



Fluid boundaries of politeness in adolescent- doctor CMC encounters

Politeness in Health Care Settings
Panel

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Introduction

- Health care and (im)politeness
- Face-to-face v CMC:

Written v spoken

Disembodied identity performance

Advice-giving from GP: persona



Politeness and Power

- 'Post-structuralist' approaches
- Politeness: set of judgements
 - Emerges at level of discourse
- Power: 'web' or 'net' (Mills 2003)
- Forms of social practice
- Fluidity



Face and advice-giving

- Defining face
- Giving/receiving advice: face-threatening: competency and autonomy are threatened
(Locher and Hoffman 2006)
- Advice: beyond individual: for any visitor to the site



Adolescent health care

- Primary care: GPs and adolescents:
Communication barriers exist
 - Fear of confidentiality breaches
 - Marginalisation
 - embarrassment

(Jacobson et al. 2001; McPherson 2005)



Teenage Health Freak Website

Provides complete anonymity:
disembodied identity performance

Popularity: 52,864 visits per day

www.teenagehealthfreak.org

Homepage of the Teenage Health Freak Website



Introducing Dr Ann

Doctor Ann's Virtual Surgery



I'm sorry there doesn't seem to be anything on the site that answers your question. Click the link below and I will try and make sure new content goes on the site or reply.

I'm afraid I can't reply to everyone though.

[Click here to send your question to Doctor Ann](#)


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Doctor Ann's Virtual Surgery

Doctor Ann's Virtual Surgery



Ask Dr Ann


If you have a health question and can't find the answer to it on my website, just ask. I'll do my best to answer, but as I receive a lot of emails, I can't answer all of them - just a selection each week. Ask away...

Sex:

Age:

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Methodology

- Over 60,000 email texts from adolescents
- Corpus approach: 1 million words
- Quantitative and qualitative methods
- Responses: qualitative analysis

Frequencies of top 20 keywords in the 'teenage health email' corpus

	Key word	Freq.	%
1	MY	27,575	2.73
2	I	71,064	7.02
3	AM	9,946	0.98
4	SEX	8,043	0.80
5	IM	6,714	0.66
6	HELP	5,628	0.56
7	ME	13,483	1.33
8	PENIS	3,711	0.37
9	DONT	3,328	0.33
10	IS	18,850	1.86
11	PREGNANT	2,804	0.28
12	2	2,537	0.25
13	HAVE	17,328	1.71
14	ANN	3,220	0.32
15	PERIOD	2,330	0.23
16	DR	2,198	0.22
17	BOYFRIEND	2,284	0.23
18	DO	15,703	1.55
19	HOW	6,792	0.67
20	WORRIED	2,139	0.21



Frequency and variety of terms of address

Dr Ann	2196
Doctor	671
Doctor Ann	656
Ann	538
Doc	218
Doc Ann	44
Sir	15
Dude	14
Annie	6
Dr	2
Madam	1



Euphemisms and face saving

- Dr-patient face to face encounters:
Euphemisms used to refer to sexual body parts to save face
- Can hamper effectiveness of medical advice/lead to miscommunication
(Stewart 2005; Weijts et al. 1993)
- Current emphasis on 'openness' in Dr-patient communication in the NHS
(Tayler & Ogden 2005)

Frequencies of words describing sexual body parts in teenage health email corpus

Orthophemisms			Euphemisms		
	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>
Penis*	3,711	0.37	*****	796	0.07
Vagina*	1,065	0.11	Down there	135	0.01
			Down below	87	—
			Downstairs	11	—
			Privates	9	—

***Also keywords in comparison with the BNC**



Examples of slang terms to describe male/female genitalia

	Freq	%		Freq	%
Willy	257	0.03	Fanny	231	0.03
Knob/nob	185	_____	Hole	154	_____
Dick	80	_____	Minge	16	_____
Cock	44	_____	Cunt	12	_____



Responses: Terms of address

- Use adolescents' self-definition: echoing the identity performed
- Doctors preserve face:
Anonymity of disembodied identities is maintained and reinforced
- Enables other readers to directly identify with the identity presented



Exchanges

- Negotiation of politeness and power

Formality-informality

Solidarity-social distance

Communication accommodation

Use of slang

Empathy

Echoing/parallelism



Impoliteness

Judgements of appropriateness made by doctors:

Messages judged to be impolite do not appear on the website:

use of expletives

Intentionally offensive/
threatening, inappropriate address terms



Summary

CMC enables advice to be requested, given and received in an environment where face is saved: disembodied fluid identities

Politeness and power are fluid:

Solidarity-building: informality & accommodation

Social distance: Authority

Doctors make judgements of appropriateness by not responding/not uploading impolite messages