Cox front door opens, and several men happily walk in and greet him.]

Dr. Cox to men “Hey, guys, whatta ya say. Beer and chips in the back.”

Dr. Cox to JD “Just ignore them. Will you tell me the answer to this question: Do you want to be the big spoon, or the little spoon?”

Season 1, episode 3, My best friend's mistake

1:13 JD in his head “ It's weird, but a hospital room can actually be a romantic place.

Maybe it's the soft green glow of a heart monitor, or the way the moonlight reflects off a bedpan....”

Elliot to JD “Our shifts keep overlapping on Friday nights.”

JD to Elliot “It's the closest thing I've had to a date, recently.”

Elliot to JD “Well, I had a great time tonight.”

JD to Elliot “Oh, yeah, me too. So... can I page you?”

Elliot to JD “You better. And don't do the whole two-day waiting thing.”

JD to Elliot “Oh, baby, I don't play by the rules.”

2:52 JD to Dr Cox “So, nothing is going on between me and Elliot.”

Dr Cox to JD “Good thing you still have your flower, then”

JD to Dr Cox “I'm just a little lonely, you know? I guess cause I haven't really been hanging out with Turk since he's been dating Carla...”

8:07 Turk to JD “What's goin' on with you, man?”

JD to Turk “Well, we always look out for each other.... I guess I just don't feel like you have my back anymore.”

Turk to JD “You really feel that way?”

JD to Turk “Yeah, I do.”

18:32 JD to Turk “Look, Turk....”

Turk to JD “Come on man, you know I always got your back”

JD to Turk “I know”

JD in his head “Just tell him how you feel without sounding like a girl, for once.”

JD to Turk “I miss you so much it hurts, sometimes.”

Turk to JD “Okay, um, you've had a rough day, so I'm gonna let that go for now.”

JD to Turk “Thank you.”

Turk to JD “Look, we're gonna find time to hang, man. It's just that we're both really swamped right now, and I'm hanging out with Carla a lot, I know... But tell

me, if there was someone you were into, you wouldn't be doing the same thing”

20:59 JD in his head “ I know the idea of choosing friendship over sex is the last thing any guy wants to hear. But you know what? This time, it actually made sense to me.

21:19 JD to Turk “I can’t believe you lost our bottle opener”

Turk to JD “Yeah, I know. I miss it so much it hurts sometimes”

Season 1, episode 4, My old lady

10:28 Carla to Elliot [speaking about sex while dating] “how about you?”

Elliot to Carla “I like to use sex as an ice-breaker.”

Carla to Elliot “Ah. And how's that working out for you?”

Elliot to Carla “I guess I don't have what you would call high self-esteem.”

Season 1, episode 5, My two dads

0:17 Elliot to 13 year old patient “Oh, hey! I heard your dad arranged a visit from The Rock?”

Patient to Elliot “Oh, yeah, I'm thirteen, I must love wrestling, right? Woo-hoo.”

Elliot to patient and JD “Oh, come on; The Rock's a movie star! I mean, out of anything in the whole world, what could a guy possibly want to see more.”

[***Fantasy Sequence: "The Family Feud" Gameshow

J.D. heads the team of Guys, whose turn is up. They huddle to come up with their answer.

The host, Louie Anderson, approaches them.

Louie Anderson “Okay, Guys, we need an answer.”

Louie Anderson “Name one thing guys wanna see more than anything in the whole, wide world.”

JD “Okay, uh, Louie, we're gonna go with "boobs".

Louie Anderson “Show me "boobs"!"]

-End of fantasy sequence-

Patient to JD and Elliot “I wanna see 'em on a real girl. A cute girl.”

JD to Elliot “You're cute.”

5:27 Dr Cox to JD “I don't know if they taught you this in the land of fairies and puppy-dog tails, where you obviously, if not grew up then at least spent most of your summers, but [high pitch] you're in the real world now. Nnnnn-kay?”

14:58 Dr Cox to JD “Hey, newbie, c'mere -- I almost forgot. I'm gonna get Mrs. Blitt her TIPS procedure tomorrow, with or without insurance; and I want you to help me.

Now, tell me, Margaret, do you have the stones to sink a putt when you have to?

19:12 JD to Elliot “Oh, come on. Yes, exposing yourself to a dead guy might have been a tad unorthodox; and yes, it might be a little hard to live down....”

Elliot to JD “I'm waiting for the "but.””

JD to Elliot “So is everyone else around here.....Oh, that's not funny.”

Elliot to JD “Thanks. Glad I shared.”

JD to Elliot “Come on. When I look at you, I look at a doctor who'll do whatever it takes to help a patient.”

Season 1, episode 6, My bad

21:02 Dr Cox to JD “You asked her for help, didn't ya?”

JD to Dr Cox “Look, I don't think you realize how important you are to some people around here.

JD inside his head “I'll always remember that moment as the first "thank you" I got from Dr. Cox.”

Dr. Cox to JD “Well, geez, Agnes, does the field hockey team know that you're Missing?”

JD in his head “It felt good.”

Dr. Cox to JD “Although, it did take some stones to be honest.”

Season 1, episode 7, My super ego

0:27 JD to Elliot “You know, It’s ok to be impressed by me. Most girls are.”

8:12 Carla to Elliot (about Nick) “You're right, he definitely has a cute little butt.”

Elliot to Carla Oh, it's almost like it's been sculpted”

JD to Elliot and Carla “Who cares? Everybody's got a cute butt; I have a cute Butt.”

Carla to JD “You should bring it in someday.”

Season 1, episode 8, My fifteen minutes

1:27 Elliot to JD “Who cares? It's only a grade.

JD to Elliot “Really, what'd you get?”

Elliot to JD “An A-plus. But, then I turned on the water-works and the resident changed it to an A-plus-plus.”

JD to Elliot [sarcastic] “It's a proud day for women everywhere”

Elliot to JD “What are you worried about? With the whole "hero" thing, whoever evaluates you is gonna give you a gold star.

13;12 Carla to Turk “Why am I even talking to you?

Turk to Carla “What?”

Carla to Turk “You're such a guy. You can't even begin to understand something this deep on any kind of real emotional level.”

[J.D. walks up to the table and interrupts the conversation by addressing Turk]

JD to Turk “Hey, Turk. Look, I'm really sorry about the whole poster thing. It was racially insensitive of me; I should have been more aware of your feelings before I went ahead and spoke for you.”

Turk to JD “It's okay; your intentions were good, and there's never been an issue of race between us. Since the day I met you, you've been nothing but a friend to me.”

JD to Turk [beaming] “I love you, man.”

Season 1, Episode 9, My day off

3:32 Elliot to everyone “Alright, showtime. Clear out so I can check em out.

JD to Elliot “Whoah, whoah, whoah, whoah, whoah, whoah, whoah. You're examining me? I don't want you to see my unmentionables.”

Elliot to JD (laughs) “I've seen underwear before.”

JD to Elliot “Actually I use the word unmentionables for my genitals as well.”

4:30 Elliot to JD “Shortness of breath, dizziness, problems urinating?

JD to Elliot “No, no, is it a problem if it whistles?”

Elliot to JD “Oh, you're making this so much easier! Are you sexually active?”

JD to Elliot “Oh it's active

Elliot to JD “I'll write, rare dry spell in the margin. Okay time for the physical”

JD to Elliot “Cold hands.”

Elliot to JD “Suck it up!”

JD in his head “Elliot's exam was frighteningly reminiscent of when my older brother used to beat the crap out of me.”

JD to Elliot “Ow! “(whimpering)

Elliot to JD “See that wasn't so bad. All done.”

5:17 Dr Cox to JD “ I don't know Dr. Benson was kind of my mentor, so don't do that annoying thing.

JD to Dr Cox “What annoying thing?”

Dr Cox to JD You know when you talk.

JD to Dr Cox Come on that's a little-

Dr Cox to JD See there it is. How does that not drive you crazy?

I know you're all excited because got the gown on but under no circumstance are you to curtsy.

JD in his head "He can say what he wants. The bottom line is he's showing me off."

6:03 JD to Turk "Dude she violated me."

Turk to JD "In a good way?!"

Elliot to JD "What's the deal? I heard you're telling everyone I violated you."

JD to Elliot "Not everyone, just the people that work here. Oh and my parents."

Elliot to JD "Was there something wrong with my exam?"

JD in his head "So there it is a classic trap. Two choices, either wuss out or tell the truth."

JD to Elliot "Well, you're kinda rough, yeah you're rough. And you're a little business like. Oh and you're cold."

Elliot to JD "Mm hm you mean my hands?"

JD to Elliot "Yeah, those too. I just think, you know, you could be more comforting."

9:52 Elliot to Patient "Hey we've gotten to know each other over the last week haven't we?"

Patient To Elliot "I'd say so."

Elliot to Patient "And as a doctor you found me comforting."

Patient To Elliot "God no."

Elliot to Patient "Come on I'm pretty good with people."

Patient To Elliot "You're horrible with people."

Elliot to Patient "I'm warm."

Patient To Elliot "You're very cold, I mean your hands it's like you're a yeti."

Elliot to Patient "I have bad circulation. I- I do this all day and it doesn't help."

Patient To Elliot "Listen sweetie, you're a very efficient competent doctor but your exams- do you examine everyone like that or just people you feel have wronged you in some way."

Elliot to Patient "Well, I appreciate your opinion-."

Patient To Elliot "Oh no it's not an opinion. You see those guys right there they're

just pretending to be asleep so you won't manhandle them anymore."

13:14 Elliot to Carla "Carla everyone likes you so much it makes me wonder-

Carla to Elliot "Why all your patients think you're a cold fish?"

Elliot to Carla "Oh my God you noticed?"

Carla to Elliot "No honey they told me."

Elliot to Carla "Great, anyone needs me I'll be in the supply closet eating sugar Packets."

19:50 JD to Turk "Turk I was an idiot"

Turk to JD "It's okay man."

JD to Turk "No seriously man, I want you to know if I ever need surgery again I want you inside of me."

Turk to JD "I wanna be the one inside you."

Season 1, episode10, My nickname

13:28 Carla to JD “Give me that, Bambi! That's not a toy!”

JD to Carla “Look, my name is not Bambi! Okay!?! It's Dr. Dorian. And I don't-- I don't really need to be looked after, okay?! So --how about I'll be the doctor, and you just...you be the nurse!”

Carla to JD “Yes, Doctor.”

14:07 JD screaming after Elliot “She called me "Bambi" in front of everyone. My name is not Bambi!”

17:52 Dr Cox to Elliot “Make your case”

Elliot to Dr Cox “Uh, I’m sorry, what?”

Dr Cox to Elliot “ Well, you tell me why Chorey McCrazy Chore should get to stay here two more nights.”

Elliot to Dr Cox “Okay.... You don't understand how hard it is for some women to make it on their own nowadays. I mean, Jill is so exhausted, and it's not gonna get any easier because she's her own worst enemy, you know? I mean, she's constantly trying to please everyone! She judges herself harsher than anyone does.”

Dr. Cox to Elliot “Have you actually seen what you look like today?

Elliot to Dr Cox “I know: I'm a skank! And she never says no to anyone, so—”

Dr. Cox to Elliot “Could you swing by my apartment after work, pick up a sample of my dog's stool, then take it to the vet for me?”

Elliot to Dr Cox “I can do it at lunch.”

Elliot to herself “Oh....”

Dr. Cox to Elliot “It's okay. Jill can stay a little longer. And if we're real lucky, she'll realize that it's okay to give yourself a break every once in a while. Right?”

Elliot to Dr Cox “Yeah....”

Season 1, episode 12, My blind date

7:27 Elliot to Dr Cox "Dr. Cox! I got the Kayexalate and I pulled all the x-rays you asked for, so I am yours for the night, do whatever you want with me. Oh! My God! Um, that totally came out wrong! I just--I meant that I want you to use me, and I don't care how degrading it is."

Dr. Cox to Elliot "What?"

Elliot to Dr Cox "No...no! No, it's just that I know you like torturing people, and I am totally up for that. [whines] I just want to make you happy!"

Laverne to Elliot "Marshmallow, hush."

8:48 JD to Elliot "Dr. Cox must have my pager on speed dial. He's completely on top of me today.

Elliot to JD "Oh, do you know how much I wish Dr. Cox was on top of me?"

JD to Elliot "That's naughty!"

14:03 Carla to JD "You want to know what she looks like...did she ask what you look Like?"

JD to Carla "No, she can tell I'm handsome -- I have a husky voice: "Hellllloo, Baby!""

Carla to JD "Well, why don't you look into your heart and see how it feels?"

JD to Carla "My heart hates uggos."

Carla to JD "You know what, that's exactly what's wrong with you men. You're all so superficial, so afraid of what you really feel. I'm so sick of it!"

15:53 Elliot to JD "It's like, I say one thing, he says the other. I seriously can't take it Anymore."

JD to Elliot "Fine, why don't you just quit, become a lesbian, and hook up with some hot model?"

Elliot to JD "What does that have to do with anything?"

JD to Elliot "I don't know...I just thought it'd be hot. Elliot, he's testing you. If you ever want Cox to respect you, you can't be afraid to disagree with him."

Elliot to JD "You're afraid."

JD to Elliot "But I still do it. Get back in the game, Elliot."