REDEFINING "NERDINESS":
The Big Bang Theory Reconsidered

BY JACLYN GINGRICH

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the linguistic characteristics of Leonard Hofstadter, television character from *The Big Bang Theory* and socially-constructed "nerd" according to viewers of the show. This study revisits Monika Bednarek's "Constructing 'Nerdiness': Characterisation in *The Big Bang Theory*," which investigates how another "nerd" from the show, Sheldon Cooper, is linguistically portrayed through explicit and implicit cues in characters' dialogue from season one. This paper will focus on season one as well, but will look at Leonard, Sheldon's roommate. A manual linguistic analysis was done by observing all seventeen episodes of season one. Explicit and implicit cues were recorded through character-based and scene-based analyses. During the character-based analysis, Leonard was observed for characteristics of "nerdiness" as defined by Bednarek, but other traits were observed as well. During the scene-based analysis, Leonard was observed for characteristics of unintentional and intentional face-aggravating behavior. The analysis of comparing Leonard's linguistic construction to Sheldon's provides insights into whether Bednarek's definition of "nerdiness" is concrete, or whether "nerdiness" is more of a spectrum. Comparing these two characters allows for perspective on how and why linguistic variation—even among the same socially-constructed group— occurs. This allows us to reflect on the aspects of television that lead viewers to connect specifically with one character over another, thus providing versatility and an opportunity to attract a variety of viewers.

1. THE BIG BANG THEORY

The original creators of *The Big Bang Theory*, Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady, started a phenomenon that has swept the nation. *The Big Bang Theory* recently completed its seventh season, and there is no hint of it ending any time soon. The show takes place in Pasadena, California. Two roommates, Sheldon Cooper and Leonard Hofstadter, work at a local university as a theoretical and an experimental physicist, respectively. They have two friends: Howard Wolowitz, an aerospace engineer, and Raj Koothrappali, an astrophysicist. Sheldon and Leonard also live across the hall from newly moved-in neighbor, Penny. These are the five main characters of the show, and the premise behind

it is that they are average people socializing with each other and living normal lives. *The Big Bang Theory* displays the comical reality of what normally happens in these characters' lives.

2. TELEVISED CHARACTERS' ATTRACTION TO VIEWERS AND ANALYSTS

Although analyzing a television show like *The Big Bang Theory* is a new and budding focus, it is also an important one. Television is a medium much like literature. Many different aspects of literature can also be analyzed in television shows. There are characters, a plot, twists, and even literary elements. This study focuses mostly on characterization, because what makes many shows popular is that viewers can connect to the characters' lives, just as readers connect to literary characters' lives.

These characters must be realistic and relatable. That is what keeps a viewer coming back for more. Co-creator of *The Big Bang Theory*, Chuck Lorre, states: "These characters are the reason why people watch. We don't have car chases. Helicopters don't come up over the horizon and fire missiles. It's just people talking. So they have to be great" (Rice). This is what makes literature and television shows successful, powerful characters.

The characters do not only have to be entertaining; they must be also be distinguishable. Each character must be unique so that viewers can pick a favorite one. This allows each viewer to bond with a chosen character with whom they can relate. This technique is effective because every viewer has a choice, providing more opportunities for more viewers to watch. And the more viewers watching, the more popular the show is and the more successful it becomes.

3. "NERDINESS" VARIATION

Since *The Big Bang Theory* showcases four "nerds" (Sheldon Cooper, Leonard Hofstadter, Howard Wolowitz, and Raj Koothrappali), it would be a bore to have each of them display identical socially-constructed characteristics "nerdiness." Each character exhibits a unique "nerdiness," suggesting that there is a spectrum according to which society defines a "nerd." In other words, there is no one-size-fits-all definition.

Many studies define "nerdiness" differently. Some would define gifted students as "nerds" (O'Connor 293), suggesting that the word is based solely on intelligence. Others may define "nerds" as "physical self-loathing [and having] technological mastery" (Eglash 49), suggesting that "nerds" have body issues or are somehow more technologically savvy than the average person. Bednarek defines "nerdiness" as displaying the following linguistic framework: "believes in his own intelligence," "was a child prodigy," "struggles with social skills," "is different," "is health obsessed/has food issues," "has an affinity for and knowledge of computer-related activities," "does not like change," and "does not drive" (Bednarek 208-209). All of these different definitions suggest that society does not specify precisely what a "nerd" is. There are variations. Some relate to body image while others derive from interests. The implication is that "nerd" exists along a spectrum, a range, and people considered "nerds" can fall anywhere along that range.

4. METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK

4.1 Character-based and Scene-based Analyses

Because this study revisits Bednarek's article, it adopts a similar methodology. I used both character-based and scene based analyses like Bednarek (205). Character-based analysis examines "how movie characters are allocated one or more distinct ways of speaking, and… scene-based analysis…examines choices of and encounters between different codes within a scene" (Androutsopoulos 3-4). I defined scene-based analysis the same way Bednarek does by focusing on a character's behavior as he or she interacts with one or more characters (205.)

4.2 Character-based Analysis Overview

During both the character-based and scene-based analyses, I did a manually linguistic analysis. This is one area where I deviated from Bednarek's methodology. While her study uses a corpus and a computer to generate key words, my study focuses on manual observation of all seventeen episodes. This allows me to accurately record each instance of "nerdiness" that falls into Bednarek's characteristics of "nerdiness" without limiting myself to specific words only. After watching all of season one and recording every instance of "nerdiness" that Leonard portrays, I use an accurate website which has every episode of every season of *The Big Bang Theory* transcribed (transcribed data can be found at http://bigbangtrans. wordpress.com). I determined accuracy by using the website's script while watching every episode from season one. There were minor inaccuracies, but these were mostly found in the endings of words, e.g. "gonna" for "going to." There were no inaccuracies in syntactical structures or semantics of each sentence.

Leonard Hofstadter's discourse is analyzed through

textual cues including explicit and implicit cues. These terms are adopted from Culpeper's *The Language and Characterisation: People in Plays and Other Texts*, in which he explains that these textual cues can help a viewer make certain inferences about a specific character (*Language and Characterisation* 167). Explicit cues are when characters specifically express information about themselves or others (Language of Characterisation 167). An example would be when Leonard says, "Yeah, I'm a frickin' genius" ("The Middle Earth Paradigm"). Here he is explicitly saying that he believes he has intellectual superiority. Implicit cues are implied. The character says something that implies a specific suggestion and the reader must infer what it is (*Language and Characterisation* 172). An example would be when Leonard says, "Our babies will be smart and beautiful" ("Pilot"), implying that if he had children with Penny, he would provide the intelligence gene, suggesting he is intellectual superior. This is another area where my study and Bednarek's (207) emphasize the same methodology because we both rely on Culpeper's terminology when collecting our data.

After collecting data, I looked for patterns that may signify "nerdiness." Because Leonard does drive, I do not focus on these characteristics from Bednarek's study. I did use the characteristics from Bednarek's study that apply to Leonard, but I also define the following other characteristics based on the patterns I saw in the data: "has a nervous tendency when talking to girls," "yearns for social acceptance among peers," "daydreams about 'impossible' social experiences," and "has particular interest in Sci-Fi related stuff."
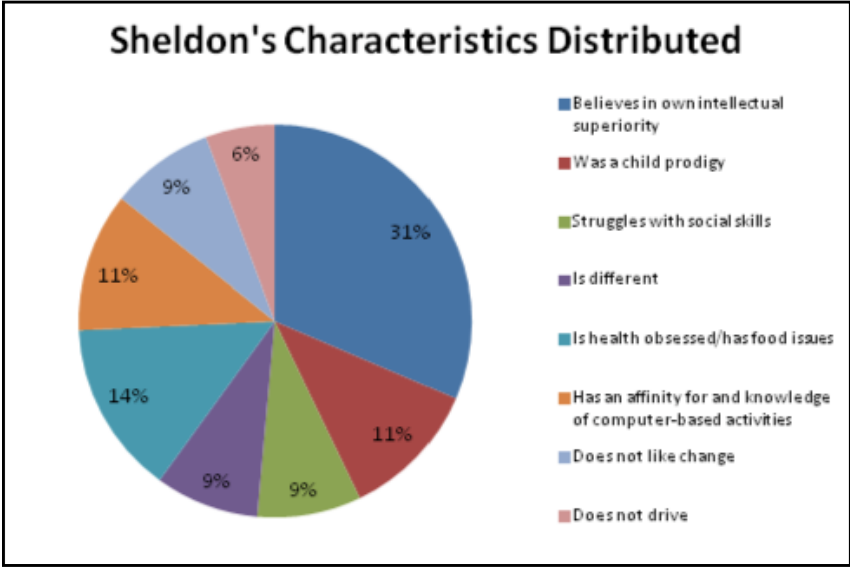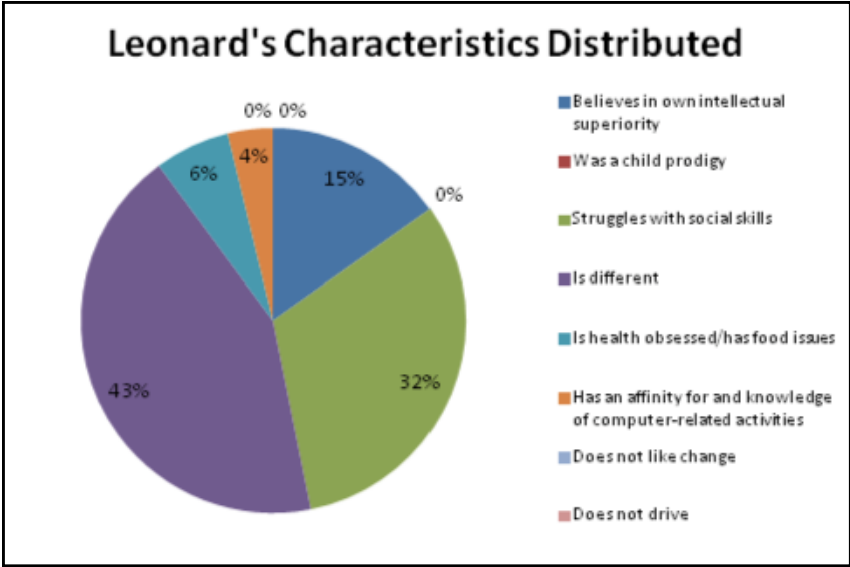
4.3 Scene-based Analysis Overview

While Bednarek's study focuses solely on Sheldon's interaction with Penny during scene-based analysis, I do not focus only on Leonard's interactions with Penny. Again, I observed all seventeen episodes of *The Big Bang Theory's* season one, and I allow for and record all instances where Leonard portrays a characteristic considered "nerdy" or provokes face-aggravating behavior.

4.4 Face-aggravating Behavior

During the scene-based analysis, my study focused mostly on face-aggravating behaviors, which relate to (im) politeness theory. This relates to "nerdiness" because "nerds" are defined sometimes as people who struggle with social skills or are socially awkward. Some of this awkwardness stems from their inability to understand face-aggravating cues. "Nerds" may not understand that what they are saying is not socially acceptable to some people. This is what places them into the realm of a "nerd."

Recent studies in face-aggravating behavior focus more on what is called impoliteness or non-cooperative behav-

Leonard's Characteristics Distributed

- Believes in own intellectual superiority
- Was a child prodigy
- Struggles with social skills
- Is different
- Is health obsessed/has food issues
- Has an affinity for and knowledge of computer-related activities
- Does not like change
- Does not drive

Sheldon's Characteristics Distributed

- Believes in own intellectual superiority
- Was a child prodigy
- Struggles with social skills
- Is different
- Is health obsessed/has food issues
- Has an affinity for and knowledge of computer-based activities
- Does not like change
- Does not drive

ior than politeness. The disparity in definitions among these studies concerns the difference between intentional and unintentional behavior. Some say that an act that is intentionally face-aggravating can be considered impolite ("Impoliteness in the Struggle," 127-153) ("Reflections on Impoliteness," 17-44). Others might contend that intentional face-aggravating behavior is considered rude, while unintentional is considered impolite (Terkourafi 45-74). Bednarek uses a blend of these two definitions when doing scene-based analysis on Sheldon Cooper. She also adapts Bousfield's impoliteness realizations (*Impoliteness in Interaction* 99-144). She includes the following: "condescending, scorning or ridiculing the hearer, using obscure or secretive language (e.g. jargon), hindering/blocking the speaker (e.g. interrupting), [and] invading the other person's space (e.g. speaking about information that is too intimate)" (Bednarek 217) in her study. I adopt Bednarek's approach and use the same four terms in my data collecting.

5. DATA AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Issues with Bednarek's "Nerd" Character-based Analysis

In Bednarek's study, she catalogues eight different characteristics of a "nerd" who is socially-constructed by popular media: "believes in his own intellectual superiority," "was a child prodigy," "struggles with social skills," "is different," "is health obsessed/has food issues," "has an affinity for and knowledge of computer-related activities," "does not like change," and "does not drive" (Bednarek 209). Unfortunately these categories do not apply very well to all "nerds." For example, Leonard does drive. After viewing the seventeen episodes of season one, if my study were to follow this categorization method, the distribution of the percentage of times these would occur would like chart 1 below as compared to Sheldon's which looks like chart 2.

Chart 1

Monika Bednarek's Categorization for Leonard

Leonard's Characteristics Distributed

Chart 2

Monika Bednarek's Categorization for Sheldon

Sheldon's Characteristics Distributed

One can see the issue with this categorization. Sheldon portrays all eight characteristics (and somewhat evenly distributed for the matter) because these are the ones Bednarek made specifically for Sheldon. But Leonard only portrays five of the categories, and they are massively unbalanced with much of the percentage falling into two categories: "is different" and "struggles with social skills." One may conclude that based on Bednarek's categorization of "nerd," Leonard would not qualify as a "nerd," although many viewers of *The Big Bang Theory* would argue that Leonard Hofstadter is definitely a "nerd." This suggests a requirement that a "nerd" categorization should be flexible.

5.2 Leonard's Personal "Nerd" Character-based Analysis

All seventeen episodes of season one suggest that Leonard has his own structural characteristics that define him as a "nerd." Through a manually linguistic analysis, I categorize Leonard's characteristics as the following based on patterns I noticed: "Is different," "Has food issues," "Has an affinity for/knowledge of computer-related stuff," "Has nervous tendencies when talking to girls (including stumbling and rambling)," "Yearns for social acceptance among peers," "Daydreams about 'impossible' social experiences," and "Has particular interests in Sci-Fi-related stuff." Some examples of this newly-developed categorization are displayed below in Table 1.

The data from Table 1 suggest that Leonard is a different

TABLE 1 | "Nerdiness" Characteristics for Leonard

CHARACTERISTIC	EXAMPLE DIALOGUE
Is different	Leonard: Don't panic, this is what the last 97 hours have been about. [while playing a video game] ("The Fuzzy Boots Corollary") Sheldon: See, this is why I wanted to have a costume meeting. Leonard: We all have other costumes, we can change. ("The Middle Earth Paradigm") Leonard: That's right, you saw what you saw. That's how we roll in The Shire. (Closes door quickly, locks and chains it.) [dressed as Frodo and after kissing Penny] ("The Middle Earth Paradigm") Penny: Oh, hey, I didn't know they still made corduroy suits! Leonard: They don't, that's why I saved this one. ("The Cooper-Hofstadter Polarization")
Has food issues	Sheldon: That's interesting. Leonard can't process corn. ("Pilot") Leonard: Oh, okay. I love cheesecake. Sheldon: You're lactose intolerant. ("Pilot") Sheldon: I guess. Don't worry; I was going to order you cheeseless. Leonard: Thank you. Sheldon: That's okay. Lactose intolerance is nothing to be embarrassed about. ("The Pork Chop Indeterminacy") Sheldon:… And until recently I had no idea that despite his lactose intolerance, he can tolerate small amounts of non-fat ice cream without producing a noxious gas that I maintain in the right concentration could be weaponized. ("The Tangerine Factor")
Has affinity for/knowledge of computer-related stuff	Leonard: Sheldon, this was your idea. A little extra money to get fractional T1 bandwidth in the apartment. ("Pilot") Leonard: Okay, the X10s are online. ("The Cooper-Hofstadter Polarization") Penny (entering): Hi, can you help me, I was writing an email and the A key got stuck. Now it's just going "aaaaaaa". Leonard: What did you spill on it? ("The Bat Bar Conjecture")
Has nervous tendencies when talking to girls	Leonard: Anyway, um. We brought home Indian food. And, um. I know that moving can be stressful, and I find that when I'm undergoing stress, that good food and company can have a comforting effect. Also, curry is a natural laxative, and I don't have to tell you that, uh, a clean colon is just one less thing to worry about. ("Pilot") Leonard: No, it's not crazy it's, uh, uh, it's a paradox. And paradoxes are part of nature, think about light. Now if you look at Huygens, light is a wave, as confirmed by the double slit experiments, but then, along comes Albert Einstein and discovers that light behaves like particles too. Well, I didn't make it worse. ("Pilot") Leonard: There is an inherent ambiguity in the word dinner. Technically it refers to the largest meal of the day whenever it is consumed, so, to clarify here, by dinner I mean supper. ("The Fuzzy Boots Corollary") Leonard: When I take a girl out on a date, and I do, she knows she's been dated. Capital D. Bold face, underline, like Day-ted. I think I might have a little concussion, I'm going to go lay down for a while, good night. ("The Fuzzy Boots Corollary") Leonard: Actually, it's centripetal force, which is an inward force generated by the glass acting on the olive. (The olive drops.) Excuse me. (Leonard disappears under table.) Now, if you were riding on the olive, you'd be in a non-inertial reference frame, and would (he bangs his head on the underside of the table.) ("The Fuzzy Boots Corollary")
Yearns for social acceptance among peers	Leonard: We don't need strength, we're physicists. We are the intellectual descendants of Archimedes. Give me a fulcrum and a lever and I can move the Earth, it's just a matter… (starts to move package) I don't have this… I don't have this I don't have this ("The Big Bran Hypothesis") Leonard: Yeah, it's like regular boggle but, in Klingon. That's probably enough about us, tell us about you. ("Pilot")
Daydreams about "impossible" social experiences	Leonard: You know, there's a pause, we both know what's happening, I lean in, we kiss, it's a little tentative at first but then I realize, she's kissing me back, and she's biting my lower lip, you know, she wants me, this thing is going the distance, we're going to have sex! Oh God! Oh, my God! [starts to have a panic attack] ("The Fuzzy Boots Corollary") Leonard: Our babies will be smart and beautiful. Sheldon: Not to mention imaginary ("Pilot") Leonard: What makes you think she wouldn't have sex with me, I'm a male and she's a female? Sheldon: Yes, but not of the same species. ("Pilot")
Has particular interests in Sci-Fi-related stuff	Leonard: It's Darth Vader shampoo. (There is a knock on the door.) Luke Skywalker's the conditioner. ("Pilot") Leonard: No, I can't look at you or your avatar right now. ("The Fuzzy Boots Corollary")

"nerd" from Sheldon. He does have some of the same characteristics, such as "is different," "has food issues," and "has affinity for/knowledge of computer-related stuff"; but he also has other "nerd" characteristics that Sheldon does not possess. He "has nervous tendencies around girls" because he struggles socially with girls. This may be due to his lack of experience. But Sheldon does not possess this characteristic because he would be what is considered asexual. He is not naturally attracted to the opposite sex and sees sex as meaningless except for procreative purposes.

Leonard also "yearns for social acceptance among peers," which is different from Sheldon's characteristics. Sheldon would not possess this one either because he does not see social interaction as a necessity. He struggles with social skills due to not understanding social protocol. Leonard understands social protocol, but also understands that he is not exactly average. Sheldon also does not "daydream about 'impossible' social experiences" for the same reason he does not "yearn for social acceptance among peers." He does not see socialization as a necessity, and he also sees daydreaming about such nonsense as pointless.

Leonard "has a particular interest in Sci-Fi-related stuff." It is interesting that Sheldon too has this affinity, but Bednarek does not use this as a characterization of "nerd." I choose to use it because all four "nerds" have this affinity, which may suggest that there is a correlation between this characteristic and "nerdiness."

5.3 Leonard's Scene-based Analysis and Data

Bednarek's study focuses on Sheldon and Penny for her scene-based analysis. She uses four of the seven categories defined by Bousfield's realizations of impoliteness (Impoliteness in Interactions 99-144) including: "condescending," "scorning or ridiculing the hearer," "using obscure or secretive language," "hindering/blocking the speaker," and "invading the other person's space" (Bednarek 217). Bednarek's study concludes that Sheldon shows face-aggravating behavior because he is too socially inept to be able to recognize that he is doing it. He does not understand social interactions and therefore unintentionally face-aggravates, resulting in impoliteness and concluding that this is caused by his "nerdiness." Although she does mention, it could also be due to Asperger's syndrome that causes him to do this (Bednarek 221). Others agree, stating, "Sheldon's lack of social graces and other quirks have led to speculation that he must have Asperger syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder commonly assumed to be prevalent in scientists and computer programmers" (Heyman 741).

The issue with this assumption is that Bednarek implies that one must have Asperger's syndrome or be on the

autistic spectrum to be a "nerd." Co-creator Bill Prady would argue that this is not the case, claiming that Sheldon would fall into that diagnosis, but he rejects "the idea that this is the ultimate in negative geek stereotypes, saying the character is an affectionate composite of the programmers he used to know" (Heyman 741). Also, there are instances where Sheldon does not follow all the typical protocols or exhibit typical behaviors of someone who is on the autistic spectrum. In episode ten, "The Loobenfeld Decay," Sheldon first feels uncomfortable being a co-conspirator to a lie Leonard tells Penny, but then he later develops an even more elaborate lie because he feels Leonard's lie is too hollow. In a normal situation, "People with autism are often thought of as having difficulty lying" (Walters 276). Therefore, it would be understandable that Sheldon would feel uncomfortable being included in Leonard's lie, but it does not make sense that he would take the lie into his own hands and make it more elaborate if he had Asperger's syndrome.

Leonard Hofstadter would not be considered someone with Asperger's syndrome. He has instances where he does not understand social protocol, but there are other instances where he does. One example below would show an instance where Leonard does not understand the social protocol of the situation and thus unintentionally face-aggravates (*the bold is my addition, and I have also added numbers to the script for reference later*):

01   Penny: Hi.
02   Leonard: Oh.
03   Penny: What's going on?
04   Leonard: Um, here's the thing. (Reads from note.) Penny. **Just as Oppenheimer came to regret his contributions to the first atomic bomb,** so too I regret my participation in what was, at the very least, an error in judgment. The hallmark of the great human experiment is the willingness to recognize one's mistakes. Some mistakes, such as **Madame Curie's discovery of Radium turned out to have great scientific potential even though she would later die a slow, painful death from radiation poisoning.** Another example, **from the field of Ebola research**
05   Penny: Leonard.
06   Leonard: Yeah.
07   Penny (*hugs him*): We're okay. (*Kisses him on cheek. Closes door. Leonard looks happy, walks back across hallway and straight into the apartment door*.)

("The Big Bran Hypothesis")

Here, Leonard is committing face-aggravating behaviors through "using obscure or secretive language" according to Bednarek's scene-based analysis methodology. Leonard mentions Oppenheimer, Madame Curie, and Ebola research, three aspects of which Penny has no under-

standing.

Another example shows Leonard "invading the other person's space" when he discusses dinner and bowl movements in the same instance:

01   Leonard: Hi. Again.
02   Penny: Hi.
03   Sheldon: Hi.
04   Leonard: Hi.
05   Penny: Hi.
06   Leonard: Anyway, um. We brought home Indian food. And, um, I know that moving can be stressful, and I find that when I'm undergoing stress, that good food and company can have a comforting effect. **Also, curry is a natural laxative, and I don't have to tell you that, uh, a clean colon is just one less thing to worry about.**
07   Sheldon: **Leonard, I'm not expert here but I believe in the context of a luncheon invitation, you might want to skip the reference to bowel movements.**
08   Penny: Oh, you're inviting me over to eat?
09   Leonard: Uh, yes.
10   Penny: Oh, that's so nice, I'd love to.
11   Leonard: Great.

("Pilot")

Leonard tries to invite Penny, their new neighbor, over for Indian food, but his nervousness hinders him from doing it smoothly. He discusses the invitation but also mentions how curry is a laxative, making Penny uncomfortable. Here, he has not recognized the face-aggravating behavior he has committed, "invading the other person's space." Notice also, it is Sheldon who explains proper social protocol in this situation, another paradox for which Bednarek's methodology could not account.

Both of these instances show Leonard in a very similar category of "nerd" as Sheldon. He does not recognize that in certain social interactions there is an unspoken rule about how to participate. He learns in these interactions that one should not discuss, assuming the other person understands, certain information that is too obscure for the average listener. Also, one should not discuss food and bowl movements in the same sentence.

But there are instances where Leonard stems away from the typical misunderstanding of social conventions. According to my character-based analysis, Leonard "yearns for social acceptance among his peers," something he probably developed because he did not receive it from his parents. This factor allows Leonard to see that there are instances where he does face-aggravate unintentionally and to try to correct the mistake. One example is when Leonard realizes that Penny is not interested in a version of boggle that the boys play:

01   Leonard: Well this is nice. We don't have a lot of company over.
02   Sheldon: That's not true. Koothrappali and Wolowitz come over all the time.
03   Leonard: Yes I know, but…
04   Sheldon: Tuesday night we played Klingon boggle until one in the morning.
05   Leonard: Yes, I remember.
06   Sheldon: I resent you saying we don't have company.
07   Leonard: I'm sorry.
08   Sheldon: That is an antisocial implication.
09   Leonard: I said I'm sorry.
10   Penny: So, Klingon boggle?
11   Leonard: **Yeah, it's like regular boggle but, in Klingon. That's probably enough about us, tell us about you.**

("Pilot")

In line 11 Leonard begins to explain what Klingon boggle is, but realizes that Penny would not really be interested in it or may think it is "nerdy," so he changes the subject by asking her about herself. He wants her to accept him socially, so he adjusts when he realizes he may face-aggravate.

All of these examples show a socially-awkward Leonard. Some show instances where he has no idea that he is not doing the socially-accepted thing, while others show that he recognizes what he is doing is not socially acceptable and tries to adjust for it. The interesting connection with these examples is that in all three Leonard is talking to Penny. This relates to his characteristic that he "has nervous tendencies when talking to girls." He is attracted to Penny and thus gets nervous around her, unintentionally face-aggravating and portraying his "nerdy" predispositions. In fact, all of Leonard's unintentional face-aggravating behaviors occur when holding conversations with girls. He normally unintentionally face-aggravates by "using obscure or secretive language," or "invading the other person's space," and nine out of ten of these are with Penny.

There are even occurrences when where Leonard intentionally knows he is face-aggravating, something Bednarek would not associate with "nerdiness." Most of these instances occur when Leonard is talking to Sheldon, but all of them occur when he is talking to a man. One example is shown below:

01   Sheldon: Sadly, it's not. Substance abuse is a lifelong struggle, but beyond that I have realized that the Leo I described would not have agreed to go to rehab.
02   Leonard: Why not?
03   Sheldon: Because Leo is a middle child.
04   Leonard: **There is no Leo, how can you say that?**
05   Sheldon: You didn't read the bio, did you? He's not just a middle child; he's the quintessential middle

child, from a broken home to boot. Psychologically speaking, the attention he gets by rebelling even to the point of self-destruction is more emotionally valuable than the help he would get at rehab.

06   Leonard: **I've got a solution.**
07   Sheldon: Great, what is it?
08   Leonard: **Get out.**

("The Loobenfeld Decay")

Here Sheldon is explaining his error while constructing his own lie. During this time Leonard commits three face-aggravating behaviors. In line four, he is "scorning or ridiculing the hearer." This may be because he is trying to make Sheldon understand something that Sheldon is not getting, but Sheldon continues to aggravate Leonard in the next few lines. By line six, Leonard becomes sarcastic and "condescending." By line eight, Leonard finally is so frustrated that he is "hindering/blocking" Sheldon.

All of these reactions could be blamed on Sheldon, because he is the initial person to aggravate Leonard, but there are other occurrences where Leonard purpose-fully face-aggravates. In episode six, "The Middle Earth Paradigm," Leonard wants to impress Penny, so he tries to pick a fight with Penny's ex-boyfriend. The scene is depicted below:

01   Penny: Alright Kurt, be nice.
02   Kurt: Aw, I am being nice. Right little buddy?
03   Penny: Kurt!
04   Leonard: Okay, I understand your impulse to try to physically intimidate me. **I mean, you can't compete with me on an intellectual level, and so you're driven to animalistic puffery.**
05   Kurt: Are you calling me a puffy animal?
06   Penny: Of course not, no, he's not, you're not, right Leonard?
07   Leonard: No, I said animalistic. **Of course we're all animals, but some of us have climbed a little higher on the evolutionary tree.**
08   Sheldon: If he understands that, you're in trouble.
09   Kurt: So what, I'm unevolved?
10   Sheldon: You're in trouble.
11   Kurt: You know, you use a lot of big words for such a little dwarf.
12   Penny: Okay, Kurt, please.
13   Leonard: No, Penny, it's okay, I can handle this. I'm not a dwarf, I'm a Hobbit. A Hobbit. **Are misfiring neurons in your hippocampus preventing the conversion from short-term to long-term memory?**
14   Kurt: Okay, now you're starting to make me mad.
15   Leonard: **A homo-habilus discovering his oppos-able thumbs says what?**
16   Kurt: What?
17   Leonard: I think I've made my point.
18   Kurt: Yeah, how about I make a point out of your

pointy little head.

("The Middle Earth Paradigm")

In this scene, Leonard goes over to Penny and speaks with her to show he is not intimidated by Kurt, Penny's ex-boyfriend. Kurt tries to intimidate Leonard, and some bantering goes back and forth between them. One can see this in lines four and seven. Here Leonard begins "using obscure or secretive language," but he realizes Kurt barely understands what he is saying. He uses even more sophisticated language in lines thirteen and fifteen to make Kurt look stupid. At this point, Kurt does not understand anything Leonard is saying, although he has a clue that he is being made fun of, so he threatens Leonard in line eighteen with physical threats.

Here, Leonard knows he is face-aggravating, but it is not Sheldon. This example shows that Leonard is completely aware of the social implications of the party, and he tries to beat his "nerdiness" by participating in a more normal social interaction—competitive dominance between men to impress a girl. Although this would suggest that Leonard is not a "nerd," he is unsuccessful in his participation because Kurt implies at the end that he has the advantage in physicality and later shows it when he lifts Leonard up in a threatening manner. At that instant, Leonard backs down and returns to his own apartment, ashamed socially from the embarrassment of Kurt winning. The other scene-based examples with Penny, mentioned earlier, also support that Leonard's linguistic structure is still somewhat "nerdy" because he unintention-ally face-aggravates like Sheldon does in Bednarek's study.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Comparing "Leonard Hofstadterisms" to "Sheldon Cooperisms" shows that there are some major differences between the two. Sheldon's character-based analysis in Bednarek's study suggests that there is a very simple way to define a "nerd" through eight linguistic characteriza-tions. But Leonard only fits into five of these characteriza-tions. Also, Sheldon's scene-based analysis from Bednarek's study suggests that a "nerd" must either unintentionally face-aggravate or be slightly autistic, but Leonard does not follow this protocol either. These conclusions suggest that Leonard Hofstadter is not, in fact, a "nerd" by Bednarek's standards. But viewers, and probably Bednarek herself, would reject this notion because that is the notion of the show: four "nerds" interact and live everyday lives.

If that is the case, then Bednarek's definition of "nerd" cannot be the all-encompassing definition. "Nerd" must consist of a range in which each individual has linguistic variations in characterization categories, does not have to be autistic, and may or may not unintentionally face-aggravate depending on the situation. Through this conclusion, one can observe that Leonard falls lower on

the "nerd" spectrum because his face-aggravating tenden-cies and social struggles are limited to certain people, while Sheldon has these difficulties across the board. This suggests that Sheldon beats Leonard on the "nerd" scale, an assessment that I am sure he would agree with, because Sheldon takes a lot of pride in his being better than anyone else at many things. In the words of Sheldon, we are just "footnotes" in his massive and prestigious memoirs. We are undeserving of anything more than footnotes because the universe revolves around Sheldon, and he would be damned if anyone beat him at being the "nerdiest" of them all.

WORKS CITED

Androutsopoulos, Jannis. "Codes, Identities and Language Ideologies in Ethnic Comedy." *The Sociolinguistics of Cinematic Discourse.* n.p., 2010. 3-4. PDF file.

Bednarek, Monika. "Constructing 'Nerdiness': Characterisation of *The Big Bang Theory." Multilingua* 31.2/3 (2012): 199-229. *Academic Search Complete.* Web. 20 July 2014.

Bousfield, Derek. *Impoliteness in Interaction.* Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2008. Print

—"Impoliteness in the Struggle for Power." *Impoliteness in Language: Studies on Its Interplay with Power in Theory and Practice.* Eds. Derek Bousfield and Miriam A. Locher. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008. 127-153. Print.

Culpeper, Jonathan. *Language and Characterisation: People in Plays and Other Texts.* London: Longman, 2001. Print.

—. "Reflections on Impoliteness, Relational Work and Power." *Impoliteness in Language: Studies on Its Interplay with Power in Theory and Practice.* Eds. Derek Bousfield and Miriam A. Locher. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008. 17-44. Print.

Eglash, Ron. "Race, Sex, and Nerds" From Black Geeks to Asian American Hipsters." *Social Text* 71 (Summer 2002): 49-64. *JSTOR.* Web. 20 July 2014.

Heyman, Karen. "Talk Nerdy to Me." *Science* 320.5877 (9 May 2008): 740-741. *JSTOR.* Web. 10 July 2014.

O'Connor, Jane. "Is It Good To Be Gifted? The Social Construction of the Gifted Child." *Children and Society* 26.4 (2012): 293-303. *Academic Search Complete.* Web. 20 July 2014.

"Pilot." *The Big Bang Theory: The Complete First Season.* Writ. Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady. Dir. James Burrows. Warner Brothers, 2008. DVD.

Rice, Lynette. "Making a Bigger Bang." *Entertainment Weekly* 28 Sept. 2012: 26-35. *Academic Search Complete.* Web. 10 July 2014.

Terkourafi, Marina. "Toward a Unified Theory of Politeness, Impoliteness, and Rudeness." *Impoliteness in Language: Studies on Its Interplay with Power in Theory and Practice.* Eds. Derek Bousfield and Miriam A. Locher. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008. 45-74. Print.

"The Bat Jar Conjecture." *The Big Bang Theory: The Complete First Season.* Writ. Bill Prady, Robert Cohen, Stephen Engel, and Jennifer Glickman. Dir. Mark Cendrowski. Warner Brothers, 2008. DVD.

"The Big Bran Hypothesis." *The Big Bang Theory: The Complete First Season.* Writ. Rober Cohen, Dave Goetsch, Chuck Lorre, and Bill Prady. Dir. Mark Cendrowski. Warner Brothers, 2008, DVD.

"The Cooper-Hofstadter Polarization." *The Big Bang Theory: The Complete First Season.* Writ. Chuck Lorre, Lee Aronsohn, Dave Goetsche, Bill Prady, and Stephen Engel. Dir. Joel Murray. Warner Brothers, 2008. DVD.

"The Fuzzy Boots Corollary." *The Big Bang Theory: The Complete First Season.* Writ. Bill Prady, Steven Molaro,

and Chuck Lorre. Dir. Mark Cendrowski. Warner Brothers, 2008. DVD.

"The Loobenfeld Decay." *The Big Bang Theory: The Complete First Season.* Writ. Bill Prady, Lee Aronsohn, and Chuck Lorre. Dir. Mark Cendrowski. Warner Brothers, 2008. DVD.

"The Middle Earth Paradigm." *The Big Bang Theory: The Complete First Season.* Writ. David Litt, Robert Cohen, and Dave Goetsche. Dir. Mark Cendrowski. Warner Brothers, 2008. DVD.

"The Pork Chop Indeterminacy." *The Big Bang Theory: The Complete First Season.* Writ. Lee Aronsohn, Bill Prady, and Chuck Lorre. Dir. Mark Cendrowski. Warner Brothers, 2008. DVD.

"The Tangerine Factor." *The Big Bang Theory: The Complete First Season.* Writ. Lee Aronsohn, Steven Molaro, Chuck Lorre, and Bill Prady. Dir. Mark Cendrowski. Warner Brothers, 2008. DVD.

Jaclyn E. Gingrich is a graduate student in the Master of Arts in English program. "Redefining 'Nerdiness': The Big Bang Theory Reconsidered" received the English Department's John Huzzard Graduate Merit Award in 2016.