Manipulation within the language of love: Politeness theory, abuse, and Woody Allen’s Match Point

Stacy Petersen
Iowa State University

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Manipulation within the language of love: Politeness theory, abuse, and Woody Allen’s

*Match Point*

by

Stacy Petersen

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Program of Study Committee:
Linda Shenk, Major Professor
Margaret LaWare
Jeremy Withers

The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2018

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family Scott, Soojin, Kristi, and Josh who have always been a constant source of support and encouragement during the challenges of my whole college life. Also, I dedicate this thesis to my boyfriend, Kyoungkeun, whom I am truly grateful for having in my life. And to my parents, Steve and Jolene, who have always loved me unconditionally and whose good examples have taught me to work hard for the things that I aspire to achieve.
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In addition, I would also like to thank my friends, colleagues, the department faculty and staff for making my time at Iowa State University a wonderful experience. I want to also offer my appreciation to my family who always believed in me, without whom, this thesis would not have been possible.
Politeness theory, proposed by linguists Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, posits that power (P), social distance (D), and riskiness (R) of a face-threatening act (FTA) are universally key factors in determining politeness strategies in conversation between two individuals. However, politeness can be used as a form of manipulation, masking the speaker’s true intentions. By using abuse as the underlying intention, I test this claim by analyzing Woody Allen’s *Match Point*. This film is used because: (1) there are no obvious signs of abuse before a major act of physical violence; (2) an adulterous relationship provides ample manipulative speech; (3) both women represent different social classes convenient for analyzing politeness strategies; and (4) some scenes give access into the Speaker’s inner thoughts that are needed in some aspects of politeness theory. I analyze both relationships separately to examine the abusive and politeness strategies between the male (abusive) Speaker and the female (abused) Hearer. In this thesis and other research, manipulation represents a subtle form of abuse.

Analyzing the politeness strategies of subtle manipulation exposes the thought process behind the Speaker’s abuse. The Speaker changes his form of abuse depending on similar factors outlined by politeness theory, i.e., power, social distance, and riskiness. In the relationship with his wife, the risk and social distance are much higher, though he still maintains the power in the relationship (with manipulative efforts). In the relationship with the mistress, the power is a constant struggle, although social distance and riskiness are less important. Since the Speaker is operating in two different politeness environments, the differences in strategies become evident. The Speaker is drawn to higher-level strategies of politeness with his wife because two of the three determining factors are at higher levels. In contrast, the speaker uses lower level strategies with the mistress because only one determining factor is at a higher level. However, since the
one higher factor is power, there is a higher level of abuse with the mistress than with the wife. This thesis examines the correlation between the determining factors for politeness choices and abusive strategies in *Match Point* to reveal the subtle signs of abuse that were always present.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

CHLOE. Well shall I call them? CHRIS. I mean, sure, unless you’d rather not. CHLOE. Well…it might be more fun just the two of us. The wine, the opera… CHRIS. Mmmm…Absolutely. I just figured, we can stay in any, any night and…they’re free and suggested a film. What’s the film? CHLOE. I don’t know, but if you’d prefer it… CHRIS. I am in the mood for a film.

(Allen 29-30)

In this conversation, from Woody Allen’s *Match Point* (2006), a dating couple Chloe Hewett (Emily Mortimer) and Chris Wilton (Jonathan Rhys-Meyers) make plans for their evening. Chloe would prefer to stay home but mentions off-handedly that her brother Tom Hewett (Matthew Goode) and his fiancée Nola Rice (Scarlett Johansson) had invited them to see a film. Chris wishes to start an affair with Nola, so he would prefer to see this potential love interest, although he cannot tell Chloe (who will be his future wife). Chris, in this simple passage which seems to be just about adjusting the evening’s plans, uses particular strategies, associated from politeness theory from socio-linguistics, to control the situation. This control will become tragically abusive later in the film.

In his strategies, Chris consistently uses approaches that seem to be attentive to Chloe’s needs and their relationship; he tries to avoid disagreement and hedge his statements, “I mean, sure.” He uses in-group speech, “we,” to include both Chloe and himself in an activity, as if they are of the same mind. Lastly, he attends to her needs saying, “unless you’d rather not.” All of
these examples are forms of politeness, and they seem in keeping with strategies appropriate for a dating couple. Through the lens of politeness theory, however, these approaches are also associated with manipulation, showing the subtle ways that Chris turns the situation in his favor and gains power. He gets what he wants: they do go to see the film, although, Nola does not show up.

By the end of *Match Point*, Chris will murder Nola after she becomes his mistress, and this thesis will show how the politeness strategies Chris so efficiently uses here—seemingly so innocently—demonstrate the deep roots of his role as an abuser and his struggle for power with Chloe and Nola. Analyzing the politeness strategies Chris uses is crucial to exposing his abusive tendencies long before they become evident and, ultimately for Nola, murderous. Early in abusive relationships, the manipulator often seems non-threatening, appearing as if the manipulator has only good intentions and cares about the partner’s needs when really their behavior is merely meant to gain power (Hopkins). Politeness theory echoes this underlying use of speech; it allows the speaker to maintain or gain face by appearing non-threatening. Politeness theory proposes that universal rules and strategies exist and that “every competent adult” follows these rules in every conversation (Brown and Levinson 312), not just in manipulative ones. In this thesis, however, I argue that politeness theory may be used to help analyze and identify manipulation, in which abusers mask their true identity and intentions. Woody Allen’s *Match Point* provides a useful example to examine these dynamics, and this thesis will reveal the film’s deep ethical ambiguity regarding sex, power, and abuse—an ambiguity that scholars of this film have not yet examined.

*Match Point* has not been considered as a film about abuse. Instead, it has been widely celebrated within the film community, receiving numerous awards and nominations including
being nominated for best screenplay in the 2006 Academy Awards. The film is described as “a genuine triumph...hard-edged and seductive” (Ebert, “Cannes”), “a marvelously slick and sexy thriller” (Hill), and a “moral critique in an intimate story” (Fuller, Graham 1). One reviewer even labels Chris and Nola as “pillow-lipped love-birds” (Smith); however, a closer examination reveals that there isn’t much love to be found. These quotes demonstrate how the film is viewed as sexy and seductive, but this view neglects the film’s ability to speak about emotional abuse and manipulation. If an audience watches the film and believes that Chris’ behavior with either woman could be considered sexy, it severely downplays the violence and abuse. This thesis will move the conversation of Match Point more into the seediness and subtleness of abuse and how the character Chris manipulates Chloe and Nola throughout the entire film. The signs of abuse and manipulation are always present which the techniques of politeness theory help to make clear, even within his romantic advances at the beginning of the film and through his self-ponderings of murder.

It is worth noting, that although Allen himself has been a source of ethical controversy regarding abuse and sexual misconduct since 1992, his films have not been examined with any significant attention to strains of abusive relationships, although scholars have examined Allen’s themes of punishment, justice, religion, and morals. “While Woody Allen’s films have for years won great critical acclaim...attention has rarely been focused on his patronizing treatment of female characters or on the angry and bilious man” (Pally 1). After the 1992 controversy, journals began attacking and defending Allen’s work. Talya Zax asserts that Allen was “relentless in depicting women as, first and foremost, sexual objects” and that “Allen’s archives...appears to be one of inherent, exaggerated misogyny” (1). Writing for Vanity Fair James Wolcott explained that, “Increasingly, the women in his [Allen’s] movies can be divided
up between menopausal nuts and coltish sluts” (153). Allen was once considered a feminist’s friend, but now there is no way to tell which Allen we will get, “the confidante of the female inner chamber” or “the condescending connoisseur of dimbulb Lolitas” (Shone). While he is often criticized for his portrayal of women, there is no denying that he wrote Oscar-winning roles for females. These well-written roles were often versions of himself (Shone). Although Allen’s questionable portrayals and treatment of women have been explored in the news, researchers have failed to explore these topics critically regarding Allen’s films. These conflicting topics, however, allow for new research and insights into Allen’s work, which this thesis will take up by analyzing the questionable treatment of Nola and Chloe in *Match Point*.

Although scholars have not examined Allen’s *Match Point* or any of his other films through the specific lens of abuse, they have been fascinated by this film, particularly about moral and ethical issues such as the ethical issues of abuse, absolute morality, conscience, guilt, and the divine. Marat Grinberg, Susan Arpajian Jolley, Hanna Mäkelä, and Pau Gilabert Barberà. Jewishness and Judaism become a point of interest in *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *Match Point*, and *Cassandra’s Dream*, focusing on Allen’s inclusion of biblical elements and themes within his films, overall. However, *Match Point* leaves out all Jewishness on purpose to act as a translation piece of *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. Grinberg creates a link between religion and moral issues, “is there order to the universe, embodied in the divine moral directive, or does everything happen at the whim of chance, making any notion of absolute morality irrelevant” (1). In leaving the Jewishness out of *Match Point*, Grinberg believes that Chris carries no religious baggage and rejects the idea of moral order. Also, this article briefly brings up how religion impacts guilt and fear of being caught.
Many critics focus on comparisons of *Match Point* and *Crimes and Misdemeanors* because of how similar they are thematically. Since these films are similar to old tragedies, both of the films can be used as a way of making connections to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and by bringing in discussions of “cosmic issues of crime, retribution, and conscience.” Jolley indicates that *Match Point* concerns itself with morality and conscience. It raises issues of social class and social mobility. Unlike *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *Match Point* carries a “heavier sense of injustice” with no comic relief. Nola represents a “lonely, marginalized woman whom no one misses when they’re [she’s] gone.” and Chris is seen as both “cold and calculating” and “something of a victim.” The fact that Chris can be seen as both of these extremes demonstrates his ability to fool even an audience of the film (78). He can manipulate and hide his calculating behavior and play the part of a victim. *Match Point* brings out issues of “right and wrong, conscience and consequences, God and morality, honesty and lying” (78). Chris performs his imperfect crime and receives no punishment. He does not believe in God, but in the randomness of life.

*Match Point* also delves into the loss and longing for moral absolutes, although Allen both accepts and rejects absolute morality. Mäkelä claims that *Match Point*, “is a morality tale about the perils of discarding morality tales” and forces the audience to accept or deny Chris’ transgression as “affirmation of a meaningless universe” (247). The world of *Match Point* is random with no moral consequences for someone’s actions. Luck dictates fate. However, is luck the only resource for Chris? Chris uses his cunning ability to manipulate politeness theory and in turn, most of the characters in the film.

Pau Gilabert Barberà uses *Match Point* to explore Allen’s connections to Greek tragedy. Chris gains social status and power through his manipulation: a wife, a new job, financial
stability, an expensive penthouse, and a sexy mistress. Still, in keeping with the tradition of Greek tragedy, Chris’ comfortable life begins to fall apart. Chris then abandons all morals to save face by killing Nola, and it works. Barberà specifically examines the use of a quote from Sophocles, “to never have been born may be the greatest boon of all” implying that ancient wisdom rewards the unethical. Chris throws away faith and decides to worship himself and his interests instead because there is nothing but random chance to stop him (12-13). Chris’ self-interest feeds into the use of manipulation and abuse throughout the film. He disregards the wants and feelings of others to boost and maintain his desire. He only cares about how he may use someone to his benefit while remaining unpunished for it.

These ethical and moral issues, explored through the research on Match Point, help to examine Chris’ self-image and self-centeredness. Politeness becomes his tool for gaining power and trying to maintain face value, despite whom he might hurt in the process. His lack of caring then leads him into manipulating and abusing both Chloe and Nola. They provide the scaffolding to the life and status that he desires. Chloe represents the social status, wealth, and recognition that he craves, while Nola represents his sexual desires and reckless passion.

This thesis combines the linguistic, sociological, and psychological aspects of politeness as they relate to power and aggression and brings these ideas into a film analysis, explicitly examining the fine line between romantic and abusive relationships. Politeness theory provides a useful lens to examine abusive and manipulative relationships. It occupies a dominant space within the sociological and linguistic fields because of its foundation in speech acts and cultural/social interactions, particularly as they relate to power. Foundational texts, such as Edward Finegan’s Language: Its Structure and Use and Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson’s Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage, demonstrate the use of politeness
strategies in everyday interactions. However, limiting our knowledge/analysis of politeness to this field alone creates restrictions on possible applications. Politeness also depends on the power dynamics between the speaker and the hearer. A person with more power, such as a boss in a company, would not feel a need to use as many politeness strategies when speaking to lower ranked employees. Power and social distance are two essential factors when politeness strategies are chosen, whether the speaker is aware of it or not.

*Match Point* provides a particularly useful window to examine the subtlety of power dynamics within this complex space between romance and abuse because in the film: (1) there are no obvious signs of abuse before a major act of physical violence, i.e., murder; (2) an adulterous relationship provides ample manipulative speech for analysis; (3) both woman represent different social classes convenient for analyzing politeness strategies; and (4) some scenes give access into the speakers’ inner thoughts that are needed for different aspects of politeness theory.

Applications of politeness theory have continued to expand to such other fields as literature and psychology but have not yet been applied sufficiently to film. Roger Brown and Albert Gilman bring politeness into the literary realm with their article, *Politeness Theory and Shakespeare’s Four Major Tragedies*, claiming that Shakespeare’s tragedies are perfect for analyzing politeness. They attempt to prove that the politeness theory principles existed even in Early Modern English and that Shakespeare’s characters masterfully use manipulation and persuasion to cause trouble and commit murder (159). Michael R. Kightley takes on an even older text with *Reinterpreting Threats to Face: The Use of Politeness in Beowulf, II. 407-472*. In Beowulf, Hroðgar can help Beowulf avoid a possible FTA by reinterpreting what Beowulf has
said to help his image (407). Lastly, Dov Cohen and Joseph Vadello, use politeness theory in social psychology to examine how politeness can mask underlying aggression (257).

In the film, the main character Chris uses politeness to manipulate his wife, Chloe, and his mistress, Nola. He not only convinces them to enter into an abusive relationship with him for his personal gains but also manages to maintain both relationships for some time. When his face value (public self image), lifestyle, and power are threatened, he takes his abuse to a new level by murdering Nola (now his mistress) and their unborn child. All of this manipulation and emotional abuse becomes apparent through examining his use of politeness strategies. Each relationship will be separated into three different stages: (the first meeting, the relationship becoming official, and the decision to murder or not murder). This separation will help identify common speech patterns that occur within the separate relationships but at the same romantic stage. It will also reveal some of the subtle signs of abuse Chris uses, which are not always obvious.

Allen’s lack of punishment creates an ethical dilemma and a sense of realism in Match Point as the murderer follows through with his crime for no ideological or philosophical reason. Match Point is essentially a version of Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment but with no consequences or punishment (Stuchebrukhov). While most articles focus on Allen’s lack of ethics or morals within Match Point, it is possible that Allen is trying to dramatize the ethical connection between the self and other. Chris is “ethically blind” to see the other. Nola’s and Mrs. Eastby’s (Nola’s neighbor whom Chris also murders) ghosts then serve as a representation of his ethical consequences in place of his legal consequences (Macready). However, this interpretation is questionable as Chris does not seem to shy away from the ghosts but calmly explains that, “It wasn’t easy, but when the time came I could pull the trigger…You can learn to push the guilt
under the rug and...go on” (Allen 125). Their ghosts do not appear again, and Chris is shown relatively enjoying his time with his family and new baby. Film and media use surprisingly similar techniques to represent both the romantic and the abusive relationship, not to mention the less obviously abusive situations, such as manipulation and adultery. These similarities can create confusion for viewers on what to expect within a romantic relationship and where the line of abuse lies. The ever-present bad boy figure is another problematic trope in films that can lead men and women to believe that someone who does not treat them well at first can and will change. The idea of the bad boy creates a false hope that many abused people trust in and therefore remain in the abusive relationship. Analyzing politeness strategies will demonstrate how an abuser creates power in order to manipulate the abused, which often causes the abused not to realize how treacherous their situation has become.

This thesis will attempt to answer the following questions: Are politeness strategies being used throughout different stages of manipulative/abusive relationships? What types of politeness strategies are used in: (1) the first meeting; (2) the relationship becoming official; and (3) the decision to murder or not murder? Is there a difference in politeness strategies depending on the type of relationship (interactions with a wife, girlfriend, or mistress)? How can identifying the similarities and differences affect audience’s interpretations of the relationships portrayed?

Politeness deals with using an indirect speech act to show the Hearer (H) that the Speaker (S) is polite and respectful. For example, if the Speaker says, “Can you get me a drink?” this is considered more polite than commanding them to “Get me a drink!” In this thesis, the Speaker will always represent Chris (the abuser), and the Hearer will represent Chloe or Nola (the abused). Both women will be analyzed through separate (but mirroring) scenes to examine the
abusive and politeness strategies within their individual relationships. In this thesis and other research, manipulation represents a subtle form of abuse.

There are two kinds of politeness, negative politeness and positive politeness. Negative politeness refers to respecting privacy, independence, and physical space of the other person. Positive politeness refers to showing involvement or interest in the other person's affairs and well-being (Finegan 315). Chris implements negative and positive politeness within both of his relationships, although, he slightly favors positive strategies with Nola and negative strategies with Chloe. Brown and Levinson expand on this idea of politeness and how it dictates the actions of most “rational” people. Brown and Levinson explain the term ‘face’ as being tied to “notions of being embarrassed or humiliated, or ‘losing face’. Thus, face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction” (311). Chris will struggle to maintain his face value throughout the film. Face represents his wealth, social status, perceived personality (as a sweet and caring man), and power in a relationship. He must constantly struggle to maintain his face, indulge in all of his desires, and keep both Nola and Chloe from losing their face in the process. Much like the two forms of politeness, there are two forms of face: negative face and positive face. Negative face refers to people’s want for freedom and to not be impeded by others (having multiple relationships, sex, and money). Positive face refers to people’s wish for their own wants to be desired by others (his wholesome reputation). This idea of positive and negative face then leads to face-threatening acts (FTAs) that either threaten negative or positive face of either the Speaker or the Hearer. ‘Negative FTA’ would threaten the Speaker or Hearer’s freedom and ‘positive FTA’ would threaten the Speaker or Hearer’s group involvement or self-image. Chris is predominately focused on avoiding FTAs to his own face.
Brown and Levinson use these ideas of ‘face’ and FTAs to analyze the strategies used in conversation to avoid or lessen the FTA. The outline examples of positive and negative politeness strategies:

**Positive politeness strategies:**

Notice, attend to H (his/her interests, wants, needs, goods)

Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)

Intensify interest to H

Use in-group identity markers

Seek agreement

Avoid disagreement

Presuppose/raise/assert common ground

Joke

Assert or presuppose S’s knowledge of and concern for H’s wants

Offer, promise

Be optimistic

Include both S and H in the activity

Give (or ask for) reasons

Assume or assert reciprocity

Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)

**Negative politeness strategies:**

Be direct/ conventionally indirect

Question, hedge
Be pessimistic
Minimize the size of imposition on H
Give deference
Apologies
Impersonalized S and H: avoid pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’
State the FTA as a general rule
Nominalize
Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H

(322-323)

Ultimately, Brown and Levinson propose different strategies for doing FTAs depending on the ‘weightiness’ of the FTA. They also provide a formula for figuring out the ‘weightiness,’ which involves the social distance (D) between the Speaker (S) and the Hearer (H), the power (P) that H has over S, and the rating (R) of the imposition in that culture. The formula therefore is

\[ W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x \]

To simplify this equation, it means that social distance, power, and rating all determine the weightiness of an FTA. The weightiness of the FTA then determines which level of politeness is needed to communicate an FTA effectively (as weightiness increase, so does the level of strategy). Chris (Speaker) changes his form of abuse depending on similar factors outlined by politeness theory, i.e., power, social distance, and riskiness. In the relationship with Chloe, the risk and social distance are much higher, but he maintains the power in the relationship (with manipulative efforts). In the relationship with Nola, the power is a constant struggle, although, social distance and riskiness are less important. Since Chris is operating in two different politeness environments, the differences in strategies become evident. Chris is drawn to higher-
level strategies of politeness with Chloe because two of the three determining factors are at higher levels. In contrast, he uses lower-level strategies with Nola because only one determining factor is at a higher level. Yet, since the one higher factor is power, there is a higher level of abuse with Nola than with Chloe. This difference demonstrates a correlation between the determining factors for politeness choices and abusive strategies. Chris focuses on protecting his own face more than trying to avoid hurting Chloe’s or Nola’s face. He is more concerned with how power, social distance, and riskiness will affect him.

Brown and Levinson also include a diagram to show the different possible strategies, which are ranked from 1-5:

![Diagram of politeness strategies](image)

Figure 1: modeled after Brown and Levinson’s (316)

The choice of strategy is then determined by the weightiness of the FTA. The weightier the FTA is, the higher the chosen strategy will be ranked.

On record FTA means that the intention of the act is clear to everyone involved (openly committing to an act) and off record refers to being ambiguous or vague to avoid commitment or blame. Off record FTA violates Grice’s conversational maxims of Relevance, Quality, and Manner. Examples of off record strategies are outlined as follows:
Violate Maxim of Relevance

Give hints/clues
Give association clues
Presuppose

Violate Maxim of Quality

Understate
Overstate
Use tautologies
Use contradictions
Be ironic
Use metaphors
Use rhetorical questions

Violate Maxim of Manner

Be ambiguous
Be vague
Overgeneralize
Displace H
Be incomplete, use ellipsis

If the speaker chooses to do the FTA on record, they may then decide to do it without redressive action (not using politeness strategies) or with redressive actions (using politeness strategies). FTAs with redressive actions can then be split up between positive and negative politeness strategies.
This thesis will demonstrate that, in Allen’s *Match Point*, abusive strategies and politeness strategies are intertwined, and politeness strategies show the roots of abuse long before they are blatantly (and tragically) obvious. This thesis will begin Chapter two by analyzing the first meetings within *Match Point*; looking at Chris’ starting phases of a relationship with both Chloe and Nola. It will show that, even from the first meeting, there are subtle signs of abuse, manipulation, and control by Chris to both Chloe and Nola. These signs will be shown through both politeness theory strategies and abusive strategies (such as threatening her, putting her down, calling her names, making her feel guilty, shifting responsibility for abusive behavior). Chapter three will focus on the beginning of the official relationships (when the first date is set). This chapter will show how Chris manipulates the women into accepting his offer of romance. With Chloe, he manipulates her into doing the work and threatening her own face. With Nola, Chris is aggressive and direct. This chapter will also examine how Chris uses different strategies within each relationship. Lastly, Chapter four examines the more abusive aspects of the film, including Chris’ decision to murder Nola and his unborn child. In contrast, he chooses not to murder Chloe, or even tell her that he has been having an affair. Nola’s ability to threaten his power provides one explanation for his decisions. Chloe’s ability to provide him with a lavish lifestyle explains why he will not admit the reason for his guilt.

**Abusive Relationships**

This thesis examines the subtle beginnings of abusive relationships as part of a broader conversation regarding the connection between abuse, domestic violence, and sexual misconduct. These issues are receiving increased attention, but there still has not been enough attention given. Lundy Bancroft, a counselor for abusive men (with over fifteen years of experience on more than
two thousand cases of abusive relationships), writes in one of his books, *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*, “unfortunately there is wide acceptance in our society of the unhealthy notion that passion and aggression are interwoven, and that cruel verbal exchanges and bomblike explosions are the prices you pay for a relationship that is exciting, deep, and sexy. Popular romantic movies and soap operas sometimes reinforce this image” (30). This quote is indeed accurate in Allen’s *Match Point* as Chris and Nola’s relationship is often described by critics as passionate or sexy while in reality, it is merely an aggressive and controlling power struggle.

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), “On average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. During one year, this equates to more than 10 million women and men.” With this staggering number, the importance of speaking on and researching abuse becomes apparent and necessary. Abuse is often subtle and difficult to identify at first. Researchers, such as Jackson Kratz, J. Kilbourne, and Sut Jhally have already taken on the task of demonstrating the impact that media can have on an audience or culture. Joan C. Williams, Dirk Smeesters, Roeder, and Heidi Fuller and Amy Damico also write about the portrayal of gender roles and abusive relationships in media and film. While some studies have looked at the depiction of domestic abuse in films (Zanzana), not much has been done to see the connection between abusive relationships and politeness theory. Habib Zanzana’s article focuses on films about Domestic violence in Spanish cinema, pointing out the ethical dilemma of who should be responsible for solving the problem of abuse and how it should be shown in a film. The 2013 film *Don Jon* (Gordon-Levitt) strived to provide a commentary on how romance films and porn can cause both males and females to create unrealistic ideas about relationships. Media plays its own games in manipulating its
audiences. There are also numerous articles and studies covering the topic of abusive relationships. These range from how to fix abusive relationships (Goldner 346), how to teach avoidance of abusive relationships (Becky and Farren 303), how to identify domestic violence (Nurse) to why women stay in Abusive relationships (Herbert 311). These articles look at how abusive relationships begin and why they continue to last. They also deal with how women need to become more aware of abusive relationships and the warning signs that correspond with abusive relationships. By using politeness strategies as one way of analyzing abusive relationships, it will help establish and expose the under-workings of abuse and how it may be detected.

NCADV has many resources that are meant to help women identify abusive relationships. One of the most widely spread resources is the Wheel of Power and Control, seen below.

Figure 2: Duluth Model’s Wheel of Power and Control (NCADV)
This wheel shows the different ways in which a partner may be abusive. It highlights not only physically abusive patterns but emotionally abusive ones as well. There does not have to be physical violence for a partner to be abusive, and many experts believe that manipulation is a form of abuse. Some of the common abusive strategies in *Match Point* include: using isolation, using male privilege, and using emotional abuse. The abusive strategies within *Match Point* are often subtle as there is no physical violence until Chris takes it to the extreme and murders Nola. Although subtle, these abusive strategies are still present and become more noticeable when combined with politeness theory.

*Match Point* presents a world of individuals struggling for power within relationships. Chris is a manipulator with little to no ethical dilemmas, outside of his personal desires. His manipulation and abuse however, must be subtle enough to escape the attention of most critics and researchers. He is capable of extreme violence, so is it possible to examine and discover his abusive capabilities throughout the entire film? Politeness theory allows for an exploration of the thought process and intent of every exchange. It allows the mechanics of his abusive strategies to emerge from under their mask, even in seemly innocent scenes. The violence and abuse do not subtly appear with no warnings.
CHAPTER 2: LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT – CREATING THE GARDEN OF EDEN EFFECT

“THE GARDEN OF EDEN”-that’s what I call the beginning of a relationship with an abuser. For the first few weeks or months, or longer, the woman is walking on air (Bancroft 109).

As Lundy Bancroft mentions, at the beginning of the relationship, the “woman is walking on air: abusive relationships are rarely apparent from the start. They may, however, have subtle signs that are difficult to notice, and thus, the first meeting in a relationship can give insights into how the potential partner expresses himself, such as the choice of politeness strategy. To create “The Garden of Eden,” Chris needs to create common ground and notice/attend to Nola’s and Chloe’s wants, needs, and interests. This will then show that he cares about them and that their similar personalities would be compatible for a relationship. Chris is manipulating the women into thinking this is true, and he behaves like a completely different person depending on which woman he is talking to. At one point with Chloe, Chris decides not to do the face-threatening act (FTA) in order to maintain the blissful atmosphere, but with Nola, he decides to keep some FTAs off record. He needs to pay special attention to who has the power, or who thinks they have the power. He must not appear to be abusive in the beginning, but must begin his subtle manipulation, to draw the women in to a relationship. This chapter will analyze how Chris begins his relationships with Chloe and Nola, focusing on his use of politeness to pinpoint the signs that he was capable of deception and murder from the start.

Because Chris uses different manipulation strategies with each woman to appear as a perfect partner, both Chloe and Nola have very different starts to their relationships. Chris’
relationship with Chloe starts timidly, while Chris and Nola's relationship begins aggressively. These differences are sometimes pointed out as the difference between love and desire. John Douglas Macready writes that *Match Point* is, “a deeply ethical film that takes seriously the separation between self and other, the conflict between love and desire” (99). Macready highlights the ethical dilemma of the film, often identified by researchers. Chris behaves as if each of these relationships is important, but in reality, he cares very little about either woman. Chris lacks the moral compass (or chooses to ignore it) of right and wrong, focusing solely on what will make him happy. Yet, the conflict is less about “love and desire” and more about sexual desire versus social desire. Chris seeks to fulfill his desire for a perfect relationship and lifestyle, without concern for the women involved. He will go to any extreme to satisfy his needs for power and money.

Love usually refers to something shared between two people, a mutual affection that goes beyond just sex. Desire is the want or lust for another person. As Macready describes in relation to *Match Point*, “love is depicted as a difficult search for redemption – a struggle to liberate love from the confines of the desirous ego that wants simply to encompass and possess, and this is precisely where Chris Wilton fails” (103). Even though Chris can gain romantic relationships with two different women, neither is a healthy romantic love. At the beginning of these relationships, it becomes evident that there is no real love. The relationship with Chloe is not loving but an escape from his more impoverished lifestyle, a desire for wealth and status. Chris’ romance with Nola focuses on his passion for Nola as a sexual object and nothing more. Chris, however, creates the illusion of having a perfect relationship with each woman.

Bancroft explains that there are two different types of abusive men: the ones that do not plan on being abusive or deceitful and envision a perfect, happy life for them and their partner.
But when the partner fails to meet their expectations, their controlling behavior takes over to correct the perceived imperfections. The second type is consciously manipulative from the start. He believes that he can create the perfect relationship by being manipulative and deceitful. This type also does not plan on being physically or emotionally abusive (he does not think manipulation is abusive) but becomes angry when his partner fails to allow his manipulation (111-112).

Chris is both of these types of abusers, although, he changes depending on which woman the relationship is with. Manipulation and politeness are subtle, and Chris must tailor each technique specific to the person he is speaking to and the specific situation. These changes can be explained through Chris’ use of politeness strategies. Chris’ relationship with Chloe begins slower than his relationship with Nola. This pace may be due to a greater social distance (D) between Chloe and Chris than the one with Nola and Chris. Referring back to the weightiness of FTAs, there will be a difference in the way that Chris interacts with each woman. Chris and Chloe have a greater social distance. Chloe is from a wealthy English family, and Chris is from a poor Irish family. Despite being a professional tennis player, Allen shows that Chris does not have much money anymore through his apartment’s shabby appearance. Regarding Power (P), Chris and Chloe are similar, but different. Chloe has some power because of her wealth and family, but Chris gains some power by merely being a man and through his once elite status as a professional tennis player. The riskiness of the imposition (R) would be neutral since a single man and single woman beginning a relationship does not create much imposition within either the English or Irish cultures.

In these beginning moments, Chris has already begun a game of manipulation. He identifies the power dynamics in a relationship and uses these changes in the situation to his
advantage. In speaking about Chris, Mick LaSalle notices his subtle strategies “He is in almost every scene, and even when it looks as if he’s not doing much, he’s doing plenty” (4). He moves deliberately through each scene, laying the groundwork of politeness and building his ability to control both Chloe and Nola. Chloe will require more subtle forms to give her the respect that her social class brings her. The signs of abuse take longer to become apparent in this relationship. On the other hand, Nola receives a more obvious treatment, which is masked only by flimsy “passion.” Her even social standing with Chris allows him more freedom in his politeness choices, but more opposition to his control and power. In each relationship, Chris tailors his strategies to create the illusion of a perfect relationship. He uses some high-level strategies (see Figure 1) to either not do the FTA, or do the FTA off record, giving the woman a sense that he is a perfect match for them. He creates a garden specific for each person, full of their pleasures and wants but with something forbidden for each. For Chloe, the forbidden is Chris’ social status and for Nola, it’s Chris’ sexual desire.

**Chloe**

I will start by examining the first meeting between Chloe and Chris. Their relationship will focus more on Chris’ desire for social status and wealth. The scene when they first meet is extremely short with very little communication between the two. Chloe is shown to have the initial power with her glance towards Chris, indicating her interest in him, “Chloe…looks at Chris once with interest and the second time with desire” (Ebert, “Match” 2). Chris, on the other hand, remains much quieter but still manages to begin his manipulation with more subtlety than with Nola.

Chris and Chloe’s first meeting is unintentionally set up by her brother, Tom. Chris begins by training Tom at a private tennis club. After a game, Tom invites Chris to attend an opera with his family, as they discover they share a love of opera music. At the opera, Tom
briefly introduces Chris to his parents and sister, Chloe. And Chris and Chloe exchange only a few lines:

CHLOE

Hello. Hi, I’m Chloe. Nice to meet you.

CHRIS

Hello, Chloe. Hi. (Allen 9)

The two share no more dialogue after this, only a couple glances from Chloe towards Chris. In this first meeting, although short, the use of politeness already becomes visible. “Using these two dimensions of politeness and abuse, it is possible to analyze the way in which individuals exploit the ambiguities inherent in greetings by seeing them as strategies by which persons minimize threats or, alternatively, gain influence, prestige or power, or secure deference appropriate to such new position” (Parkin 47). Chris’ use of politeness becomes evident from the start and includes only this simple greeting to begin his attempt to “gain influence, prestige or [and] power.” The FTA for beginning a relationship is the possibility of being rejected and humiliated or losing the connection. Since the first meeting is not specifically about creating a romantic relationship, the FTA is slight, but because of the social distance between Chloe and Chris, he does use politeness strategies to minimize possible FTAs. Chris mimics very closely what Chloe has said to him; “Hello,” “Hi,” and “Chloe.” He creates common ground between them by using the same language. This strategy shows Chloe that a social distance does not mean difference. His repetition also helps to lessen any embarrassment that Chloe may have felt by repeating a greeting, demonstrating that he cares about her wants and needs.
Chris has just met Chloe, but already his work has begun to close the social distance gap by using two positive politeness strategies; creating common ground and noticing her wants/needs. He also distances himself from her, by not looking at her during the opera. This distance could be considered a form of not doing the FTA. He does not engage with her further, but only watches the show. Chris holds Tom’s family in high respect and does not want to jeopardize his standing with any of them. Chris is unable to know how Tom would react to him pursuing his sister and does not want to take that risk yet. It is Chloe who is willing to take the risk. Bancroft explains through an anecdote that, “Not every abusive man falls head over heels so quickly...She was drawn powerfully to him because of his sweetness and sensitivity and for the challenge of drawing him out (109). Chloe is drawn to Chris because of the challenge, making her want him more. Chris is then able to sit back and appear innocent and sweet through his caring demeanor. This act allows him to take the pressure off of himself. The camera even focuses in on Chloe, with Chris not even visible. He enjoys feeling desired and the benefits that could come from a relationship if he is patient. In Chris’ next scene with Chloe, he sets up an official date, which begins their romantic relationship. This scene will be analyzed in chapter three, but right after this scene when his relationship with Chloe begins, he meets Nola for the first time.

**Nola**

Unlike Chloe, Nola gets a more a threatening version of Chris, although most critics would refer to their affair as passionate because of the overtly flirtatious exchanges and sex scenes that involves ripping clothes off of each other, “Chris Wilton…conducts a passionate affair with an aspiring American actress, Nola Rice” (Jolley 77). Nola is of a different social class than Chloe, making her a more equal fit for Chris. Nola is already engaged to Tom and Chris has just set a
date with Chloe. Since they are both in, or almost in, committed relationships, it changes the riskiness of the situation. Chris seems to follow an out of sight, out of mind rule. Chloe was timid and patient in her approach, but Nola is much more aggressive and power hungry, which prompts Chris to follow suit.

Most of the scenes with Nola, especially after their relationship begins, involve sex or the bedroom. However, passion can refer to something good in a relationship, and Chris’ extreme forcefulness does not have many, if any, good qualities. Possibly, their first meeting is meant to show how Chris cannot stop himself from making a move on Nola, despite having just agreed to a date with Chloe and being at her parents’ house. Just after this scene, Chris changes and wanders around the estate during the party. He finds Nola playing ping-pong. They have a short flirtatious exchange before Tom enters and Chris discovers that Nola is Tom’s fiancée. Chris’ interaction with Nola shows that he is quick to make a move. He engages her in physical activity and feigns weakness to lure his prey.

NOLA (O.S.)
So -- who’s my next victim? You?

CHRIS
I haven’t played table tennis in quite a while.

NOLA
Would you like to play for a thousand pounds a game?

CHRIS
What did I walk into?
They play. Chris smashes the ping-pong ball across the table. He smiles.

**NOLA**

What did I walk into? (Allen 13)

Chris can hear Nola’s voice before he sees her. Nola is American, and this is obvious because of her accent. She “is a powerhouse from the word go. The role calls for sexiness but also demands a lack of vanity, and Johansson [Nola] hits every note” (LaSalle 4). Nola is meant to represent passion and desire where aggression is read as sexy. She is confident in her ping-pong skills and shows this confidence through her language use by calling her next opponent a “victim.” The irony is not lost knowing that she will become his victim, not only a victim of his advances, but also his murder victim. Her confidence gives her a sense of power in the interaction, despite being of lower social status. Nola bets a large amount of money on the game, “a thousand pounds a game.” The bet shows that she believes Chris is another member of the wealthy community. While Nola believes that she is in control of the situation, Chris quickly begins to take control. Chris starts by pretending that he is not good at ping-pong, which we will soon discover is not true. He pretends in order to manipulate Nola into engaging in conversation and activity with him. This choice by Chris is a level 4 strategy, “Do the FTA off record.” He violates the maxim of both Quality and Quantity. Chris implies that he will not do well because it has been a long time since he has played. While the amount of time that passed is unclear, it is evident that it has not affected his ability. He also withholds information about his skill level.

Next, he continues to violate the maxim of quality by posing a rhetorical question, “What did I walk into?” Chris’ choice of politeness strategy indicates many different things. First, he most likely knows that he and Nola are similar in social status, or she at least thinks they are.
This secretly gives him the power in the situation, so he feels more comfortable playing with politeness strategies. Since Nola is American, Chris can determine that she cannot honestly be at the social standing of Tom or Chloe. There is also a high chance that Nola would not know his social position and assume that Chris does belong. Both of these instances would not provide much change for the social distance (D) between them. There is not much risk (R) involved for Chris. He does not need to worry about losing money in the game, or about making advances on Nola. If he fails, he will still have Chloe, and at this point, Chris believes he might not see this person again since many strangers are attending the Hewett party. Similar to (D), the power (P) is working on a couple of different levels. Nola believes that she has the power, but Chris knows his ability and knows that he has the upper hand in the situation. Not just in ping-pong ability, but in that Nola does not know who he is or his financial standing.

Power is a primary contributing factor for the first part of Chris and Nola’s exchange. However, it is mostly due to what Chris wants Nola to believe. Nola believes that she has the power and Chris wants her to think this. For this reason, he chooses a higher-level strategy (as weightiness increase, so does the level of strategy). By remaining off the record, Chris can appeal to Nola’s perceived power and keep her interested and engaged. It also allows for a more significant reveal of his power since she is surprised at how well he can play. Chris needs to be in control, but it is vital to let Nola feel as if she has the authority. This struggle for control is how many abusive relationships begin. The female will believe that she has equal power in the relationship, especially at the beginning of the relationship. Chris and Nola’s ping-pong match is very telling of their abusive relationship.

After demonstrating his skills and Nola realizing that Chris has misled her, Chris changes his direction of politeness strategies.
CHRIS

It’s like this. May I?

NOLA

Please.

CHRIS

You have to lean in…and hit
through the ball

NOLA

I was doing just fine until you
showed up

CHRIS

Ah, the story of my life… (Allen 14)

Chris now needs to demonstrate that he does have the power, but he does not want to insult Nola or put her off from his advances. For this reason, Chris puts himself in a teaching position, but not without Nola’s permission. He begins to teach by saying, “It’s like this” and making a move closer to her to show her how to hit the ball. He wants Nola to see him as powerful as he advances to her, but he asks her before physically touching her. “May I?” is the positive politeness strategy of hedging his statements by posing it as a question, even though he has already begun to move towards her. This gives Nola the feeling that she has had a choice even though Chris’ decision was already made. He moves to Nola removing the paddle from her hand, wrapping his arm around her waist, and pulling her to his side as he demonstrates the way to hit the ball. He pulls her closer as he says “lean in” to make it appear more natural for the way that
he is making physical contact. Since Chris is so assertive physically, he has switched to a lower level of politeness through his negative and positive politeness strategies.

For a positive politeness strategy, he uses multiple strategies. First, “include both Speaker and Hearer in the activity.” By taking the paddle from Nola and literally wrapping himself around her, he places both himself and Nola in the physical activity. This is going even further than just the two of them playing ping-pong together. He creates a way to engage her physically and creates a way for them to feel connected. This leads into “attend to Hearer (his/her interests, wants, needs, goods).” Chris is demonstrating that he cares about Nola and wants her to improve her ping-pong skills. She had believed that she would win the game and might feel down or embarrassed about having been wrong. His physical closeness to her can also be a form of intimidation. While more subtle than the examples in the Wheel of Power and Control (see Figure 2), Chris is surrounding her with his body. This action does not register as abusive but unconsciously would tell Nola that he is bigger and more powerful than her. He can move in and take control of the situation.

He also makes a joke to help put her at ease. After Nola exclaims, “I was doing just fine until you showed up,” Chris responds, “Ah, the story of my life.” This comment is meant to be funny and put Nola at ease. Joking is a positive politeness strategy, meant to help the Hearer relax and feel that the speaker cares about his/her needs. This is especially important because he has moved so much closer to her and does not want to appear threatening. Providing the earlier joke is almost meant to combat this extreme move. Simply stepping in and making physical contact with a stranger would not be welcome, but Chris is talented in layering strategies to prevent rejection. Again, there are many similarities between the dialogue in this scene and what will happen in the future of the film, as Nola was better off before meeting Chris.
While Chris’ advances have been very forward so far, they become even more apparent in the second half of their exchange. He begins making more direct/flirtatious comments towards Nola, specifically focusing on her looks and drawing attention to her lips. Both of which, demonstrate Chris’ sexual desire for Nola.

**CHRIS**

Ah, the story of my life. So tell me...what’s a beautiful young American ping-pong player doing mingling amongst the British upper class?

**NOLA**

Did anyone ever tell you you play a very aggressive game?

**CHRIS**

Did anyone ever tell you you’ve very sensual lips?

**NOLA**

Extremely aggressive

**CHRIS**

I’m naturally competitive. Is it off putting?

**NOLA**

I’ll have to think about that for a
After prefacing with the joke, Chris starts to be more forward with his speech, concerning his romantic advances, “what’s a beautiful young American ping-pong player doing mingling amongst the British upper class?” Here, Chris uses a lot of politeness strategies. He has not met any resistance from Nola, giving him confidence in the situation and minimizing the amount of risk (R). At the beginning of the situation, Nola believed that she had the power (P), there was probably a social distance, but a minimal risk (R) for herself (regarding the ping-pong game). Chris knew how she would interpret the situation, but believed he had an equal social distance and more power.

For this second half, they both have a different take on the situation. Nola’s idea of the situation has changed. She now has less power and a greater social distance. The risk has changed but is still relatively small. Chris must try to correct the situation to help minimize the FTA that Nola might now incur. To do this, he starts adding in positive politeness strategies. Chris appeals to her wants by praising her looks and youthfulness and shows that he is interested in her life by asking her a question. “One of the things she liked most about him was how crazy he was about her. He pursued her avidly, seemed to like everything about her, and couldn’t get enough” (Bancroft 109). This quote describes the beginning of an abusive relationship but relates to Chris and Nola’s situation. He is pursuing her strongly without hesitation or concern. He praises her and makes her feel like she is special; that she is so beautiful he can’t help but worship her. But it is all superficial at this point; he does not know her.

Chris even manages to establish common ground (although she does not know it yet) by explicitly mentioning that she does not belong to the British upper class. This connection between Chris and Nola is often pointed out by critics as well, “Chris Wilton, the young tennis
pro, is in exile from his humble Irish beginnings, and from his career in professional tennis, while Nola Rice is in exile from her failing acting career in Colorado” (Macready 97). This connection becomes part of the reason their relationship is often referred to as “passionate.” However, Chris creates this connection to separate and manipulate Nola. While he is using many positive politeness strategies on the surface, there is also an underlying negative politeness strategy used. Most obviously, “be direct.” Chris does not try to hide his interest in her anymore. He has made his intentions clear through the closing of physical space and flattery. However, we also see Chris asserting his power more openly because he can hide behind the mask of politeness that he has created. His hidden strategy is to distance Nola from the community that she is surrounded by and to impersonalize her. He simply refers to her as “a beautiful young American ping-pong player”, taking away her true identity and giving her labels and characteristics. These labels set her apart from her current community. She is not British; she does not belong to the upper class; her implied occupation is a hobby; and her looks set her apart. He is mentally trying to isolate Nola from everyone else that may be at the party, while still appearing to be complimenting her. Using isolation is one of the fundamental ways that an abusive partner gains control (see Figure 2).

Although the romantic relationships are just beginning, it is possible to see a difference between the way that Chris interacts with Chloe and Nola. By increasing our knowledge of when and why the use of negative or positive politeness influences persuasion outcomes, the successfulness of reducing face threat through the use of politeness strategies becomes apparent (Dragojevic and Feng 27). Most of the differences come from the amount of riskiness and social distance. Chloe is part of the upper class and offers Chris more possibilities and money. With Chloe, Chris is less direct and keeps his power more hidden than he does with Nola. Chris and
Nola’s relationship already has signifiers of an abusive relationship because Nola is not afraid to speak her mind in order to try and maintain power. For Chris and Nola’s relationship, there is less social distance between them and the risk between them is slight, although the risk of losing Chloe does create a riskier situation overall. Within the relationship with Nola, there is less to lose, so Chris lets his true character show; he is aggressive and controlling. This begins to show in his politeness choices as well. Where he mostly stayed within negative and positive politeness with little directness with Chloe, he adds in off the record the strategies as well being more direct with Nola. Chris’ ability to read situations and adjust accordingly shows how manipulative and calculating he is. His subtle shifts in politeness allow him to get exactly what he wants from each interaction.
CHAPTER 3: SHALL WE DATE? – THE ILLUSION OF CHOICE IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

He creates the kind of relationship he wants through charm and dishonesty and expects to continue in that mode for good.

Manipulation feels clean and satisfying to this style of abuser, while degrading language and physical intimidation do not (Bancroft 112).

Abusive relationships do not necessarily start out with bad intentions, but power struggles create potentially harmful situations. Chris wants to create a perfect relationship through his “charm and dishonesty” by manipulating both Nola and Chloe. If he can maintain the manipulation, he will avoid any conflicts and threats to his face (public self-image). Chris’ face value is often in danger because of his manipulative and abusive strategies. It is every normal adult’s desire to maintain his/her face value and keep a positive image and reputation. Chris wants to appear as a nice, caring man but also wants to be in control of the situation. He uses politeness to hide his ulterior motives and abusive strategies to keep the control and power in the relationship. Lundy Bancroft also wrote that an “abusive man is often unusually good at expressing an intensity of caring early in a relationship and can make you feel so special and chosen—as if you were the only person who could ever matter so much to him” (109). Abusers are great at appearing normal and caring until they are not normal and caring; Chris has these same qualities. He is consistently using language and politeness strategies that show his “caring” personality. Chris avoids losing face by manipulating both women to allow the deceit to take place, thus agreeing to let Chris have control.
By manipulating Chloe and Nola, Chris creates a false sense of love and support, although, this is an illusion meant to make them feel connected. Chris needs this connection to get them (or keep them) in a relationship despite his selfish motivations and emotional abuse. But this manipulation looks very different in each relationship. Chloe will go into the situation open and willing, allowing Chris to shape the power dynamics and gain control. One way that allows Chris to shape the power of the situation is through the venue. He attempts to ask Chloe out at or near tennis courts. Preston Ni explains this as the “home court advantage” (“14 Signs”). Chris was a professional tennis player and is comfortable and confident in this venue. The setting is familiar to him and a place where he often has control. This manipulation of power and control, allows the women to believe that they are making the decision and thereby have the power. This sense of power, however, is completely of Chris’ making. Chloe has just met Chris and had a real conversation for the first time. He also allows Chloe to speak first, this gives him time to establish a “baseline” of her behavior and pinpoint her weaknesses (“14 Signs”). She likes him and is not afraid to start the conversation or to pursue him, although timidly. Chris also fosters the shy and slow-moving aspect of the relationship by letting Chloe make all of the direct statements towards setting up a date, with Chris subtly feeding her the ideas. He suggests places for a date off record and lets Chloe fill in the missing information until she has asked him out.

Nola, on the other hand, has a bigger threat to her own face value through Chris’ manipulation. She knows that he is married to Chloe before she starts to have a consistent relationship with Chris. Mäkelä writes, “[Chris] deceives Nola into imagining they could lead a life together despite his purely carnal motivation for the affair” (252). His deceit is obvious not only for the audience of the film, but for Nola as well because she knows about his romantic situation. He begins by asking probing questions. Similar to his strategy with Chloe, he is trying
to find her weaknesses in order to exploit it (Ni, “14 Signs”). He uses negative politeness strategies to imply that she owes him and tries to make her feel guilty; however, Nola does not feel too guilty about Chris’ actions. He eventually manipulates her into making a decision by giving her “little or no time to decide” (Ni, “14 Signs”), a strategy used by manipulators. Chris hopes, that by applying the pressure of time (and with Chloe being present), Nola will crack and give in to his demands. Since both situations are so different, Chris must use different politeness strategies to win each of them.

Although Chris and Nola have already had sex at this point (more on this in Nola’s section), this aggressive scene is a key turning point in their relationship. Macready remarks that “Her return in this scene serves as a turning point in the pursuit/withdrawal motif in the film, in which scenes of Chris’s pursuit of Nola are followed by scenes of her withdrawal or absence” (107). Nola often tries to avoid Chris and the temptation he brings, but gives in during certain moments. While this turning point is key, almost none of the research (outside of Macready) even brings up this scene. Macready uses this scene to examine an ethical dilemma that Chris must face regarding Nola. Nola has entered a sort of exile that Chris must bring her back from, as well as, Chris’ exile from ethical responsibility. By following scenes of pursuit with scenes of withdrawal, Allen is able to show that Chris is the aggressor in the situation and that it has become a game for him. These scenes become similar to a tennis match where a ball is hit over a net to score, but the opponent always tries to return the ball. This back and forth creates a connection to tennis for Chris, a game that he is comfortable with and enjoys. He enjoys pursuing Nola and the fact that she keeps resisting. The relationship becomes a challenge for him, a game that he wants to prove he can win.
In this chapter, I will examine how Chris is able to officially start romantic relationships with Chloe and Nola. In order to achieve his goal, Chris uses multiple politeness strategies. As he usually does, he must use multiple instances of negative and positive politeness (do the FTA with redressive action) and even instances of doing the FTA without redressive action; however, the dynamics between the characters are very different. Chris’ pursuit of Chloe happens before he meets Nola. Therefore, there is less treat to Chris’ face and less riskiness in the FTA (Face Threatening Act). He favors off the record or positive strategies, to give Chloe a feeling of her being in control, although Chris is subtly manipulating her. He uses jokes to put her at ease in the situation and builds a foundation of common ground. Since they come from different worlds, he needs to convince her that they have similarities and are compatible together.

Chris not only uses manipulation to get her into a romantic relationship but also to gain sympathy and financial support (she will eventually get Chris a job at her father’s company). He wants Chloe to see him as a caring person who wants more from life than what he has been given. He wants “to do something with” his life and wants “to make a contribution” (Allen 12). If Chris can convince her that he has goals, then Chloe will offer to help him achieve those goals. Chris creates the illusion of being a poor Irish boy who just wants to make a difference and do something good for the world. This is an aspiration that Chloe admires, and she sympathizes with him and his struggle, (Chris uses the “intensify interest” and “exaggerate sympathy” sub-strategies, which are both positive politeness strategies). This ‘dream’ of his, unfortunately, is not true. He is simply appealing to Chloe’s sense of accomplishment, stability, and traditional social norms (men should be providers). Chloe will get him a job at her father’s company, and her father will help out financially whenever they need it. This can also be a form of “guilt-baiting” as described by Ni (“14 Signs”). Chris is making Chloe feel guilty about his situations to
prompt her into giving him handouts. What Chris truly wants is for everything to be handed to him, without having to do any real work. But this want would not satisfy Chloe if he was honest, so he must hide his true intentions and work under the surface.

In contrast, Chris wants Nola as a sexual object. His official relationship/affair with Nola comes much later in the film. The risk is higher (because he is married), and the social distance has changed as well. Nola has physically distanced herself from Chris, and Chris has socially distanced himself (into the upper class) from her (social distance creates a weightier FTA, see Figure 1). With such a drastic change, Chris must now convince Nola to put all of this aside and start an affair. He flimsily attempts to give her a choice by hedging his statements (negative politeness), but his desperation is overpowering. While it should be Nola’s choice to decide about starting an ongoing affair, Chris is able to convince her to throw away her previous convictions and start the relationship. The main way he accomplishes this task, is through his use of “do the FTA with redressive action, negative politeness, and “do the FTA without redressive action” (Brown and Levinson). He is much more direct with Nola both verbally and physically than with Chloe. The power struggle between Chris and Nola is more obvious, but nonetheless, Chris becomes the victor.

Chloe

Chris begins his relationship with Chloe by setting up two separate power plays. First, he knows that he does not have the money and social standing to be equal with her, so he must find a way to improve his financial situation. He does this by setting up an ongoing manipulation about his current financial status and his goals for the future. To accomplish this manipulation, Chris uses mostly positive and negative politeness strategies, creating sympathy for himself to provoke Chloe to want to help him. Second, he needs to get Chloe to agree to a relationship despite their
social and economic differences. Chris employs a number of positive and negative politeness strategies, but also, he uses “do the FTA off record” strategies. The latter is done to give Chloe the illusion of respect and give Chris deniability for his actions.

Chris and Chloe’s relationship is a form of slow moving and subtle abuse. He allows her to make most of the moves, creating the illusion that Chloe has control. After their initial meeting, Chris and Chloe have another encounter that moves their relationship further as Chris and Chloe set up their first official date. After the night at the opera, Tom (Chloe’s brother) informs Chris that Chloe liked him, “she thought you were terrific and wanted to invite you to our house with the parents on Sunday” (Allen 10), an offer which Chris accepts. Once at the Hewett Estate, Chris is first seen playing tennis with Tom as Chloe approaches timidly. Tom suggests that Chloe train with Chris while he takes a break. Chloe tries to avoid the situation at first, “No, it’d be really boring for Chris to play with me on my own” (Allen 11) to which Chris responds, “Don’t be silly. I teach people who have never held a racket” (Allen 11). This situation involves a weightier FTA since the Chloe (the hearer) is self-conscious about her tennis ability, not only because Chris (the Speaker) was a professional tennis player but also because she does not want to embarrass herself in front of a romantic interest. She was the one who invited him, through her brother, to her parents’ estate, presumably with the intention of gaining his interest. She did not receive glances from Chris during the opera but gave him a longing glance.

Since the weightiness has risen, Chris takes note and uses both positive and negative politeness strategies. For a negative politeness strategy, Chris attempts to minimize the imposition. He wants Chloe to feel that it would not be a burden or an embarrassment because he has worked with people far worse than her, though, this is also a type of positive politeness. Chris is exaggerating and trying to make a joke to put Chloe at ease. He wants to bring her into a
situation where he has an advantage over her, as a professional tennis player. Both of these negative and positive politeness strategies fall under the “Do the FTA with redressive action.” Chris appears to be pleasant and to always take Chloe’s needs and feelings into consideration. While this may not seem like an abusive partner, it is the abuser’s ability be nice and blend in that creates such a threat. “Although a man who abuses his partner may be assumed to be ‘crazy’ or consistently ill-tempered, this often is not true. Anecdotal reports suggest that many are ‘nice guys’ who can be charming and lovable and who often function well in all roles save that of an intimate relationship” (Herbert 313). Brown and Levinson note that using redressive action (like Chris) is the most common form of politeness (317). Chris can manipulate Chloe into believing that he is nice and caring. This sets up the image of a perfect relationship, which is what Chris wants. It is a familiar form of politeness and does not seem like he is trying to do anything but be polite.

However, Chris also employs the “Do the FTA without redressive action.” When Chris says, “Don’t be silly,” it is a command. Usually, as the social distance increases or the power that the Hearer has over the Speaker increases, the choice in politeness strategies shifts (Brown and Gilman 165). With this shift, Chris’ perception of his power has changed. He has moved from the level 2 or 3 strategies down to the level 1 strategy of not using redressive action. Chris has the power in the situation. He is more knowledgeable and talented regarding tennis, and he changes his politeness to accommodate the shift in power. He no longer needs to hide behind the use of politeness but can be direct and to the point. Chris also demonstrates his power over Chloe by merely being a man. The word “silly” often refers to someone who is acting childish. By connecting Chloe to something childish or foolish, he can raise his status as an adult with power.
By looking at his word choice, it is almost like he is commanding a child, although he keeps his tone more playful.

As mentioned previously, Chris is trying to boost his power to gain control of the relationship. He does this by using low level politeness strategies. By using the lower level strategies, such as “do the FTA without redressive action” (see figure 1 for strategy rankings), Chris is able make Chloe feel like they have a close relationship and the FTAs (commands) are friendly banter. Chloe will be more willing to accept his advances if she believes they are already on friendly terms. This can be seen through his previous statement “Don’t be silly. I teach people who have never held a racket” (Allen 11), and the following statement, “That’s how you get better. Playing with a stronger player. Come on” (Allen 11).

Similar to the first, Chris uses a mixture of politeness strategies in his second dialogue. “Come on” is another FTA without redressive action and positive politeness with “that’s how you get better” to show that he is interested in her needs and wants to give her something. Nonetheless, the most interesting part of these two is Chris’ struggle to gain power over Chloe.

Social distance is one of the largest contributing factors for Chris’ politeness choices. Large social gaps can often create more abusive relationships, especially when the male is at the disadvantage. As Abigail Fuller explains, when the woman has a job and more money, it can be viewed as a “threat to his authority” (22). Chris understands this idea and knows that it may be off putting for Chloe that Chris does not make a lot of money. Chloe has him beat in social status, and Chris will never be able to surpass her. Even if he was able to gain money, new money is not the same as old money. She comes from a wealthy, well-respected family. Instead, he gains power through his tennis experience and manliness. Byers acknowledges that, “Couples often struggle for power in the relationship resulting in a symmetrical pattern of escalating abuse,
contributing to a negative spiral of abusive behavior” (43). Chris’ abuse follows this escalating pattern, allowing him to seem perfect at first and slowly shift into someone capable of violence and deceit caused by struggle. Chris can avoid this spiraling effect by gaining power from different aspects. He does not have more money or a higher social status but is able to claim being a professional in tennis. If a struggle is needed to escalate the abusive behavior, Chris will try to avoid a struggle completely.

To gain power in a different form, rather than social distance, he uses his status as a professional tennis player to boost his social standing, although, he is no longer a professional and merely an instructor. To start, he uses the word “teach”, as in “I teach people who have never held a racket” (Allen 11). He emphasizes that he is a teacher and that he (in tennis at least) is higher up than Chloe, who is the student. He gains control over Chloe; however, since this control is mostly gained on the tennis court, he needs a way to transition this power into a real-world power. For this reason, he makes the later comment, “Playing with a stronger player” (Allen 11). He uses the word stronger, which does not immediately apply to tennis alone. He is emphasizing his strength as a man. This feeds into the abusive strategy of using male privilege (see Figure 2 for more on abusive strategies). Chris acts like the master and tries to define his male role as the stronger and more athletic person. The dialogue is also vague enough that he might not be talking about tennis at all. The term “player” could refer to many different games or instances. Romance is also referred to as a game. Chris could just as easily be talking about his ability to play women, “the life-as-a-journey metaphor is secondary to the life-as-a-game metaphor” (Mäkelä 264). The metaphor keeps repeating itself throughout the film and gives insight into how seriously Chris contemplates his actions, which isn’t much. His concern is on winning and being in control. This vagueness in whether his reference to a game means the
actual tennis game or romance allows Chris to make a transition from only having power as a tennis player, to having strength and power as a man. Chloe may not even realize what is happening, but Chris attempts to take control and gain power in the relationship. While the conversation as a whole might not seem manipulative or abusive, it does give insight into Chris’ need for power and control. The struggle for power and control is precisely what abusive partners are trying to gain within their relationships.

After the tennis training, Chris and Chloe walk along a terrace at the Hewett Estate. This scene allows Chris to share some details about his life and upbringing and how he became a professional tennis player. Chris mentions that playing tennis “was a way out of a poor existence. Caught the eye of a good coach. I don’t know. It all came so easy at first” (Allen 11). His experience to playing tennis matches his experience with Chloe. He has caught the eye of a woman that will give him a way out of his current “poor existence.” For Chris, both tennis and Chloe will come easy at first. He has not had to make much effort in gaining Chloe’s attention.

Next, Chris begins an ongoing manipulation about money and his need to do more with his life. Although the full extent of this manipulation will not be examined throughout the thesis, this is the beginning. (Eventually, Chris is able to manipulate Chloe into getting him a job at her father’s company and Chloe’s father pays for their apartment after the marriage.) The conversation then moves into Chris’ teaching. Chloe asks, “Do you enjoy teaching?” (Allen 12) to which Chris replies, “Not really. I mean, it’s okay for now, but I’d cut my throat if I thought I had to do it forever. I’d like to do something with my life. You know, special. I’d like to make a contribution” (Allen 12). This comment by Chris begins a set up that he will continue later in the story. He is showing Chloe that also is not happy with his current situation as a simple tennis instructor. He uses positive politeness to prove that he and Chloe have similar wants regarding to
lifestyle. Chris would like to have a better job and be able to afford the life that Chloe already has. In the future, Chris believes that Chloe would be unhappy with his current living arrangements and monetary value. He wants to let her know that this situation is temporary, and he wants to be an important person. This idea is significant because Chloe is the one that makes these changes for him. She is his way out.

Chris tries to gain sympathy from Chloe as a subtle form of emotional abuse (see figure 2), by making her feel guilty about the privileges that she has always experienced. The beginning of this scene allows Chris to show Chloe that he is not rich and gain sympathy from her. He needs sympathy from her, in order to manipulate her behavior towards him. Chloe is a caring person who is willing to help other people. Chris takes advantage of this opportunity to setup financial stability that Chloe will give him. This is a positive politeness strategy done to intensify the interest of the Hearer (Chloe). By getting her to sympathize with his story, he engages her into the conversation. Naturally, abusive men are very adept at gaining sympathy, “the abusive man’s native ability to lie convincingly and elicit sympathy” (Bancroft 305). Gaining sympathy is a way to take the focus off of what they have done wrong, and make the abuser appear to be a victim as well. Becoming a victim also helps to create an idea that the abuser needs saving. This is something that women feel at the beginning of an abusive relationship, Chloe begins to care about him and his upbringing and wants to help him. Chris does a face-threatening act (FTA) against himself in this way, to get Chloe to react and correct the FTA.

Chris also creates common ground (positive politeness strategy) by demonstrating that he wants the same things for himself that Chloe should want from a future spouse. By earning her sympathy first and then mentioning his wishes for change. Many women in abusive relationships believe that they can help their abusive partner and save them, especially in the beginning stages
before the abuse has become physical. “She was excited by her confident belief that she could bring out the person he was capable of being” (Bancroft 110). Chris takes advantage of Chloe’s caring nature and plants the idea in Chloe’s mind that he needs help and she can be the one to offer that help. His setup makes Chloe try to lessen the FTA by using her own politeness strategies. He hopes that she will use positive politeness strategies, to show that his wants are desirable by her as well. These strategies (that Chris would like Chloe to use) are giving sympathy and offering him something (a way into the upper class). His previous story about catching the eye of a coach and finding an easy way out can then be thought of as a plan for Chloe to follow. While it seems like a typical conversation on the surface, there is so much hidden meaning behind his words and his organization. Politeness allows him to hide his true intentions. By beginning with a formula for Chloe to follow (catch the eye of someone, and they will save you from a poor existence), it makes it less visible that these are actually instructions. It appears as a simple comment about his past and not a prediction/want for his future. He then gains sympathy from Chloe and hints that he is ready for a change in career. He does not want to be an average citizen and would like to reach a status closer to Chloe. He has led Chloe into correcting his self-made FTA and offering him what he desires.

The second half of this conversation is when Chris shifts the topic to that of a romantic relationship. After Chris’ comments on wanting to “make a contribution,” Chloe says, “So you’re a poor boy from Ireland come to London” (Allen 12). This comment by Chloe shows that he has gained her sympathy, but in doing so has slightly distanced himself from her. Chloe calls him a “boy from Ireland.” This comment makes it seem that while she does have sympathy for him, the sympathy might become motherly and she points out that they are not from the same place. While Chloe probably did not mean to show their distance, it triggers a change in Chris.
This change demonstrates Chris’ ability to read the situation and change strategies. “Chris is always aware of his opportunities and is always playing a kind of mental game of tennis with people. He may not have a grand design, but he always knows where he is placing the ball and what he hopes to achieve. This quality, though subtle, is there from the beginning” (La Salle). Although subtle, he is playing a game of politeness and manipulation, which he is very good at doing.

To respond to Chloe’s comments and change the direction of the conversation, Chris says, “I love it. It’s so exciting and alive. I’ve never seen so much art or theatre. Not that I’ve taken much advantage of it yet” (Allen 12). His first line, “I love it,” is an attempt to save face. While he does want sympathy from Chloe, he does not want to lose power. By stating that he loves being in London, he is trying to lessen the distance and make a connection through London. He enjoys his new position as a Londoner, much like Chloe does. After saving face, he smoothly transitions setting up a date. He begins with mentioning art and theater, which are two interests the Chloe has, showing that they are similar and closing the distance once more.

Chris then using a “Do the FTA off record” politeness strategy to avoid any possible face threats, such as rejection, “Not that I’ve taken much advantage of it yet.” Here, Chris implies that he would like to see the art or theaters the city has to offer, but has not had the opportunity. Chris wants to go with Chloe but is not willing to risk getting rejected. By suggesting the idea rather than asking, Chris keeps his intentions off the record by breaking Grice’s maxims of conversation by being vague and incomplete. He had brought himself down to gain sympathy from Chloe. The weightiness of this interaction increased because Chris had to increase all of the contributing factors in the overall weightiness of the FTA. The riskiness increased because asking for money would hurt his face value more than asking for a date would have. Chris also
had to increase the distance between himself and Chloe in both power and social distance to achieve his purpose of becoming sympathetic. These reasons are why Chris uses the level four strategy of “Do the FTA off record.”

Chloe then falls right into step with Chris’ plan, “Well, look, if you’d like someone to show you around...I grew up in Belgravia, I’d be happy to take you to all the good places” (Allen 12). Now that Chloe has taken the bait, so to speak, Chris knows that his strategy is working. He has gained sympathy from Chloe and has allowed her to take the lead in the relationship. This step is necessary for Chris’ overall plan. As an abuser, Chris wants to be in control but must maintain a pretense that he does not care about control. Politeness allows Chris to fake having less power and make Chloe believe that she has power, leading to her paying his way through life. However, he cannot let Chloe know that his only wish is for the status and lifestyle that she can give him. Chris needs to make Chloe weaker and to find a way to keep her down without her realizing what is happening.

Because Chris had to lose power and create social distance to set up his plan of gaining financial stability through Chloe, he must now regain some of the power that he has had to relinquish for his greater purpose.

CHRIS

That’d be great. On one condition:

I buy the tickets.

CHLOE

Oh dear, is that going to be an issue?

CHRIS
I’m afraid it is. I’m very old fashioned. But actually, I did read something about the exhibition in the Saatchi Gallery.

CHLOE

That’s perfect. It’d be my pleasure to take you.

CHRIS

You’re very kind to offer this. Can I at least give you some free tennis lessons?

CHLOE

Okay, it’s a deal. How about Wednesday for the Saatchi? (Allen 12)

As seen at the beginning of this section of dialogue, Chris is making a move back towards the lower level strategies. This move shows that the overall weightiness has decreased. When setting up for Chloe to help him financially, Chris was taking a more significant risk to his face value. As the politeness strategies are ranked by weightiness (as weightiness increase, so does the level of strategy). Now that Chris can transition back to a less risky topic (romance), he reverts to using redressive action with positive and negative politeness (levels one and two respectively). When Chris says, “on one condition: I buy the tickets,” he is using both positive and negative politeness. For positive politeness (level one strategy), Chris is giving her a gift and making an offer. These sub-strategies allow him to show he does have power in the relationship.
After having just set up a longer manipulation to gain money and a job from Chloe/Chloe’s family, he now needs to imply that he does not need her help, which will give him some of his power back and keep Chloe from catching on to his manipulation. Chris needs her to think that he is not just asking for money, or that the relationship is based on Chris’ need for a social/financial status change. By making it a condition that he will not go on a date unless he can pay, he hopes to convince her that he cares about her and cares about her positive face value. For negative strategies, Chris “minimizes the imposition on H [Hearer]” and goes “on record as incurring a debt, or not indebting H [Hearer].” Through these sub-strategies, Chris hopes to show Chloe that he is not trying to impose negative face value by being an obstacle for her or causing her financial loss. The relationship would benefit both of them, not just Chris.

When Chloe then asks, “is that [her spending money on him] going to be an issue?”, Chris replies, “I’m afraid it is. I’m very old fashioned.” Instead of just saying yes, Chris says “I’m afraid it is,” hedging his statement (positive sub-strategy) to lessen the FTA of opposing her. He then tries to avoid disagreement (positive sub-strategy) and further arguments on the subject by offering a reason for his original disagreement, “I’m very old fashioned.” This statement also allows Chris to try and create common ground. Traditionally, the British upper class would be very “old fashioned” or follow traditional social/gender roles. While this may not be true for Chloe, he can still appeal to her upbringing by saying that he follows the same values and norms as her and her family.

Chris keeps his comments general and off record to insure Chloe’s participation and perceived control of the relationship. Chris follows this line by offering a more specific option for a date, “But actually I did read something about the exhibition in the Saatchi Gallery” (12). However, he will not yet be direct and does not ask her if she would like to go to the Saatchi
Gallery, but simply mentions that he has read about it. He is still using politeness strategies to avoid actually asking her on a date or taking control of the situation. This strategy allows Chris to still give Chloe the feeling that she is in power and that she has the control, furthering hiding the manipulation that he is running behind the scenes. So when Chloe responds, “That’s perfect. It’d be my pleasure to take you,” she accepts his suggestion and makes the final decision on where the date will be and that she will be paying for the date, which is exactly what Chris wanted. Chris could try again to pay, but he does not. Instead, he continues with his politeness strategies to maintain the manipulation of the relationship and conceal his need for her financial resources. “You’re very kind to offer this. Can I at least give you some free tennis lessons?” He immediately accepts her offer to pay and gives her positive face by exaggerating her positive attributes (positive sub-strategy) by remarking how kind and generous she is, and by going “on record as incurring a debt” (negative sub-strategy), asserting that he must give her something in return for the trouble. He offers her free tennis lessons, which will cost him nothing but time. Even in this offer, Chris cannot help but overload the statement with politeness strategies by also hedging the statement (making it a question) and not assuming that she will accept his offer. However, Chloe does accept and offers a day and time for the date. It is not until after the date has been completely arranged that Chris finally says, “It’s a date” (Allen 13). Only being direct at the end when he is confident that she feels as if the entire plan was her idea.

From these first two encounters, we can already see a difference in politeness and manipulation. In their first meeting, Chris does not have the upper hand. Tom and Chloe’s family are wealthy and have power over Chris. Chris uses positive politeness during this encounter because of his status, “Low power speakers are less likely than high power speakers to use positive politeness” (Morand 549). However, when Chris can gain some power over Chloe
(through his status as a tennis player), he begins to incorporate negative politeness strategies, although the positive strategies are still present. While no obviously abusive elements have been seen, the power struggle has already begun. This struggle is seen through the politeness strategies.

If Chris is going to have a relationship with Chloe, he needs to find a way to gain power. This need for power and control over others is one of the key elements in abusive relationships. While many abusive people seem perfectly normal at first, “Possessive and controlling behaviors don’t always appear overnight, but rather emerge and intensify as the relationship grows” (National Domestic Violence Hotline). Chris is demonstrating that he can appear perfect, through his positive politeness strategies, and it is the negative politeness strategies that show his need for power.

Nola’s relationship will look very different in terms of both politeness and abuse. Chris is less aggressive and seeks sympathy with Chloe, but not with Nola. In his relationship with Nola, Chris is demanding and forceful. He pressures her into making a decision that she is not ready to make.

**Nola**

Nola, at this point in the film, knows that Chris is married to Chloe. This creates a higher riskiness in Chris advances. She is not just concerned with her image in front of Chris, but how the world would view her as well. Chris holds the power in the situation overall. In contrast to Chloe’s scene, he advances on Nola and begins the conversation. He does this to limit the amount of time that Nola has to think about what he is suggesting. Nola and Chris’ official relationship takes multiple scenes to start. The first scene is when Chris and Nola first have sex while both in relationships. While important, this scene is not their official start. This section will very briefly explain the circumstances of their first sexual encounter, and then move into the
scene when Nola gives in to Chris’ pursuits. Unlike Chloe, Chris and Nola’s relationship begins much later in the film. The FTA (Face Threatening Act) of the official start is too great because of the extreme riskiness of the situation. Not only would having an affair be enough risk, but Chris also attempts to setup the affair while his wife is a few feet away. Since the riskiness is very different with Nola than with Chloe, Chris uses more negative politeness, which is a higher-level strategy caused by the higher weightiness. He is very direct but attempts to avoid disagreement, usually by simply not responding to her questions. Eventually, to add to his time pressures, he begins commanding her (do the FTA without redressive action). By giving commands, he is also demonstrating to her that he has the power and control.

After Chris and Nola first meet, they continue to see each other at social events and dinners because of Tom and Chloe. Chris continues to be infatuated with Nola, but he is unable to get much alone time with her. While everyone is visiting Tom and Chloe’s parents at the Hewett estate, Nola and Tom’s mother, Eleanor, get into an argument about Nola’s acting career. Nola get upset and leaves to take a walk outside in the rain. Chris follows her and decides to make a move while she is upset and vulnerable. After a couple flirty comments, Nola says that Chris should not have followed her outside, and Chris replies, “Do you feel guilty?” (Allen 44). Nola responds with her own question, “Do you?” (Allen 44). Chris is trying to make her feel guilty as a form of emotional abuse and shifting the blame to her. If Chris is able to knock Nola down slightly, she would be more willing to view herself negatively and then fulfill negative acts as well. Chris and Nola then kiss and eventually have sex outside in the rain. Chris behaves aggressively, pulling at her clothes. Chris uses aggression but masks it as passion. Even the process of almost ripping her clothes off, he is demonstrating his power and control over her. This act, however, is regarded as a mistake by Nola. Chris is able to gain leverage from this
sexual encounter. One of the biggest threats has already happened, and he was able to get away with it. The affair has technically begun, although she stopped it immediately after.

After having sex, the distance (a determining factor for politeness) between Nola and Chris grows. She does not want to encourage anything and even says that “passions are passions but we’re both very involved with other people” (Allen 45). This distance is able to temporarily stop Chris, as he sees the lust between Nola and Tom during a social gathering. He believes that there is no longer a chance for Nola and him, and he marries Chloe soon after this realization. It is not long after the marriage before Tom confesses to Chris that he has broken up with Nola for another woman (whom he marries rather quickly). After the breakup, Nola moves back to America and out of their lives (although Chris does not know where she has gone) until her sudden reappearance at Tate Modern Gallery.

Chris arrives at Tate Modern Gallery to meet up with Chloe. She is opening a new gallery and wants to show Chris a new artist that she is interested in. Upon entering, he passes by Nola on an escalator. Chris and Nola have been separated for a while, but Allen creates both a physical and ethical separation, as described by Macready, “she is still separated from him by an ethical distance that parallels their physical distance and withdrawing from him down an escalator” (107). After Nola and Chris had sex, Nola withdrew from interacting with Chris. She withdrew even more after her breakup with Tom, leaving the country completely. She regretted what happened between them and felt the need to distance herself, but Chris did not want this distance. This idea is paralleled in the scene where they pass each other on the escalator. They are on separate paths moving in different directions. Nola does not notice Chris because she does not want to be part of his life anymore, but Chris notices Nola despite the physical distance. He still wants Nola in his life and rejects the distance without risking his current relationship. He
finds Chloe and her friend Carol but after exchanging pleasantries, makes a quick excuse about needing to phone his work. Chris agrees to meet up with them and leaves to speak to Nola. He finds her again and they make eye contact, still from a distance, but Chris is able to close this distance (both physically and emotionally). This scene is the beginning of their on-going affair.

CHRIS

Hello. What a surprise.

NOLA

I, um… I moved back into town.

CHRIS

I didn’t know you’d left town.

NOLA

Yeah. I was really upset about everything that happened so I just went back to America to look for a job.

CHRIS

I thought you hated that place.

NOLA

Anyplace but here.

CHRIS

I looked for you. (Allen 60)

After a brief exchange, Chris begins to make his moves; “I looked for you.” Here, Chris is showing his interest in Chloe, a form of positive politeness. He wants her to know that he did not
give up on her, despite her giving up on him. This politeness strategy will make Nola feel that Chris cares about her and wants the best for her. Chris is also using negative politeness strategies here by being more direct in his approach and going on record as “incurring a debt”. He implies that she owes him something because he has looked for her. He has put in effort to start/maintain a relationship since having sex, while she has not. Chris starts by using positive politeness and moves into negative politeness. By starting with a lesser level strategy and moving up, he is implying that he respects her and respects the situation. Nola’s objections to him also would cause this shift to a higher-level strategy. This line also demonstrates a form of emotional abuse by trying to make her feel guilty about not having contacted him.

Nola attempts to thwart his manipulative advances by continuously asking him questions, “For what?” and “why are you asking me these questions? Aren’t you still married?” However, Chris merely ignores all of her questions. He is trying to avoid having a disagreement with her—a positive politeness strategy. He cannot admit that he is doing something wrong because then it would be true. In order to gain Nola’s trust and acceptance, he must build up common ground and convince her that they want the same things. He does not want to answer and admit that he is still in a relationship, although they both know that he is still married to Chloe. Instead, Chris first answers with, “You’re still so angry. Where are you living?” In avoiding disagreement, he changes the subject. First, Chris sympathizes with Nola and tries to show that he notices what she needs and how she feels (positive politeness). He knows that she is angry, but he implies that with time she will no longer be angry about Tom breaking up with her. Chris needs Chloe to not be angry anymore, or to at least not be angry at him. He needs to rebuild their connection after having been apart. He also needs to convince her that she should ignore the fact the he is married.
By avoiding answering her questions, Chris is trying to show her that his relationship with Chloe is not worth talking about and not important. At first, Nola’s questions are not directly related to Chris’ relationship with Chloe, but eventually she asks, “Aren’t you married?” Here, Chris makes a subtle change. He becomes more direct in his questions, “Can I meet you for a drink? Where can I meet you?” These lines consist of mostly negative politeness strategies. Chris is more direct/conventionally indirect with his questions and hedging his statements as questions. He then ends his line of questions with a command, “Come on…” With this statement, Chris has left the realm of using redressive action through positive and negative politeness and decided to not use any form of redressive action. He simply implores her to stop messing around and give in.

As seen earlier in Figure 1, this change in overall strategy levels can indicate a shift in the overall dynamics between Chris and Nola or demonstrate that Chris would like there to be a shift in the relationship dynamics. Chris had started by using positive politeness strategies, which is indicated as the level two strategy. The overall weightiness of the situation was not too high. Chris and Nola still do not have much social distance, and Chris is trying to keep the power even. The biggest factor is probably the risk of imposition; however, Chris is trying to cover up this fact by avoid talking about his marital status and emphasizing her single status. As she begins to question his motives for speaking to her, Chris changes to more negative politeness strategies (level 3). This demonstrates a new shift in weightiness of the FTA. Power dynamics have a slight move in favor of Nola as she tries to take control of the conversation, but Chris will not give up control and continues to move the conversation back to the direction that he wants. The riskiness of the FTA also increases as Chris’ marital status gets brought up. Two single people having a
conversation or agreeing to meet up is far less risky than a married man trying to meet up with a single woman. Especially when the intentions are obvious, even though not directly stated.

Lastly, Chris’ move to a level one strategy, do the FTA without redressive action, shows that Chris is trying to take total control. He is increasing his power over Nola and taking control of the conversation. He has had enough of the power struggle and is done allowing her to think she has a choice. This relates using male privilege by trying to impose his right as the male to have the power and make the decisions (see Figure 2). His command of her to “come on…” is also a subtle form of intimidation. The command is especially threatening since he leaves the sentence unfinished, implying or else. This implied threat is likely because of Chris’ aggressive behavior towards Nola in the past (and in the future).

Chris makes a drastic shift in politeness choices near the end of the exchange by using on record strategies without redressive action. The exchange with Nola is then interrupted by Chloe. Having been looking for Chris, as he had not met up with her yet, she finds them talking. She does not know anything of their conversation but greets them with surprise. She has a short conversation with Nola about how she has been and answering questions to how Tom has been. He is now married with a baby. Chloe’s friend Carol then arrives and pulls Chloe aside to talk about where they think a video installation may be located. They do not go far but are outside of earshot of Chris and Chloe’s next conversation.

CHRIS

(to Nola)

Say your phone number.

NOLA

What’s the point?
CHRIS

Just say your phone number.

NOLA

Chris.

CHRIS

Please…Say your phone number

NOLA

02079460996

CHRIS

I’ll call you. (Allen 62-63)

Chris has now begun to do the FTA without redressive action, “Say your phone number” and “Just say your phone number.” He is not using any politeness strategies to cover up his intentions. He wants her to give him her phone number. There is not time to try to be polite since his wife is nearby and he doesn’t know how long they have. They have not yet started a consistent relationship, but already the struggle for power exists. Unlike Chloe, Nola does not give in to Chris’ advances as easily. For Nola, there is a much higher weightiness involved in her interactions. Chris is married to someone she knows, and someone who is standing close by. Ultimately, it is not Chris’ rushed demands that get Nola to reveal her number, but his sudden switch back to using redressive action, “Please…say your number.” He is no longer commanding but almost begging her to give him what he wants. This is a negative politeness strategy. Not only is he being very direct, but he is hedging his statement with “please.” Using “please” can also be a form of an apology. Chris’ commands did not work, so he apologizes for the way that he commanded the number and turns it into a polite request. Apparently, this is all it takes to
convince Nola, and she gives her number to Chris, “In giving her number to him, she gives him access to her, but this access involves a summons – a demand for ethical responsibility” (Macready 107). The ethical responsibility refers to Chris’ need to make a decision and choose one woman to be with. It also refers to Chris’ responsibility after Nola becomes pregnant (more on this in Chapter 4). Nola wants a deeper, committed relationship, not just an affair. She believes that Chris may want the same thing and gives in to him. However, Chris does not want a committed, real relationship with Nola. He wants a love affair full of freedom and sex.

Chris’ ability to control a situation without appearing to do any work is even noted by Mick LaSalle, “Chris always is aware of his opportunities and always is playing a kind of mental tennis with people. He may not have a grand design, but he always knows where he is placing the ball and what he hopes to achieve. This quality, though subtle, is there from the beginning” (3). While LaSalle may not mention abuse, he notices how Chris is manipulating his way through most scenes and how his manipulation is subtle. Chris is playing a game with these women and with his life, but he will make sure that he wins all of these games. There is more to Chris’ character than might be noticed on a first watching of the film, but it has been there since the beginning of the film. Chris has always been good at playing games, even in the beginnings of his relationships. He is able to quickly judge a situation and the woman’s weaknesses and then exploit her. However, he can do all of this without anyone even noticing. Chris’ ability to manipulate Nola in front his wife, Chloe, shows how smart Chris is. He was given an opportunity that he could not pass up, even with such a high risk. Similar to their first meeting, Chris maintains an aggressive approach with Nola. He will switch strategies more often and is not afraid to commit FTA’s without redressive action. He has less to lose with Nola because his lavish style is provided by Chloe (he works at Chloe’s father’s company and her father pays for
their apartment). Nola is a bonus for him, a sexual desire and a way to prove his competitive domination. She does not have more power than him or a higher social standing, especially not with Chris’ new position within Chloe’s father’s company. He is more willing to take risks; however, Nola is more willing to fight back. She does not hesitate to question his methods and intentions. This creates a greater struggle between Nola and Chris than with Chloe and Chris. This struggle is what causes abusive relationships to advance further into physical abuse.
CHAPTER 4: TO DO OR NOT TO DO THE FTA – AN ABUSER’S DECISION TO 
BECOME PHYSICAL

When he does start to tear her down or frighten her later, he will blame it on her, probably thinking of her as a “bitch” for not allowing him to lie and manipulate his way through life (Bancroft 112).

In this chapter, I will examine Chris’ choice to become violent (or not) in both relationships. Although the relationships do not start out as obviously abusive, Chris begins to get angry at Nola because she will not allow him “to lie and manipulate his way through life.” Chloe, on the other hand, is more willing to fall for his deception. These differences create two very different reactions in Chris and his approach. Chris represents different types of abusers depending on the relationship that he is in. In his relationship with Chloe, he took a slower approach to gaining her affections. He won her over with his innocent and caring nature. After his affair with Nola begins, he moves into vague references and lies to keep Chloe from knowing about the affair. Nola, however, knows that Chris is married and that she is part of an affair. Chris lies to Nola as well in order to keep her satisfied with their relationship, until it becomes hostile and Chris is forced to make a decision when his notices that his manipulation has begun to fail.

For both of these relationships, the FTA (Face Threatening Act) is ending the relationship. The major difference in the determining factors is the power and riskiness (two of the three determining factors for politeness strategy choice outlined by Brown and Levinson). Nola has
been fighting for the power and control in the relationship, which causes Chris more risk in keeping this relationship. Since Chloe’s relationship gives Chris less resistance, there is less risk of losing power or face value. With Chloe, he chooses not to do the FTA, but with Nola he does the FTA without redressive action in the extreme by murdering her. These choices are made because of his struggle for power. Hanna Mäkelä explains that, “Allen delivers his characters over to his cultural crossroads and presents him with a choice: affirmation or negation of moral absolutes. Sadly, but not surprisingly, Chris chooses the latter route” (247). Chris is given a choice to except responsibility for what he has done and incur moral/divine justice or reject it and do what makes himself happy. He chooses to flee from his moral responsibility and keep the relationship that involves less conflict and more reward. A life with Chloe provides more than just financial stability but a lavish, elevated social status. He will want for nothing in this life and requires little maintenance. The child from this marriage will also cause him less strain because he will have a lot of help, including a nanny. He refuses to take responsibility for what he has done with Nola and for unfulfilled promises he has made. He has changed her life forever, saying that he loves her and wants to be with her. He holds no moral obligation to Nola or to his unborn child. He does not care about the part he has played in this situation, only that the situation would now be a lot of work. This choice shows that Chris does not have honest feelings for either woman. Chris’ conversation with a friend of his, Henry, also shows his lack of real feelings or love for either woman. His conversation with Henry makes it possible to understand his choice in not doing the FTA with Chloe, which would be difficult to analyze if they were not present.

Chris finally becomes fed up with Nola’s constant threatening and stealing of his power, so he makes a change in both his politeness and his behavior. He decides to take an excessive form of power by playing God. Mäkelä calls it a form of, “radical school of family planning”
where he chooses which child can be born and which will be aborted, “an act of counter-creation” in which he plays God (253). He goes beyond being able to create life but also who deserves to live. He casts judgment on people by what they are worth to his happiness. He casts judgement on Nola and her neighbor as well. Their lives are not worth the inconvenience they would make in his life or in his plan. He takes the ultimate power of life into his own hands without much hesitation. He holds no religious beliefs (that we know of); he is the God of his own world and only his life and happiness matter. But he will do this in a way that allows him to maintain ‘face’ value (public self-image). Chris has been building to this moment. He does not play God from the beginning but there are signs that he would be willing and capable of taking this role.

Chris’ violence, although it seems sudden, does not appear without warning. His abusive strategies have been hidden by politeness strategies, though a buildup has been coming. Bancroft explains that, “The symptoms of abuse are there, and the woman usually sees them: the escalating frequency of put-down. Early generosity turning more and more to selfishness. Verbal explosions when he is irritated or when he doesn’t get his way” (9). The signs are there, but they do not become visible without time. Manipulation and abuse are both escalating techniques: they do not become apparent until they are repeated often and more frequently. It is easy to dismiss these signs early because they do not appear often, but they are still there. All of these signs are present in Chris and Nola’s relationship, but she is blinded by his manipulation and cannot see what is in front of her. Their encounters have become more and more argumentative, although their relationship has been aggressive from the beginning. The aggressiveness did not appear out of nowhere, but has been building and escalating throughout the relationship.

In both Nola and Chloe’s relationships with Chris, there have been constant movement or shifts in the politeness strategy, depending on the situation and the relationship. Brown and
Gilman explain, “politeness comes with the return of affection and goes with its withdrawal” (195). Politeness, similar to abuse, is related to affection and resistance. As long as Chris is receiving affection, he does not feel the need to act violently, but with the loss of affection, the violence becomes more apparent. The same goes for politeness, if there is no affection between two people, then there would be no need for politeness. Chloe is able to maintain a fairly consistent amount of affection until the affair with Nola. But the amount of affection is not very high because of Chris’ obsession with Nola and money. After he decides to murder Nola, his affections for Chloe grow again. With Nola, he has a consistent amount of affection until she becomes pregnant (if you can call lust affection). But once his way of life is threatened, his affection is lost. She becomes too much of a hassle and his politeness breaks down to “doing the FTA without redressive action.”

Chloe

After Chris’ affair begins with Nola, Chris can maintain a pretty normal relationship with Chloe through his use of politeness and keeping his FTAs (Face Threatening Acts) off record. He often lies about having work issues to sneak off and see Nola, but Chloe does not indicate that she suspects anything. Chloe is focused on trying to start a family with Chris, however, they have trouble conceiving. Mäkelä writes, “Ironically, Chris’ accidental impregnation of Nola comes easily to him, whereas the many futile attempts to have a child with Chloe resemble a ‘fertility project’” (253). Chris and Chloe’s relationship has lost its passion as it becomes a “project”. Creating a child with Chloe is work and Chris knows that she is having a hard time dealing with the situation. Chris dislikes anything that is not easy for him. He even quite professional tennis because he could not compete with everyone anymore. Trying to have a child with Chloe and not seeing any results does not fulfill Chris’ need for easiness in his life. He wants results without
conflict. Chloe’s desire for a child also creates the perfect opportunity for Chris to shift his blame and guilt (a form of abuse, see Figure 2) of the affair onto Chloe, although she doesn’t know it. In the other relationship, Nola has begun to threaten Chris that she will tell Chloe of the affair if he will not. Eventually, Chris decides that he needs to end things with Chloe because it is what Nola wants, but ending the relationship will put Chris at great risk of losing face value (public self-image). Not only will he severely lose face in front of Chloe, but he will also lose his money and lifestyle. The risk is so great, that he uses many high-level politeness strategies. First, he uses off the record approaches (level 4 strategy) to save his face, then chooses to not do the FTA at all (level 5 strategy). The choice of high-level strategies demonstrates that there are higher levels of risk, greater social distance, and/or a difference in power dynamics (see figure 1). This risk and threat to his face becomes too great, and Chris makes the final decision to never tell Chloe the truth and keep his manipulation going until he can’t anymore. His conversation with Chloe in this scene is the closest Chris gets to obvious abuse in his relationship with Chloe. Chris approaches Chloe and says that they need to talk about their relationship and Chloe guesses at the possible problem, that he may be having financial issues.

CHLOE

Is anything the matter? You seemed very gloomy all weekend?

CHRIS

I wanted to talk to you.

CHLOE

About what?

CHRIS
Us.

CHLOE

Is something wrong?

CHRIS

Yeah. There is.

CHLOE

What? If you’re still taking a hammering financially in the market, you know it’s not a problem

(84)

Chris utilizes the “do the FTA off record” by violating the maxim of manner. He knows that Chloe will be upset and he wishes to minimize the amount of face value that he is about to lose. By doing this FTA off record, he still maintains deniability. He can opt out at any moment or make excuses for his actions. He also uses positive politeness by including both the Speaker and Hearer in the activity through his use of the word “Us.” Besides being a politeness strategy, it is also an abusive strategy. Bancroft states that, “abusers tend to use the language of mutuality during the dating period: ‘We are going to be really good for each other.’ ‘I want to be with you all the time.’ ‘I really want to be there for you.’” (111). Being inclusive represents a politeness strategy that directly doubles as an abusive strategy, especially during the beginning stages of an abusive relationship. The mutuality of the conversation implies that both of them have a part to play in the conversation. This is also a way for Chris to place some of the blame of what he has done onto Chloe. He will continue to build up this blame making her feel guilty for the situation.
Chloe has guessed that Chris’ mood was about financial issues, but they are not. Slowly she begins to guess what the real problem is, an affair.

**CHLOE**

What is it?

Is it something to do with those phone calls you kept getting?

Cause you acted really strangely after each of them.

(beat)

Are you having an affair?

**CHRIS**

Am I having an affair?

Before, Chris was able to keep the conversation vague, leaving room for him to apply the lesser level strategies of politeness (redressive action strategies) and keep the potential risk at a minimum. This strategy changes after Chloe guesses the correct reason for their conversation and Chris’ mood. When Chloe accuses Chris of having an affair, he quickly switches strategies to minimize the threat on his face. He mimics what she said and asks the question back to her, “Am I having an affair?” an attempt to behave as if the idea is crazy, even if he had been planning on telling her the truth. When faced with the actual consequences, he runs from them. Forming the response as a question is also a form of negative politeness and trying to keep the threat off record. Chris begins to pile on the politeness to mask what he is doing without having to move to higher-level strategies.
Chloe is suspecting that Chris may have been lying and manipulating her. However, this moment of realization is fleeting because Chris is clever in his manipulation and able to turn the conversation around by doing “off the record” strategies and making her feel as if she is crazy. But during Chloe’s momentary realization, she pushes him further for a clear response and asks him more directly for an answer.

CHLOE

Yea, that’s what I asked.

CHRIS

(beat)

No.

CHLOE

You are.

CHRIS

Of course I’m not. Don’t be silly. (Allen 85)

Now, Chris is faced with a greater threat (Chloe actually discovering the affair). Chloe appears to understand that he is having an affair and his manipulations were not working properly to keep her appeased. With Chloe gaining power in the situation, Chris decides to take the matter further off-record by simply lying; “No.” When pushed further, he denies more strongly, “Of course I’m not. Don’t be silly.” Here, he is starting to add in more abusive strategies along with his politeness. He asserts his male privilege of having authority and tries to put an end to the conversation. He also attempts to make her feel crazy about having suspected him. The idea is of an affair is “silly.” By making the idea seem childish and absurd, he tries to make light of the abuse and will soon begin to shift the responsibility of their current problem to Chloe. Both of
these strategies are abusive strategies and part of the Wheel of Power and Control’s “minimizing, denying, and blaming” (see Figure 2).

After the close call of Chloe finding out about the affair, Chris must distance her from the truth to keep his manipulation going. He needs to maintain control of this relationship because he is already losing control within the affair.

CHLOE

Do you not love me anymore?

CHRIS

Oh course I love you.

CHLOE

Well what’s wrong?

CHRIS

I just feel like I’m letting you down. (Allen 85)

Knowing that Chloe has now left the topic of an affair and gone back to wondering what is wrong, Chris goes back to his strategy of keeping everything off-record and vague. He states that he feels like he is letting her down. This creates sympathy from Chloe. Similar to the earlier experience when Chris was trying to start their relationship, Chloe quickly moves from feeling sympathy to finding a solution. She takes the hurt and blame that he claims to feel and turns it on herself. Bancroft also notes similar behavior in abusive relationships, “after a manipulative interaction she may have little idea what went wrong; she just knows that she feels terrible, or crazy, and that somehow it seems to be her fault” (67). Abusers want sympathy and have to keep the abused in the relationship and keep them feeling like the abused has a problem, not the
abuser. Having been manipulated through Chris’ vague reference of feeling ashamed, Chloe searches to find her fault, and figure out what she could have done that led Chris to feel like he is letting her down. Chris’ manipulation and abuse has already been implanted into her brain and she cannot see that the problem is with Chris and not herself.

When Chloe stumbles upon a plausible explanation for Chris’s behavior that will take the blame away from himself, he latches on to her assumption and mimics her ideas without ever really saying them (to avoid lying, he keeps his comments vague). Chloe asks if it is because she has not been able to get pregnant and Chris replies, “I just…feel so guilty. So terribly guilty” (Allen 85). While Chris may feel some form of guilt, he is really trying to pass on his guilt to Chloe. He lets Chloe believe that his guilt is from them not being able to get pregnant, although, his guilt is from the affair and getting someone else pregnant instead. He keeps this reason off record, letting Chloe think what she wants about the comment. Chris’ plan is to say as little as possible and not be caught in a lie. He needs Chloe to take the blame for his mood and get him out of a situation that he created. Getting the victim (Chloe) to take the blame for her own victimization is a form of deception “to distort the victim’s perception…for easier control” (Ni, “How,” 7). As Preston Ni points out, altering the victim’s perception allows the abuser to keep control of the situation and hide their abuse. Chloe then tries to comfort him by explaining that it is not his fault, they have been to fertility doctors and they are both capable of conceiving a child. Their perceived mutual desire for a child is what keeps Chloe from continuing to seek answers.

In passing the guilt to Chloe, Chris has also managed to create common ground, at least from Chloe’s perspective. A shared experience that will help them get through this hiccup of a possible breakup (from Chloe discovering the affair). When Chloe then asks, “Is it me? Have I been horribly pushy and obnoxious on the subject” Chris’ reply is merely, “Oh Chloe” (Allen 86)
and a kiss on her forehead. He completely avoids answering. In this way, he can keep his reply off-record and let Chloe continue thinking that she is the problem.

One unique feature of this film is that we are given some insight into what Chris is thinking through his conversations with a friend, Henry (and later through a dream sequence). These insights help to examine some of the “off the record” and “don’t do the FTA” strategies, as they cannot be seen. Chris tells his friend that “I’m contemplating leaving my wife for another woman… But when the time came to tell her…I couldn’t do it…I don’t fool myself that I haven’t gotten used to a certain kind of living. Am I supposed to give it all up?” Henry suggests that he could find another job doing what he does now, because he appears to be doing well at his current job. Chris then explains, “Let’s face it. I’m the boss’s son-in-law. And he loves me” (Allen 86-87). Chris has not earned anything that he has gotten. He has manipulated his way in his relationships and in his career. His lifestyle is a fragile illusion that he doesn’t want to lose. These thoughts help to prove what Chris is thinking when he makes his decision to not leave Chloe. He is only thinking about money and social status. He is worried about his current lifestyle and how easy it has come to him. Continuing a relationship with Nola instead would be difficult and he would have to start over. This does not appeal to Chris because he has become accustomed to getting what he wants through manipulation, not work.

**Nola**

With Nola Chris decides to do the FTA (Face Threatening Act) without redressive action and will use the highest form of physical violence to accomplish this task, murder. After the previous conversation with Chloe, Chris has decided not to end his relationship with his wife. This decision will then create a new problem of a very angry mistress, which Chris will now have to deal with. Nola has been threatening to tell Chloe about the affair herself, if Chris will not. Chris
did not begin this relationship thinking that he would have to kill his wife or girlfriend, as most abusive men do not plan on being abusive. Bancroft observes that, “The abuser doesn’t picture himself yelling, degrading her, or hurling objects at her. As he falls in love, he dreams of a happy future of conjugal bliss, just as the woman does” (111). Abusive men do not plan to be violent, but they are capable of violence. It does not mean that Chris was a murderer and was looking for an opportunity to kill someone. He wanted a happy life with both Chloe and Nola, but when both relationships were threatened, he was ready and willing to take violent measures to prevent the loss of both. Chris needs to have control of the situation; he needs to call the shots. However, Nola is not letting that happen; she disrupts his bliss and therefore must be dealt with. He does not even care that she is pregnant with his child. Because of Nola’s struggle for control, Chris decides that eliminating her would be the easiest option.

But he does not jump straight into his decision to kill her, he first makes a few attempts to appease and manipulate her without violence. Chris first tries to use “do the FTA without redressive action” strategies to be as straightforward and direct as possible. Except, Nola continues to threaten his ‘face’ value, saying that she will ruin his reputation and reveal everything. Chris is losing the power and control of both the relationship and the current situation. He then tries to up his politeness from level 1 (without redressive action), which was not working to level 2 (with redressive action) by mixing in positive politeness strategies, such as “giving gifts” in the form of compromise and understanding. For these first strategies, the face threatening act that Chris was trying to perform on Nola was not as weighty. But once his attempts at a compromise have been exhausted (after not much effort), he raises the threat to murder and in doing so, starts using higher-level politeness strategies, such as “do the FTA off record” and “do the FTA with redressive action”.

Nola, however, will not relent on her demands for Chris to end the relationship with Chloe. She continues to claim power and demand respect in the relationship, which would be normal in a healthy relationship. Chris and Nola then argue about why he has not told Chloe that the relationship is over. Chris commands her to stop, “I can’t tell her” and “Nola, stop.” She will not listen to his lies and manipulation anymore and Chris is scrambling to get her under control. He begins with a slight negative politeness strategy by saying that he “can’t” tell her instead of he won’t tell her. However, fearing that this is not direct enough to stop her, he then commands her to stop (without redressive action). Chris is becoming more aggressive again in his demeanor. He is failing to keep Nola under his control as she fights to maintain a life that she thought they both wanted. Macready notes that Nola’s need for a real commitment from Chris is what triggers his defensive instincts and ultimately his decision to kill Nola, “desire for a deeper love and commitment [from Chris] to her and their child call Chris’ insatiable desire into question” (107). The relationship is no longer just about passionate sex and freedom. Nola wanted commitment from Chris, especially now that she is pregnant. She has believed his lies and thinks that he also wants the same things. Chris had fully convinced Nola that he loved her and cared about her more than he did Chloe. Chloe meant nothing to him, a loveless marriage that had become routine sex and a fertility project. He is so successful in his original manipulation that she cannot see what is now in front of her. Chris does not care about Nola or their child as much as he cares about a lavish lifestyle without conflict.

Chris attempts to manipulate Nola by offering her a gift (positive politeness). The gift he offers is a compromise, although the compromise is completely selfish, by saying that Nola could have an abortion. After arguing on the phone about why Chris has still not told Chloe and Nola threatening to tell her herself, Nola explains to Chris that the situation is crazy because they
are having a child together. There is no need for him to continue his relationship with Chloe because nothing has come of it so far. Chris replies, “We don’t have to have a child together. It would make life a hell of a lot simpler if we didn’t” (Allen 96). Chris is showing that he does not care about their child as Nola thought he did, and he just wants his life to be simple. He is trying to hold her responsible for his happiness and success, which Ni explains is a form of guilt-baiting in psychological and emotional manipulation (“14 Signs”). He is using the child as a way to try to make Nola feel guilty. The child was not planned and is not really wanted, it is her fault that she is still pregnant. The baby is just a burden that they both must try to deal with. Nola does not think of the child in this way. She wants to keep the baby and raise it with Chris. Chris even offers to pay for the child without raising it, “It occurred to me that even if you had the child, I could help you out financially” (Allen 97). His manipulation so far has failed, and Nola is completely taking control of the situation and the conversation. So, he then tries to buy his way out, a form of positive politeness. He offers her a gift of financial well-being for the baby, but Nola rejects the offer. Chris then implies that Nola’s behavior is crazy. He will not come out and say it because he has already lost so much of the power and control, so he tries to mask it through his word choice, saying “Nola, be reasonable.” This implies that she is being unreasonable and making the situation more complicated than it needs to be. Although the word change does not seem to help the situation. Nola becomes angrier, rejecting again Chris’ attempts to create a less dramatic outcome. His only option (according to himself) is to make a final decision. He makes one last attempt to discover if there is another option, “So you’re threatening me? If I don’t do what you say, you’re gonna go to my wife?” (Allen 97). Chris has become fed up with Nola trying to be in control and needs to make a decision, he does not want to fight anymore. He phrases this as a question (negative politeness) to lessen the impact, although the
impact is still strong. Being in an abusive relationship does not mean that a woman is weak or at fault. It is her belief that he will truly do that right thing that keeps her pushing him towards a solution. Their conversation ends with an ultimatum.

NOLA

Were you lying to me? All those times we made love, all those conversations, were you lying to me then?

CHRIS

Of course I wasn’t lying.

NOLA

Tell Chloe. Someone has to explain the situation. Either you do it or I’ll do it.

CHRIS

Okay, okay. I’ll do the right thing (Allen 97).

When Nola directly asks if he was lying, Chris responds, “Of course I wasn’t lying.” It is probably true that Chris did love Nola in some way. Most abusive men really do feel a connection and love with their partner. It is simply the struggle for control that causes them to become abusive. Nola has pushed him to his limit; she has taken control or at least threatens to take control of Chris’ entire life. His last words to Nola in this conversation are very telling, “Okay, okay. I’ll do the right thing.” He keeps his comment off record, by lying to Nola and appearing to give in to her wants. Chris, however, makes different plans. He will kill Nola
instead. For him, this is the right thing. He only cares about himself and his face value. He does not want to lose his lifestyle and is angry that she has tried to take his control.

Nola presents Chris with two options. He may leave his wife and current lifestyle to make a family with her and their unborn baby, or she will tell his wife and make the decision for him. Chris does not like either of these options because both would cause him to lose his current job and connections. That is not something that he is willing to lose. He prepares a gun, which he hides in his tennis bag and begins the plans. He informs Nola that he will tell Chloe tomorrow. He uses this conversation as an excuse to find out what time she will arrive home after work. The next day, he calls again implying that he has ended things with Chloe, which is a lie, “everything’s taken care of, but I am reluctant to talk on the phone” (Allen 103). In fact, he has made plans with her to see a play as his alibi. He lets Nola know that they must speak with her right away and that she should go straight home after work.

The murder is cold and detached. He first murders Nola’s elderly neighbor, Mrs. Eastby and stages a robbery. The plan is to make it look like Nola has accidentally encountered the robber as he was trying to leave and was shot in the process. He then waits in the stairwell for Nola to return. When she arrives at the top of the stairs, he calls her name, “Nola,” and she turns to face him. He then shoots her and quickly leaves. Chris is taking control of his situation and plays God in choosing who lives and who dies. He does this not only through his decisions to kill Nola and Mrs. Eastby, but through choosing which of his children he will let live and raise (Both Nola and Chloe become pregnant). Mäkelä notes how Chris is seeking to play God and that his decision is made from convenience: Chloe and her child will be easier to take care of and keep happy. They are provide a more “legitimate (and profitable)” lifestyle (253). He only cares about his status and how easy his life would be with Chloe. His decision to kill both Nola and the child, without
hesitation, demonstrates his extreme selfishness and abusive possibilities. He only cares about the money. This is also shown through his conversation with Henry.

CHRIS

Maybe it’s finally the difference between love and lust. But what the hell am I going to do if I leave Chloe…

HENRY

Is it for a woman you love?

CHRIS

To live how? Where? To work as what?...

HENRY

Doesn’t seem to me like you want this woman enough to give up everything you’ve achieved for it”

(Allen 86-87)

Chris is asked if he loves Nola, and his only response is about money and his lifestyle. He does not care enough about Nola to lose what he has gained through Chloe. He does not even know what he wants because he does not want to compromise. Chris says that it might “finally be the difference between love and lust” but he does not explain which woman he loves and which he lusts after. He does not know the difference; he only knows what makes him feel good, which is different parts of each relationship. He must choose between the one person makes him happier
or the lifestyle that makes him happier. He doesn’t even answer the question about if he loves Nola or not. He only cares about what his lifestyle and status would be if he left Chloe. A life with Chloe is easy, and that is what he chooses. He does not care about the people in his life and what losing them would mean to his life. He only thinks about himself and the financial burden that would follow a divorce. For this moment and in this decision, Chloe’s easiness and family status wins, but what would happen later if Chloe was not so easy to manipulate.

Chris only shifts to physical violence with Nola, but that does not mean that he does not have the possibility to do the same with Chloe later on. Bancroft provides a list of about 20 danger signs that a man could be abusive. Bancroft also mentions that these are not hard rules, “A small number of abusers who kill or severely injure their partners do so with few or none of the above elements known to be present, which is all the more reason to rely ultimately on your own “gut” feelings of how dangerous he is” (227). Chris, however, does portray some of these qualities in the end of his relationship with Nola and therefore could eventual have these same qualities in his relationship with Chloe. The danger signs that apply to Chris, regarding his relationship with Nola are:

1. “His violent behavior and threats have been escalating” (226). Chris’ relationship with Nola has slowly become one of arguing and her threatening to leave. He displays angry behavior and responses to most of what she says. The unhealthy nature of their relationship becomes clear as there are fewer and fewer happy moments together. Even before he finds out about the pregnancy.

2. “You are taking steps to end the relationship or have already done so” (226). While Nola is not attempting to end their relationship, she is definitely trying to end Chloe and Chris’
relationship. This attempt would still be seen as a threat to his current relationship and lifestyle, making the situation just as dangerous.

(3) “He has access to weapons and is familiar with their use” (226). Chris, as we see, does have access to many weapons through Chloe’s family. This would be something Nola is familiar with because she also knows the family and knows about the weapons. Having access to weapons makes it easier for an abusive partner to become violent. Similar to how Chris is always trying to keep his life easy by gaining his fortune through marriage and connections instead of hard work.

(4) “He is familiar with your routines...the location of our workplace, or other personal information he can use to locate you” (227). In his phone call before setting up the actual murder, Chris makes sure to ask about her work schedule and what time she will arrive home. He needs this information to make sure that his plans to kill her will work. Nola even mentions that it is strange that he is asking, “Same time I always get off. Six-thirty” (Allen 100). This could have been a warning sign for Nola that he is behaving strangely and may be planning something.

Lastly, (5) “He uses or threatens violence against other people” (226). There are two instances of this, although one is unknown to Nola. The unknown is Chris’ ability to kill the neighbor, Mrs. Eastby. Chris does not care that an extra innocent person would need to be killed in order for him to not be caught and keep his current lifestyle. The other instance is when Chris asks Nola to have an abortion. He does not care about the unborn life even when she makes it obvious that she does care and wants to keep the baby. She rejects the idea but does not think about the greater implications that this could have, such as him essentially killing the baby himself, since she will not.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

It would be fitting if I were apprehended and punished. At least there would be some small sign of justice. Some small measure of hope for the possibility of meaning… (Allen 125-126).

This above quote is from Chris during a dream sequence in which he speaks to the deceased Nola. After Chris has been questioned by detectives, he has a dream in which he speaks to both of his victims, Nola and her neighbor, Mrs. Eastby. He says that he deserves punishment for what he has done and that it would be a sign of justice in the world. But Chris does not get punished for what he has done. This lack of punishment for his crime and emphasis on luck echo the opening lines of Match Point, “The man who said ‘I’d rather be lucky than good’ saw deeply into life” (Allen 1). The image shown is of a tennis ball hitting the top of the net and bouncing straight up, not knowing if it will go forward or backward. Allen directly matches this scene at the end of the film with Chris throwing a ring (of Nola’s murdered neighbor) over a railing. The audience does not know whether the ring will bounce over the railing and plunge into the river or bounce back and land on the sidewalk. This scene is a crucial moment in the film that inevitably frees Chris from punishment of any kind. At the end of the film, it jumps about a year into the future. Chris and Chloe are seen bringing home a baby boy and socializing with Chloe’s family. If I was analyzing Allen’s politeness, I would say that he chose to do the FTA without redressive action. Chris’ face value is undamaged, and the audience is left without justice. The world will not do the right thing on its own and bad people get away with bad actions. Chris’ last line, “some small measure of hope for the possibility of meaning…” demonstrates Allen’s view of the
world. There is no meaning. Everything is random, and Chris symbolizes that fact. The world we live in now is often unfair and victims are given blame.

Critics often characterize Allen’s Match Point as full of passion and seductive. Graham Fuller describes Nola as “Lethally sexy…whose initial unavailability and promise of an ultimate, limitless thrill stroke his uncontrollable lust” (16). This description implies that Nola’s sexiness is to blame for her lethal end. Fuller also emphasizes that Chris is unable to contain his lust because of her looks and behavior, this again puts the blame of Nola’s victimization on herself rather than on Chris. She is a sex symbol and represents Chris’ sexual desire. Chloe is described and bourgeois and problematic by Roger Ebert, “No one has such moral qualms in Allen’s film, not even sweet Chloe, who essentially has her daddy buy Chris for her” (“Match” 2). Similar to Fuller, Ebert is highlighting that Chloe is taking blame away from Chris and onto one his victims. Chloe is manipulated into helping Chris through Chris’ politeness strategies. His layering of stories from his poor childhood and his ambitions for change are what trigger Chloe’s sympathy and cause her to try to help. Both women in this film often receive criticism for being just as unethical as Chris, however, much of their actions are due to Chris manipulation and abusive behavior. By analyzing Chris’ use of politeness theory, it is possible to not only see that he is manipulating these women, but how he manipulates them. The politeness allows for a closer examination of the abusive dialogue, even when obvious signs of abuse are missing.

As seen throughout this thesis, Match Point reveals how politeness theory can be used to show the manipulation and abuse through different stages of a relationship. While there are not obvious signs of abuse in most of the film, politeness explains how Chris can manipulate the woman in his life to gain power and control that escalates into abuse. He uses multiple politeness strategies throughout the film, demonstrating that he is capable of reading a situation and
applying the most useful strategies. He is cunning and charming in his abuse. But the different relationships and social dynamics create different forms of abuse and politeness strategies. Ultimately, Chris’ decision to become physically abusive with Nola is determined by a struggle for power and money, revealed also through his inner-thoughts and dreams. His decision also indicates that he was capable of abuse the entire time and could capable of such abuse in other/future relationships.

In the introduction to this thesis, I provided research questions that would be answered through this paper. First, are politeness strategies being used throughout different stages of manipulative/abusive relationships? Chris uses every politeness strategy throughout the film. He favors using negative and positive politeness sub strategies, which are the most common strategies even outside of abusive relationships. As an abuser, it is critical that Chris does not appear abusive, especially in the beginning stages of a relationship. He must maintain a healthy image in order to keep relationships. LaSalle writes, “But Meyers is the one. He is in almost every scene, and even when it looks as if he’s not he’s doing much, he’s doing plenty” (4). This quote shows that Chris is able to appear normal in many of the scenes while still being in control of every situation. He knows how to manipulate without getting caught, which is a skill that every abuser must know. No one would willingly come into an abusive relationship. As each relationship progresses, he is forced to use more strategies including level four strategies such as, lying and being vague.

Second, what type of politeness strategies are used in: (1) the first meeting; (2) the relationship becoming official; and (3) the decision to murder or not murder? Is there a difference in politeness strategies depending on the type of relationship (interactions with a wife, girlfriend, or mistress)? Depending on his relationship, Chris changes his strategy. In the
beginning of his romance with Chloe, he performs his FTAs (Face Threatening Acts) with redressive action, without redressive action, and off record. His social distance and difference in power (both determining factors for politeness strategies) with Chloe are much greater. He must gain power by using his professional tennis status and male privilege. He lets Chloe be the pursuer of the relationship and lets her feel in control. Since her status would often allow her to be in control, he appeals to her status by giving her the illusion of control. This illusion allows Chris to secretly control the situations behind the scenes. When Chris and Chloe actually start a relationship, he barely even asks her out. Instead, he leads her into asking him and offering to pay for the whole trip, though Chloe believes it to be her idea. In the last scene analyzed, Chris struggles with his decision to tell Chloe of the affair and leave her for Nola, but ultimately decides not to tell her. The risk of losing her and his financial stability with her, are too great of a risk for him to take. To accomplish this switch in his purpose (switching from telling her of the affair to not telling her), Chris uses off the record strategies to remain vague in what he is referencing and let Chloe make assumptions that he never corrects. He tries to make her feel guilty and shift the blame for his behavior onto Chloe, which is a form of emotional abuse.

In contrast, Chris’ relationship with Nola begins very differently. He is aggressive in his pursuits and often direct. He does his FTAs (Face Threatening Acts) with redressive action but uses more FTAs without redressive action than he does with Chloe. Most likely, he is able to be more direct (without redressive action) because their social status is similar. He is physically involved from the start and not afraid to appear obsessed with her. As an abuser, Chris decides to shower Nola with compliments and let her know how beautiful she is. Chris and Nola have less difference in social distance and power which gives him the confidence he needs to make his move. Even with his relationship with Chloe, he does not shy away from the risk. He wants to
have money, status, and passionate sex. He does not want to compromise on any of his wants. When Chris finally does begin a real relationship with Nola, he uses a lot of direct dialogue and does the FTA without redressive action. He is impatient and aggressive with Nola, unlike his relationship with Chloe. However, Nola is not afraid to stand up for herself and argue with Chris when she disagrees with him. It is because of how aggressive they both are that the situation leads to murder.

The dynamics between Nola and Chris are very different than those with Chloe because Nola is more aware of the situation. She knows that Chris is married to Chloe when they start an affair. Chris must adjust his strategies because of Nola’s knowledge. He cannot lie about being in a relationship with Chloe, but he lies and manipulates her into thinking that he will leave Chloe eventually and that he is unhappy in his marriage. Unfortunately, Nola begins threatening him to leave his wife and Chris decides that his only option is to kill Nola. This decision is his most obviously abusive moment in the film. Despite his alternative options, he chooses to lessen the treat to his face value by removing Nola from the picture. This way Chloe will never find out about the affair, and Nola will not be mad at him anymore. He will be able to keep the fortune and lifestyle that he is now accustomed to and escape punishment and consequences.

Although Chris’ abuse is often subtle, it is clear he only cares about himself and his desires. He is similar to an abusive partner. Bancroft explains that abusive men do not enter a relationship thinking that they will be violent and degrading to their partner. They enter a relationship thinking that everything will be perfect and easy (111). Chris follows this same pattern. He does not go into either of his relationships thinking that he will eventually kill one of them or even that he will leave one of them. He believes that he can manipulate his way into
having two fully functioning relationships. He has no reason to doubt that he is capable of loving both women and keeping them satisfied.

Third, how can identifying the similarities and differences affect audience’s interpretations of the relationships portrayed? As mentioned previously, both of the women in this film do not receive much sympathy from critics. They are viewed as being just as manipulative as Chris. But through viewing the differences in the two relationships, it is possible to see that Chris behaves like two different people and two different types of an abuser. His abuse comes from his desire for power and control in his relationships and is triggered when he believes that he is losing that power. Both Chloe and Nola are victims of his manipulation. This makes Chloe appear to be obsessed with money and only wanting to change Chris. In reality, Chris is setting up a situation to gain these things from Chloe. Similarly, Nola is manipulated into starting a relationship which is toxic. Chris offers Nola many promises about how much he loves her and that his relationship with Chloe means nothing to him. By viewing the politeness used by Chris, it becomes apparent that these relationships are both manipulative and abusive. Abusive relationships and domestic violence are important issues that media and the film industry need to take seriously. Aggressive/abusive behavior should not be labeled as sexy. Politeness theory can shed light on this topic and bring forward the potential strategies used in manipulation and abuse.
REFERENCES


