

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE IN THE IMPOLITE UTTERANCES OF FATHERLESS WOMAN

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Abstract

Fatherless women often experience unresolved emotional trauma and inner conflict that can surface in their speech. This study examines how impolite language used by five Indonesian women (aged 18–30) who grew up without fathers reflects underlying cognitive dissonance and emotional regulation strategies. Chat transcripts and interview data were analyzed using Culpeper's impoliteness framework and Festinger's theory of dissonance. The women's utterances were categorized by type and function, revealing that 33% were direct, "bald-on-record" insults (e.g., "*Bajingan kali jadi orang tua*" ("What a bastard of a parent")), while positive impoliteness and sarcasm each accounted for 24%, and negative impoliteness 19%. Nearly half of all impolite utterances served to express pent-up anger or disappointment, 32% served to assert dominance over the absent father, and 20% to signal identity (e.g. rejecting the obedient daughter role). These hostile expressions were immediately followed by internal conflict: participants felt torn between cultural norms (respectful daughter) and their cathartic outburst. Consistent with Festinger's (1957) model, the most common dissonance-reduction strategy was reframing the behavior (justification) (36%), such as insisting "I know it's rude, but it's the fastest way to show I'm disappointed". Other strategies included behavioral change (24%), avoiding conflict (20%), and environmental adjustment (20%). These findings suggest that impolite utterances in this context are not random aggression but purposeful emotional outlet and coping mechanisms. The women use language both to release long-suppressed trauma and to negotiate their sense of self, later employing cognitive strategies to restore consonance with their internal values. This complex interplay of linguistic expression and psychological regulation underscores impoliteness as a form of self-protective agency rather than mere rudeness.

Keywords: *cognitive dissonance, impoliteness, fatherless women*

Introduction

Fatherless children frequently have particular emotional and social difficulties, such as identity uncertainty and feelings of abandonment. According to earlier studies, fatherlessness is associated with negative psychological effects (such as heightened trauma and decreased social support) (McLanahan et al., 2013). Such unresolved trauma might manifest in interpersonal communication as angry or "impolite" language. Speakers can attack another person's face in a variety of ways, such as bald-on-record insults, sarcasm, and ignoring, according to the impoliteness theory (Culpeper, 1996, 2005). According to Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, people experience psychological discomfort and work to lessen it when their actions (like insulting their own father harshly) contradict their internal beliefs (like "I should respect my father"). This study looks at the ways in which fatherless women's rude chat messages reveal cognitive dissonance and the methods they employ to bring their speech into harmony. We find trends in the kind and function of utterances and relate them to dissonance-reduction processes through qualitative analysis of chat transcripts and interviews with five Indonesian women who identify as fatherless.

Research Method

Five women, aged 18 to 30, who had been separated from their fathers due to emotional inaccessibility, alienation, or desertion, took part. The data included follow-up interviews and screenshots from WhatsApp or conversation that contained offensive remarks directed at or about their fathers. Each rude statement was coded according to its kind (bald-on-record, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm/mock politeness) using Culpeper's (2005) taxonomy. In accordance with Kienpointner (1997, 2008), we additionally classified each

utterance's function (signalling identification, expressing emotion, and establishing dominance). The participants' internal responses were coded for the dissonance-reduction approach (Festinger's framework: adding beliefs, modifying conduct, adjusting context, or avoidance) following each instance of rudeness. The results were expressed as percentages and frequencies. Triangulation of chat data, interviews, and observation notes was used to address trustworthiness.

Findings and Discussion

Utterance Types: Table 1 summarizes the distribution of impolite utterance types. The most common form was bald-on-record impoliteness (33%), consisting of direct, unmitigated insults or commands. For example, one respondent typed "*Bajingan kali jadi orang tua*" (literally, "What a bastard of a parent"), a blunt attack with no softening. The next largest categories were positive impoliteness (24%) and sarcasm/mock politeness (24%). Positive impoliteness included ignoring or belittling the father (e.g. "This old man is such a burden"), aimed at damaging his social value. Sarcasm (mock politeness) involved praise-laden phrases that actually conveyed contempt (e.g. "*Hebat kali memang orang tua satu ini*." ("What a great parent!")). Negative impoliteness, which attacks the addressee's autonomy, was least common (19%). We observed no instances of passive "withholding politeness" (silent resistance) in the chat logs. This pattern indicates that in emotionally-charged conversations these women favored explicit confrontation (even if indirect via sarcasm) over silence.

No.	Type of Impoliteness	Example	Number of Utterances	Percentage
1	Bald on Record Impoliteness	" <i>Bajingan kali jadi orang tua</i> " (What a bastard of a parent)	7	33%
2	Positive Impoliteness	" <i>Menyusahkan tua bangsa satu ini</i> " "This old man is such a burden"	5	24%
3	Negative Impoliteness	" <i>Nanti mati kan repot aku</i> " (If you die, I will be in trouble)	4	19%
4	Sarcasm & Mock Impoliteness	" <i>Hebat kali memang orang tua satu ini</i> " (What a great parent)	5	24%
	Total		21	100%

Functions of Impoliteness: The impolite utterances served clear pragmatic-emotional functions. Nearly half (48%) were aimed at expressing emotion (Table 2). In these cases, the women reported using harsh language as a release valve for anger, hurt, or frustration. For instance, one participant justified her rude phrasing by saying "*Aku tahu itu kasar, tapi itu cara tercepat nunjukin aku kecewa*." ("I know it is rude, but it's the fastest way to show I'm disappointed"). Such quotations illustrate that the impoliteness functioned as a quick way to externalize emotion that had been "bottled up" for years. About 32% of utterances served to assert dominance in a relationship where the father had historically held power. For example, a respondent declared "*Aku bukan anak kecil lagi*" ("I'm not a child anymore") as part of a scolding message, directly challenging the paternal authority. Finally, 20% of the cases were used to signal group identity or self-positioning: the speakers used language to align themselves with a resilient "fatherless" identity rather than a submissive daughter role. These identity-related comments often compared oneself to other abandoned siblings or emphasized maturity (e.g. "*Aku bukan anak kecil*").

No.	Function of Impolite Utterances	Example Expression	Number of Utterances	Percentage
1	Expressing Emotions	“ <i>Tapi itu cara tercepat untuk nunjukin aku kecewa</i> ” (But it is the fastest way to show that I am disappointed)	12	48%
2	Asserting Dominance	“ <i>Aku pengen kontrol balik keadaan</i> ” (I just want to control back the situation)	8	32%
3	Signaling Group Identity	“ <i>Aku bukan anak kecil lagi</i> ” (I just want him to know I am no longer a kid)	5	20%
	Total		25	100%

These figures show that impoliteness was not used simply to offend. The primary function (48%) was to articulate anger and disappointment that could not be contained. As Kienpointner (1997, 2008) argues, impoliteness often acts as a cathartic outlet for high-intensity emotion. Indeed, participants explicitly said that without these utterances they felt they would “explode” inside (e.g. “*Kalau nggak dikeluarin, bisa meledak sendiri nanti aku*” (“If I don’t let it out, I will explode”)). Cognitive Dissonance Reduction: Immediately after producing an impolite statement, all participants described experiencing guilt, shame, or conflict, a classic sign of cognitive dissonance. They felt their direct insults clashed with their ingrained belief that one should honor family and be polite to parents. In line with Festinger (1957), the women engaged in various dissonance-reduction strategies to resolve this discomfort. The most common approach (36%) was adding a cognitive element or essentially justifying the behavior by reframing it as emotionally necessary. For example, one participant said “*Aku tahu itu kasar, tapi itu cara tercepat nunjukin aku kecewa*.” (“I know it’s rude, but it’s the quickest way to show I’m disappointed”), explicitly reconceiving her impoliteness as a justified emotional expression. Table 3 summarizes the distribution of strategies: adding new justification (36%), changing one’s behavior (24%), changing the environment (20%), and avoiding the conflict (20%).

No.	Cognitive Dissonance Reduction Strategy	Example Expression	Number of Instances	Percentage
1	Change a Behavioral Cognitive Element	“ <i>Kupikir, lebih baik dia yang sakit hati daripada kupendam dan makin berat malah aku pula yang sakit nanti.</i> ” (I think it is better that he feels offended than to keep it all until I feel heavier and ends up getting disease)	6	24%
2	Change an Environmental Cognitive Element	“ <i>Kalau dia di rumah dan aku lagi capek, aku lebih baik nggak ngomong sama dia kak.</i> ” (If he’s home and I am tired, I choose to not talk with him instead)	5	20%
3	Add a New Cognitive Element	“ <i>Aku tahu itu kasar, tapi itu cara tercepat nunjukin aku kecewa.</i> ” (I know it is rude, but it is the fastest way to show that I am disappointed)	9	36%
4	Avoidance of Dissonance	“ <i>Lama-lama aku pikir ya udah lah, kan aku cuma jujur sama rasa sendiri</i> ” (The more it happens the more I think that I am actually just trying to be honest with my own self)	5	20%
	Total		25	100%

Changing one’s behavior (24%) involved conscious effort to speak more gently in future, usually accompanied by regret or emotional fatigue. For instance, one participant reflected “*Kupikir-pikir... kalau aku diam aja, aku malah makin stres. Tapi kadang rasa bersalah juga. Tapi kuanggap itu bagian dari proses.*” (“I thought it over... if I keep everything in, I get more stressed. I do feel guilty sometimes, but I consider it part of the process”). Environmental change (20%) was enacted by avoiding provocative situations (e.g. “*Kalau dia di rumah dan aku lagi capek, aku lebih baik nggak ngomong sama dia.*” (“If he’s home and I’m tired, I’d rather not talk to him”)). Avoidance/denial (20%) sometimes meant mentally dismissing the conflict (e.g. “*Aku ngomong gitu, tapi dia gak peduli juga, jadi kenapa aku harus merasa bersalah?*” (“I may speak like that, but he doesn’t care anyway, so why should I feel bad?”)). These patterns reflect Festinger’s assertion that dissonance is often alleviated by altering one’s cognitions or actions to realign with beliefs. The predominance of justification suggests that participants preferred to adjust their perspective (e.g. “it was necessary”) rather than undo the verbalized feelings.

Discussion

The findings show that impoliteness in fatherless women’s speech is deeply intertwined with unresolved emotional pain and identity struggles. Importantly, these impolite utterances functioned as purposeful emotional releases and self-assertions, not merely rash insults. The dominance of bald-on-record insults (33%) indicates that when emotions peaked, these women explicitly dropped polite constraints to voice their anguish. This aligns with trauma theories: van der Kolk (2014) notes that individuals with unresolved wounds often have poor emotion regulation, leading to abrupt outbursts. Indeed, respondents’ use of profanity (“*bajingan*”) and direct accusations echoed the “System 1” impulsivity described by Kahneman (2011) under high stress. At the same time, the frequent

use of sarcasm or mock politeness (24%) suggests a more guarded expression of hostility. These ironic utterances (e.g. “*Hebat kali orang tua satu ini*” (“Such a great parent”)) serve as a protective mask: they allow the speaker to criticize the father while preserving a veneer of politeness and distancing themselves from outright aggression. From a pragmatic standpoint, nearly half of all impolite utterances explicitly served emotional expression (48%). The women did not insult for the sake of disrespect; rather, they needed language to articulate emotions (“show that I am disappointed”) that had been suppressed. This mirrors Pennebaker’s (1997) view of language as an outlet for trauma. As one participant put it, if she did not speak angrily, she would “explode” inside. This emotional function co-occurs with cognitive dissonance: speaking out violently contradicts the ingrained belief (“I should not curse at my father”), creating inner conflict. As a result, participants continuously negotiated between truth and tradition. Assertive utterances (32% of cases) reveal another dimension: these women were rebalancing power. Growing up fatherless in a patriarchal culture can leave a sense of lasting disempowerment. By using commanding or demeaning language, the speakers symbolically reclaimed control. One said “*Aku ingin kontrol balik keadaan*” (“I just want to control the situation again”), indicating that impoliteness was a deliberate tool to invert the failed paternal hierarchy. This is in line with Bousfield’s (2008) idea that impoliteness can be an act of resistance when other forms of negotiation have failed.

For these women, polite pleas were ignored, so rudeness became the only language that could force attention. Additionally, 20% of utterances signaled identity: rejecting the status of “obedient daughter” and aligning with others who shared their experience. By saying “*Aku bukan anak kecil lagi*” or “*Kami ini anak kalian bukan sih?*” (“Are we really your children?”), participants were publicly redefining their self-image as mature, independent, and agency-bearing. After each outburst, the women faced the cultural dissonance between their feelings and social expectations. Their coping strategies reflect classic dissonance reduction. The most frequent strategy (adding justifying cognition) reframes the behavior as legitimate (e.g. “He deserves this because of how he treated me”). This finding echoes Festinger’s notion that explaining away dissonance can restore equilibrium. Less frequently, participants tried to change how they spoke in the future (behavior change) or avoid triggering situations (environmental change). Notably, some chose avoidance or denial outright, effectively telling themselves the incident “doesn’t matter” to evade guilt. Overall, the impolite language of these fatherless women emerges as a double-edged communicative strategy. It is a genuine expression of long-suppressed emotion and a means to reassert agency, but it also introduces internal moral conflict.

The dissonance that follows indicates that, despite the apparent aggression, the speakers still value cultural norms of filial piety and respect. They mitigate the tension by either justifying their speech or limiting its future use. This underscores that their impoliteness is not arbitrary; it is a calculated, emotionally-driven negotiation with their own values and the broken reality of paternal neglect. These insights correspond with and extend previous research. Prior studies (e.g. Mukhallisa et al., 2023; Puspita & Setiadarma, 2024) noted that fatherless women often exhibit verbal defensiveness and volatile emotions in family interactions. This research confirms those tendencies but goes further by explicitly linking utterance types to specific dissonance management strategies. Similarly, Fatimah and Jatmiko (2023) found sarcasm and confrontation to be common among fatherless youths asserting autonomy, and we corroborate that finding, adding that such acts function as self-protective identity work. Finally, our results resonate with Thompson and Wright’s (2022) observation of oscillation between silence and aggression in fatherless women. We add a finer-grained understanding by quantifying those patterns: the “silence” often corresponds to environmental avoidance, while the aggression corresponds to impulsive speech, both shaped by the underlying dissonance.

Conclusion

This study reveals that impolite utterances among fatherless women are far from being mere outbursts of rudeness. Instead, they are meaningful expressions shaped by deep-seated emotional wounds and cognitive conflict. The most dominant form – blunt, bald-on-record insults – represents an immediate channeling of long-standing anger when social filters are off. Equally important are ironic and status-attacking remarks, which allow the speaker to voice critique while momentarily shielding vulnerability. Nearly half of all impolite messages were explicitly for emotional release, and another third to claim power; only the smallest portion addressed pure autonomy concerns. After each episode, the women struggled with cognitive dissonance and typically resolved it through justification or moderate speech adjustment. In conclusion, being rude in this situation serves as a coping method as well as a communication tactic. As they eventually worked to strike an internal balance between their emotions and societal expectations, it gave these women the opportunity to express what had been kept hidden for years: their hurt, frustration, and changing self-concept. A more sympathetic perspective is provided by acknowledging these utterances as adaptive rather than aberrant: these women are regaining their sense of agency and making their suffering known by using whatever linguistic tools at their disposal. Clinicians, families, and educators may react

differently if they are aware of this dynamic; rather than merely punishing such language, they may recognize it as an indication of unresolved conflict that needs discussion and help.

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