

## APPENDIX III

### A SAMPLE OF EVERYDAY CONVERSATION

A sample of everyday conversation was collected at a large family-and-conference resort located in the middle west. The summer staff was provided by 143 students, mostly women, typically having finished their second year of college. Two women from the sociability project joined the resort staff during the summer, working half-time as regular employees of the resort, and in the other half of their time, recording from memory all conversation that they had overheard during the day or in which they had taken part.

Resort observations continued over a period of about 10 weeks. The ten weeks of observation at the resort yielded a total of 1621 episodes, for an average of 23 per day. The 26 parties that were examined most intensively yielded a total of 1873 episodes, for an average of 72 per party.

There were many differences between the two samples. The people at the resort were college students, significantly younger than the party participants, and a majority of episodes included only women. They were away from school on a summer vacation, albeit a working vacation; and conversation usually was an accompaniment to some other activity, rather than an end in itself. Differences in maturity, gender, and situation all had to be considered.

There also was a difference in the quality of the records. Conversation at the resort was more briefly reported, and more briefly analyzed. In coding conversational episodes at the resort, we looked only at the 5 parameters that define an episode (see Appendix II): the set of people talking together, or axis partners; the tie between them that they utilized as a basis for conversation; their manner of relating to each other; their topic of conversation; and their manner of relating to the topic.

Comparisons between the two samples of conversation were striking, both in their similarities and in their differences.

### Similar context effects.

Four different contexts for conversation were identified at the resort. An interstitial context was one in which people were moving from one place or activity to another; this context produced 527 episodes, mostly brief and undeveloped. As associate context was one in which persons were assembled in one spot partly from personal choice and partly by organization membership. These included mealtimes, when staff members filled each 12-person table in sequence as they came from the cafeteria line; public recreational settings, such as sunbathing on the pier; and conversations on the job between working partners. For comparability with associates at the resort, we combined the acquaintance categories of familiar and institutional colleague to get an associate category for parties.

The other two contexts at the resort were more private. 387 episodes of conversation were observed at home, in the 16-20 person cabins where employees lived; and 207 episodes were observed among people who had gathered to do something for fun: to go out together to a movie, for pizza, or to the coffee shop.

Context Effects: Results

Personal disclosure at the resort was most likely to occur in the home setting, and in this, the home setting was comparable to dyads at parties or to party conversation among persons who were engaged in expanding their acquaintance.

Table 1. Personal Disclosure

	Frequency, Overall	Frequency, Designated Setting
Resort	15%	22%
Parties: dyads	14%	22%
“ exp acq	14%	23%

The associate setting was one in which axis partners were more likely than elsewhere to draw upon a tie of shared membership. This was the same for associates at parties as for associates at the resort. Overall, the tie of

shared membership was used slightly more often at the resort than at parties, suggesting that the resort itself, in comparison with parties, provided a context with more qualities of a membership group.

Table 2. Membership Tie

	Frequency, Overall	Frequency Among Associates
Resort	11%	24%
Parties	8%	24%

The festive setting was one in which people were more likely to talk about things in the “here-and-now,” taking note of their immediate surroundings. The comparison here was between the fun setting at the resort, and parties classified as festive. The effect was larger for parties than for the resort, suggesting that party surroundings offered more interesting things to talk about than, for instance, a pizza parlor.

Table 3. Topic Taken From The “Here and Now”

	Frequency Overall	Frequency In Festive Settings
Resort	14%	26%
Parties	15%	34%

## Dissimilar Talk About Self

If one takes a global view of self, including in the concept all self-related reports, surrogates, interests and values, then it appears that the total amount of talk about self (person-based ties) was about the same in the two samples.

At the resort, choice of person-based ties was relatively high in the home setting, and in -- usually dyadic -- interstitial episodes. At parties, use of person-based ties was relatively high for people engaged in expanding their acquaintance, and for people in dyads.

Table 4. Person-based Ties

	Frequency, Overall	Frequency, Designated Setting
Resort: home	69%	81%
“ Interstitial	69%	74%
Parties: exp acq	70%	79%
“ dyads	70%	76%

However, the quality of self-relevant conversation was very different in the two samples. At parties, individuals made an effort to draw upon

personal resources to find topics that would be of interest to others – self-surrogates, or interests and values. The reference to self was indirect. At the resort there was very little effort of this kind. Individuals simply talked directly about themselves, expecting others to listen but not inviting comment. Coders found conversation at the resort much more tedious than party conversation: for the resort conversation, it was necessary to know and care about the person(s) speaking in order to be interested the conversation.

Table 5. Type of Person-Based Tie

	Direct	Indirect
Resort	46%	23%
Parties	14%	56%

### Discussion

There was a good deal of difference in the composition of the two samples, so that the difference in conversational patterns was easier to understand than the similarity. Our intention was to compare party conversation with everyday conversation, but there were also other differences between the two samples that probably contributed to the difference in use of person-based ties.

- 1) At a party, the focus was on the conversation and on keeping it interesting; there was time to develop a topic. Therefore participants looked in their repertoire of experience for interesting topics that could provide something to talk about with others. At the resort, the focus usually was on some other activity, with conversation merely an accompaniment. The difference that appears in Table 5 is exactly what we would expect from a comparison of party conversation with everyday conversation.
- 2) At the resort, individuals were in a somewhat isolated setting, away from family, school, and normal activities, so that many of the things they would normally talk about were far away. The self loomed larger as a possible focus for conversation.
- 3) A related fact was that the composition of the staff at the resort included three times as many women as men. The men had jobs that were either completely separate from the women, or that gave them supervisory responsibility over the women. Socially, some of the men quickly settled on a single woman with whom they were paired during the summer, others kept apart from the women, concentrating on work and sports. The result was that the women whose conversation we were able to observe were in an environment that was virtually without men. For college women in their early 20'ies, this was a real deprivation. It may have contributed to a feeling that there was no need to make an effort to be interesting.

- 4) Participants in conversation at the resort were most often young women who had just finished their second year of college. They may have been too young to value effort or skill in sociability. Young people who talked to us about the study of sociability were likely to insist on the importance of being authentic in conversation with others; they rejected the idea of effort or skill as being not authentic.

Our other results showed great similarity in the conversational patterns of the two samples. We did not expect the conversational patterns among students at the resort to be so very much like the ones at parties. Results for the two samples as reported in Table 1-4, if they were not identical, were within 1 or 2 percentage points of each other. There were a few exceptions, but these could be understood as differences between the two relevant contexts, rather than between the two samples.

We considered the possibility that the similarities were observer-effects. One observer took part in both the party study and the study at the resort. However, an analysis of variance among observers from the party study indicated that, while there were mild observer effects, these were not statistically significant. An observer who sometimes reported parties with a large deviation from “average” also had a large variance, indicating that he or she was observing real differences between parties, and not simply imposing his/her own bias on the reports. And in any case, the observer who

took part in both studies was one of two at the resort, and one of three at the parties.

We had to conclude that the two samples came from the same population, i.e., the people involved were using the same conversational conventions. To state it a different way, it appeared that at least some of the conventions that shaped sociability were learned by the time a person had finished two years of college, if not sooner. It was only in talk about self that the two samples differed, and this difference was exactly what we would expect from a comparison between party conversation and everyday conversation.