Girl Talk Tales, Causal Models, and the Dissertation: Exploring the Topical Contours of Context in Sociology Talk and Text

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Since the early 1980s, composition studies has arrived at a broad consensus that it is important to understand how social contexts relate to the cognitive processes and individual behaviors involved in writing and reading texts, although within this broad consensus are various notions of context and of how contexts relate to processes and texts. Drawing on both structuralist and everyday accounts of discourse and society, composition theory and research have generally conceptualized the contexts of writing in terms of abstract, unified constructs. Whether defined globally (culture, language, history, discourse community, genre, ideological state apparatus) or locally (institutional setting, communicative situation, task demand), context has typically been construed as a static, unified given, something that both frames and governs literate activity.

Sociohistoric theories question such unified constructs, viewing discourse as the concrete, historical, socially mediated actions of individuals (e.g., Bakhtin, *Dialogic* and *Speech Genres*; Becker; Duranti and Goodwin; Lave and Wenger; Lemke; Tannen; Vygotsky; Wertsch). In these approaches to discourse, contexts are dynamic, dialogic, negotiable constructs that participants achieve in interaction by drawing on socially-sedimented and emergent resources. Instead of asking what is the context of a particular communicative action, sociohistoric approaches would ask:

1) What are the practices through which contexts are nominated, displayed, ratified, and contested by particular participants in interaction?

2) How does the emergent situated action of the moment articulate with past and future chains of events, chains which are, in effect, streams of micro- and macro-histories?

How contexts are conceptualized and studied is a key issue in composition studies, particularly in understanding the complex relationships

between discourse, knowledge, and social formations. From a sociohistoric perspective, contexts are in effect emergent, dialogic histories generated as sedimented practices and resources are dynamically employed at a local intersection of multiple histories (personal, interpersonal, institutional, and sociocultural). One way to trace this unfolding interaction of histories is to explore the *special topics* (Aristotle; Miller and Selzer; Perelman) participants employ in talk and text. In this paper, I will illustrate this approach by presenting a case study of topics in the talk and texts of a sociology seminar.

Topics: Connecting Rhetoric to Sociohistoric Approaches
        In Aristotle's rhetoric, the common and special topics were places rhetors could go to generate lines of arguments and to find material for those arguments; topics formed a fixed terrain of established concepts, propositions, and narratives. Miller and Selzer's examination of special topics among transportation engineers decentered and expanded Aristotle's notion in two key ways. First, following the modern rhetorical stance (see Perelman) that rhetoric is ubiquitous, Miller and Selzer treated scientific concepts, which Aristotle had treated as arhetorical first principles, as topics. Second, they formulated a more explicitly multidimensional view of topical terrains, suggesting that the texts they examined were shaped by the intersection or interpenetration of three topical domains:
- the generic—implicit and explicit models and expectations for the form and content of particular types of texts;
- the institutional—concepts, procedures, values, issues, and narratives connected with particular institutional bodies or forums; and
- the disciplinary—concepts, procedures, values, issues, and narratives connected to specific disciplines.

The notion that special topics are associated with particular institutions brings Miller and Selzer's view close to sociohistoric approaches because it clearly situates topics in concrete, local sociohistoric worlds as well as in abstract, unified discursive domains.
        Miller and Selzer's notion of special topics brings rhetoric close to sociohistoric notions of sense (Vygotsky, Wertsch; Wertsch and Minick) and thematic content in speech genres (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*). Sociohistoric theories, however, would suggest further decentering and expansion of topical dimensions as discourse is fully grounded in the concrete, situated activities of people rather than in abstracted terrains.

Concretely situated, topics become dialogic, varying locally with situation, activity, and participants. In other words, topics must be situated in what Bakhtin called speech genres, highly flexible and heterogeneous types of situated discourse (utterance) linked to the varied spheres and differentiated roles of human activity. To take a general example relevant to this paper, the topic of gender might be infused with content from a range of discursive domains, from everyday experiences of gender in particular settings (e.g., a classroom or a doctor's office) to highly theoretical domains like the role of gender in the construction of biological knowledge. The sense of gender as a topic will vary as the speech genre (situation and activity) varies (e.g., a private conversation at a coffee house versus trial testimony in a courtroom). It will also vary according to the persons who are sources and recipients of an utterance: the sense of gender will be shaped by social categorizations (male/female, boss/employee, lawyer/witness) and by individual biography (to use well-known examples, Jane Fonda versus Barbara Bush, Cindy Crawford versus Gloria Steinem, Clarence Thomas versus Jesse Jackson). Rather than imagining gender as a stable location on a single, abstract topical terrain, gender becomes a dynamic network of place-times, generating multiple interpenetrated topical terrains. In this view, topics emerge as indexical expressions linked to social and affective as well as linguistic and propositional contexts. Topics are seen as spaces where affective and conceptual attention might accumulate, a continuum of spaces ranging from widespread, deeply sedimented, well worn sociocultural ruts to highly transient, local and emergent currents in a particular stream of communication.

Connecting Topics to Contexts

How can topics point to contexts? In an earlier ethnographic study, I explored disciplinary discourse in a graduate seminar in second languages education. An analysis of the special topics rehearsed in classroom sessions and course materials revealed a complex array of disciplinary topics, originating in two kinds of spaces. First, the course rehearsed topics like communicative competence, the writing process, cultural schemata, text parsing, foreigner talk, and so on. These special topics represented concepts and issues drawn from particular disciplines (e.g., second language education, linguistics, psychology, and composition studies), that is, from public spaces intertextually constituted by disciplinary publications and cycles of credit. Second, the course rehearsed topics like randomness, validity and reliability of tests,

sample size, connection of hypotheses to measures, and replication. Here the course drew on a different public intertextual space, the apparently transdisciplinary issues of experimental design and analysis.

By examining how these special topics were (or were not) employed by students in their writing and how they were treated by the professor in his written response, I was able to explore how discourses and roles were negotiated in that course. One writing task in the course was a critique of a research article. Some students closely matched prominent course topics in their critiques. For example, in a single paragraph Barbara, a Ph.D. student, noted that a researcher had problems with sample size, randomization, and design (lack of a control group, inadequate observation time) and had failed to provide sufficient information on subjects, experimental conditions, and tests (i.e., reliability and validity). In addition, she questioned the researcher's definition of "communicative competence," arguing that it failed to consider meaning, a key criterion in the field. In his written responses to this critique, the professor underlined these key topics and praised the writer for her analysis in the margins of the paper. However, Pat, another Ph.D. student, offered a critique employing very different topics, drawn from everyday and political discourses (i.e., self-interest; critiques of technocratic society and the decontextualized nature of empirical social sciences). The professor accepted Pat's use of these topics in her critique, displaying agreement in his marginal comments. However, when Pat employed the same kinds of topics for a second writing task (a practice dissertation research proposal), the professor rejected them, asking (in his marginal comments) for her to provide citations to support her claims and details to clarify her research plan. (See Prior for further details of these cases.) These students' use of special topics and the professor's responses to those topics traced not only the multiple, sedimented contexts available to participants, but also pointed to the local negotiation of relationships and the local construction of the discipline.

In analyses of classroom talk, Wertsch has examined how teachers' and students' asymmetrical negotiation of referential content and perspective works to privilege certain sociocultural voices (or discourses or speech genres) over others (see also Wertsch and Minick). For example, Wertsch analyzes how an emergent topic in a conversation (a piece of lava an elementary student brought to class for share-time) fluctuated between multiple discourses as referential content and perspective were negotiated. Over the course of a 41-turn exchange, the

lava appeared as a physical object connected to the personal history and experience of the child, as an object subjected to formal/scientific taxonomies like light-heavy and smooth-rough, as a sign defined in terms of other signs in a dictionary, and as a sign/object subsumed within geological narratives of volcanic activity. In this brief interaction, the teacher introduced the formal, scientific, sign type-sign type exchanges, pushing the students to reconceptualize (and recontextualize) the lava outside of the personal history of the child. Wertsch notes how such microdiscursive exchanges fit into macro-social and historical patterns as the teacher is seen initiating and privileging a particular sociohistoric discourse, the Western "voice of rationality."[1]

These examples from textual and conversational exchanges suggest that topics can trace contexts in two senses. First, topics index the biographical and social histories (or contexts) that, in part, shape emergent interactions. In this sense, topics represent sedimented resources that can be used in communication. Second, topics are dynamic tools used by participants to nominate, sustain, and challenge emergent constructions of context as part of the general activity of managing the intersubjective grounds of meaning, configuring participants' identities and relationships, and fabricating goal-oriented actions.[2]

The Research

The research presented in this paper was undertaken as part of a broader ethnographic study of how writing was cued, produced and responded to in four graduate seminars at a major midwestern university. Data was gathered from multiple sources, including:

1) observation and audiotaping of seminar sessions;
2) collection of students' draft and final texts (often with professors' written responses); and
3) semi-structured and text based interviews with professors and students.

In analyzing and presenting these data, I have sought to integrate multiple research inscriptions (texts, interview accounts, field notes, and classroom transcripts) to produce a situated, documented narrative of literate activity in talk as well as texts.

One of the seminars I entered offered particularly rich data that sharply framed issues of context. *Sociology*, a seminar organized by Professor Elaine West, was a topical offering without a title.[3] It counted toward a departmental requirement for advanced research, but was only

offered pass/fail. The seminar, in fact, appeared to be an institutional extension of other activities. The seven Ph.D. students in the seminar were all employed as research assistants in the Study, a longitudinal survey of high school students and their parents that examined relationships between social and psychological variables. Professor West was the principal investigator of the Study, and her two co-investigators, Professors Lynch and Harris, regularly sat in. Five of the seven students were also West's advisees. At least four had decided to use the Study's data for their dissertations. Three students had already (when the seminar began) been listed as co-authors on one or more of the 15 conference papers or journal articles generated from the Study. The salience of these other contexts (the Study, the departmental program, and disciplinary forums) was reflected in the fact that West, Lynch, Harris, and five of the students had met biweekly as an unofficial seminar the previous two quarters.

The seminar provided a forum for the students to present and get responses to their individual projects, all of which used the Study's data. As an intact research team with an established agenda, the seminar opened with West suggesting that students should produce more developed versions of the work they had started the previous two quarters and reviewing what students planned to present. After this first meeting, most sessions were devoted to discussion of one student's written work and research. In the seminar, students presented drafts (some rough, some near completion) of dissertation prospectuses, preliminary examinations, conference papers, technical reports, and journal articles. Discussions focused on substantive issues of theory and research design as well as the texts themselves.

To explore the topical contours of contexts in *Sociology*, this paper will focus on one case, a dissertation prospectus written by a student I call Sean. I chose Sean's case for two reasons. First, the data I collected on it were particularly complete. The data presented in this paper are drawn from a corpus of materials consisting of:
  1) six drafts of Sean's prospectus, including the final version;
  2) a transcript of a two-hour seminar discussion of his draft
      prospectus (the raw data is over 20,000 "words" long);
  3) semi-structured and text-based interviews with Sean, in which
      the prospectus and related work are discussed; and
  4) semi-structured and text-based interviews with Elaine West
      (Sean's employer/advisor/professor), in which his prospectus
      and other work are discussed.

Second, as I analyzed how Sean presented his draft prospectus, how it was negotiated in the seminar conversation, and how it was finally revised and implemented, I was struck by the topical and contextual heterogeneity I found, and especially by the differences between the topics invoked in interviews and seminar talk and the topics displayed in Sean's texts. In this paper, I examine how contexts and contextualizations were implicated in the negotiation of Sean's prospectus by tracing three key, interwoven topical threads in this microhistory of disciplinary response and revision: *girl talk tales*, *causal models,* and *the dissertation.*

Negotiating Sean's Dissertation Prospectus: A Microhistory of Topical Trajectories

Sean was the most advanced graduate student in the Study/ seminar. As the Manager of Data Analysis, Sean had played a key role in the Study, a role reflected in his co-authorship on ten of the sixteen articles or conference papers the Study had generated over a two-year period, a total that placed him second only to Professor/Principal Investigator Elaine West (fifteen out of sixteen) and just ahead of Professor/Co-Investigator David Lynch (seven out of sixteen).   In addition to several third and fourth authorships, Sean had first authorship on one conference paper that had been submitted to a refereed journal for publication and second authorship on four other papers (at least one of which had been submitted for publication).

Figure 1 provides three accounts of how Sean selected depression as the issue for his dissertation. (See Appendix A for conversational transcription conventions.) Much as Gilbert and Mulkay found in their discourse analyses of scientific accounts, Sean's interviews point to more local, personal, contingent influences (his work in the Study, variables available in the Study's data, his need for a dissertation topic), while the textualized account in his prospectus points more to the public contexts of the discipline, particularly the professional literatures of sociology and psychology (his central citation is his own preliminary examination, a 64-page document that cited 132 sources). Much as Knorr-Cetina found in her study of how research articles on plant proteins related to laboratory work, Sean's text appears to reverse history. In the interviews, the Study appears to be the origin of the research, institutionally providing Sean with *depression* as a researchable issue, while in the text it appears that the literature is the origin that has prompted and authorized *depression*.

1) Interview #1

...I've been working on this project for about 2 1/2 years as the data analyst and **I had to come up with a dissertation area and the study was designed to um investigate the effects of adolescent work experience on psychological functioning and I knew that there were 5 main indicators of psychological functioning and I just decided to pick one of them and that would be my dissertation topic,** ok, ...So anyway I just said you know "I'm interested in depression." Well, as part of the project we had a prototypic analysis, it's a standard way we have of looking at each of the 5 outcomes, so Elaine just said, "Well, good, why don't you start the prototypic analysis on depression"

[asked if he had an initial interest in depression]

...i**t was more of looking at the five variables and deciding what I was going to do.** Basically the three biggies as far as I could see were self-esteem, self-efficacy, and depression. **Self-esteem I know first hand was just a very complicated literature, it's gigantic, and there are some very serious complications with the whole idea of self-esteem, so I didn't want to get into that**...and also there's a lot of good work that's been done on self-esteem, so it would be difficult for me to make a contribution in that area, not only in terms of getting on top of the huge literature, trying to circumvent the fundamental problems, but also in trying to come up with something new and that you know people would be interested in, very difficult variable to work with I think. **Self-efficacy was actually a very good variable, but someone already took it, ... Professor Lynch, he already had self-esteem, er self-efficacy, and so I felt as though depression would be my best shot....**

2) Draft prospectus: Introductions

      The preliminary examination was suggestive of several profitable areas of research into adolescent depressed mood. Because my current research has focused on adolescent work experiences and depressed mood, I have chosen to pursue a project which both reflects this interest and extends the findings to date. The hypotheses to be explored by this dissertation concern how social support from different sources affects the relationship between work characteristics, self-concept, and depressive affect; emphasis is especially placed on gender differences.

      These expectations will be further specified in the first section of this prospectus. The second section considers issues relating to operationalization and analytic strategy, which necessarily entails discussion of the data to be used. The final part of this prospectus considers the specific contributions that can be made by this dissertation, as well as limitations.

I. Formulation of the Hypotheses

      The central focus of this dissertation is the examination of how social support from various domains impacts on the relationship between work characteristics and depressed mood among adolescents. **A literature search failed to identify any research, using adolescent samples, which has examined the role of social support in the workplace.**

      Yet there is reason to believe that social support may play an important role in the adolescent workplace. **As indicated in the preliminary,** adolescents draw on social supports from various domains of involvement; indeed, adolescent mood and self-concept are quite responsive to social support. **Previous research** has also indicated that features of adolescent work, including stressors, significantly predict variation in depressed mood. Among adults, indicators of social support have been found to lessen the effect of depress-ogenic qualities of the workplace. Thus, **several pieces of evidence from adolescents and the literature on adults** both suggest that social support may be integral to models depicting the relationship between adolescent work experiences and depressed mood.

Figure 1: Accounts of Sean's dissertation in talk and text

In Sean's interviews, his texts, and, as we will soon see, the seminar talk, the dissertation is topicalized. However, while the dissertation appears to be a marginal, backgrounded topic in his texts, it assumes a more central role in the talk. For Sean, the dissertation is a multiply charged topic, a contextual confluence tied not only to projected research and writing and departmental evaluations (his up-coming prospectus meeting; his dissertation defense), but also to his work in the Study, which is the source of his data; to interpersonal relationships, particularly the key relationships with Lynch and West; and finally to career plans (such as the fact that he has just accepted a position and must successfully defend his dissertation within six months). Thus, the first topical thread we encounter is *the dissertation*.

Seminar/Study Participants attending
Elaine West: professor of record, Principal Investigator of the Study, advisor to Sean, member of Sean's prospectus committee.
David Lynch: professor sitting in on seminar, Co-investigator of the Study, chair of Sean's prospectus committee.
Sean: ABD Ph.D. student, Data Analyst for 2 1/2 years, West's advisee.
Thomas: Ph.D. student, data coder for the Study, not West's advisee.
Moira: Ph.D. student, Data Collection Manager for the Study, West's advisee.
Linda: Ph.D. Student, data coder for the Study, West's advisee.

Sean's hypotheses from the text of his draft dissertation prospectus	**Sean's hypotheses from the text of his final dissertation prospectus**
(1) Girls will utilize social support more than boys.	(1) Girls will utlize more social support than boys
(2) Girls will be more responsive to expressive social support than boys.	(2) Girls will be more responsive to expressive social support than boys.
(3) Boys will be more responsive to instrumental social support than girls.	(3) Boys will be more responsive to instrumental social support than girls.
(4) Expressive social support will have negative implications for depressed mood especially among girls; among females, these effects will be more pronounced among same-sex dyads.	(4) The negative, causal relation-ship between instrumental support and depressed mood for boys will be stronger than the negative, causal relationship between ex-pressive social support and de-pressed mood for girls.
(5) Instrumental support will have positive implications for negative mood, especially for boys.	(5) The difference between the magnitude of the negative causal relationship between expressive social support and depressed mood for boys and the magnitude of the negative, causal relationship be-tween instrumental social support and depressed mood will be negli-gible.
(6) Level of depressed mood will affect subsequent, perceived social support.	
(7) Different sources of social support will have differential influence; support from parents, teachers, peers and work supervisors will be examined.	

Figure 2: Seminar participants and Sean's hypotheses

As the seminar discussion of Sean's draft prospectus began, Professor West suggested discussing first conceptual, then measurement, and finally analytic issues. Conceptual issues essentially referred to the hypotheses and their justification. Figure 2 provides a list of participants to refer to as extracts from the seminar discussion of Sean's prospectus are provided and then displays the hypotheses from Sean's draft prospectus on the left and his final prospectus on the right. As the changed hypotheses suggest, conceptual issues were a central and contentious focus of the seminar conversation: after two hours of seminar talk, only the first three hypotheses emerged intact. Hypotheses four and five had undergone major revisions, and six and seven had been dropped.

In the seminar, Sean began by reviewing his preliminary examination, saying that the key issue he had identified in the prelim was: Why do adolescent girls (and women) suffer from greater depressed mood than adolescent boys (and men)? Arguing that the literature suggests that girls and boys occupy basically the same structural positions in society and that both share the same basic human information processing system, Sean concluded that the differences in depressed mood might come from gender-related differences in the contents of thought, what he called "the sense-making aspects of the gender role identity." After Sean had reviewed this argument, West prompted him to discuss his specific hypotheses.

Figure 3 provides examples of Sean's arguments from his seminar talk and from his draft text. Episode 1 presents Sean's reasoning for his first hypothesis. His depiction of girls as "more emotional" (lines 7) and his immediate self-repair (lines 7-10) foreshadow what is to come as participants appear to draw on everyday and specialized discourses to debate Sean's hypotheses. In Episode 2 in Figure 3, Sean presents the core of his argument for hypothesis 4 in a series of truncated narratives. In lines 13-14, he introduces the issue as "what happens when girls get together and engage in social support," a double-voiced topic, a hybrid construction (Bakhtin, *Dialogic*) combining the everyday world of *girls getting together* and the disciplinary world of *engaging in social support*. Lines 17-20 present the first premise in Sean's argument, and his basic story of girl talk. Lines 22-24 present the second premise, a *someone* story depicting the interpersonal theory of depression. Lines 24-29 then represent a narrative conclusion drawn from the two narrative premises, Sean's combined tale of how girls' talk leads to girls' depression. Sean's tale of girl talk is immediately challenged by

Thomas; however, before turning to the challenges (many of which are framed in counter-narratives of girl talk), I would point to the way Sean presented the same argument in the draft prospectus. In the

Seminar Episode 1

1   Sean: ...um just picking up on the idea of the differences
2   in the sense making aspect of gender roles, because girls are more-
3   are thought to be more communal and social support is
4   inherently a communal phenomenon, the first hypothesis then
5   that girls will utilize more social support than boys, um,
6   also though, part of the- the sense making difference is
7   that **girls are more uh emotional, [.5 s] and, um, [1.5 s] uh**
8   **ex- expressive is a better word,**
9   **boys have emotions, just different types of emotions, um, [.5 s]**
10   **that they're more expressive and so uh** social support in the prelim is
11   conceptualized as being either expressive or instrumental,

Seminar Episode 2

12   Sean: [talking] ....hypothesis 4 is the most controversial one, um
13   and it's based on some speculation about uh **what happens**
14   **when girls get together and they engage in social support**,
15   expressive social support, and it- it's thought that-
16   it's argued that, there's a lot of evidence that
17   girls ruminate more than boys do and that **if they get together**
18   **and engage in expressive social support**
19   **then the content of that is going to be, it's going to be like**
20   **vocal rumination, it's going to be very negative,** and then there's um
21   also an interpersonal theory of depression that says that
22   **when someone expresses negativity, the other person is much more apt**
23   **to deny its legitimacy, which increases the seriousness**
24   **of the person's negativity** and so, **when you get two girls together**
25   **engaging in expressive social support, uh one is going to express**
26   **some negative things, they're going to ruminate out loud,**
27   **the other one is likely to deny that, that those feelings are**
28   **legitimate in some way, and that could increase the negativity of**
29   **that person**, but=

Draft of the dissertation prospectus

1   These relationships could explain gender differences in the process
2   by which adolescent depressed mood is determined. **Research suggests**
3   **that females internalize their problems and ruminate more than males**,
4   who engage in distractions and externalizing behaviors (Nolen-Hoeksema,
5   1987; Conway et al., 1990; Patterson and McCubbin, 1987; and see fn. #7
6   in preliminary). **For females the affective quality of expressive social**
7   **support will tend to be negative, reflecting this rumination.** Coyne's
8   (1976) interpersonal theory of depression further suggests that **expressions**
9   **of negative affect will tend to be rebuffed, as not legitimate feelings**.
10   This denial enhances negative mood.[1]

[*footnote at the bottom of same page*]
11   (1) **Thus, ego (seeking support) expresses negative feelings.** Expressive
12   social support becomes a forum for further rumination.**Yet alter, from**
13   **whom support is elicited, disconfirms ego's feelings. This denial leads**
14   **to greater negativity. This dynamic is most pronounced in a female**
15   **dyad engaged in expressive social support.** In such cases, **alter not only**
16   **negates ego's expressions, but imbues the exchange with her own**
17   **negativity as well.**

Figure 3: Why are girls more depressed?
Sean's argument in talk and text

textualized support for hypothesis 4, Sean cites the literature more prominently and also deploys his argument in terms of abstract, synchronic relationships between variables rather than narratives of girls talking, the only exception being the somewhat obscure, footnoted narrative (lines 11-17) of *ego* and *alter* that is explaining the interpersonal theory of depression. I suggest that Sean's tale of girl talk and the round of conflicting stories that it generates are strongly double-voiced narratives, connected intertextually to both everyday sociocultural stereotypes and disciplinary discourses of gender. *How girls talk*, in any case, becomes a second key topical thread in this seminar conversation.

Figure 4 presents two challenges to Sean's arguments for his fourth hypothesis; both are stated primarily as counter-narratives. In

Seminar Episode 4 : Thomas challenges Sean's story
1   Thomas: **I mean, that doesn't seem to make sense to me.** I mean, yes,
2   I expect that- that **girls are getting together** and ex- and **engaging in**
3   **expressive support**, but **I wouldn't expect** that they would-that they would
4   um [1s] dismiss um **negative feelings**
5   Sean: What would you **expect**?
6   Thomas: **I would expect the opposite**
7   Sean: /**why**?/
8   Thomas: /because/ I would **expect** that they would be getting together in- uh
9   **to listen to each other's feelings** and not necessarily just dismissing it,
10   as I would **expect** boys to do that, because they **would try to move away**
11   **from emotion**, [1 s] to well, **"Ok, you have- you have this problem**
12   **now what can you do about it"** whereas I think girls are
13   much more likely to be comfortable...

Seminar Episode 5: West challenges Sean's story
14   West: Can I say something? When I read the first version of this,
15   I suggested that maybe this one be-be dropped /'cause/=
16   Lynch: /yeah/
17   West: =it seems like **the critical issue is what's happening**
18   **in these interchanges** and if in fact it does generate kind of you know [1 s]
19   **mutual gloom and /negativity/**
20   Sean: /umhm/
21   West: **you know you tell me about your problems, and that makes me**
22   **more depressed and I'll tell you about mine, and you'll get more**
23   **depressed and then I'll say "I'm depressed" and you'll say [laughing]**
24   **"there's no reason to be you know"**
    [8 seconds of West and others laughing; several short fragmented voices]
25   West: and and you know but- but that may not happen, and then you know
26   in a lot of cases um, you know, **people do want to sort of let off steam**,
27   and that is cathartic and uh- but we have no idea **what's happening**
28   **in these dyads**,
29   Sean: uh, well, we have, we- we can look at it to some degree, [1 s] so
30   West: well, well you can try it, but I think that of all your **hypotheses**,
31   this is the one that's really **the most controversial** and also the one
32   that's **least amenable to test in the kinds of data that we actually have**

Figure 4: Counter-narratives:
Challenging Sean's story of girl talk

Episode 4, which immediately follows Episode 3, Thomas challenges Sean's tale of girl talk, stating that it "doesn't seem to make sense" (line 1) and that he would "expect the opposite" (line 6). Thomas first intertextually echoes Sean's double-voiced formulation, agreeing (in lines 2-3) that *girls get together* and *engage in social support*; however, as he contests Sean's story of denial, his naming of the topic shifts toward everyday discourse: "negative feelings" (line 4), "feelings" (line 9), and then "emotion" (line 11). Finally, animating the voice of a boy presented with a problem (lines 11-12), Thomas presents a fragment of *constructed dialogue*, a conversational device that Tannen (1989) argues is intended to enhance listener involvement.

It is interesting that Thomas simply elaborates on his expectations in response to Sean's question ("Why?" line 7). My question is: Why does Thomas' story represent a legitimate, even effective challenge? Thomas does not cite sociological literature, research or theory; he simply restates his expectations, yet Sean's response to Thomas' challenge was essentially to concede the point. Recalling a technical distinction between clinical depression, which the interpersonal theory addressed, and everyday depressed mood (or depressive affect), which the Study's data queried, Sean conceded that denial might not make sense in discussing depressed mood.

After his concession on denial, Sean went on to reaffirm that the basic linkage between expressive social support, rumination, and negativity still held. David Lynch, the professor who would chair Sean's upcoming prospectus committee, then entered the conversation. Arguing that Sean needed some empirical support for his claim, Lynch concluded that "it" should either be substantiated or dropped (though whether he was referring to just denial or hypothesis 4 as a whole was not clear).

Elaine West, the principal investigator and Sean's advisor, then enters the conversation with her comments in Episode 5 of Figure 4. West identifies the central issues as "what's happening in these interchanges" (lines 17-18). West then shifts into a more informal, everyday discourse, signalled first by her decidedly non-technical term "mutual gloom" (line 19) and strengthened by the sing-song prosody of lines 21-24 ("you tell me" and "I'll tell you" and so on). Climaxing in a constructed dialogue carried on laughter, West's ironic retelling of Sean's story is punctuated with 8 seconds of loud laughter and multiple voices, after which West regains the floor to suggest that expressive

support may allow "people" to "let off steam" (line 26).

At the end of Episode 5, West returns to disciplinary topics. In lines 27-28, referring back to the critical issue identified in lines 17-18, West suggests that the data does not provide evidence of what happens "in these dyads." In lines 31-32, she assesses hypothesis 4 as "the most controversial" and (again) the "least amenable to test in the kinds of data" the Study collected. With these comments, West has opened up the third key topical thread, the issue of *causal models and measurement.*

From this point on, the extended debate over Sean's fourth hypothesis bounces back and forth between two main topical threads, *tales of girl talk* and discussions of *causal modelling*, while the third topical thread, *the dissertation*, is a powerful subtext, only occasionally surfacing. Here I should highlight two key patterns in the negotiation of these topical contours. First, the conversation is proceeding in a multidimensional space where topics may suddenly jump from one discursive surface to another or may in a sense be suspended between surfaces, dialogically invested with multiple senses. Second, words (lexical selection) appear to play a key role in nominating, sustaining, and contesting these topical terrains. For example, the topic of girl talk appears to invoke multiple discourses in this conversation. Sean attempts to evoke girl talk as a variable in an abstract disciplinary domain, as a potential mechanism connecting depressed mood to social support. However, Thomas, West, and Lynch contextualize Sean's argument in more concrete domains. All three refer to girl talk as the concrete interactions of girls. West and Lynch also contextualize Sean's argument in terms of the concrete measures of the Study, the questionnaire items that underlie Sean's psychological and social constructs. In other words, girl talk is a discursive shifter in a dialogically contested space, and the words participants select work to reconfigure the topics and the space. Are girls "emotional" or "expressive?" Do girls "engage in expressive social support" or do "I say, 'I'm depressed.'" In short, the sedimented senses of words (the different discourses they invoke) make them key forces in a dynamic representational conflict over how to contextualize Sean's hypotheses.

Responding to West's comments, Sean argues in Episode 6 (Figure 5) that his use of the Study's measures for his model does make sense. His argument seems to work on three levels. First, Sean is making a theoretical point about modelling, arguing that because linkages between his variables are being estimated in the Study's

statistical model, the meaning of those linkages should be considered. Second, the theoretical argument seems to have everyday overtones of opportunity and waste ("We have it, shouldn't we use it?"). Finally, Sean constructs a narrative of scientific activity (cf. Myers). With almost kaleidoscopic deixis (e.g., the varied uses of "I," "you," and "we" in lines 4-7), Sean's tale of pursuing unpopular hypotheses in the face of skepticism (animated in line 4) appears to be an appeal for identification and solidarity. Sean's narrative of science seems to be deployed to reestablish the social-discursive fabric of science that became frayed in West's parody of his story and the laughter that followed.

After Sean's narrative, West continues (in Episode 7) to question Sean's hypothesis; however, Sean's topical nominations apparently rekeyed the conversational context, at least for a time. The topics shift to disciplinary issues (relations between measures and hypotheses, the

Seminar Episode 6: Sean shifts to modelling
1   Sean: ... that the way I see it, I- ih, um you know um [.5 s] **you want**
2   **to try to specify the model as fully as possible** and you're never able
3   to fully test any model especially using secondary data, so just, I-
4   **the argument that "well this is speculative and you can't test it that well."**
5   **well, you can say that about many many things,but we can follow it up**
6   **somewhat, so why not?** particularly given, I think, that what we're talking
7   about here when a hypothesis is offered, what you're saying is, "I think that's
8   there's a relationship here that should be looked at," now when you look
9   at the model that's going to be specified, you see that **whether or not**
10   **we pay attention to this hypothesis or not, those linkages will be estimated**
11   **in the models,** so what you're really talking about is, **should we,** you know,
12   **look at that number and- and try to give substantive meaning to it or not?**

Seminar Episode 7: West questions Sean's models and measures
13   West: /but the problem is/ that **if you set forth the hypothesis and**
14   **your measures aren't very good, if you don't confirm your hypothesis,**
15   **you don't know if it's because your measures or the hypothesis is wrong,**
16   so so you know, not that it hurts to look at anything, /uh/
17   Sean: /yeah/
18   West: **to uh you know not really develop it as a major contribution and-**
19   Sean: yeah
20   West: **of, you know, of this study** because I think what's (clear you're)
21   going to find is that **closeness and you know /these/**=
22   Sean: /**closeness**/ [sotto voce]
23   West: =variables will have **positive effects** on lots of outcomes, just like
24   they always seem to do in the **literature**, and uh and it could be that it's
25   because the **literatur**e is right, that **warmth** in parent-child relationships
26   you know is very important and you know **this keeps coming up** [laughing]
27   as- as important, then **our measures** probably tap **warmth** here, [laughing]
28   they're **the same measures** that are used in **many other studies** that have
29   found**positive relationships** between **closeness** in both boys' and girls' uh
30   outcomes now if **we had /more/**=
31   Sean: /yeah/
32   West: =**finely tuned measures that really got into the kinds**
33   **of interactional dynamics that you're talking about we might find um**
34   **you know the negative effects of social support**

Figure 5: Of measures and models and many things

literature, the nature of the Study's variables), and the conversational organization and tone shift to a serious, well-regulated two-party exchange. West repeatedly mentions "measures" in general (lines 14, 15, 27, 28, 32) and refers to the Study's measures, which Sean has glossed as indicators of social support, as measures of "closeness" (lines 21, 29) and "warmth" (lines 25, 27). She alludes directly and indirectly to the literature on the measures (lines 24, 25, 26, 28) and characterizes the outcomes associated with them as "positive" (lines 23, 29). Finally, she contrasts this discussion of measures with Sean's, representing (in lines 32-33) Sean's story as one of "finely tuned measures ... of interactional dynamics" and emphasizing the contrary nature of his negative expectations for outcomes. Contextually, it is important to recall that West established the measures and to note that the variables Sean has been describing as "social support" are derived from question-naire items like, "How close do you feel to your best friend of the opposite sex?" As this stretch of talk continued, Sean's turns continued to be mostly short, although at one point he attempted to defend his use of the Study's measures. When Sean finally appeared to agree that his use of the measures was problematic, the topical subtext of the disser-tation resurfaced as West noted that "the whole thing doesn't stand or fall on that particular hypothesis."

This dialogue between West and Sean ended equivocally as David Lynch re-entered the conversation. Lynch and Sean engaged in a dialogue over 50 turns, divided into three main sections. In the first 30 rapidly exchanged turns, Lynch and Sean revisited the issue of Sean's measures. Seconding West's argument, Lynch first suggested that Sean's "story has to do with interactions among girls as the expressive interaction; we don't have any measures of that." When Sean pointed to the questionnaire items he had planned to use as measures (apparently reversing his agreement with West five short turns earlier), Lynch insisted that they were not measures of interaction, pointing out that they did not get into the quality or amount of interaction or in some cases even say much about who was interacting.

In Episode 8 (Figure 6) Lynch disagrees with Sean's argument on modelling from Episode 6 (Figure 5). In a kind of mini-lecture, Lynch reviews basic concepts of causal modelling (lines 1-14), thus, continu-ing the disciplinary conversation West and Sean had established. However, at the end of his remarks (the 39th turn of this stretch, lines 16-19), Lynch renominates the topical thread of girl talk and begins to

Seminar Episode 8: Lynch on models and girl talk
1   Lynch: **in anoth- I think there's a sli- a little misperception of modeling**
2   **here too, I listen to your s- your comments on- that is, you're right**
3   **the numbers are out there,** but by that we mean the correlations are
4   out there, the question is what do you do with those, if you take uh say (aw)
5   the simplistic but nice little typology, we have causal and non-causal aspects,
6   and inside the causal we have direct and indirect effects, well if we don't-
7   **if we don't choose to look at this, it doesn't mean we have to put it**
8   **in a causal path, we just leave in a non-causal path, it's an error term,**
9   **or it's non-causal**=
10   Sean: =umhm=
11   Lynch: =**association**, so even if it's out there, **you're right in a sense that,**
12   **yes, it's part of the correlation matrix, but that doesn't mean**
13   **we have to look at it, because if we can't specify the process, (then we'd**
14   **say) we may misspecify the process (ok?), we'll get faulty /conclusions/**
15   Sean: /yeah/ yeah I see your point
16   Lynch: and uh, [2 s] but- b**ut my main count[er] on that,** this is more in
17   terms of the measurement, I- I- I agree, **I also have to think of why-**
18   **why would someone— if you're if you're in this dyad or relationship**
19   **or just an expressive relationship like this— why would you stay?**
20   **why would you react that way, knowing, after some experience doing this,**
21   **that in fact these things deteriorate, that would argue for a woman**
22   **not being in situations like that,** and I think- which is Thomas' /(count)[er]/

Figure 6: From models back to girl talk

question its reasonableness, particularly focusing on the motivations of
Sean's characters. His question "Why would you stay?" in line 19
invokes powerful, long-standing cultural notions connecting motiva-
tion to probable action. Such notions can be found in Aristotle's
Rhetoric and their continuing power was illustrated some time after this
session when the same question was repeatedly directed at Anita Hill in
her testimony against then Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas.
It is also worth noting that in this narrative, as in several others that
contested Sean's story, Lynch offers another kind of recontextualization,
maturing the characters from *girls* to *women* (line 21).

After a short discussion of what the literature says about social
support, the three topical threads converge in Episode 9 (Figure 7).
Lynch and Sean (lines 5-11) jointly construct the problematic relation-
ship between Sean's models and the Study's measures. Sean concludes
in line 11 that he will drop "that" (presumably referring to the hypoth-
esis). At this point, West offers an alternative to dropping the hypothesis
(lines 15-20), suggesting for the first time that a subset of girls may fit
Sean's story. Sean agrees that West's alternative may be the way to test
his hypothesis, but concludes "not with the dissertation" (line 22). Thus,
in this short series of exchanges, the three topical threads converge as
Sean moves to jettison hypothesis four.

Seminar Episode 9: Sean tries to drop his hypothesis
1   Lynch: /I-[clears throat]/ I think you might be able to tighten
2   the theoretical stance to make the point, but I don't think there's- you know,
3   there's- it's going to be real tough testing with anything here
4   Sean: yeah=
5   Lynch: =**I think the more you tighten up the idea, the less well**
6   **any of our data is /going (to)/=**
7   Sean: /yeah/
8   Lynch: =**substantiate it**=
9   Sean: =**because it's essentially an interactive**=
10   Lynch: =yeah=
11   Sean: =**type of**- yeah, **I think we'll just drop that** [laughing]
12   West: oh, you know, what he might do is to=
13   Lynch: =the first part is still fine
14   Sean: yeah, good
15   West: you know I mean **in your analysis you could separate**
16   **the cases ( ) and separate out the cases who really seem to be quite**
17   **depressed and see if for them the closeness has a (more) negative effect**,
18   because then that might indicate that they're, you know, they're engaging in
19   that kind of depressive uh rumination and interaction, I mean that's what-
20   that's kind of indirect and it's uh by implication and it's not as=
21   Sean: =well I think but uh yeah, **that would be the- maybe a way to do**
22   **it, but not with the dissertation**

Figure 7: Hypothesis 4 is dropped. Or is it?

Although the hypothesis had apparently been dropped, Thomas next reentered the conversation to raise a "theoretical issue." Thomas asked Sean: "Are you saying that the ways girls support each other is dysfunctional, the ways boys support each other is more functional?" Sean first answered "no," but by line 4 in Episode 10 (Figure 8), he has apparently talked himself into accepting Thomas' characterization of his argument. In his question, Thomas again renamed the topic, switching from Sean's use of the abstract, agentless terms "expressive and instrumental social support" to the concrete terms "the way boys (girls) support each other." This renaming, combined with his use of the term "dysfunctional" (as in "dysfunctional families") again seemed to shift the conversation toward everyday discourse.

Sean's acceptance of Thomas' representation of hypothesis four as suggesting that girls' social support is "dysfunctional" triggers more questions and is shortly followed by another intense round of narratives and counter-narratives of girl talk. However, first West reenters the conversation to offer another alternative to hypothesis four (which had, remember, apparently been dropped). In Episode 10 (Figure 8) from lines 7-11, West begins to reformulate hypothesis four, suggesting that support is beneficial for boys and girls, but is somewhat less beneficial for girls because some girls are enacting Sean's story of mutually reinforcing rumination. Sean asks how to state this hypothesis and then

Seminar Episode 10: Sean gets a new hypothesis
1 Sean: ... **we should assume that social support has positive effect**- that
2 would explain hypothesis 5, **but in the case of girls it doesn't because it's-**
3 **because it's expressive** it's- and because they ruminate,
4 **it's just another occasion for them to ruminate and so it's dysfunctional**
5 West: well maybe /you could/
6 Thomas: /that so-/ go ahead
7 West: now **maybe you (could) state this in a somewhat weaker form**,
8 and to **just say** that you would expect that **the uh positive implications of**
9 **social support or uh (effect)would be weaker- would be less for girls**
10 **than for boys because some girls may be engaging in these processes**
11 **that you don't- you don't expect so much for boys**
12 Sean: how do you- the positive aspects of expressive support will be
13 greater,
14 West: no /what you say is/=
15 Sean: /will be less for/
16 West: =is that- is that, you know, **you're expecting (that) social support**
17 **will have a negative effect on depressive affect, you could say that**
18 **that negative effect would be stronger for boys than for girls**

Figure 8: Girl talk reconsidered

West restates it (lines 16-18), shifting from the everyday use of "negative" as "bad" that Sean had employed in his draft hypotheses to a more technical, mathematical phrasing in which "negative" means numerically lower. As can be seen in the final version of hypothesis four (see Figure 9), a somewhat more elaborated version of West's reformulation becomes the final word in Sean's revision of his prospectus. The debate over this hypothesis continued for some time (with girl talk the primary thread and modelling a secondary one), but we will leave it at this point.

Figure 9 provides a side-by-side comparison of hypotheses four and five and their support in the draft and final versions of the dissertation prospectus. The final prospectus was rewritten with each hypothesis or pair of hypotheses stated, followed by a paragraph or two justifying the hypothesis (a structure Lynch proposed later in the conversation). Having read selections from the transcript of the seminar response, you can see the major effects it had on both Sean's formulations of hypotheses four and five and on their accompanying support. The bold print text, indicating revision, shows that little remains of the draft text (basically two sentences, Draft, lines 14-25; Final, lines 25-35).

The first effect seen in Figure 9 is the reversal of hypothesis four. The original hypothesis had suggested that expressive support was bad, increasing girls' depressive affect; the revised hypothesis suggests that it is good, decreasing their depressive affect, although this decrease is less than the decrease instrumental support provides for boys (the

(Areas of revision are marked in bold to show what was dropped or changed.)

[Hypotheses 4 and 5 from page 8 of Sean's draft prospectus, excerpted from a paragraph in which all seven were listed.]

1 **(4) Expressive social support will**
2 **have negative implications for**
3 **depressed mood, especially among**
4 **girls; among females, these**
5 **effects will be more pronounced**
6 **among same-sex dyads.**
7 **(5) Instrumental support will**
8 **have positive implications for neg-**
9 **ative mood, especially for boys.**

[Support for hypotheses 4 and 5 was found on pages 5 and 6 of the draft prospectus, starting with the second paragraph of a section headed "The Subjective Appraisal of Support."]

10 These relationships could ex-
11 **plain gender differences in the**
12 **process by which adolescent**
13 **depressed mood is determined.**
14 Research suggests that females
15 internalize their problems and
16 ruminate more than males, who
17 engage in distractions and
18 externalizing behaviors (Nolen-
19 Hoeksema, 1987; Conway et al.,
20 1990; Patterson and McCubbin,
21 1987; and see fn. #7 in preliminary).
22 For females the affective quality of
23 expressive social support will **tend**
24 **to** be negative, reflecting this
25 rumination. **Coyne's (1976) inter-**
26 **personal theory of depression**
27 **further suggests that expressions**
28 **of negative affect will tend to be**
29 **rebuffed, as not legitimate feel-**
30 **ings. This denial enhances neg-**
31 **ative mood.[1]**
32 **In developing an instrument to**
33 **assess adolescent coping (A-**
34 **COPE, Adolescent Coping**
35 **Orientations for Problem Exper-**
36 **iences), J. Patterson and**
37 **McCubbin (1987) present data**
38 **which bears on this argument.**
39 **"Developing social support," a six**
40 **item factor, five of**
[footnote at bottom of same page]
41 **(1) Thus, ego (seeking support)**
42 **expresses negative feelings.**
43 **Expressive social support be-**
44 **comes a forum for further**
45 **rumination. Yet alter, from**

[Hypotheses 4 and 5 with accompanying support as presented on pages 4 to 6 in Sean's final prospectus.]

1 **(4) The negative, causal relation-**
2 **ship between instrumental support**
3 **and depressed mood for boys will**
4 **be stronger than the negative,**
5 **causal relationship between ex-**
6 **pressive social support and de-**
7 **pressed mood for girls.**
8 **(5) The difference between the**
9 **magnitude of the negative causal**
10 **relationship between expressive**
11 **social support and depressed mood**
12 **for boys and the magnitude of the**
13 **negative, causal relationship be-**
14 **tween instrumental social support**
15 **and depressed mood will be**
16 **negligible.**

(In Sean's final prospectus, support for hypotheses 4 and 5 was presented in the two paragraphs immediately following the two hypotheses.]

17 These hypotheses acknowledge
18 **the often observed, negative re-**
19 **lationship between social support**
20 **and depressed mood (e.g.,**
21 **Friedrich et. al., 1988; Cohen et.**
22 **al., 1985; Dean and Ensel, 1983).**
23 **However, the salutory effect is**
24 **greater for boys than girls.**
25 Research suggests that females
26 internalize their problems and
27 ruminate more than males, who en-
28 gage in distracting and externalizing
29 behaviors (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987;
30 Conway et. al., 1990; Patterson and
31 McCubbin, 1987; and see fn. #7 in
32 preliminary). For females the
33 affective quality of expressive social
34 support will **sometimes** be negative,
35 reflecting this rumination. **While**
36 **such rumination could be bene-**
37 **ficial, operating as a catharitic**
38 **release, it could also contribute to**
39 **further rumintion, which would**
40 **detract from its beneficial effect.**
41 **The instrumental support received**
42 **by boys assists them in changing or**
43 **reacting to their stressful cir-**
44 **cumstances. Hypothesis 5 reflects**
45 **the speculation that the less-salient**
46 **type of social support will have**
47 **roughly the same effect between**
48 **the genders.**
49 Thus the proposed model posits

46   whom support is elicited, dis-
47   confirms ego's feelings. This
48   denial leads to greater negativity.
49   This dynamic is most pronounced
50   in a female dyad engaged in
51   expressive social support. In such
52   cases, alter not only negates ego's
53   expressions, but imbues the
54   exchange with her own negativity
55   as well.
[page break to page 6]
56   which reflect expressivity (e.g.,
57   "talk to friend about how they
58   feel"), was positively correlated
59   with cigarette, beer, wine and
60   marijuana use among girls, but
61   not boys. Similar results were
62   obtained for two other factors,
63   "Ventilating feelings" and
64   "Investing in close friends," for
65   both boys and girls. These
66   correlational patterns, plus some
67   regressions, lead the authors to
68   conclude that, particularly for
69   girls, coping which involves
70   investing in close friends,
71   ventilating feelings, and de-
72   veloping social support facilitates
73   substance use.

50   that: the protective effect of social
51   support is greater for boys than
52   girls; and the magnitude of social
53   support received by girls does not
54   offset this difference.

**Figure 9: Comparison of Hypotheses 4
and 5 in Sean's draft and final prospectus.**

formulation West offered in Episode 10, lines 16-18). The complex language about magnitudes in the revised hypotheses reflects a pragmatic puzzle that followed the debate over girl talk (i.e., how to reconcile more support with less efficient support so that the result is still more depression).

A second obvious effect is what has been deleted in the final from the support for hypotheses four and five. The interpersonal theory of depression, with its tale of denial, is gone, as is the detailed description of the relationship between support and drug abuse (Draft, lines 32-40, 56-73). And, of course, gone too are citations to these sources. In the final text, several key additions also appear. The first sentence (Final, lines 17-22), with its three new citations, documents the beneficial effect of social support, a point West repeatedly stressed (e.g., see Figure 5, Episode 7, lines 23-29). Another addition (line 34), the explanation for the weaker influence of expressive support among girls, follows West's argument that Sean's story only "sometimes" applies (see line 10 in Episode 10) and also mentions (lines 35-38) the potential cathartic value of expressive social support, a point West made in lines

Seminar Episode 11: Hypothesis 6 gets dropped
1   West: [discussing the confounded nature of the data]...there's a lot of issues
2   in here that are /difficult to deal with/
3   Lynch: /it wou- **you'd be/ hard pressed to convince me without data**
4   **that uh that that's- that's a linear effect** also [1 s]
5   Sean: yeah, why's that?
6   Lynch: because I- me- th- th- **the more depressed mood you get,**
7   **I think the more effect it's going to have on your perception of support,**
8   **and it's really non-linear**
9   Sean: yeah, I (need) to get that too, /I think it gets-/
10   Lynch: /**yeah, and you don't want/ to get into nonlinear models in your**
11   **dissertation, not at this point,** [7 s] **you have a- but that's a great stand-**
12   **alone** [2 s]
13   West: that would be something you could write a paper on later

Figure 10: Avoiding non-linear models in the dissertation

26-27 of Episode 5 (Figure 4). Although West had initially suggested
dropping (Figure 4, Episode, 5, lines 14-15) or downplaying them
(Figure 5, Episode 7, lines 18-20), hypotheses 4 and 5 ironically end up
playing a more prominent role in the final draft because they stand in a
reduced field. In relatively short exchanges in the seminar talk, Sean
agreed to drop hypotheses 6 and 7 (See Figure 2) because they presented
difficulties of measurement and modelling, difficulties that would
complicate the speedy completion of his dissertation. Episode 11 in
Figure 10 presents the conclusion of a brief exchange on hypothesis 6.
Lynch's unanswered statement in lines 10-11 that Sean would not "want
to get into nonlinear models" in his dissertation evidently sealed the fate
of hypothesis 6. It also provides an example of how a disciplinary topic,
nonlinear models, can be repositioned in another topical terrain, in this
case being associated with Sean's practical concern to finish his
dissertation quickly so that he could take the job he had accepted. With
hypotheses 6 and 7 removed, hypotheses 4 and 5 appear to be the key
contributions of Sean's dissertation.

Before turning to concluding remarks, I should reinforce two
points. First, I have suggested that the girl talk tales that Sean, Thomas,
West, and Lynch offered drew on everyday sociocultural discourses as
well as disciplinary discourses. The two seminar episodes and one
extract from an interview with Sean in Figure 11 provide additional
support for this claim. In Episode 12, as West is again arguing for her
rewording of hypothesis four (offered first in Episode 10), she identifies
a "kernel of truth" (line 1) in Sean's hypotheses. Evidently West is
appealing to her everyday understanding of society since the hypothesis
has not been tested. Her argument that Sean's story applies to a subset
of very depressed *girls* but not *women* in general (lines 6-12) apparently

Seminar Episode 12: West's explains her rewording of hypothesis 4
1   West: because **I think that the kernel of truth in this**
2   **is that there are tendencies for girls to be somewhat more introspective**,
3   and you know **this comes out in the literature over and over again**, that
4   boys with problems kind of express them in an outward way, in behavioral
5   problems and so on whereas girls you know ruminate and they get depressed
6   and so forth, now **if you get two girls that are operating along those lines**
7   **that are kind of mutually reinforcing this negativity**
8   **you expect that to happen**, and for- for both perhaps to become
9   more depressed, because see the- **the way that I think about this is that**
10   **this is more a characteristic of a subset of girls**,you know, who are sort of
11   more depressed so that **while women in general** may have some
12   of these tendencies /that/=
13   Sean: /yes/
14   West: =they only uh lead to this uh-, you know, increase in depressive affect
15   for those who, uh you know, show them more strongly, or who are, you know,
16   already depressed for other reasons,

**Seminar Episode 13: Sean argues that boys do not engage in expressive social
support**
17   West: [talking] ....**how would you consider just kids getting together and**
18   **hanging out and talking, I mean boys do this as well as girls**
19   Sean: Yeah, but they- the- um, the argument is that they engage
20   in distracting behaviors, so that you know, **something goes wrong at work**
21   **and then they** [i.e., boys] **get together after work, they're talking about**
22   **the baseball game and this that and the other thing, they're not**
23   **talking about what happened at work, whereas girls get together,**
24   **they'll be talking about work, what happened at work**, you know,
25   so, I think- there's a lot of empirical support for the fact that girls ruminate
26   more and that boys engage in distraction more, ok? so, I think we're on safe
27   ground there.

**Sean Interview #2: Challenged that girls and boys occupy the same structural
position, given issues like teen-age pregnancy, sexual harassment, and so on**
28   Sean: ....**I'm really thinking about work** and uh, I still think your critique
29   applies, but maybe less so for adolescent work,we know that **girls make**
30   **significantly less than boys, not that much, but they do**,so there is
31   **some evidence that girls are treated differently** than-**I don't think it's,**
32   **you know, they're not being sexually harassed or anything at this stage**....

Figure 11: Connecting narratives of girl talk to cultural discourses

explains both her initial, unsuccessful attempt to reformulate Sean's
plan (Figure 7, lines 15-20) and her final, successful attempt (Figure 8,
lines 7-18). In Episode 13, Sean is arguing that boys do not engage in
expressive social support. While the literature certainly supports the
notion that boys engage in distracting behaviors, Sean's narrative of
boys talking about "the baseball game" (lines 21-22) points again to the
insertion of culturally stereotyped topics into a disciplinary argument.
Finally, a short segment from Sean's interview provides additional
insight into the grounds of Sean's argument. As an observer, I had
immediately been struck by the oddness (from my perspective) of
Sean's assertion that boys and girls occupied the same structural
positions in society, an assertion that was never questioned in the
seminar. When I assumed the role of devil's advocate with Sean about

this assertion in an interview, he indicated that I had offered a good critique, explained that it was a heuristic assumption, but then concluded with the comments in lines 28-32 (Figure 11). In an analysis of the rhetoric of sociology, Edmondson suggests:

> The deviations from conventional [sociological] methodology which are discussed in this book have a common character: they deal much more with personal events, attitudes, or reactions than their authors' theoretical positions would justify. Because of this, though not only because of it, I claim that the sociological arguing I investigate takes place in terms of 'personal communication.' This type of communication is not necessarily irrational, unscientific or unduly biased. It is simply more closely connected with the personal existences of author, subjects and reader than most current assumptions about academic writing imply. (p. 2)

Sean's suggestion in line 32 that adolescent girls are not being sexually harassed at work illustrates, I believe, the way a key assumption in Sean's argument is grounded in his everyday experiences and beliefs, just as my questioning of that basic assumption was grounded in my everyday beliefs, which would lead me to say that such harassment is likely.

    Second, it is important to stress that *the dissertation* was also a highly indexed, multidimensional topic. The prospectus, at least theoretically, served as a kind of institutional charter document for Sean's research. This status was implicit in the fact that most of the seminar response to the draft prospectus addressed what Sean believed and what research he would do rather than what his revised text should say. However, in addition to its ties to canonical models for scientific research and institutional models for professional certification, Sean's prospectus had topical radiations to his status in the Study, his interpersonal relationships (particularly with West and Lynch), and his future career (especially the position he hoped to take in six months). In this sense, the draft prospectus represented just one element in a complex pattern of relationships and activities; response to the text provided an opportunity not only to revise the text, but in a real sense to revise that wider pattern of relationships and activities.

    In Sean's final interview, the multiplicity and power of this first topical thread, the dissertation, is strikingly illustrated. In Figure 12,

Sean interview #2: Asked what results he had found, Sean laughs
1   Sean: [laughs] ...when you get down to the empirical business of it Paul,
2   **the very first thing you have to do is establish that there is indeed**
3   **an instrumental and expressive support.   There isn't.** [laughing]
4   So **the whole thing was blown out of the water within one week of analysis**
5   Paul: [laughing] so that's what you're writing up now, or did you do
6   something different
7   Sean: [Sean discusses what he did find and then returns to the prospectus]
8   ...but see **when the committee met to talk about the prospectus, the actual**
9   **committee**, what they sai-, the- **Ray Scott** is a statistician type of guy and
10   he **said, "You know Sean this argument is too well specified because**
11   **you know"** and like **he saw what was going to happen right away**, he said,
12   **"You know, at every step you're assuming that something will definitely**
13   **be true and that's not, that's not a good way to construct an argu-,**
14   **you should leave arguments open so one way or the other you'll be able to**
15   **do something"** so the committee, it was kinda weird, **the committee said,**
16   **you know, "The hell with this prospectus, you know, go do something**
17   **on social support, stressors, and adolescence,** [laughing] **we'll see you**
18   **in a couple months."** so I went out and sure enough it failed and I came
19   in, told Elaine, she goes, "Ok, well, go back and do it, you know, keep
20   going"

Figure 12: Making the dissertation work

Sean recounts how the plan laid out in his dissertation prospectus failed in the very first step (lines 2-4). He then goes on to explain that the third member of his committee, a statistician, had predicted the problem. In a stretch of constructed dialogue, Sean first animates Ray Scott (lines 10-11 and 12-15) and then the whole committee (lines 15-18) to the effect that they had anticipated that his analytic strategy would blow up, but had authorized him to just do something, or as Sean's account has it, "The hell with the prospectus...." (line 16). Finally, Sean narrates a discussion with West in which he announces that he cannot test his hypotheses and she tells him to "go back and do it" (line 19). I am reminded of a conclusion Knorr-Cetina drew from her research: "If there is a principle which seems to govern laboratory action, it is scientists' concern with making things 'work,' which points to a principle of success rather than truth" (p. 4). *Making*, in this case, *the dissertation work* appears to me to be the fundamental topical thread in this microhistory of talk and text, the theme around which other topical variations play.

Conclusions

First, a sociohistoric analysis of three key topical threads displayed in the seminar negotiation of Sean's dissertation prospectus and inscribed in Sean's texts points to the dynamic and dialogic nature of topics and to the kinds of practices involved in their contextualized use. Tracing the topical threads in the talk and texts illuminated, at least

partially, the sedimented contexts and discourses infused into this negotiation. Each thread appeared to be discursively multiple. Participants' tales of *girl talk* pointed not only to the disciplinary literature on adolescent girls and boys, but also to everyday sociocultural discourses. Discussions of *causal modelling* rehearsed concepts from experimental design and statistical analysis, but were also grounded in the local institutional contexts and relationships of the Study. Discussions of the *dissertation* invoked an overlapping matrix of personal, interpersonal, and institutional contexts (everything from Sean's history of work in the Study and the nature of the Study's data to his prospectus committee meeting scheduled for the next week and the job he had accepted for six months later). In other words, the topics were indexed in multiple discourses, shifting between different topical terrains, and, at least sometimes, dialogically charged with divergent senses.

As for the practices involved in using these topics, the topical analysis suggests that sedimented contexts did not simply enter this chain of events as static, inert elements: participants tactically employed these topics to nominate and display, contest and ratify discourses as they worked to achieve the emergent meanings and goals of their on-going interactions. Simply the act of switching to everyday discourses, as Thomas and West did in their early counter-narratives of girl talk, represented a tactical construction of the immediate context, a construction that not only directly challenged the disciplinary validity of Sean's arguments, but that also tacitly contested the disciplinary contextualization of that argument, the social-discursive fabric in which the argument was embroidered. In addition, participants' situated use of topics often reaccentuated the established discourses. Thomas' everyday commonsense expectations (Episode 4) were tacitly ratified *as* legitimate disciplinary arguments. In Episode 11, Lynch's comments illustrate recontextualization in the opposite direction, turning the abstract, "disciplinary" issue of non-linear modelling into a contingent issue connected to Sean's timeline and his institutional evaluations. Thus, I suggest that this topical analysis traced key contours of the contexts (sedimented and emergent histories) and the practices implicated in the construction, negotiation, and revision of Sean's prospectus.

Second, the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of topics, and particularly the gap between the topics in the seminar talk and those that appeared in, and disappeared from, Sean's texts, has important implications for our understanding of disciplinary enculturation. Sean's texts,

and his actual research, were not generated through the instantiation of canonical schemes of sociology, scientific research, and graduate education. Instead they were constituted as a historical trajectory through a dynamically configured, multidimensional space. In other words, Sean's texts were radically indexed in local activities and local histories. Yet, these local histories of textual production and reception were not overtly displayed in Sean's text: indeed, as we have seen, many were literally marked by their absence. Thus, this study of the topical contours of context in the negotiation of Sean's prospectus suggests that disciplinary knowledge and disciplinary membership are not contexts that we can simply assume and use in explaining discourse. Instead, they represent dynamic achievements that must be artfully constructed or displayed within (perhaps against) the heteroglossic, multiply deter-mined ground of everyday life. As de Certeau argues, disciplines have no true autonomous space to operate in, no way to cut the cord of social and material historicity. As a complex of situated practices, disciplinarity is achieved through tactical movements back and forth between mul-tiple possible worlds/discourses, translating all the time, and through the tact to sense how which topics may be appropriately nominated where. Clearly, as this microhistory of talk and text suggests, the practices of disciplinarity can only partially be learned through a study of its texts, for where the discipline is most purely displayed, its practices are most thoroughly obscured.

Notes

1) In another illustration of how topics connect to contexts, Lindstrom provides an interesting analysis from a very different setting, an oral debate on the island of Vanuatu. In the debate, the participants strategically employed topics, working to establish the truth of their positions by invoking or contest-ing different (sometimes contradictory) island discourses. For example, part of the debate focused on the issue of whether there should be a debate at all and, if so, who had rights to speak in it, that is, on whether it was an internal family issue or one involving the wider community. Another issue revolved around whether the death of a boy was connected to his grandfather's cursing him or to his parents' early resumption of sexual relations. I cite this example because it makes the cultural nature of topics more visible; topics can appear obvious and natural at home.

2) In saying that participants use tools, I do not mean that this use is always conscious and controlled. Indeed, I assume that use of these semiotic tools is largely tacit and normally involves unintended consequences (i.e., the

tools in a sense also use the participants). Bakhtin (*Dialogic*) vividly describes the conflicts that emerge as an individual's word encounters the alien words of others. Leont'ev, who developed Vygotsky's notions into activity theory, suggests that tools represent a crystallization of sociohistorically developed structures of labor practices and relations. In more memorable terms, the psychologist Abraham Maslow is reported to have said, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to treat everything as if it were a nail."

    3) Names of participants and institutions are pseudonyms.

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Appendix A: Transcription of Talk

Transcription symbols:
1)   = latching of speech, i.e., no perceptible pause across a turn
2)   / He /
          /No /   overtalk (i.e., simultaneous talk)
3)   ( )   unintelligible
4)   (yes)   uncertain transcription
5)   -   abrupt self-interruption
6)   [ ]   explanatory note
7)   [1 s]   note indicates a pause of over 1/2 second, estimated in
half-second intervals
8)   "Go ahead"   quotation marks indicate constructed dialogue
9)   ....   material deleted from transcript
10)   **Bold print** Emphasis added to highlight points for analysis

Closer transcription was generally done for classroom interactions than
for interviews. In interviews, some backchannel talk may be deleted to
save space. Capitalization, punctuation and line breaks are included to
aid in reading the text. In some cases, line breaks might be related to
breath groups and intonation contours; however, line breaks were not
based directly on transcription.