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Politics among friends : political persuasion through the lens of sequential inferential paradigm

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POLITICS AMONG FRIENDS: POLITICAL PERSUASION
THROUGH THE LENS OF SEQUENTIAL INFERENTIAL PARADIGM

by

Amber Jannusch

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in Communication Studies
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

August 2014

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Kristine Muñoz

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy
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To my mom
I will always miss you.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to investigate actual communication and real world interactions among friends, in order to add to our understanding of political persuasion. Opinions and attitudes are affected by more than deliberate persuasive attempts, and politics are more than just elections and candidate speeches. What people say or do on an everyday basis with friends can be just as – if not more – influential, particularly as a meaning-making endeavor to establish, test, or solidify attitudes. An alternative approach to political communication should address the ongoing interactive nature of meaning-making and the role of relationships in political persuasion. Thus this study uses discourse analysis through the lens of Sequential Inferential Paradigm to examine a conversation among friends about a political topic, finding that the structure of the conversation and the relationship between the participants are important considerations of influence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND PERSUASION AMONG FRIENDS	1
A Significant Oversight:	
Review of relevant persuasion and political communication research	2
Beyond Stimulus → Result:	
Acknowledging the Impact of Complex Interactions	3
Confounding Effects:	
The Significant Gap in Political Communication Research	5
Making Meaning:	
Interpersonal interaction is more than a conduit	6
Following Tracy:	
Moving from family to community	10
The Friendship Halo:	
How Friendship Affects Credibility, Identification, and Meaning-Making	14
The influential nature of relationships	15
Relationships in political communication research	18
Blurring “The Political”:	
The Benefit of Participant Identified Political Topics	26
An Alternative Way:	
Using Sequential Inferential Paradigm	29
Understanding and expanding SIP	30
Reconsidering the theoretical implications of relationships	33
CHAPTER TWO: CRITICAL CASE STUDY THROUGH DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: AN EXPLANATION OF METHODOLOGY	37
Understanding Complexity:	
Interactions Through the Lens of Discourse Analysis	38
Making meaning:	
Discourse as organizing framework	39
Understanding meaning:	
The Role of sequence in discourse	42
Content meaning:	
Defining the political topic	43
Process	44
Participants	44
Recorded conversations	45
Conversation one	45
Conversation two	48
Conversation three	49
Transcription	52
Preliminary analysis	55
Further analysis	57
CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS	60
Selection of a Critical Case	60
Analysis of the Case	61

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION	95
A Friendly Conversation:	
Relevance, Facework, and Diffusion of Disagreement	95
Negotiating a Political Topic:	
Sequentially Discovering an Ideological Worldview	100
Seeing the Forest and the Trees:	
Analyzing Conversational Progression Through Sequence	103
Opening More Doors:	
How Relationships Contribute to SIP	107
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS	114
Limitations and Future Directions	119
Contributions and Implications	124
Expanding Persuasion Research	124
Growing Political Communication Research	126
Finding the Power of Friendship	127
APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPT	129
REFERENCES	137

CHAPTER ONE:
POLITICAL COMMUNICATION
AND PERSUASION AMONG FRIENDS

The purpose of this research is to investigate actual communication and real world interactions among friends, in order to add to our understanding of political persuasion. Opinions and attitudes are affected by more than deliberate persuasive attempts, and politics are more than just elections and candidate speeches. What people say or do on an everyday basis with friends can be just as – if not more – influential, particularly as a meaning-making endeavor to establish, test, or solidify attitudes. An alternative approach to political communication should address the ongoing interactive nature of meaning-making and the role of relationships in political persuasion. Thus this study uses discourse analysis through the lens of Sequential Inferential Paradigm to examine a conversation among friends about a political topic, finding that the structure of the conversation and the relationship between the participants are important considerations of influence.

This chapter reviews literature on persuasion, political communication, and friendship, pointing out an important gap in the research, and suggesting an alternative approach to the study of political communication. Research in persuasion and political communication is largely composed of quantitative effects-based studies, which focus on the efficacy of particular messages, styles, or campaigns on an individual or an electorate. That predominant type of research isolates a moment in time as a “snap shot” to be studied, often at a macro level, rather than engaging communication as a cooperative meaning-making endeavor. Research on the role of interpersonal communication in political persuasion is minimal, and tends to focus on effects of interpersonal communication (generally between strangers or among a family) on political outcomes, again neglecting the ongoing nature of both interpersonal communication and persuasion. To investigate interpersonal meaning-making and persuasion in political communication,

I explain and utilize a theoretical framework of Sequential Inferential Paradigm (SIP), within which the focus is on the interaction rather than individuals, and suggest an expansion of the theory to consider the complexity of relationships on sequence and inference.

Chapter Two outlines the method of discourse analysis, as well as the process of recruiting participants, the procedure of gathering the data, and the steps of transcriptions and analysis. Chapter Three is the analysis of the entire conversation of a critical case study, with particular emphasis on sequence, inference, and the role of friendship in interaction. In Chapter Four I examine the analysis using the lens of Sequential Inferential Paradigm to respond to each research question. Finally, Chapter Five addresses limitations, future directions, contributions of the study, and implications for the fields of political communication, persuasion, and interpersonal communication.

A Significant Oversight:

Review of Relevant Persuasion and Political Communication Research

We have important knowledge of effects resulting from interpersonal communication in persuasion, political communication, and political persuasion in a variety of situations. In this chapter, I ground my study by first looking at how interpersonal communication has been taken up in studies of persuasion in various contexts, and then examine political communication, which is broadly about the political process, elections or campaigns, political parties, or social movements. Specifically, I focus on the intersection of political communication and persuasion, reviewing literature that investigates the attempt to change attitudes or behavior as related to a political subject or action. This review shows that strictly effects-based studies, which are the norm in political persuasion research, neglects the complications of real world interaction, including the role of friendship and of discourse as meaning-making and attitude development. Research in health communication and persuasion has

demonstrated that interpersonal communication between friends is important and influential, and yet there is a gap in the literature at the intersection of friendship and political persuasion that neglects this potential site of significant attitude development, change, or entrenchment. To begin to fill that gap, I use Sequential Inferential Paradigm (SIP) (Sanders, 1995) as a theoretical framework well suited for a nuanced examination of real-world interaction. SIP moves away from the effects-based perspective to focus on discourse and how sequence within an interaction influences the interaction itself as well as the participants. However, SIP has not fully explored the role of relationships of participants, proving another gap to be explored by this project.

Beyond stimulus → Response Research:

Acknowledging the Impact of Complex Interactions

At its heart, the investigation into attitudes and behavior in political communication is a contextual site for persuasion research. Because of this intersection, I begin by looking at persuasion writ large, from which I then narrow into the political arena. Typically, theories and studies in persuasion have focused on effects with a more individual-centered, psychological perspective (Festinger, 1957; Wilson, 2002). Work in this trajectory looks at the mechanism for attitude or behavioral change within an individual. For example, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) suggests that there are two internal pathways to persuasion: the central route, which appeals to those who are cognitively motivated and able to develop elaborated thoughts on an argument; and the peripheral route, wherein people depend upon heuristics and cues to develop an attitude or behavior. Notably, this theory addresses only internal pathways of an individual who receives a persuasive message. Social Judgment Theory (Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965), another common psychologically-centered persuasion theory, is likewise focused on attitude change as it is taken up in an individual mind, suggesting that an individual has a central anchor point and that the goal of persuasion is to move that anchor incrementally toward the position one is attempting to

persuade upon. These theories, like others in this psychological perspective, are studied through quantitative effects-based research that provides a persuasive stimulus and tests the response. This work focuses almost exclusively on the individual target of a persuasive attempt, searching for variables of what makes a message persuasive and the mechanism by which the persuasion occurs within the mind or brain of that target; it does not consider the impact of the interaction itself, thus neglecting the fact that persuasion by its nature is a transaction rather than a response only.

Some persuasion research includes transactional behavior, looking at two parties in a persuasive situation and their interaction, but even in this trajectory the focus is on effects or outcomes of messages. For example, some compliance gaining research interrogates the interaction of a persuader and a target, examining and codifying types of messages and responses common in compliance gaining (see Marwell & Schmidt, 1967). This work, like the individual-centered psychological research, allows us to isolate elements of persuasion and move those elements to the center, providing insight into how persuasion works in an individual or even as an action between sender and receiver. However, this examination of a communication transaction still depends on a view of persuasion that takes a snapshot of a persuasive attempt and analyzes the effect of that attempt. Outside of a lab environment, however, persuasion is complicated by real world variables that increase the complexity of any interaction. In other words, while this research does provide insight into the persuasive power of, for example, word choice or credibility, its value is undermined by the multitude of variable intersection occurring in actual interaction.

Persuasion research in the field of Communication Studies also assumes a strategic persuasive attempt, whereas in the real world persuasion need not be strategic or even intentional. Discussion is a way of world building, or figuring things out through the process of everyday discourse (Carl & Duck, 2004). Interpersonal discussions may not have an anticipated or necessarily observable outcome of behavioral or attitude

change, yet may still serve as a way of reinforcing or developing a belief or value. This may not be strictly measurable as an outcome or effect, yet is no less important as an element of persuasion. However, the current trend of focus on intentional and strategic communicative action and reliance on measurable attitudinal or behavioral outcomes neglects this important location of attitude development and reinforcement.

Because of this, I shift the frame to look at interaction and process in persuasion, acknowledging the complications of interaction and the role of relationships in persuasion. Specifically I focus on persuasion in the realm of political communication, which has likewise been studied in an ends-focused and effects-based manner but which would benefit from further examination of political discourse. In addition to a meaning-making based approach to political communication, broadening our understanding of what political communication means and what is included in its study opens the realm of political persuasion research into potentially unexplored areas.

Confounding Effects:

The Significant Gap in Political Communication Research

Political communication is a broad term encompassing a variety of topics in a variety of genres. Most commonly it is taken up as communication about the political process, political elections or campaigns, political parties, and social movements, among others. The messages in political communication can be disseminated in a variety of ways, including through individual public speeches, through mass media productions, and through formal and informal interpersonal communication. In other words, political communication includes individual speeches, campaigns for public office, and mediated advertisements, but also includes the less formal and less intentional communication in everyday life.

The study of political communication has generally focused on a macro level, looking at campaign advertisements or public speeches of elected officials and determining their persuasive effects. The realm of study itself is a broad one, including

(but not by any means limited to) rhetorical studies of speeches by people involved in the political process, analysis of media campaigns or social movements, observation of political discussion, and tests of the efficacy of certain political messages in changing attitudes and behaviors (Kaid, 2004). While more of the research focuses on campaigns and media effects, there has been some consideration of interpersonal communication in persuasive political communication. Like the research in persuasion, this work provides an understanding of the mechanism of attitude change in a “snapshot” approach through effects-based work, often dealing either with purposeful conversations between strangers or focusing on family communication and its relationship to political persuasion. Also like the research in persuasion, this quantitative work neglects the complications and process of everyday conversation about political topics. A focus on everyday conversations can provide deeper understanding of mechanisms of communication, which bolster effects-based conclusions and add to our knowledge about political communication.

Making meaning: Interpersonal interaction is more than a conduit. To contextualize and ground this study more specifically than “political communication,” this section looks at the previous work done at the intersection of interpersonal communication and politics. The research transcends academic areas, drawing from political science, interpersonal communication, and persuasion. However, most of this work, particularly that done in political science, limits the role interpersonal communication to that of a channel or conduit, looking at the effects of interpersonal communication (generally between strangers) on political outcomes (actions, opinions, or knowledge).

Consideration of interpersonal influences was specifically prompted by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948), who in their investigation of the effect of media messages on political decision making in the 1940 presidential election found that interpersonal contact was mentioned as being influential far more frequently than were messages transmitted through the mass media. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) further

explored the relationship between mass media messages and political decision-making, finding that face-to-face communication can be more directly influential than traditional media influence, as it serves as a way to distribute and interpret media messages. From this they explored the method by which messages are transmitted from the media through opinion leaders and distributed widely through the public. Their argument was that the role of interpersonal communication was as a way to disseminate information gathered from the media, and a mechanism for people to test and further their understanding, primarily through interaction with opinion leaders who were considered influential in their community. This work and the subsequent work on the “two step flow” theory in political communication (Cho et al., 2009; Compton & Pfau, 2009; Hardy & Scheufele, 2009; Morgan, 2009) focuses more on the role of interpersonal communication as a mediating factor on media influence, rather than on the interaction of the opinion leaders and “opinion followers” as a way to develop attitudes or behaviors. In other words, work in this trajectory focuses on the mass message and the final effect on opinion, relegating interpersonal communication to an intermediary pass-through stage.

In a similar vein, though with a somewhat different angle, is the study of political psychology. Research in this area focuses on the construction of political messages in the media and the roles played by the press, the president, political consultants, and campaign staff, but also considers individuals and how they construct political meanings from available messages (Crigler, 1998). This work does take into consideration interaction between people through interpersonal discussion, but looks at the psychological actions in an individual, examining how people communicate and interpret messages and meanings in the context of current and prior information and how people use both personal experience and popular wisdom in their internalization of media coverage. While, unlike much of the other work in political communication, political psychology researchers have employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches, they continue in the trajectory of viewing interpersonal communication as a mediating step in their

examination of how journalists construct the news and how lay audiences interpret and assimilate politically-based media messages (Althaus, 1999).

Interpersonal communication has been considered more directly in research that looks at the efficacy of interpersonal messages as a political mobilization tool. Two major studies focused on the persuasive effect of written, verbal, and face-to-face communication on voting. Gerber and Green (2000) and Green, Gerber, and Nickerson (2003) ran experiments on the effectiveness of telephone calls and in-person visits on Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) campaigns in six cities – Bridgeport, Columbus, Detroit, Minneapolis, Raleigh, and St. Paul. They chose the 2001 off-cycle (non-federal) elections in order to isolate the treatment effects from complications of advertising or up-ballot candidates (such as a Presidential or Gubernatorial race). In the experiment conducted by Green, Gerber and Nickerson (2003), names of registered voters were randomly assigned to a control group (no contact) or a treatment group, the latter of which were visited prior to the election by a volunteer with a scripted reminder of the upcoming election. The researchers found that face-to-face campaigns can increase turnout, raising an individual's probability of voting in a local election approximately 7 percentage points (a considerable accomplishment inasmuch as these off-cycle elections typically attract only 25% of the electorate). Both studies concluded that beyond simply being a channel for information distribution, interpersonal interaction itself has political outcome effects. Once again, though, interpersonal communication is a means to an end, where the focus of the studies is on desired political behavior (voting) rather than the interaction. Additionally, the interpersonal communication in these studies was notably artificial: volunteers used a script in going door to door and had no prior or future relationship with the people to whom they were speaking.

A more common field of exploration at the intersection of politics and interpersonal communication has been to look at how interpersonal communication (or what political scientists refer to as “political discussion”) correlates with an increase in

political knowledge (Bennett, Flickinger, & Rhine, 2000; Lenart, 1994; Scheufele, 2000, 2002) and political participation (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999). In addition to dissemination of political information, interpersonal communication can also help people who are presented with dissonant or threatening information to seek validation in their own opinion or in their proposed opinion change (Compton & Pfau, 2009). To theoretically explain potential mechanisms for these findings, Eveland (2004) used survey data to explore potential reasons for the knowledge and participation effects that had been found in previous studies as a result of interpersonal communication. Eveland's work suggested (but did not test) two interrelated and contributory theoretical explanations.

The *anticipatory elaboration explanation* suggests that when exposed to political information, people expect to have a discussion with others and therefore cognitively elaborate on the information to which they are exposed, allowing that information to become more salient. In this explanation, the increase in knowledge precedes the interpersonal communication, but is a result of the expectations of political communication (implying if not affirming the general idea that people talk to one another about politics). The *discussion-generated elaboration explanation* similarly draws upon cognitive elaboration of news information, suggesting that as people engage in political discussion they meaningfully process the information they had previously been exposed to, thus increasing learning during the discussion. In this explanation the political discussion precedes the increase in knowledge, suggesting that knowledge comes from political interpersonal communication. What these explanations have in common, however, is the view of interpersonal communication as a conduit for media information or as a stimulus for further individual cognition, rather than a jointly constructed meaning-making interaction. Eveland's (2004) explanations make no distinction based on the participants; under these causal hypotheses, it begs the question that relationships ostensibly make no difference.

This is not to say that research has entirely neglected the relationship of participants in exploration of political effects. Family relationships specifically have been targeted as a location for significant political influence (Kan & Kwak, 2003; McDevitt, 2005; McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002). Focusing on the intersection of family communication and politics, scholars have found that interpersonal communication can prompt increased motivation and learning for both children and adults, helping them to become more informed and more motivated to get involved in the political process (Kunkel, Hummert, & Dennis, 2006). Research in this vein has investigated effects of familial interaction on political attitudes and behavior, looking at general communication patterns as well as at political conversations within a family, and is addressed in detail in the following section.

Following Tracy: Moving from family to community. Based on the concept of social learning, it has been widely accepted that parents influence their children through political socialization. Numerous studies have determined that there is a correlation between parental political attitudes and behavior and that of the children, though there is not necessarily direct reproduction of ideology or action. However, researchers have concluded that, in a general sense, politically related actions of parents have an effect on children. Looking at this assumption and a corollary, McDevitt and Chaffee (2000) conducted a quasi-experiment in which they tested whether exposing adolescent students to a civics curriculum designed to increase their knowledge and motivation to vote would affect the interpersonal communication and media use of the families of the participants. They hypothesized a “trickle-up” influence, whereby students use interfamilial communication to affect their parents. This experiment was derived from a civics program instituted in one half of the schools in the San Jose School District during the fall election campaign of 1994. Because half of the schools participated and half did not, this provided an opportunity to conduct a quasi-experiment on the effects of the curriculum on participants and their families. In the three weeks following the election,

phone interviews were held with students and a parent, sampled randomly from a district-wide list of students, providing participants who were not exposed to the Kids Voting curriculum as well as those who were. After controlling for predispositional factors (such as socioeconomic status, sex, age, ethnicity, and classroom grade), McDevitt and Chaffee found that the exposure to this special curriculum correlated with additional familial conversations about politics and voting, and increased attention to political news. In other words, this research found that students who are exposed to civics programming bring that knowledge home and talk about what they learned, and that the lesson in turn spurs additional conversations on other political or civic issues. In addition to parents having influence on their children, it appears that children too may influence the political communication environment of their family.

McDevitt and Chaffee's (2000) study looked only at the immediate quantifiable aspects of political communication – number of family conversations and amount of media consumption. In this way it is similar to previous literature in that it is a quantitative examination of specific behaviors at one point in time. It tells us nothing of the content of the conversations (what was said and who said it) or about how the family conversations developed. However, this study does demonstrate the intersection of family and politics, setting the stage for additional investigation into family communication, political influence, and political behavior.

Saphir and Chaffee (2002) used the same situation – the use of Kids Voting USA in the San Jose school district – to look specifically at the influence this intervention had on family communication itself. Recent empirical research has traditionally conceptualized family communication patterns as unidirectional parent-imposed norms that affect a child's socialization. However, Saphir and Chaffee hearken back to early theoretical pieces that suggest that family communication is dynamic and complicated, as each member of a family can influence the others. Specifically, the authors also hypothesized a “trickle-up” influence from adolescents to parents, in this case to

stimulate wider political communication within the family. And, like the previous study, Saphir and Chaffee (2002) found that teaching the advanced civics curriculum did inspire adolescents to discuss political information and involvement with their parents, which in turn allowed for developing political norms and knowledge among the entire family.

These studies conceptualized the family as a social unit that can nurture political interests of parents and children. This is an important consideration for the study of political persuasion, as family can have significant influence on political behavior. These studies also begin to focus on the role of interpersonal face-to-face communication among people who have established relationships – specifically familial relationships. While the general idea of family influence had been considered earlier, these articles added the possibility of children having the capacity to stimulate family political communication, suggesting that family communication is important not just in politically socializing children, but also in motivating and instructing parents. At the same time, this suggests that interpersonal communication about politics has persuasive potential in and of itself, albeit specifically focused on the family.

While the studies on Kids Voting USA looked at the number of political conversations within the family and the effect that communication had, other studies of political communication hypothesized that the family communicative climate, rather than specific conversations, may also influence political socialization. For example, Tims (1986) similarly looked at political discussions in the family, but focused on the amount of open communication in the family environment. Postulating that social norms held by parents influence the family norms for communication in general and political communication specifically, Tims used data surveys to determine that the social values of parents are related to the amount of political talk experienced in the family communication environment, and that participation in open family communication whatever the topic socializes children to seek political information and engage in family discussions of politics. In other words, Tims found that the experience of a

communicatively open family results in its members becoming more politically involved, again supporting the importance of interpersonal communication on both political discussion and future behavior.

Most scholars have neglected interpersonal conversations among those with established relationships beyond family when investigating political communication (Eveland, 2004). One exception is the work done by Karen Tracy and associates (Tracy, 2007a, 2007b, 2011; Tracy & Durfy, 2007) who look at interpersonal political persuasion among community members, and do not relegate the role of the interaction to that of a mediating step. This work provides rhetorical and discourse analysis of talk between citizens in meetings of a community governing body (such as a school board or city council). Tracy (2011) names the observable communicative practices that occur in local-level representative governance groups “ordinary democracy” and differentiates this from other types of democracy. She argues that categories such as deliberative democracy, participatory democracy, and discursive democracy are normative concepts relating ideal conditions (in the institution and the communication) necessary for the existence of that type of democracy; in contrast, ordinary democracy focuses on what *is* – the communicational content and structure used by participants. Thus, Tracy examines how talk and conduct is enacted in public meetings and how this communication operates to strengthen or weaken the practice of democracy.

Tracy’s work indicates the importance of a focus on interpersonal communication and the value of qualitative work in political persuasion. She highlights the power of talk itself through which “people make, resist, and change policies; cement or endanger relationships; and soothe or intensify conflicts” (2011, p. 6). While the same could easily be said about conversations among friends in terms of attitudes or relationships, by definition ordinary democracy involves role-based talk, where a community member addresses a member of a governing body based on that person’s role as a leader in the community, and the officials respond as elected representatives. The interaction is

affected by rules of local governance, and the topics are pre-determined and determinative of the entire interaction. A focus on less formal conversations among friends still emphasizes the importance of interaction in political persuasion, and supplements Tracy's work through investigation into less formal interactions in which topics are generated during the course of the interaction rather than by agenda.

As a whole, though political science and communication scholars do in some cases address the role of interpersonal communication in politics, its value is generally relegated to effects-based media comparison studies. However, politics are more than just elections and candidates, and political communication involves more than just communication about or around candidates. Polling happens all the time, and poll results change even without intervening events, suggesting that what people say or do on an everyday basis with friends can be just as – if not more – influential.

The Friendship Halo:

How Friendship Affects Credibility, Identification, and Meaning-Making

The gap in the literature at the intersection of political persuasion and interpersonal communication means that our knowledge of how people reference or integrate consideration of their relationship in discussions about politics, particularly with friends, is limited. The work that has been done tends to consider relationships as a context, isolating a specific relational situation in which to explore persuasion, such as in workplace relationships (Barry & Watson, 1996), between doctors and patients (Turk & Rudy, 1991), and between husbands and wives (Sagresto, Christensen, & Heavy, 1998). These studies focusing on the specific relationships help demonstrate that interaction and influence are impacted by the relationship between people involved. In other words, they collectively highlight the importance of relationships on influence in a general sense.

However, like the work on political communication between strangers or family members, much of this work is outcome focused rather than interaction focused.

Relationship context research demonstrates that the situation and roles of participants affect the interaction and level of influence. Generally this is explained in two ways: first, in the absence of personal knowledge people rely on attributes and generalizations to formulate less targeted persuasive messages (Sanders, 1995); so in doctor-patient interactions, for example, both participants generalize and apply attributes to the other (expertise, concern or worry, etc.), which affects the interaction. Second, relationships also provide a resource, allowing people to rely on personal knowledge that is a result of a relationship to shape their messages (Wilson, 2002). In the case of husbands and wives, for example, the personal knowledge developed in the course of that relationship helps each to interpret the others' message as well as providing understanding of effective ways to influence or persuade.

The influential nature of relationships. Duck (1998) suggests that interpersonal influence cannot be separated from relationships, as relationships themselves are a foundational basis for interpersonal influence (Carl & Duck, 2004). Thus we cannot neglect consideration of relationships and how that relationship affects the interpersonal communication itself, as well as the outcomes of persuasive attempts. Relationships, and in particular friendships, can affect persuasion in at least three aspects: credibility, identification, and psycho-communicative.

Credibility is based on the receiver's perception of whether a speaker ranks high on expertise, trustworthiness and goodwill. Credibility, in turn, is highly correlated with persuasion; a speaker rated higher in credibility is more likely to be successful in a persuasive attempt (O'Keefe, 2002). While a relationship may not change the amount of knowledge or expertise a person has on the subject at hand in the interaction, studies have found that people can be an expert in one field and still be seen as credible in another field (Rind, 1992). This, for example, is often used in advertising, where a spokesperson who is an expert in one field is used to promote a product outside his or her area of expertise. Personal knowledge within a relationship can allow a relational partner to

know of the persuader's expertise in one field (such as work) and then generalize that expertise to another area (for example, politics). In other words, if one views another friend as someone knowledgeable based on what they know of the person from the relationship (from previous conversations in an area of the friend's expertise or knowledge of the friend's credentials), they may transfer that credibility to a conversation about an unrelated political topic. In transferring this credibility, they are granting influence. Relationships may also affect trustworthiness and goodwill, as knowledge obtained through the relationship can affect one's interpretation of the relational partner's honesty, integrity, or level of caring, understanding, or empathy, which are the other elements that add credibility.

The second way relationships serve a persuasive function is through identification. The typical concept of "persuasion" stresses deliberateness on the part of the speaker, the receiver, or both. The concept of "identification" (Burke, 1950), on the other hand, allows for a more unconscious factor, something that influences both members of the relationship by virtue of their own interconnectedness and identification with one another; this is something that may never even be directly called upon or referenced, but nonetheless contributes to persuasion. In other words, the influence of a relationship may be more likely due to unconscious identification, rather than deliberately chosen communication strategies. This is a potential mechanism of influence from family interdependence (Knobloch & Solomon, 2003). Friends who consider themselves as members of an interdependent group tend to do so in part because of their connection and identification with one another. And because their identification and interdependence suggest similarity, a group member may adopt a similar attitude as that of a friend, or take a position on something they previously had not considered.

Finally, Carl and Duck (2004) argue that relationships themselves can be a foundational basis for interpersonal influence on a psycho-communicative level, and thus we should look to everyday talk as a foundation for influence. Gossip, for example,

serves as moral persuasion to encourage conformity with norms of the group or culture (see Fitch, 2003), and works within relationships to construct a situation and to distribute warnings to relationship members regarding violations of expected behavior. For example, when with a group of friends, one may be less likely to carry a disagreement on a political topic into a personal attack, knowing the others would not support this. Carl and Duck (2004) approach interpersonal influence as located in relationships themselves; thus in order to understand persuasion, one must take into account both the meanings and significance constructed by the members of the relationship and the influential force produced by the relationship itself. In a general sense, relationships serve a persuasive and rhetorical function and provide influence in a variety of ways, including demonstrating to another about the existence of a relationship, acting differently because another is present, or when a person processes information to develop a certain perspective because of information introduced from the relationship.

These three mechanisms of effect on persuasion by relationships demonstrate that relationships – such as friendship – can be an important element in direct persuasive attempts. In fact, the impact of relationships on persuasive attempts for behavioral change is highlighted in some health communication research. A number of studies have looked at the implicit influence that friends and peer groups have, beginning in adolescence (Andrews, Tildesley, Hops, & Li, 2002; Gardner & Steinberg, 2005; Jussim & Osgood, 1989), and continuing through adulthood (Dishion & Owen, 2002), finding that both parents and peers can influence health or risk related decisions in adolescence and early adulthood. Some of this influence is purposeful, as parents and peers confront explicitly a health behavior they want to target to change; for example, parents may confront a child to discourage (and eliminate) smoking, or peers may expressly persuade a friend to shoplift. In other cases, the influence is implicitly derived, and the relationship bolsters that influence; for example, an adolescent may observe a parent using drugs, or someone might see his friends ordering healthy food and do likewise. In

these cases, the relationship matters. However the adolescent views their parents, the fact that it is her parents rather than a stranger she observes affects how the action is perceived; likewise someone may not change his order at a restaurant because a person at different table did, but he may wish to emulate his friends or at least give them a certain impression and therefore affecting his actions.

In fact, studies have found that interaction with friends can be correlated with better health (Newsom & Schulz, 1996; Seeman, Lusignolo, Albert, & Berkman, 2001) and with better health related behaviors; specifically finding that friends who encourage healthy behaviors can affect whether an individual engages in the healthy behavior (Wright, 2008). This trajectory of work demonstrates the effect that our interactions with friends can have in shaping our health behaviors and attitudes, both explicitly and implicitly, suggesting that the role of interpersonal communication between friends is an important element for consideration.

Relationships in political communication research. More specifically to the realm of this study, some research has found that relationships and communication affect political persuasion and influence. Yet even these studies in which the relationship context is taken into account (i.e. when the participants are not necessarily strangers), the interpersonal conversations themselves serve only as a means to an end. For example, a special edition of *Communication Theory* included a series of articles that looked at the role of interpersonal communication as a mediating factor for mass media campaigns (Cho et al., 2009; Compton & Pfau, 2009; Hardy & Scheufele, 2009; Morgan, 2009), and the development of descriptive factors that determine the importance and effect of interpersonal conversations (Southwell & Yzer, 2009). From this and other political communication research we know that interpersonal communication within a network (the exact definition of which depends on the study but generally includes family, friends, co-workers, and regular acquaintances) can affect political or electoral participation, party preference, amount of political knowledge, and even the extent to which discussants

disagree. However, we do not know the communicative mechanism through which this happens, as this research also considers relationships in an ends-focused, “snap shot” approach.

This ends-focused political research has provided a valuable starting point for discourse-focused work, highlighting the importance of interpersonal communication. For example, interpersonal communication in social networks is an important way to disseminate political information (Rill & McKinney, 2011). It also can increase political knowledge, as having conversations with people who are more politically informed increases the likelihood of obtaining relevant information and helps to clarify other information (McClurg, 2006). Using survey data from two communities during the 1996 Presidential election, McClurg looked at social networks and political expertise of members, finding that having a member of one’s social network who has some political expertise is an important element in participation. Knowledgeable people “provide access to information that helps people recognize and reject dissonant political views, develop confidence in their attitudes, and avoid attitudinal ambivalence, thereby making participation more likely” (p. 737). While quantitative in its conclusions, the explanatory mechanisms for the broad conclusions on participation suggest a meaning-making approach to interpersonal political communication that further supports the necessity for exploration of discourse between friends in political communication.

McClurg (2006) particularly notes that discussion partners in a network can be influential to election outcomes by providing information as well as providing an opportunity to develop political opinion through interaction with a political “expert”. Huckfeldt , Johnson, and Sprague (2002) explain that election campaigns can stimulate network discussions, but the communication within those discussions must be effective in providing alternative information as well as accurate understandings of vote choices of participants. Discussion partners provide more than just information; they can also

influence choice of candidate through effective communication, though the candidate preference is more influential if it is in alignment with the majority of network members.

On the other hand, representation of minority views can stimulate public deliberation (Fishkin, 1991), exposing people to multiple viewpoints and promoting reasoning that is healthy and important in a democracy (McClurg, 2006). However, as people tend to form networks with others with whom they are similar, there is often more political congruency and therefore less disagreement in network interaction (Morey, Eveland, & Hutchens, 2012). This can significantly affect the amount of political information people are even exposed to, much less dissonant information.

Even in cases of attitude incongruence, people tend to avoid disagreements in interpersonal interaction (Morey et al., 2012). Disagreement itself is psychologically uncomfortable, and people actively avoid dissonant information when possible (Festinger, 1957; R. Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). In addition to being adverse to conflict, people also desire positive social recognition from their social partners (Morey et al., 2012). The nature of political discussion itself compounds this, as politics are tied to identity (Sherif et al., 1965) and political attitudes may reflect aspects of one's core identity (Morey et al., 2012). Thus studies of political communication within social networks have widely found and comment on the homophily of political discussion (see, e.g., Morey et. al, 2012).

Clearly, though, disagreement and minority opinions remain; the historical exchange of dominant political parties empirically proves this. Some of the disagreement, of course, comes between strangers or adherents to opposing political parties, as campaigns contain plenty of disagreement and heterogeneity (Huckfeldt et al., 2002). However, if significant influence comes from discussants within a social network, and social networks tend to be homogeneous, the concern remains that within these influential groups the opportunity for disagreement and thus enhancement of public

discourse will be rejected in favor of conflict avoidance and in response to the influence of majority opinion.

With this consideration, R. Huckfeldt and Mendez (2008) researched reported political discussion in networks. They interviewed a random sample of participants and one person the participant lists as a discussant. The discussants formed two groups: those who were named by the participants as partners for talking about “important matters” and those with whom participants discussed “government, elections, and politics.” Participants and discussants in both groups reported the frequency of discussion of political matters and the frequency of disagreement. While this study did not ask about the specific type of relationship between the participant and the discussant, it also found that within these social networks participants reported having significant episodes of disagreement. Interestingly, the group to which the discussant belonged was insignificant; people reported talking about politics about as often with general conversants as with those they consider to be political conversants. The authors concluded that political discussion stimulates argumentation, while argumentation impedes discussion, and the combined dynamic between the two helps to explain patterns of persistent disagreement in democratic politics.

Similarly, Morey et al. (2012) hypothesized that networks of more intimate relationships, such as family, marriage, and friends, may be less likely to avoid argumentation and disagreement, thus allowing different political opinions to survive and be shared even in homogenous groups. The authors gathered a nonprobability sample of participants who, in the course of the survey, were asked to produce a list of discussion partners, and code those relationships as strong (family, spouse, friend) or weak (colleagues or coworkers, acquaintances). They provided their own party affiliation (Republican, Democrat, or Independent) and the presumed party affiliation of each discussion partner; the combination was then rated as congruent (if matching) or non-congruent. For each partnership, participants were asked to rate how often they discussed

political issues, how often they disagreed, and how often they tried to avoid discussing specific aspects of political issues about which they tended to disagree. Results found that, though partners tend to be politically similar in terms of overall ideology or party affiliation, within a discussion with a strong tie there is political disagreement and a higher than expected willingness to disagree.

This surprising result is possible for two reasons, one regarding political attitudes and one regarding close relationships. First, the nature of close relationships leads to more disagreement and conflict, even in the political realm. These relationships tend to be more stable, and feature increased personal disclosure and less likelihood of concealing or lying in order to avoid conflict. Secondly, previous studies tended to consider agreement based on party or candidate choice, or at least based on general attitudes. However, within any given party there are a variety of political positions, with which not every member will agree. Additionally, within any ideological consideration of a policy there are numerous attitudinal details that can differ from person to person (see Sherif et. al, 1965). Therefore even if the party or ideological affiliation within a relationship is congruent, there still remains plenty of opportunity for interpersonal disagreement. Studies that focused on congruency of attitudes are not necessarily testing expression or avoidance of political disagreement; Morey et. al (2012), by specifically asking for expression of disagreement within interaction, is targeting this gap.

It is important to note, however, that Morey et. al (2012) define strong or close relationships broadly, including family, marriage or romantic partners, and friends in the same category and comparing these with weaker relationships such as coworker or acquaintance. Each of these subgroups exhibits a unique combination of interpersonal and relational considerations that have prompted diverging concentrations of research within the field Communication Studies, and categorizing them all together may elide some important distinctions. That said, the characteristics particularly noted by the authors, that of increased disagreement and conflict, increased self-disclosure, and a

tendency to be more willing to disagree, are highly characteristic of friendship, as particularly studied by Planalp (1992) and Knobloch and Solomon (2003), suggesting that disagreement may also be present in this study of political discussion between friends.

Disagreement and discussion are influential within networks, but the individual cannot be entirely subsumed within network analysis; political expertise of a communicative partner is also an important consideration (McClurg, 2006).

“Knowledgeable political discussants provide access to information that helps people recognize and reject dissonant political views, develop confidence in their attitudes, and avoid attitudinal ambivalence, thereby making participation more likely” (McClurg, 2006, p. 737). However, expertise is more than just political knowledge, and the effects of interaction with a political expert go beyond likelihood of political participation. Experts can communicate messages with clarity and context, helping people connect information they receive with their own predispositions and work through dissonant information. In other words, interaction with political experts increases internalization of political information, reduces ambivalence, and increases confidence of political views. In so doing, experts encourage people to make politics a larger part of their identity and more relevant to their lives (McClurg, 2006).

Another consideration must be the number of social networks within which one individual exists. A person may exist in a relatively closed network, in which they interact primarily with the same group of people and have little regular contact or relationships with others. A discussion partner is most influential when expressing an opinion that is in line with that of the majority of members in a network, so in these networks minority opinions may get little support and disagreement is much less likely to survive. In fact, the candidate preference of an individual that is not supported by the network can cause a reactive response, such that, for example, a single vocal Democrat in

a group of Republicans can move a discussion further to the right or increase negative attitudes toward a democratic candidate (Huckfeldt et al., 2002).

On the other hand, a person may operate in a number of networks, some of which are quite diverse, and in so doing are exposed to a variety of interactions. Having a number of weak social ties in heterogeneous networks allows minority opinions to remain alive, as an opinion that is a minority in one group may be the majority opinion in another network. As a result, individuals may be able to continue discussion and disagreement in a number of networks, which in turn increases knowledge and deliberation, and factors in to the historical shifts between political parties in the American political system (Huckfeldt et al., 2002).

Interestingly, in some cases the level of expertise can counter the influence of majority opinion. Huckfeldt et al. (2002) found that even a moderate amount of expertise was rated more important than agreement with the network. In other words, if a conversation partner is presenting information or an argument that represents the minority opinion of that network, if they are considered enough of an expert, the fact that the opinion is dissonant from others' is less likely to be factored in.

Focus on the role of an individual within a social network provides a balance between sheer aggregation of network influence and measure of individual influence. It also demonstrates the potential importance of interpersonal communication for political persuasion:

[Our] analysis suggests that the conversion of any single individual to a particular candidate's cause is not only important in terms of a single vote or a single unit of social influence. It is also important in terms of the enhancement and attenuation effects that it creates throughout the networks of relationships with which the individual is embedded, quite literally transforming entire patterns of social influence. In this way, political interdependence among citizens might actually magnify the importance of events in the external political environment. (Huckfeldt et al., 2002, p. 18)

In other words, an individual has potential to influence a number of people through interpersonal communication within his or her social networks, particularly if that

individual has a moderate level of political expertise and is in a diverse number of discussion networks.

Relationships do provide an “information shortcut” to obtain (and in turn spread) political knowledge in a social group, and thereby help people develop and substantiate political opinion (McClurg, 2006; Rill & McKinney, 2011). However, interpersonal communication in social networks has considerably more potential to influence in a variety of other ways. The research on political knowledge dissemination begins to connect some of the work involving political persuasion with interpersonal communication, in that it looks at social groups and political outcomes. It is distinct in two ways, though: first, it focuses on wider social networks, which participants identify as including people beyond what they would consider their friendship groups; and second, like much of the research in political communication, it is purely outcome focused (testing for political knowledge or information) and often relegating the interpersonal communication only to a channel or conduit. Research on the influence of networks on political or electoral participation is also outcome-focused, using self-reports for frequency of discussion and disagreement between dyads within a broader “discussion network.” Self-reports like these provide some insight into frequency of disagreement, but only within the subjective understanding of what “disagreement” means to each participant. It also provides no information about what happens in a disagreement in a network, or how it is handled by discussants.

However, these studies do go beyond strangers and family interaction to show a connection between influence and personal relationships, from which we can narrow our investigations into friendship groups. This trajectory of work also suggests the importance of discourse in meaning-making and opinion development, which further reinforces the importance of a discourse-focused examination of political talk. A qualitative approach that analyzes an actual interaction also can provide insight into how friends approach dissemination of political information and how disagreement is

communicatively handled within a group. For example, in an intercultural communication study of disagreement, Habib (2008) found that rather than causing conflict, disagreement was paired with humor and used as an educational tool, helping maintain friendship and providing cultural knowledge and awareness. A similar exploration between friends, as in this study, can show how disagreement operates within a conversation about a political matter.

In looking at only a “snapshot” of time in order to test effects of messages, studies neglect the complications that arise during discussions among friends, and relegate the role of communication to one of simple transmission. We the readers are left to presume how the interactions progress between these friends or within social networks, without knowing how the conversations developed. This approach ignores the role of communication as a way of making meaning and developing an attitude or opinion, instead moving immediately to attitude testing or measuring political participation. Thus this dissertation begins with the broad preliminary research question:

RQ1: What are the features of a conversation about a political topic among friends?

While some studies have created a measurement of friendship and others have tabulated features of friendship, in this study the participants were asked to self-identify as friends rather than being tested or judged to be so. This is because the way the participants interact is impacted by how they view their relationship with one another. In other words, whether they fit a researcher-imposed definition of “friends” is unimportant; what matters is only their interaction with people they themselves identify as friends.

Blurring “The Political”:

The Benefit of Participant Identified

Political Topics

In order to explore features of political conversation, it is first helpful to understand the boundaries of “political” discourse. As observed earlier, political communication research has generally focused on campaigns and elections, looking at

candidate and media messages and testing persuasiveness of these messages; in other words, generally studies of political discourse focus on professional politicians and political institutions, and their communication with citizens (van Dijk, 1997). However, this can beg the question of what “politics” means; by looking at a certain element as political communication, it assumes that the element is – in fact must be by definition – political. Yet with constantly changing public opinion documented in polling data, what is considered “political” may not necessarily fit in previously understood categories.

Etzioni (2004) relaxes the definitional constraints somewhat by focusing on the actions both from society to state and state to society, particularly as it relates to the application, reallocation, and legitimating of power. However, he does highlight the importance of including the relationship with the state or laws to differentiate the political from the social. The legitimate fear is that failing to distinguish between the two could result in the political realm overcoming the social realm. As an example, conflating the political with the social could mean that the government creates and assigns grievance counselors assigned in times of loss rather than having this be a social role that is fulfilled by neighbors and loved ones; the result, then, could undermine and potentially destroy social and personal needs and action.

However, there is a relationship between the social and the political, particularly in consideration of the moral dimension contained in all political action and deliberation (Etzioni, 2004). While moral dialogues are typically initiated and developed in the social realm, they are often subsequently taken up within the political realm, suggesting that the line between the social and the political is at best blurred. And with the use of consciousness-raising as political action by second wave feminists, the political has been expanded to include the personal (Hanisch, 1969). That said, there must still be boundaries on the understanding and study of political communication, as considering everything personal as political would not only subsume the role of the social, but also

would create too broad of a subject matter (would everything then be political? Would nothing be?).

Teun van Dijk (1997) expands the more general understanding of political discourse from simply a focus on professional politicians or political institutions to include the recipients of political communication. In so do, he suggests that political discourse should not be prescribed, but should be defined contextually when the aims, goals, or functions are at least primarily (though need not be entirely) political. This understanding broadens political communication beyond strict categorization and focus on government actors or the media to also include interpersonal conversations in that intersecting area of the political and the social.

The issue of determining the context (and whether the context can or should be considered political) remains, however. If it is wholly researcher determined, it can again run the risk of begging the question, or risks potential research-based issues in the judgment of the context. However, when participants themselves determine the content of a “political conversation” they indicate by that choice their own understanding and framing as political a subject matter that, as is generally the case, overlaps with non-political realms. Additionally, understanding and framing something as political can influence the way the participants approach and discuss a subject, moving it from the realm of the purely social into at least the intersection of the political and social.

Allowing participants themselves to determine the meaning of the political also provides fluidity to the definition that allows adaptation and opens areas of future political concerns. Consider, for example, a conversation among friends on the topic of drugs. This subject may be discussed entirely in the realm of the social, for example focusing on educating children about drug abuse or on community action for prevention and treatment. If the group chose this topic as a political one (after being prompted, for example, to choose a political topic to discuss), they may still discuss education, prevention, and treatment, but their understanding of the topic as political also suggests

their understanding of the role of the government or public officials in addressing what could otherwise be a social concern.

To explore a more adaptive understanding of political communication in light of these concerns, I reserved the definition of the political topic to the participants themselves, prompting the following question:

RQ1a: How do friends make meaning of the term “political topic”?

An Alternative Way:

Using Sequential Inferential Paradigm

Sequential Inferential Paradigm (SIP) (Sanders, 1995) offers a flexible approach, which provides context and nuance in the examination of political persuasion and adds to the quantitative knowledge already addressed. This is appropriate for an exploratory study of this nature, as it looks at the actual interaction between friends. Traditionally, influence has been conceptualized as how an individual affects or changes thoughts, actions, or emotions of a relational partner, while persuasion is a form of influence wherein the individual uses messages intentionally designed to appeal to a partner to enact change. Thus influence is an umbrella construct encompassing persuasion and other types of influence, often considered as a continuum (Hsiung & Bagozzi, 2003). SIP does not necessarily focus on the success or failure of an intentional or unintentional persuasive attempt, but provides insight into the systematic bases individuals use to fashion their discourse to influence others. SIP has been most notably taken up to demonstrate and explain how mutual influence, specifically in a compliance gaining situation, is enacted incrementally and interactively (Sanders & Fitch, 2001); however, the principles of the theory can be more broadly expanded to meaning-making in interaction.

Sanders (1995) looks at sequence rather than component acts individually, shifting away from an information and effects-centered perspective to a social perspective similar to that of Burke (1950) and Goffman (1959). SIP acknowledges that

people actively interact with one another and are affected by and can affect others, but asserts that an individual cannot determine results alone or with a single act. Instead, “the central influence over what befalls individuals is... the sequence of acts that they interactively produce with others – not the acts themselves – where each person contributes but none controls the whole” (Sanders, 1995, p. 132).

Understanding and expanding Sequential Inferential Paradigm

SIP recognizes that traits, messages, and relationships do exercise some influence, but argues that the principle influence over what happens in an interaction is the sequence of acts the individual participants produce. The focus is on the interaction, rather than the individuals; while individuals do contribute, no one individual can control what happens in the interaction as a whole. Thus instead of looking at whether an act, a message, or an individual changes an audience’s mind, SIP focuses on whether and how acts within an interaction sequence contribute to a possible resolution of that sequence, and how the potential resolution is shaped by the progression of the interaction.

As a primary assumption, Sanders (1995) observes that members of a given culture share rules of organization and sequence in interaction. These rules affect what can be said and when, based on applicability to what was said previously. In essence, this creates a series of branching possibilities for an interaction. When person A makes a statement, there are X number of possible responses, based on the cultural rules of acceptable responses. If response B is taken (rather than A, or C, or D...), it produces another set of X possible responses. After that response is made, the other potential responses to person A’s statement become impossible (as making one of these other responses, like C, would violate the rules). Thus a choice of response restricts the direction of the interaction further each time a response is made, essentially directing the flow toward possible resolutions.

A major tenet of organization and sequence is the importance of relevance in response. People are culturally and intellectually taught that an appropriate response to

another's statement is one that is clearly relevant (based on the circumstances of the interaction). If the relevance is unclear, the response becomes nonsensical, and the interaction does not progress. People experientially develop knowledge of these principles of relevance and can project how different acts of discourse can be fashioned and what influence a given response could exert. They can then tailor responses so that they can influence the discourse to proceed toward a resolution that they support. In order to develop understanding of these rules and to use the rules advantageously, people also learn to make inferences about the course of an interaction. People figure out what response would receive a desired interpretation, and can test that through the response itself, allowing further development of rules and understandings, as well as aiding the resolution of the interaction.

SIP is easily understood in the realm of compliance gaining, as these are situations where there is a clear end: the point at which one agrees to (or refuses to) comply with the requested behavior. The interaction develops along a sequence toward resolution of the act of compliance seeking. Similarly, acts of intentional persuasion are also ends-focused, with the ends extended beyond behavioral compliance to include attitude or belief change; thus SIP is also clearly applicable as a way to examine the development of these sequences as well. Persuasion and compliance gaining interactions are organized around an agenda, which aids in the resolution of that interaction and allows people to make inferences about the development of the interactional course. However, SIP can also be applied beyond the limiting situations of persuasion or compliance gaining to look at interaction that is less clearly ends-focused or agenda driven.

The purpose of interaction is to make meaning: it is through our interaction with others that we are able to understand ourselves and our world (Mead, 1934). Thus every interaction is ends-focused and agenda driven inasmuch as the purpose of any interaction is to make meaning. And these interactions are not separate from or in need of different

theorizing from persuasion because, as Burke (1950) explains, where there is meaning there is persuasion. Likewise, discourse itself has a functional aspect, designed to win hearts and minds (Wetherell, 2001). In other words, everyday conversations are no less teleological than purposeful persuasive attempts in creating a shared meaning, and the process of making meaning in these everyday conversations is itself influential. Studying everyday conversations about politics through a persuasive lens is particularly important, as the realm of “the political” is notably tied up with attitudes and behaviors. In other words, everyday talk about a political topic among friends can serve as overt political persuasion, but it also can more subtly coordinate meaning-making in a way that affects attitudes and behavior.

SIP can thus be used as a lens to observe the interaction between friends talking about a political issue, whether or not they are attempting to (or succeeding or failing to) persuade one another. In an attempt to make meaning together, friends will follow the rules of interaction and make inferences based on what each is saying. As the interaction develops, the sequence itself influences the trajectory of the conversation. A conversation could develop in a variety of ways, which in turn would influence what each participant contributes and what each is exposed to. Consider a discussion on “environmental issues”: as the conversation develops, the sequence could result in a discussion of pollution, global warming, carbon footprints, or alternative energy (among many others). Likewise, the conversation may develop to encourage individual action, or political action, or advocating for a policy change, or simply be an opportunity to share information (as Eveland, 2004, observed as a role of interpersonal political communication). SIP allows us to view the entire discussion holistically, examining how each turn influences the development of the interaction.

Interaction between friends is also understandable with the influential meanings postulate. Building from SIP, Sanders and Fitch (2001) postulate that the inferences made by participants in an interaction are affected by social considerations of how each

seeks to be perceived (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934). Specifically, Sanders and Fitch (2001) posit:

Person P's likelihood of saying or doing X depends on what P projects the social meaning of his/her doing or saying X would be to relevant others (i.e. what they could infer about P's identity, character, or relationship with others). This is because the way others treat P depends on their beliefs about P's identity, character, and relationship with others (p. 265).

People are vigilant about the potential inferences that can be made from their actions or comments, particularly when those inferences could put their own interest at risk (Sanders & Fitch, 2001). This may be particularly important in interactions about politics, as politics are highly tied to identity (see Sherif et. al, 1965).

Reconsidering theoretical implications of relationships

While Sanders' theory has significant potential as an alternative explanation for persuasion and as a theory that can be expanded beyond compliance-seeking situations into meaning-making, its consideration of relationships is underdeveloped and somewhat simplified. Sanders (1997) suggests that relationships are best considered as an integration of complementary considerations. Traditionally, a psychological approach to relationships concentrates on the assumptions and conclusions of an individual, looking at the knowledge and values that each has and shares. A social approach has instead suggested that individuals form relationships because they are social beings who are compatible in their interaction patterns. After tracing each of these trajectories and looking at each situationally, Sanders concludes that neither approach is sufficient for understanding human relationships, and that we must draw from both to fully appreciate the complications of relating. Thus he suggests that relationships are based on two things: how each person socially presents and enacts his or her role identity, and the way each assesses the other's presentation of that role identity. This integrates the two perspectives, with the presentation representing the social and the assessment representing the psychological.

Sanders (1997) encourages additional work that examines the actual interaction between people in relationships, to help understand the lived experience. He explains that interaction itself gives individuals a framework for being able to make inferences about the other person, and aids in understanding based on knowledge of previous interactions. At the same time, the interaction has sequential determination, in that communication “is a process that in and of itself makes demands on persons, who have to incrementally adjust and adapt what they say and do for the sake of achieving coordination and understanding” (p. 390). When the Sequential Inferential Paradigm is applied in looking at interaction of those with previous relationships, however, Sanders (1995) focuses more on inferences drawn from relationships than on the influence of the relationship on the sequence itself.

For example, Sanders (1995) observes that we can infer whether people are mutually compatible by assessing whether their acts help to move the interaction toward resolution and by looking at “conflicts” and how they are handled (whether they are resolved or cause interaction breakdown). To demonstrate, he uses an example from Gottman’s (1993) work on marital communication and dissolution, where a husband and wife are discussing whether the wife would have a problem with the husband spending time with another woman. In the course of the conversation, the husband uses the example of a former romantic relationship he had, and the wife asserts that this would be a different case because of the shared history. The husband defends the other woman, claiming that the wife would like her and that they had a lot in common. Then the wife heatedly asks if he is speaking hypothetically or if he actually wants to see his ex-girlfriend. Sanders explains that this last statement is based on the interaction itself, because instead of referring to the general idea of meeting with any woman other than his wife, the husband uses specific characteristics of one particular woman, from which the wife infers that he wants to see that woman.

While this is a potential interpretation of the transcript of the interaction itself, there is also an element that can be attributed to relationship that Sanders neglects. The fact that the couple is married allows for inferences and interactions that would not be available if the participants were strangers. In other words, the relationship is what allows the woman to first make the assumption and second to confront the man about the assumption. In this way, then, the relationship aids in the sequential progression of this interaction.

On the other hand, Sanders (1995) seems to suggest that relationships may be inhibiting for influence. He asserts that people who often engage each other in conversation may standardize their sequences, which could inhibit their ability to change the sequence and to exert much influence once the sequence becomes rigid. This suggests that someone may influence a friend less than a stranger, because of the commonality of interaction. Yet at the same time, friendship may be used as a resource that allows sequential options that may not be available when interacting with strangers (as in the case of the couple above), as suggested by Knobloch and Solomon (2003).

Knobloch and Solomon (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on communicative relational cues and outcomes, finding three key characteristic features of interaction among friends, each of which can provide for broader interactional opportunities. First, friends demonstrate reliance on relational knowledge through self-disclosure and mutual understandings, which provides a resource for friends to access to design messages or to tie a conversation to previously shared knowledge. Second, friends demonstrate interdependence, allowing them to work and reference themselves as a group; this, in turn, can impact the trajectory of the conversation as the group resolves issues and evolves together as a cohesive unit. Finally, friends show mutual commitment to the relationship, and invest in the maintenance of the friendship, which can produce references to the status transitions and negotiating events of the relationship itself – topics only available by virtue of the friendship.

Beyond allowance for additional topics and sequential development, relationships themselves may have an impact on interaction and on influence by virtue of the relationship alone (Carl & Duck, 2004). Yet these important considerations have not been taken up in the development of SIP. The present study, then, allows SIP to be expanded beyond compliance gaining, and challenges the considerations of relationships in the theory, through the following research questions:

RQ2: How does a conversation about a political topic sequentially develop?

RQ3: What role does relationship play in conversational development and inference making?

CHAPTER TWO:
CRITICAL CASE STUDY THROUGH
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS:
AN EXPLANATION OF METHODOLOGY

Persuasion research has focused on the cognitive aspects of persuasive attempts, measuring degrees of attitude change and assessing the success or failure of messages based on that measurement. Much of the political persuasion research that includes face-to-face communication looks at scripted speeches and one-way communication, often between strangers. When relationships have been considered it usually has been either to focus on role-based communication (e.g., Tracy, 2007), or has centered on parent-child communication. This dissertation moves away from a cognitive-focus, instead exploring interaction between friends when talking about a political topic. In other words, this project does not examine what people are thinking, but rather on what they do in the moment and how their friendship is implicated in the observable dimensions of talk. For example, how a group of friends handles a disagreement provides clues about the social structure operating within the group. However, the manner in which disagreement is handled is indicated in the discourse itself, not in the cognitions of the participants. As we cannot know what each individual is thinking at the moment of a disagreement, we must look to the actions taken in the interaction, from which we can better understand how the group interacts and how it handles dissent when discussing political issues. These actions comprise the features of the talk, which also provide indications of the role of relationships in conversational development, affording answers to the research questions.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that attitude research, previously done in psychology through self-report surveys and questionnaires, should be reexamined through discourse analysis for contextual information and orientation of talk to create a fuller understanding of the complexity of attitude expression through talk. Instead of

focusing on psychological attitude change based on a snapshot of a situation, discourse analysis acknowledges the complexity of expression and relational maintenance during communication about political issues and draws from the interaction itself. As interaction is a way to create, modify, or reinforce political beliefs, examining how an interaction proceeds through discourse analysis allows researchers to examine the sequential, dynamic, and turn-taking flow of conversation.

Discourse analysis, then, provides an alternative method for exploring political communication and persuasion, and in so doing gives insight into relationships and how the relationship affects the interaction. In order to illuminate the “rich ambiguity” of existence” (Flyvbjerg, 2006), my study specifically focuses on an in-depth analysis of a single interaction. A case study allows deeper insight into the nuance of interaction, answering the critique in Chapter 1 about the inability for quantitative methods to account for the complexity of real-world variables and interaction.

This chapter will explain the theoretical and methodological foundations of discourse analysis, including the role of sequence in discourse. I then outline the process, from recruitment of participants through the protocol of the study and the transcription of the recorded interactions. Finally, I explain the procedure for analysis, tracing my progression from preliminary analysis to produce the findings outlined in Chapter 3.

Understanding Complexity:

Interactions Through the Lens of Discourse Analysis

This study focuses on the “kinds of resources drawn on in discourse and the practices in which those resources are used” (Potter, 1997, p. 208) in everyday political communication among friends. Specifically, I draw from Gee (1999), who suggests that language allows us to socially interact and reinforces institutional involvement. He explains that the role of the discourse analyst is to note patterns within and across turns and to form hypotheses about how meaning is being constructed in that moment.

Through discourse, people organize, present, and understand social interaction, following unwritten “rules” of performance and conversation. Discourse analysis allows an understanding of turn-taking, sequence, and inferences made by participants in an interaction, addressing the first and second research questions. Likewise, discourse illustrates the relational aspects of interaction, demonstrating and integrating values of social norms among an interacting group, for example through indications of friendship (overlap, agreement, laughter) or times of disagreement; this, then, speaks to the third research question.

Making Meaning: Discourse as Organizing Framework

Discourse provides an organizing framework that allows our meaning-making interactions to run smoothly. Social encounters are ritually organized, which creates requirements for social interaction (Goffman, 1955). In other words, in order to make meaning, we organize or “do” our talk in regular ways, adhering to the genre of the conversation and using contextualization cues to inform us of the appropriate behavior in a given the situation so as to not threaten our own or other’s face. Goffman’s (1955) conceptualization of face as a self-claimed positive social value becomes “something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). At the same time, social roles are not simply projected, but rather coordinated and jointly created. Through discourse, we socially present and cooperate in the maintenance of face, because loss of face is emotionally painful (Goffman, 1959). Facework consists of politeness strategies as well as responses to an incident that may threaten a person’s face, in order to prevent or help recover from the emotional pain of face threats.

Part of what allows us to make meaning is adjusting to what we assume the other members of the interaction know (Goffman, 1983). We make inferences based on genre and context as well as relationships and experience. “Each participant enters a social situation carrying an already established biography of prior dealings with the other

participants – or at least with participants of their kind; and enters also with a vast array of cultural assumptions presumed to be shared” (Goffman, 1983, p. 4). In other words, even when dealing with strangers, our historical understanding of how interaction works and the rules of social encounters facilitates meaning making. When a participant is interacting in a social situation with someone with whom they have already dealt significantly (like friends), they have even more specific assumptions and understandings they can use in the interaction. In the case of interacting with friends on a political topic, there are already strictures in place from which we draw to organize our interaction, demonstrating that coordinated interactions are not random but the result of social learning of a sort. Many of these strictures come from assumptions that we make about fellow participants and about the subject matter.

When engaging in a conversation about a political topic, we approach the interaction with basic assumptions from past political and relational communication; when that conversation is with friends, and particularly when it is with friends with whom we have had previous political discussions (as is the case in this study), those assumptions are even more developed, and can provide more guidance in our organizational structure and in our meaning making. Communicators may already have knowledge of another’s general political ideology or party identification, or they can make assumptions about a political viewpoint their conversational partner may hold based on the stances the party has taken in the past. Even knowing a friend’s preference in a recent political election can guide what is talked about and how it is discussed; if communicators disagree with or hold different assumed viewpoints, they may approach the conversation focusing on areas of agreement and attempting to avoid areas where they assume there will be conflict.

Strictures of discourse also allow conversational partners to make assumptions based on genre and context (Goffman, 1983). A political or academic debate, particularly in formalized occasions, has unspoken constraints built in; for example, conversational

partners may assume and expect that the conversation will refer to externalities rather than personal attacks. In a discussion with friends, they also operate according to assumptions on how one should behave with friends. When the two are combined – when a group of friends is talking about politics – even more constraints may be in place. However, as these constraints and assumptions are generally unspoken, researchers must look to the discourse itself to attempt to unpack them.

In addition to genre and context constraints affecting and organizing our discourse, we also subscribe to unspoken “rules” of communication. By understanding the rules we follow, we can make further reasonable assumptions about meaning or understanding being created. Grice (1999) suggested that in a conversation we implicitly agree to work together to establish meaning or achieve common purpose; thus all things being equal, conversational partners expect responses in an interaction to be cooperative in order to be effective. The tenets explained in Grice’s four maxims describe rational principles people adopt to participate in effective communication. The first maxim is that of Quality, specifically focusing on truthfulness; this requires that communicators do not say something they believe to be false or for which they lack adequate supporting evidence. The Maxim of Quantity directs that they include as much information as is required for the purpose of the exchange, but do not provide excess information. The Maxim of Relation requires that comments are relevant to the purpose and direction of the conversation. Finally, the Maxim of Manner requires clarity and organization, avoiding ambiguity and obscurity of expression.

These maxims help explain how communicators make meaning or understand utterances, because the meaning lies in the sequence, and responses illustrate the understanding of the previous statements. With the assumption that someone’s comment is cooperative and follows the Maxims, communicators and researchers can draw inferences to help contextualize. For example, if I comment that I have not seen a mutual friend for several days and another replies that the friend has the flu, I can infer that the

information about my friend's health is to explain the lack of contact (that I have not seen her because the flu has prevented her from activities). Without the assumptions of these maxims, we would not make the inferences required to allow us to make sense of the response. Again, it is through the discourse that communicators observe these maxims at play; because each response is contingent upon that before, the sequence of comments in the interaction in light of Grice's maxims allows communicators to understand the purpose of specific statements. This is the work undertaken in a discourse analysis – specifically looking at how each turn progresses from the previous, and the types of assumptions being relied upon or made to create understanding.

Discourse among friends about a political topic is wrought with constraints and assumptions that may influence the interaction and the progression of the conversation. At the same time, these factors can allow for inferences and development of trajectories that may not be available in a different context, such as with strangers or family members. This is where sequence and discourse intersect.

Understanding Meaning:

The Role of Sequence in Discourse

In addition to its role in aiding conversational inference and observational understanding, sequence is at the heart of discourse analysis in several ways. First, as a basic tenet of the organizing theory of Sequential Inferential Paradigm (SIP) (Sanders, 1995), sequence influences the development and direction of a conversation. Additionally, sequence is important as an element of discourse analysis, helping us understand utterances. Whether a person's statements are taken in the conversation as cooperative or uncooperative depends on sequence – the responses to the statement illustrate whether the previous statement is taken as a violation of a maxim (Grice, 1999). Sequence also helps understand the illocutionary force of an utterance. Searle (1985) explained that the words one says and the tone in which it is said—the propositional content of a message—are not necessarily what the utterance means. Rather, meaning

goes beyond words and tone to include what the utterance is meant to do (the illocutionary force). However, in order to understand illocutionary force, we must see how a given utterance is responded to. For example, consider the following exchange:

A: This is going to end badly for you.

B: Are you threatening me?

In this case, B treats A's statement as having the illocutionary force of a threat. A in turn can confirm or change that interpretation, by saying "That's not a threat, that's a promise" or "I'm just telling you what I think will happen." As language allows for multiple versions or alternatives (Wetherell, 2001), people can draw a number of inferences from any given utterance; sequence helps illuminate what inferences are being made or what alternative is meant (Gee, 2011).

These principles apply to any communicative discourse. The way something is said and the order of the content are as important for this project as the content itself. Thus one important step in this discourse analysis is to look turn-by-turn through the interaction, determining how one utterance led to another. In addition to looking at the content and sequential development of the discussion, this project examines details of the conversation, including overlap and pauses, intonation, and laughter. The inclusion of these details is implicated in the process—specifically the transcription of the discussion groups' conversations.

Content Meaning: Defining the Political Topic

None of this is to say, however, that the content of the interactions themselves are not important, and discourse analysis does not preclude exploration of the meaning-making and persuasion inherent in the content of an interaction. This is where the political content and the second research question come into play. In this project specifically, I explore how groups understand the term "political topic" by allowing them to decide themselves on the topic of their discussion. Political communication has tended to focus on candidates and elections, essentially allowing the course of an election to

determine for researchers the matters of public concerns to be studied. However, this begs the question of a political topic, assuming the definition without first determining it. Allowing groups themselves to decide what to talk about provides an alternative understanding of political communication, opening up previously unexplored areas of public concern. Discourse analysis allows exploration of the meaning-making participants exhibit when deciding upon a political topic, as well as the conclusions and implications participants arrive at within the interaction.

Process

Participants

With approval from the University of Iowa IRB, I set out to recruit groups of friends who are interested in politics from the community at large. Because of the specific nature of participants I was looking for, I contacted several area political groups, including the Johnson County Republicans, the Johnson County Democrats, College Republicans, University Democrats, Young Americans for Liberty student organization, and University of Iowa Socialists. Extra credit was also offered to students in “Communication and Conflict” class at the University of Iowa. Interested participants were required to come in established friendship groups of three to five people, all of whom were comfortable talking politically with one another.

Despite significant outreach, I had little success recruiting participants. One reason for this may be that the parameters were highly specific: participants had to come in a pre-existing friendship group of 3 to 5 people, had to be politically interested, and groups had to be composed of people all of whom were comfortable talking about politics with one another. Another potential reason is that cultural constraints – specifically the fact that in the United States people are loath to argue about politics – limit the number of people willing to participate. At the end of a four-month recruitment period, I had collected data from three groups of participants – one from the Johnson County

Republicans, one from the Johnson County Democrats, and one group of politically knowledgeable but not politically active (i.e. not affiliated) friends.

Recorded Conversations

With each group I followed the same protocol. After explaining the study, I prompted the discussion by asking the group to choose a political topic and discuss it for 15 to 20 minutes. This prompt is purposefully vague, because the starting point for Research Question 1a is what friendship groups consider a “political topic” and how they negotiate settling on a topic. It also allows the groups to choose topics they may be more familiar or comfortable with, or topics they have (or have not) already discussed together. I then left the group for 20 minutes, allowing their conversation to proceed more naturally, having found previously (in a trial run for a sample analysis in the prospectus stage) that if I remained in the room they would often turn to me to see if they were “doing it right.” I returned in 20-25 minutes, informed them that sufficient time had passed, and asked if they would like to continue talking. If they chose to continue the conversation, I returned every 10 minutes. Each conversation was approximately twenty to thirty minutes each.

All interactions were audio recorded and outlined/summarized before being transcribed. The first step was to listen to the recording in its entirety, focusing on the development of the conversation and summarizing major points of subject matter. This created a general summary that I used for my own understanding of the passage and to serve as a heuristic as I proceeded.

Conversation one. The first comment after I left the group was “I don’t hang out with people with different opinions on political things.” This turned into the group talking about their opposition to “the feel good” and the “we have to take care of them” society. They all spoke to the need for people to work and pull themselves up rather than expecting the government to give them anything.

Shifting to the local, the group talked about the local food bank. One participant suggested that anyone could use the food bank without having to prove indigence. Another disagreed, but the disagreement was diffused quickly and the subject turned to people and companies that donate to the food bank, including the local grocery store. Mention of the donors led one participant to relate that she heard that many homes would have a turkey and a ham for Christmas, which in turn led to the entire group reminiscing about foods they ate for the holidays when they were younger.

One participant concluded that people aren't grateful, and the others talked about how aid is just expected, and brainstormed the things that the current poor have (such as TVs, cell phones, cars...), also incorporating a book one of the participants had brought along that contained statistics about relative price of things.

With no break or transition, one participant began a story about meeting a woman working in a gas station who, while also poor, condemned people using their food stamps for junk food. The woman in the gas station explained that she did not take aid from the government but instead was working, then related a story about accidentally dropping cash at the grocery store and being unable to pay her telephone bill. The participant told the group how she played "the Christmas elf" and emotionally gave the woman money for her bills.

In response to this story another participant talked about how other people complain about not getting enough "free stuff" and the group reminisced about what "luxuries" they did without and what cheap food they ate when they were young. Asking if this had gotten them off task, the woman with the book again read more examples of things that are considerably more affordable today, such as lawn mowers, answering machines, and garbage disposals, finishing by relating that the largest expenditures for low income households is now audio visual systems rather than food and clothing [I returned to the table in this discussion to see they wanted more time, which they did, and so I continued the recording]. The others joined in talking about the reasons for this

upsweep of consumer electronic in low-income households, including the ability to buy things cheaply at Walmart, and the fact that the poor are getting resources from charities, churches, and the government.

Immediately following these observations of charity and aid, one of the participants explained about the situation her daughter is in: she attends college in Nashville and, while the parents are paying for tuition and rent, she has chosen not to work and instead should go to the Salvation Army for free lunch. This participant talked about her daughter working hard over Christmas break to have money while in school, and another related that her granddaughter does the same. With the theme of working hard, the third participant in this group relayed the story of her nephew working in horrible conditions in Dubai and the state of affairs in that country, concluding that “we forget actually how good we’ve got it” despite the person who is the “fearless leader” right now. At that moment I returned to the table and the group chose to end this conversation.

The group was instructed to choose a political topic, which is the only way we can know a priori that the topic they are developing is political. The political topic chosen by this group was not readily apparent at first, but as the conversation continued it coalesced into a conversation about poverty and an ideology about the role of the government. Considering the understanding of politics established earlier, the prompt itself creates an understanding that the topic is in the realm of the political. Without that consideration, and particularly as this group focused more on an ideology rather than specific government program, it may not have been as clear that the topic was political. Specific policies (other than a mention of the food stamps program) were not addressed, nor were specific candidates. Rather, the group considered a wider worldview about poverty as their political topic. This conversation had very few pauses, and the friends overlapped one another and laughed often, demonstrating their friendship in the interaction.

Conversation two. The next conversation began with a participant referencing an article that argued that, in light of the continually growing executive power and the inability for Congress to effectively check that power, the Executive branch should be revamped to have a leader from each party who must agree in order to execute and enforce laws. The other members of the group raised concerns, such as worry that the executives wouldn't agree or that obstruction tactics would result in more skewed Congress producing even more partisan laws. They quickly concluded that, at the very least, it was an idea designed to solve the problem that the government clearly isn't working as currently enacted. As the conversation progressed, participants shared ideas of reform, such as a strong third party or change in gerrymandering laws, to which other participants shared advantages and disadvantages.

Following the discussion of redistricting, one participant suggested that voting itself should be reformed in order to ensure each congressional representative was selected by more of the people he or she would be representing. The proposal was that if either a certain percentage of the population in a district did not participate, the district's seat would remain empty. While another jokingly worried that there would be no members of Congress remaining, another suggested that it "couldn't be worse than we have now" and that there would be fewer unconstitutional laws being passed just to be struck down by the Supreme Court. Likening this idea to that of ballot initiatives, the group shifted to discuss procedures for getting an initiative on a state ballot (which differs by state), and the problem with solely self-interested voting and corruption.

Following this section, there was a two second pause in the conversation, after which one participant brought up Congress's recent failure to pass a law requiring background checks for gun ownership, despite 90% popular approval and support of representatives who are backed by the National Rifle Association. The group provided explanations of why the bill did not pass, such as that people who are opposed are more passionate than the ones who support it, and that organizations such as the NRA have the

political capital to manipulate the political system. One participant explained that the opponents' argument was that people who wanted guns to do bad things wouldn't follow background checks anyway, which prompted the comparison to Australia's gun collection initiative, reference to constitutional protection afforded guns in the United States, and the suggestion (from *The West Wing*) that gun control advocates should join the NRA and vote in gun control measures at their next convention. At that point I returned and asked if they wanted more time for their discussion, which they declined.

This conversation began with reference to an external source in order to provide a topic for the discussion, which in turn prompted shifting to a wider critique of the political system. As all were in agreement about the need for political reform, the group brainstormed potential solutions and illustrated current problems with political leaders. After discussing government corruption, there was a two second pause, after which a different participant suggested a different topic, this time focused on the specific policy of gun control. However, instead of discussing the policy itself (i.e. whether there should be gun control laws or what they should be), much of the conversation on this topic was debate about the reasons for the failure of the bill to be passed through Congress; in other words, while policy focused, the group understood this political topic beyond the policy itself, and include discussion of procedure. This conversation had a few moments of short pauses, but in general flowed from topic to topic with occasional overlap and laughter, particularly in the occasions when the group was brainstorming alternative solutions to a problem.

Conversation three. The third data collection conversation took place on a local election day, so the friends began by talking about where and when they had voted, and then discussed the ballot initiative proposing a new Justice Center and jail in the county. One participant suggested that the initiative would probably fail, prompting all to talk about counter-arguments they had heard and their concern about lack of a middle ground.

One illustration (of this lack of a middle ground) provided was surprising results in the state legislature where both a Republican and a Democrat voted in the same way for utterly different reasons; specifically, the former voted against funding Planned Parenthood because he is ideologically opposed to it, while the latter felt that the bill did not include enough funding. One participant related an interview she had heard on NPR of a prominent state Republican discussing her own and others' upcoming elections, and the group discussed how they expect that Republicans will do better locally in upcoming elections. Acknowledging that they live in a Democratic county, they maintained that the county was 10 years behind and people aren't voting their interest, the state had a surplus because it was not funding Medicaid, schools, or roads, and that teachers are being held hostage to education reform and increasing distribution of "pink slips."

One participant talked about how government officials are there to do the people's business and must do it right, prompting another to relate a segment from the previous night's *The Daily Show* where a correspondent interviewed an official from Australia who stated "I'm here to serve the people, not get re-elected." She then compared that to another interview where a member of Congress mentioned that the most important thing to him is getting reelected. The group then returned to the subject of *The Daily Show* and the quality of the writing and participants, then talked about *The Colbert Report*, an offshoot of *The Daily Show* that is broadcast immediately after.

On the previous night's episode, Colbert had wished his sister luck, because she was that day running in an election in South Carolina, as one of the participants related. The group discussed this election in detail, talking about her opponent running against Pelosi rather than Colbert-Bush, and returning to their concern about voter turnout. As they discussed Colbert-Bush's opponent, they mentioned some of his more notorious activities and his reputation, and one participant referred to him repeatedly as "gross." Immediately after referring to this politician as "gross", another participant asked the group what they thought about Chris Christie, the governor of New Jersey, getting lap

band surgery. In addition to mentioning the benefit to his health and his young children, the group talked about this in political terms, looking at his need for weight loss in order to be a contender for national office. They continued to talk about Christie's potential presidential run but added that he wouldn't get the nomination because "these people are insane". They suggested that Christie must think he'll get the nomination because "they can't possibly go with those wackjobs" and discussed his ability to win a general election. One participant observed that after eight years of Obama intellectualizing and explaining things in an attempt to get rational legislation, people are "ready for some New Jersey get-it-done." Unlike some other governors, Christie threatened to break unions but has learned to work with them.

Upon discussion of unions, the group turned to talk about the teacher's union in Iowa. They suggested that they were hesitant to trust government officials because Branstad, the governor, has always been focused on breaking the teacher's union, and they feared he would impose a policy that uses student scores as evaluation for teachers, despite having no research base that says it works to do so. At that point I returned and asked if the group needed more time. They declined further recording as they planned to be discussing "personal things" and I stopped recording and left.

This conversation provided the most variety in terms of topics, and participants often mentioned names of local and state government and party office holders, who, as there were no questions of clarification, were known to the entire group. This group was also the most concrete, discussing actual policies (such as construction of the local Justice Center and education reform) and actual candidates (Colbert-Bush and Christie). They also went beyond these specific political topics, discussing ideology, such as the value of working "for the people" rather than for re-election.

I did notice at this preliminary stage significant commonalities between groups. All three groups in some way or in parts of their interaction chose topics that would not necessarily fit into a "traditional" consideration of political communication; rather than

always being about candidates, or elections, or even specific policies, the groups focused on abstract considerations, such as poverty or the two-party system. I also observed similar friendship cues: participants were more familiar and informal with one another, there was laughter throughout, and disagreement was smoothed over by neglecting an original argument (a concept further explicated in Chapters 3 and 4). They used mutual knowledge, often referring to other people (by name or by reference) that the group understood without further explanation. Participants used similar tactics in each interaction, such as supporting their opinion by referencing experts or articles they had previously read.

Transcription

Discourse analysis typically focuses on transcripts formed from everyday talk or open-ended interviews (Potter, 1997). However, the development of these transcripts is as theoretically tied as the analysis itself:

A discourse analysis is based on the details of speech (and gaze and gesture and action) or writing that are arguably deemed *relevant* in the situation *and* that are relevant to the arguments the analysis is attempting to make. A discourse analysis is not based on *all* the physical features present, not even all those that might, in some conceivable context, be meaningful, or might be meaningful in analyses with different purposes. Such judgments of relevance (what goes into a transcript and what does not) are ultimately theoretical judgments, that is, based on the analyst's theories of how language, situations, and interactions work in general and in the specific situation being analyzed. (Gee, 2011, p. 88)

Thus while additional details are available in the recordings, my choice of what to focus on and therefore what to include in the transcription is theoretically grounded and purposeful.

Full detailed transcription was a highly time intensive endeavor, in order to capture the important nuances needed for discourse analysis. Beginning with the first recorded conversation, I choose to complete detailed transcription and preliminary analysis for one interaction before moving to the next. In addition to who spoke and what they said, the detailed transcription includes marking of five specific features of interactional sequence that are relevant and consequential within the Sequential

Inferential Paradigm: intonation, pauses, overlap, latching, and laughter. Features were marked with traditional Jeffersonian transcription markings.

I began by listening again to the entire conversation, noting passages with potential for further examination; I particularly took note of demonstrations of concepts or ideas discussed in the literature review or research questions, such as indications of friendship (overlap, agreement, laughter), times of disagreement, and particular political implications or direct political statements (drawing a political conclusion rather than telling a story, for example). When noting these passages, I marked the time stamp on the recording that coincided with the beginning of the section of interest, and focused on transcribing several of these pre-identified passages. The process outlined below was completed for one full passage before I moved on to transcription of the next marked passage.

Transcription itself was an iterative process, as there were a number of important elements to note in the transcription itself. Instead of attempting to mark down all elements for each line at the same time, I instead focused on one or two in each stage. I began first by identifying the actual words and who spoke each. However, as is often the case when friends are having an informal conversation, there was significant overlap; this too required segment replay to distinguish the words and speakers and to note when the overlapping began and ended. Some of the overlap was notated while transcribing the words themselves, but I did another round of detailed listening to be sure the notations of overlaps and words spoken were correctly marked.

My next step was to address the pauses in the conversation. First I listened through and simply marked times between words where there was a pause of any kind. Then I slowed the recording down and zoomed the program display to show tenths of seconds, so I could measure the length of each pause. Pauses that were less than a tenth of one second were marked as a micro-pause, indicated in the transcript as (.). Longer pauses were measured and the length of time of each pause was noted. Finally, I listened

to the passage several more times, noting points of emphasis (marked by underlining the emphasized word), times when the pitch of the voice changed (marked by up and down arrows), and times when the speaker spoke more quietly than usual (marked between degree symbols) (Jefferson, 1983). Each one of these steps (marking words, noting overlaps, noting and measuring pauses, and marking voice-based details) required frequent repetition of the passage of conversation. In fact, I listened to each passage so many times that I can hear the voices of the participants in my head as I read the transcript now; and thus I began to get familiar with the content and style of my data.

In early stages, I included summaries of the untranscribed sections between transcribed passages, to help contextualize and for following the development of sequence. Sometimes these were tangents in the midst of a passage (such as a point in one discussion when all three women began to laugh and make jokes about using the shampoo from the hotels rather than buying expensive or fancy shampoos). In other cases they would be providing details that were generalizable to something like “*talked about food they ate as children, including pasta with ketchup instead of pasta sauce for spaghetti*”.

I then reviewed the transcript as a whole, with transcribed sections and the summaries between, and realized I needed to contextualize some of the transcribed passages more, or that I was unable to identify how the participants transitioned into the transcribed section. So I returned to the recording and went to the previous minute of conversation before each chosen passage, adding more to the beginning of each passage to provide this contextualization (in some cases realizing that I had to back up several minutes). This, then, meant I returned again to the process of transcription and the iterative process described above for each of the additional transcription segments. Eventually I realized the importance of having each turn recorded in order to look at sequence and organization more thoroughly, and I then returned to the recording and transcribed the entire interaction.

Preliminary analysis

The first stage of analysis is highly preliminary, because discourse analysis is generally an inductive process that starts with a discursive phenomenon rather than from a hypothesis. Before hypotheses can be formed, the discourse analyst must identify patterns and implications within and across a series of turns (Gee, 1999).

The focus is on texts and talk as social practices in their own right. Part of [discourse analysis] may involve coding a set of materials, but this is an analytic preliminary used to make the quantity of materials more manageable rather than a procedure that performs the analysis itself. There is nothing sacred about such codings and extracts are often freely excluded and included in the course of some research. (Potter, 1997, p. 216)

Because of my focus on sequence, relationship, and politics, I needed to do preliminary analysis of each transcript with an eye to the whole as well as the specifics. Instead of attempting to do all of that at once, I returned to the stages approach I had taken for transcription, choosing to do a preliminary review several times, each time focusing on or considering different things.

After I was satisfied with the level of detail and inclusion of conversation in the transcript, I marked on the summary I had previously created the line at which each “major point” approximately began and noting more specific points for future reference. I also summarized specifics and included general purposes to create a notated outline.

For the case study group, my initial outline of the sequential development was:

- Talk about what this country was founded on (individualism) – line 13
 - individualism → work ethic (single mom story) – line 17
 - reference to poor people in general (“other”)– line 46
 - specific localized reference (Crisis Center) – line 67
 - general conclusion of ingratitude – line 125
 - counter example of “deserving poor” (gas station story) – line 158
 - comparison to generalization – line 219
 - comparison of current poor to participants’ past – line 224
 - conclusions about current poor in general – line 264
 - counter general conclusions with specific personal “exceptions”
 - daughter – line 290
 - granddaughter – line 348
 - nephew – line 357
 - general conclusion (from stories) of “having it good” – line 390

As an iterative document, this outline allows for changes in the wording of this sequential development to serve as support for a holistic overview.

For the next stage of preliminary analysis, I again returned to the recording and listened to it in its entirety, noting on the transcript as I listed observations without any attempt to categorize or code beyond a loose generalization. Thus I might mark “personal story” or “reported speech” or “disagreement” or even circle or star indications of friendship, such as laughter or agreement, or details I wished to return to. This involved several readings through the transcript, to include a number of observations.

As indicated, I found the data to be rich and highly contextualized. My previous efforts to segment parts of the interaction resulted in a failure to fully capture the detailed sequence and nuances of the interaction, and I found it necessary to transcribe the entire conversation for full analysis. In order to fully explore the intricacies of sequence and inference in interaction among friends, I abandoned the tactic of looking for commonalities between groups, instead approaching each interaction as a whole.

Thus I approached the conversations as case studies, analyzed in their entirety to highlight the features of the conversation and the role of each utterance in sequence. A case study allows for a more nuanced view of interaction, which is in line with the purpose of this study. Flyvbjerg (2006) explains that “it is often more important to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur” (p. 229). Previous literature having explored many of the more quantitative aspects of political persuasion, case studies allows deeper and more holistic insight into the nature of a political interaction among friends, which can be complicated. In addition to a more nuanced view of an interaction, case studies also afford the researchers a greater ability to consider “how” and “why” research questions in highly variable contexts. Additionally, it is an appropriate method for study of contemporary situations or issues when the researcher does not have control over behavioral events (Meyer, 2001).

With this strategic goal, I began further analysis into the conversation. As analysis deepened, the richness of the data and the observations and interpretation of conversational features, sequence, and inference from that data further supported the necessity of deep and holistic analysis. In the next section I explain this process of further analysis, with examples from the first recorded conversation.

Further analysis

Further analysis began in a preliminary note-taking manner. With the entire interaction transcribed, I had to segment the conversation for reference and analysis (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Thus I went through and found natural breaking points, such as a long pause, or a change of topic, and marked these breaking points. I then made three labels for each segment: observation, analysis, and evaluation. Under the “observation” label I noted direct pieces of the transcript and how they interacted, using the text itself; this was a description of both content and structure. For “analysis” I moved a bit deeper, noting potential implications or observations that come from the transcript but are beyond a description of what occurred in the transcribed section; this included explication of presupposed assumptions or notation of inferences drawn. Finally, for “evaluation” I focused on noting ideas of potential interaction with the literature (for example, whether it displayed a feature highlighted by other scholars), and potential impact on the areas of interest (friendship, politics, sequence). An example of this stage of the analysis looked like this:

- A: I think the more you I think the more that you make it easy for someone (1) to (1.5)
 B: get by without [working
 A: [to get to get through hard times the easier that you make it the less they want to get out of it.
 C: The less they want to do to help [themselves.
 A: [to get out of it right. Benjamin Benjamin Franklin said that being poor should not be easy.
 C: Exactly. (2)

Observation:

- A pauses for nearly 3 seconds with only the word “to” between pauses.
- B breaks the 1.5 second pause by continuing a thought (not restarting a sentence, building off of A’s)
- C agrees with A’s statement, rephrasing “the less they want to do to get out of it” as “the less they want to do to help themselves” and A affirms that rephrasing by saying repeating her own phrase and agreeing with C’s opinion.

Implication:

- B phrasing her input as a continuation of A’s sentence rather than a restatement suggests a continuation of thought, which is affirmed by the fact that A expands upon that idea immediately after.

Evaluation:

- *Using relational knowledge (K&S), perhaps building on conversations they have had in the past, knowledge she has of A’s ideology or of A herself, B can correctly complete A’s thought when A appears to struggle for words.*
- *Psycho-communicative (Carl & Duck) implications, as the influence over the conversation hinges on each understanding what the other is (trying to) say (?)*

With the entire transcript broken into sections of 10 to 20 lines, outlined in this fashion, I had created notes for findings and analysis, explicated in Chapter 3.

It is important to note again the role of the researcher and the impact that has on analysis. Using a qualitative method like discourse analysis means that a variety of interpretations and conclusions can readily be drawn; of course, these interpretations and conclusions depend on the paradigmatic understanding of the researcher. This chapter outlines my understanding of the nature and role of argument in persuasion, drawing from Grice as well as my own background as a trained lawyer. Specifically, when referring to an argument in the following analysis, I understand this to be the presentation of a conclusion (explicit or implicit) that follows from (stated or unstated) premises and is supported by evidence of some form. In addition to the relational analysis, the content analysis in Chapter Three includes identification of arguments, premises, and evidence, in accordance with this understanding of argumentation.

In light of the complexity of real-world interaction, I chose a method of discourse analysis, which involves observation and interpretation of patterns within and across turns and aids in understanding how participants are constructing meaning. Discourse analysis allows an understanding of turn-taking, sequence, and inferences, while also

illustrating the relational aspects of the interaction. As the research questions focus on the qualitative details in the interaction, discourse analysis provides a framework for investigating these in an interaction.

Participants were recruited in friendship groups from politically interested people in the community, which resulted in three groups. I prompted each group to choose a political topic and talk about it for twenty to thirty minutes. As a preliminary step, I listened and summarized each conversation, then began with the first conversation and transcribed it in a multi-stage process, which resulted in transcription of the entire conversation.

I next reviewed the complete transcript again in a multi-stage process, identifying patterns and implications in the whole as well as specific segments. I divided the transcript on natural breaking points, and made observations, analysis, and evaluation of each segment. As the interaction produced evocative data with numerous points of interest, I chose to focus in detail, which allows for deep investigation into the interaction. In the next chapter I begin with details of my decision to choose one conversation and explain how I chose which conversation to analyze.

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS

Selection of a Critical Case

Unlike quantitative studies, research that employs case studies uses a selective and purposeful process of data collection and analysis. In deciding what data to include in a case study research project, there are two major questions to ask (Meyer, 2001). The first question requires the researcher to determine how many cases to include. The theory of SIP requires a holistic view of an entire conversation in order to observe sequence and inference between turns and across the interaction, and as I proceeded through the rich data I realized the necessity of analyzing each turn of the entire conversation. In fact, the theoretical points are better elucidated by analysis of one entire conversation than from sections of several interactions; analysis of the latter could in fact cause confusion and detract from theoretical understanding. Thus in answer to the first question I chose to include one case, and determined that I would analyze the interaction in consecutive fragments. The fragments, based on natural pausing or topic change points whenever possible, provide a way to deeply analyze individual utterances and the conversation trajectory, without becoming lost in or having to refer back to a multi-page document that contains the script of the interaction. Unless otherwise noted, each segment of transcript directly follows in real time from the segment preceding it. Appendix A contains the transcript in its entirety for a holistic view of the entire interaction.

The second question about case studies involves the decision of sampling and choosing a case to use. To address this, a researcher should consider the goal of choosing a case or cases that fill theoretical categories and can provide rich and evocative examples. One option is to choose a critical case, in which the researcher assess the evidence by looking at a favorable illustration of a particular idea (Meyer, 2001). In this case I was looking at the intersection of friendship and political talk, and specifically wanted examples of how a topic was decided upon, how the group dealt with dissent or

disagreement, and how the participants utilized their friendship in the interaction, and I found an appropriate critical case in the first recorded conversation.

Analysis of the Case

This particular interaction involves three women in their late 50's and early 60's. They work together for the county Republican Party, and responded to my call for participants sent to that organization. All three had a college degree, did not currently work, and were upper middle class. The discussion, held at a local coffee shop, began with my prompt, which was simply "I want you to choose a political topic and talk about it." After giving the prompt, I left the group alone to choose a topic and discuss it. The conversation began with the group members expressing concern that they would have problems coming up with a topic because of their similarities, starting with the very first utterance after the prompt.

Amie: I don't hang out with people with different opinions on political (.5) things
 Cara: Me too.
 Amie: I.I.I think its I.I don't know whether that's a sign of the whole society or because we're becoming such (mumbling) but this whole this whole kumbaya stuff just drives ↑me nuts
 Beth: heh heh heh ha ha
 Cara: Yeah, see (.) I just (.) I can't deal with that.
 Amie: Well it makes me feel good. You(.) you know (.5) (mumbling) it doesn't mean that everyone needs to be slathered with it I. I. I.
 Cara: I (.) I
 Amie: It's not what our country was founded on
 Cara: No. It [wasn't
 (lines 1-13)¹

Amie explicitly states that she is friends with people who have similar opinions because of how other people talk: "this whole kumbaya stuff just drives ↑me nuts" (lines 3-4). Amie does not explain what "this whole kumbaya stuff" is, yet by responding with laughter and agreement, Beth and Cara demonstrate that they understand the characterization. The meaning of this phrase is not evident until the conversation develops, at which point others can understand the meaning of "kumbaya stuff"; at this

¹ "Lines" refers to the transcript, included and numbered in the appendix.

point in the conversation, however, someone not in this group of friends would not know what specifically Amie was referring to.

By characterizing a style she does not support or appreciate immediately after saying that she spends time with people who have similar political opinions as herself suggests first that her friends do not participate in “this whole kumbaya stuff” (which is reinforced by Cara agreeing in line 2), and second that the people participating in that kind of conversation are people with different political opinions from what the group shares. She not only differentiates herself (and her friends), but also implies that people with different political opinions are wrong, because “It’s not what our country was founded on” (line 11). As Amie is in a group of self-identified friends, her statement about with whom she will talk about politics ensures that the others agree; disagreement at that point could be tantamount to admitting they are not friends. In addition, the derision of “that kumbaya stuff” by saying that it’s not what our country is founded on further characterizes a certain kind of talk as a kind that nobody in the group of friends participates in.

At this point, however, outsiders to the conversation do not know what “that kumbaya stuff is”; all that is clear in the conversation is that “that kumbaya stuff” is something antithetical to what the country was founded on. The agreement and further conversation among the friends demonstrates that they understand the reference, but it is not until further in the conversation that the discourse reveals clues as to what “that kumbaya stuff” refers.

Amie: [The feel good was not what our country was founded on (our country was built on) independence. Independent thought independent from (.) the government (.2) being able to do your own thing (.) Um (.) Take care of yourself personal responsibility

Cara: It’s (.) yeah (.2) I I can’t do the (.) I have very little tolerance for the (.) the (.) we have to °we have to take care of them° society. I’m sorry (.) I was a single mom

Amie: [You of all people

Cara: [For many years

Amie: should be resentful of that

Cara: I am. For many years I worked two full time jobs to keep a roof over my kids' head (.) food in their bellies and clothes on their backs cause
 [their father
 A [not to mention the other people you [brought in
 Cara: [yeah]
 Amie: you took in other kids [too.
 (lines 14-29)

Amie incrementally indicates what she means by “that kumbaya stuff” by stating what it is not – it is not independence or taking personal responsibility. Amie’s statement focuses on the values that she supports as a way to differentiate those with whom she disagrees. Cara, in the following turn, transitions from the positive view of “what our country was founded on” (namely that people take care of themselves) to a negative view of how people are not taking care of themselves but are instead a “we have to take care of them society.” The “kumbaya stuff”, then, refers to people who claim that “we have to take care of them”. By contrasting the independence that the country was founded on with those who argue that “we have to take care of them”, Cara is further clarifying those with whom the friends disagree.

The “them” reference here is not yet explained, so the understanding of the “political topic” the group seems to be coalescing around remains vague to the outside observer. However, the overlap and flow of the conversation indicates that the group itself understands their implicit topic; absent this understanding, Cara’s following story about being a single mother becomes nonsensical. Yet Amie is able to not only follow Cara’s reference to her past, but also to participate in the telling of the experience. Amie clearly knows that Cara was a single mother for many years, because she references that knowledge while Cara is giving it. Amie demonstrates even more extensive personal knowledge by adding more information that she clearly knew ahead of time – that Cara took in other children as well as her own. It is unclear from the interaction whether Beth was explicitly aware of Cara’s history because Beth makes no comment; however, the fact that Amie references Cara’s care of other children with neither Amie nor Cara explaining more about that situation (something that would be

necessary for those who did not have knowledge of this previously) suggests that Beth does not need more information to understand. Once again, an outsider would not know the details of Cara's personal life, which would require more detailed explanation for strangers or acquaintances; because of their friendship, Cara can reference her single motherhood and her hard work to call up her friends' previous knowledge about what that entailed.

This knowledge that the group shares helps members determine what is important and anticipate what is coming in the conversation. While Cara mentions first that she was a single mother, Amie's agreement and details that add to Cara's background and past experience indicate that Cara's single motherhood is an important contribution to their conversation about the as-yet-undefined "political topic," and that Amie expects Cara to explain and expand upon her original claim of intolerance of the "we have to take care of them" society. In so doing, Amie highlights the authority of C, suggesting that Cara of all people should have an insightful view on the topic because she was a single mother who was dedicated enough to the ideal of self-reliance that she worked two jobs to care for her own and others' children. This authority, in addition to the ethos of personal self-disclosure, adds to Cara's support; in other words, Cara's story, which she uses as justification for and to further explain her original conclusion, is based on personal knowledge and makes her more persuasive. Cara continues her story after Amie's contribution, which begins to identify the political topic to the outside observer.

Cara: [Yeah. Their father wouldn't (.) their father would not support them he said you wanted the divorce (2.5) you wanted the divorce (1.5) You wanted the divorce you know therefore its (.) you know (.2) it's up to you to figure out how to take care of them. And he (.5) And this was before the time that you go you go to child services or where ever and they say ok fine we'll take care of you I went had to go to court well that meant that I had to miss days off work to take him to court to get my child support (.) So I have absolutely no sympathy and [I mean

Beth: [So that could be
 Cara: no sympathy for those who say (.hh) °the government has to give me° or you need to give me

Amie: I think the more you I think the more that you make it easy for someone (1) to (1.5)

Beth: get by without [working
 Amie: [to get to get through hard times the easier that you make it
 the less they want to get out of it.
 Cara: The less they want to do to help [themselves.
 Amie: [to get out of it right. Benjamin Benjamin
 Franklin said that being poor should not be easy.
 Cara: Exactly. (2)
 (lines 30-50)

Cara pauses and repeats herself often, which causes the story to be somewhat choppy rather than flowing easily. She does not go into great detail, and in fact only tells up to the point that she had to go to court for child support. However, the story itself involves disclosure of a personal nature, and the dysfluency and repetition employed suggests that Cara is engaging in facework (Goffman, 1959). The pauses in the story create a tone of seriousness, and allow for the solemnity of the situation. Likewise, the repetition of “you wanted the divorce” highlights Cara’s role as a passive victim rather than an instigator of the situation, once again protecting her image.

Cara’s concluding statement that she “has no sympathy” for those who demand or expect help from the government bookends her story with the introductory sentence that she has no tolerance for the members of society who expect to be cared for. The entire story, then, becomes evidence or justification for her initial claim. Sequentially, Cara is setting up her argument with a broad statement of claim, then providing personal experience as evidence, concluding that the evidence leads to the claim initially made. Following Cara’s story, Amie makes a claim that interprets but also adds to Cara’s original claim, suggesting that Cara was bemoaning those for whom being poor is easier than it was for Cara. Amie hedges in this conclusion, pausing for nearly 3 seconds with only the word “to” between pauses, suggesting a search for the right word. Beth breaks the pause with “to get by without working”, prompting Amie to finish her claim. The fact that Beth phrases her input as a continuation of Amie’s sentence rather than a restatement suggests a continuation of thought, allowing Beth to demonstrate publically that she has a similar opinion to Amie – perhaps even similar enough to finish Amie’s sentence. This agreement is affirmed by the fact that Amie expands upon the idea Beth

provided immediately. Beth's ability to do this suggests that she has some knowledge of Amie's perspective, perhaps building on conversations they have had in the past or knowledge that Beth has about Amie's ideology or about Amie herself.

The overlap in this section, in addition to demonstrating the features of friendship in interaction, also highlights the influence of sequence. In order to move forward with the development of the conclusions from Cara's story, the group must be able to build upon one another, which hinges on each understanding and agreeing with what the others are saying. In this case, all three show a similar level of understanding of Cara's story and the implications of it by overlapping and making similar – if not identical – claims, namely that governmental help discourages self-reliance.

The concluding sentence of Cara's statement (lines 38-39) also leads into an explanation for the "them" in the "we have to take care of them" utterances earlier. Amie builds from Cara's comment about people who say "you have to take care of me" to encompass those who are in "hard times". It isn't until Amie's comment in line 47 that the outside observer is finally clued in to the group's political topic: being poor. While it began as only those receiving handouts, Amie's comment that "Franklin said being poor should not be easy" generalizes the topic to include anyone considered "poor." From here, participants begin to clarify that the "other" that the group has been referencing are the current poor, a subject that they focus on throughout the conversation. At first it is still hypothetical, as nobody has yet mentioned "the poor in this country" or that right now the government specifically is making it easy to be poor. They talk in generalizations and conclusions: that the easier one makes it to be poor the less they will help themselves (and by implication the further they are from what this country has been founded on).

Sequentially, this section of the conversation topically began with the generalizations that the country was founded on personal responsibility but some people believe they have to be taken care of, and ends with a conclusion that people who receive

help or get by without working will not work to care for themselves. As the understanding of a topic as political is inherent from the instructions from the prompt, the statements about America set up a scene in which participants will be discussing some way of being or interacting in this frame (as citizens or residents of this country). It also serves as a statement of background beliefs that are then made particular in regards to people who receive government aid. Before concluding with the particular, however, there is a story about the opposite: a story about the experience of hard times that were overcome through personal responsibility. This story works through differentiation; by highlighting that she (and the rest of the group who share her political opinions) is an example of independence and self-reliance, Cara begins to create an “other” – a group of people who do not act as Cara did but rather are dependent upon the government (and are satisfied to be dependent upon the government). The identification of that “other” as contemporary poor becomes clearer as the conversation continues.

Beth: If it's easy it's easy to stay poor versus if it's [not easy
 Amie: [then what's the (gap)?
 Cara: And see and right now that's that's where did I read I just read over the weekend that basically (1) °the Democrats actually hate poor people° and the reason this person said they hate them is because that they want to keep them poor
 Amie: [If they really cared
 Cara: [if they actually cared] about them they would want to see them lift themselves up and suc[ceed
 Beth: [succeed
 Cara: [succeed
 Amie: [Give a man a fish he eats for a [day]
 Cara: [Yeah]
 Amie: teach a man to fish and he eats forever
 Cara: Exactly.
 Beth: Exactly, that's the whole that's the whole business.
 (lines 51-68)

The group concluded that being poor shouldn't be easy and that if it is easy the poor will not act to better their situation but rather will continue to rely on the government to take care of them. Cara brings the hypothetical generalizations into the contemporary situation by mentioning the political ideologies and actions taken by current Democrats.

At this point the “political topic” clarifies: the group is focusing on the policies the Democrats are promoting that, in their opinion, continue the dependence on the government.

Through the use of an external source (something she just read over the weekend), Cara can put forth the claim (that Democrats hate poor people) yet not necessarily be responsible for its veracity; if someone were to argue, she can simply repeat that she read it somewhere. However, Amie and Beth agree with Cara (and the writer Cara references) about the value of being able to lift oneself up and succeed, which is demonstrated through the overlap and the sequential continuation of the theme. Amie reinforces Cara’s claim about the necessity that the poor “lift themselves up and succeed” through the old cliché about teaching one to care for oneself rather than giving care. Both Beth and Cara overlap and agree explicitly with Amie’s claim, once again demonstrating the similarity of ideology Amie expects from friends (the fact of which she established at the beginning of the interaction). This also demonstrates the incremental nature of persuasion through interaction; each statement sequentially builds upon what came before, and in the process provides more distinction or additional constrictions of the original premise.

The generalizations become more specific – both more contemporary and closer to home – when, prompted by the comment about giving fish, Amie (with the transition of “speaking of eating”) focuses on the Crisis Center in the participants’ hometown.

Amie: When I go by (.) speaking of eating when I go by °(crisis)°

Beth: Where?

Amie: °Crisis Center°

Beth: Oh, ok.

Amie: You know when that place first started out, I. I thought about maybe volunteering because it was kinda a (.) a (.) as it started out it was a place where you could call (.) a hotline kinda thing for people that were talking about [suicide or

Cara: [Right

Beth: [Mhmm]

Amie: Right.

Cara: And they still have that.

Amie: Right and they still have that part (.) but I don’t think that’s what it’s primarily used for now primarily it’s used for (.) a great little free ↑grocery store for people. You don’t have to get any (I.D.) you don’t have

(.) you don't have to tell them your plight don't have (.) you just go in and ask for food.

Cara: [Well

Amie: [And they] just give [it to you.

Cara: [Well I don't know] I don't know one hundred percent about that cause my sister in law works there and she said (.) she volunteers there and she said that they were going to train her and then she got sick (.) train her to interview these people (.) to make sure I guess there is a need so I think there is [some sort of

Amie: [Well that's ↓different] then because one of the gals who kinda heads it up lives in my neighborhood

Cara: °Ah, ok.°

Amie: We all know who I'm talking about.

Cara: heh heh heh ha ha ha ha

Amie: She uh (1) you know she's (a raving) she (.) anyways (.) I asked her one time I said so 'cause she's always [wanting us to give

Cara: [donate

Amie: food and you know do you=if you're going someplace bring all your shampoo bottles from the hotel. You know (.) Do (.) and I said well we use that ↓

(lines 71-108)

Having discussed ideological issues in a general sense, the group now turns to specifics in their own location. The move to talk about the Crisis Center specifically was set up by the earlier discussion of the ease of being poor. Having discussed the “you need to give me” mentality in a general sense, Amie concretizes the issue by explaining that the mentality can be seen right in their town, at the area Crisis Center, which is now a “great little free grocery store for people.” This segment of the conversation depends on the previous sections, wherein the participants began with a broader idea of what they support (independence) and then what they generally oppose (dependence/making it easy to be poor). Once established and agreed upon in a general sense, it becomes easier to bring a more macro “political topic” – being poor – to a micro level – being poor in their town.

It is at this point that the first real disagreement occurs. As this is a network of friends who have already established their similarity, disagreement could have been lost in homophily. However, disagreement can occur within a homogenous group, and friends are more likely to be willing to disagree with one another. The key here is not whether disagreement occurred, but rather in how that disagreement was established and

dealt with. Cara begins to challenge Amie's assertion that one can just freely get whatever they want at the Crisis Center without having to prove need. However, she qualifies and gives explanations for her challenge, which works to soften the threat to Amie's face. Cara gives a preliminary challenge with an overlapping "well" that she repeats as Amie is concluding, adding a qualifying "I don't know." When she has the floor to herself, she repeats that with yet another qualification: "I don't know 100% about that." In so doing, she makes it clear that her opinion is at least different from what Amie has expressed, but at the same time her qualifications suggest that she is not taking on and arguing directly against what Amie said; when she says she doesn't know 100% about what Amie said, she allows that Amie may have some validity to her claims. This becomes a face-saving opportunity for both participants because it allows both to be at least somewhat correct. The hedging is "safely vague", which is a positive politeness strategy in a face threatening situation (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Cara also acts to soften the potential disagreement with Amie by giving a reason for her disagreement: namely, her sister-in-law works at the Crisis Center, so Cara has received information from an outside source. She also provides the credentials of that source (explaining how the sister-in-law has that information) to legitimate the reported speech she uses to back up her disagreement with Amie's claim. By qualifying and hedging through her words and by using an outside source to explain, Cara softens the disagreement with A, and provides a number of options for resolution of this issue. Through these tactics, Cara also is identifying the importance of the friendship and defers the risk that a disagreement may engender. Sequentially, this way of handling conflict develops from Amie's first statement that she doesn't talk to people who have different political beliefs from her. Through the hedging and facework, Cara can be honest with the group while still protecting the similarity of opinion necessary for her friendship with Amie.

Amie responds in a similar face-saving way, immediately differentiating Cara's proposition (that there must be some sort of interview process to demonstrate a need). However, Amie does not explain further what that differentiation is; she simply says "well that's different then." Like Cara's qualification of not knowing 100%, Amie leaves open the possibility that they both have elements of correctness, but does not specify exactly how their claims can be reconciled. Simply suggesting a difference – and not being challenged on that point – is another way of diffusing the situation to save face and save the friendship.

Amie also follows Cara's example of using an outside source and giving the qualifications of that source (as someone who "kinda heads it up"). The explicit use of shared knowledge ("we all know who I'm talking about") is an opportunity to reassert cohesiveness as a group, if the previous disagreement caused a disruption. Amie does not respond directly to Cara's suggestion that there is a qualification process to use the resources, but instead turns to focus on the other side of the coin; from the people who are taking the donations to the people who are making the donations (specifically herself and, though the use of "us" adding the others in an act of interdependence). The qualifications and explanations both Amie and Cara use during this disagreement lowers any level of attack that might be felt, and the use of differentiation and the change of focus minimizes the entire disagreement. In fact, mentioning the shampoo bottles from the hotel and their own use of it prompts the group to all begin joking about bathing and not using fancy shampoos except for what they get at the hotels. The tangent of laughter and incoherent joking lasts 50 seconds (excluded here), ending with Beth mentioning that they use fancy shampoos like Green Apple in the hotels, to which Amie agrees and then immediately get back to her original point.

[:50 laughter]

Amie: Oh yeah, oh yeah. But she's but you know it's always (hh) °oh because it makes us feel good° and I asked I said well (.) if I went in and she said oh yeah you could get you could get whatever she said in fact (.) just the other day (1) this older couple came and they were going to a church

supper and they needed something to take so they wanted to know if we had a couple of pies for them to take to the church supper ha ha ha heh (2)

Cara: Well do you know (.) °Hy-Vee donates a [tremendous amount of food for them

Amie: [Oh yeah oh yeah]

Cara: A tremendous amount of food↓

Amie: I know I know. (1) Well and then there was some place that gave them a bunch of money (.) some (1) some private↑ person↓ gave them a bunch of money before Christmas and (.) this one person was saying about how (2) um how many homes now were going to have a turkey and ham for Christmas.

Beth: A turkey and a ham?

Amie: Yeah.

(lines 111-128)

Having changed the focus from who is receiving items from the Crisis Center to who is providing them, through the tangent about how they can't donate hotel shampoo because they use it, Amie returns to what directed them into the tangent – the fact that people are asked to donate, specifically “because it makes us feel good.” From this, however, Amie moves back into the realm of her original argument from lines 80-82, which claimed that anyone could go into the Crisis Center and get free food – shifting the focus from the donators back to people who are availing themselves of the donation. Amie supports her original point with a story from her neighbor that exemplifies the abuse Amie was previously referencing. Using that authority (of “one of the gals who kinda heads it up”) and re-telling it as a story given to her, Amie is providing support for her claim through an external and credible source with first-hand experience. Thus while not directly refuting Cara's opposition, Amie reasserts her point without acknowledgment of the previous exchange. The interlude of tangential conversation and laughter that preceded this excerpt continues the work of diffusing the disagreement, adding time between Cara's statement and Amie's evidence of disagreement.

After Amie tells the story of the couple getting free pie for a church supper, there is a two second pause, after which Cara changes the focus once again from the receiver back to the donator, reporting in a quieter voice that the area grocery store donates a significant amount of food to the Crisis Center. Here Cara does something similar to

what Amie did before: she does not directly contradict the claim, but rather changes the point of view of the conversation, thus avoiding a direct confrontation. By doing so, Cara is still involved in the conversation and still appears to be in agreement with the original conclusion (that the Crisis Center is an example of the earlier generalizations of making it easy to be poor), without actually agreeing with Amie's claim. Cara could have again taken issue with Amie's assertion of the "free little grocery store", but instead almost abruptly changes the direction of the conversation without any identifiable transitions. This challenge of sequential relevance relieves the potential conflict, and Amie supports Cara with direct agreement, adding additional information about a private person who also donated a tremendous amount to the Crisis Center. But once again, Amie shifts the focus back to the recipients of the donations by reporting that "this one person was saying" that some people were having a turkey and a ham for Christmas. These shifts in focus seem to violate sequential development, but actually allow the conversation to progress. Shifting the focus allows each participant to be involved in the conversation and to be on-topic, yet at the same time to not be in conflict with one another, as each is speaking of a slightly different subject of action.

Amie never explicitly says that someone is having both a ham and a turkey for Christmas – she is simply reporting something she heard from an unidentified source – nor does she make clear that it is the poor or recipients of aid from the Crisis Center who were going to have a turkey and a ham for Christmas. However, following the trajectory of the entire conversation, from the general characterization of the poor and the "you need to give me" society to the specific information she has been given about the local Crisis Center, the inference is that it is because of the donations from the area grocery store and a private person, and with consideration of the purpose of the food bank, the recipients of these benefits are "the poor." The sequence of the interaction allows the outside observer, as well as participants, to make assumptions and reconcile the non-

specific story about Christmas dinners with the previous topic of the poor in the area, through the intervening conversation about the local food bank.

As the conversation continues, the group members report on what they have for Christmas dinner now (for example, a turkey breast) and what they had when they were first married (one had tomato soup); they do this as a direct contrast between themselves and the “other” of the current poor that they have created. After 52 seconds of that reminiscing (not excerpted here), the group directly returns to the idea that some homes are having both a turkey and a ham, and suggest that the recipients create a group the participants have been creating: the “other” of today’s poor.

[.52 untranscribed reminiscing]

Cara: We didn’t have a turkey and a ham.

Beth: No reason to have ↑that

Cara: Exactly

Beth: And I think that’s probably the issue (.) people aren’t grateful

Cara: They’re not.

Amie: It’s just expected. Once again it’s just [expected.

Cara: [It’s just like It’s like supposedly
the poor in this (.3) country (1) have nothing well I’ve seen them

Amie: [except the
[cell phones

Cara: [I’ve seen them with I’ve seen them with better cell phones than mine (.)
um (.) [newer

Amie: [well and they’ve got better ones [than ↑mine hahaha

Cara: [newer newer newer cars
than ↑mine (.5) big screen TVs that ↑I don’t have. Heck my TV that I
[watch

Beth: [The thing is that you’re poor and just don’t ↑know it.

Cara: Evidently. Evidently. I like my kind of poor ↓though.

Beth: heh heh

Cara: Give me give me my horse give me my horse [and I’m happy as well

Beth: [see you have a horse you’re
not poor you’re rich you have a horse] (all in higher register)

Cara: They all—and they all have at least one air conditioner (.) in their ↑homes

Beth: See that’s what I was going to say this this book this Steven War book I
was reading the other day was talking about...

(lines 133-157)

In this exchange, the group moves from the specific situation in their own community to the generalizations they had been making earlier, adding a conclusion that “people aren’t grateful” and just expect to be given aid. This bookends Cara’s earlier labeling of the

poor as a group who claims “the government has to give me or you have to give me” (lines 38-39). Sequentially, the friends had moved from general claims about “them” to specific claims about the Crisis Center in their town, and here move back to general claims. This move from the specific back to the general allows for wider claims without the need for specific localized evidence.

This part of the excerpt is the most explicit point of drawing a direct comparison with “the poor in this country” as the “others” in the us/them dichotomy the group is creating, while also supporting the claim that the poor are not grateful or that it is easy to be poor. Cara makes a number of points of differentiation, claiming that they have better cell phones and cars and TVs than she has, from which Beth suggests that perhaps Cara is poor (albeit in a joking manner, as evidence by her laughter in the next turn). Cara continues the dichotomy, this time suggesting that if she were poor, it would be a better kind of poor because she is happy with it. She clarifies that her “kind of poor” needs less in life – all she needs is her horse and she’s happy; the unspoken corollary, which reinforces the comment by Beth that “it’s just expected”, is that the “others” – the poor – demand and receive more than what Cara requires.

There is an irony in the juxtaposition of joking about Cara being poor and Cara claiming all she needs is a horse, when a horse is notably expensive to buy and to care for and is almost exclusively something that someone in middle or upper class would have. Beth does comment on this assumption that having a horse means you’re rich; however, her comment is all done in a higher register than her normal talking voice, which could sound like an imitation or a joke. Beth’s comment is a face threat to Cara, so her switch into a higher register can soften the face threat or turn it into a joke (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This could provide cover for B, if she were intending to call Cara out but didn’t want the conflict, or it could be how Beth denotes that the argument she is making (that having a horse means one is rich) is untrue; however, Beth’s comment is mostly made as an overlap and no one responds to it at all. With no following turn responding to it, we

cannot tell how the comment fits into the conversation or how it was intended; this too highlights the importance of sequential analysis as a way of making meaning of a possibly ambiguous statement. Instead Cara continues with her list of things that poor people have, such as at least one air conditioner in their homes.

Beth does not pursue the issue of the horse, and instead begins to talk about a book she had brought with her that has the premise that the idea of a shrinking middle class or a group of terminally poor is a myth. For several minutes she gives examples from the book about affordability of consumer items, comparing the cost from 1970 and 2005 for appliances such as a dishwasher, VCR, or a personal computer (mentioning the fact that these appliances were considerably less advanced and popular then as a side note in the book). Much of this part of the discussion (not excerpted here) consists of Beth reading direct quotes and statistics from the book. As she concludes the section of comparisons, the group all comment on how the cost of different products has decreased. They specifically mention cell phones, which can currently be purchased with considerable technology for a relatively low price; in comparison, they reminisce about a 1980s cell phone in a bag that Cara has in her basement and that Beth suggests can be thrown out because it is not going to be coming back into style. There is a short laugh, then a one and a half second pause, and then Amie immediately begins the following story.

[Beth reads facts from book] (1.5)

Amie: I (.) I don't know if I told you guys this story or not but before Christmas there was this I went into this one (.) I always call them Kwik Trips but you know gas station [(sort of thing)

Cara: [Mmhmm

Beth: Ok ↑

Amie: And uh this (.5) gas (station) and there was this uh (1) to get my pop my daily pop and I was over at the fountain and it said we do not take G. O. (4.5) I can't remember [the initials

Cara: [EBT]

Beth: [EBT]

Amie: EBT cards for fountain drinks [so I

Cara: [Which is

Amie: I asked [the

Cara: [↑ food stamps.

Amie: I ask the [gal
 Beth: [it is food stamps
 (lines 169-183)

There is not a clear transition or comment that leads into this story; it begins immediately following a short pause in the conversation. Perhaps Amie already had planned to tell this story but was looking for an opportunity, which was provided by the pause; the fact that the pause was not at all lengthy and she jumped immediately into what she herself labeled as a “story” provides some consideration of this assertion. Or perhaps Amie had transitioned internally but did not express what led her to tell that story. Because there are no identifiable markers in the transcript, we cannot know what prompted this line of the discussion. Even Beth’s upward tone in saying “ok” could be interpreted as a question of what prompted the story or as a verbal encouragement to continue (the latter exemplified by Cara’s “Mmhmm”). In this case, then, even sequence in turns cannot clarify the beginning of the conversation.

After introducing the subject, Amie moves to set the stage for the story. Her explanation of the situation is somewhat fragmented, because it contains a number of pauses, and then continues amidst overlap from both Beth and Cara. The others add their own knowledge – specifically that they know the initials Amie is looking for – after Amie pauses, which helps move the conversation along. However, they do more than just providing the initials; they both explain what the initials stand for as Amie continues her story. The overlap here encourages Amie to continue, and the agreement suggests that Beth and Cara can anticipate the immediate conclusion Amie is approaching. The fact that the participants are all friends and have shared mutual knowledge allows them to anticipate the development of the conversation. In other words, Beth and Cara fill in the gap when Amie says she cannot remember the initials but even when Amie continues they still add overlapping explanations beyond simply providing the initials, anticipating based on knowledge of Amie (of her personality, of her storytelling style, etc.) the

connection between the soda fountain and the fact that Amie is referencing food stamps.

And this is indeed the case, as Amie continues her story.

Amie: what is EBT I.I don't (.) I don't know what that is and she said °oh food stamps she said (believe)° and this lady bless her heart (.5) she (1) she was kinda rough around the edges you know but she was nice and she was working (.5) you know (1) and she was nice. And she said °you wouldn't believe the people who come in here with food stamps° or your card now you know now it's a card but they come in: and the junk they buy with that and yet here's Aldi's just right down the street and they could get real food

Beth: Right.

Amie: you know.

Beth: For [nothing]

Amie: [She said] yeah [she said it makes me so mad

Cara: [At an inexpensive price

Amie: she said I am (.) I (.) I uh °am separated from my husband° and I just moved to town a few months ago she said °I told myself I'll be° darned if I'm going to take government money (1) I'm working even though I'm making like eight dollars or something an hour° she says but I'm working

(lines 186-202)

Previously in the conversation the participants have been creating an “us/them”

dichotomy based on generalizations of how the ‘poor’ act in this country. They also talk about how much these “poor” have, such as unnecessarily having both a turkey and a ham for Christmas, concluding that “people aren't grateful” because “it's just expected”.

Here, Amie tells a story of an encounter she had with someone who may be an “other” in the class of people they've been talking about (the poor) but who is different from the generalizations made earlier. The way Amie describes the woman helps to clarify her socioeconomic class but also helps justify her as an exception. By saying “she was kinda rough around the edges you know” Amie suggests that the woman is different from herself (and the others in her group). But Amie also indicates that the woman is not among the group of random poor they had been discussing earlier: “she was nice and she was working (.5) you know (1) and she was nice.” The fact that Amie twice mentions that this woman was “nice” (once after a 1 second pause) suggests a struggle to come up with an alternative description, but also shows how Amie seemingly makes clear that the

woman in the gas station was an exception to the generalizations they had previously been making about the poor.

Amie also uses reported speech to have the woman herself reinforce and affirm the participants' criticisms of "the poor"; it is a member of this group of "others" who explains that people use their food stamps and buy junk food when they could be going to the grocery store and getting real food. This line brings authority to the conclusions drawn earlier by the participants, and the fact that it is said by someone who fits into the socio-economic class referred to makes the conclusion even stronger. At the same time, this reported speech also demonstrates that the gas station cashier is an exception to the general conclusion about this class; she gets mad at people taking advantage of the system by getting gas station fountain drinks with their food stamps and insists that she would never take money from the government: "she said I told myself I'll be darned if I'm going to take government money (1) I'm working even though I'm making like eight dollars or something an hour". Through her own description as well as reported speech, Amie is drawing a picture of the woman in the gas station as a deserving exception to the generalized undeserving poor. Establishment of the character of the woman sets up the following story, based on the fact that the hardworking yet poor woman lives paycheck to paycheck and must pay everything with cash.

Amie: Right yeah and she said uh (.) that she had this forty dollars put aside for her phone bill and (.5) on a Sunday on a Sunday she'd gone to Aldi's (.5) and she pulled out her money and paid for her groceries she said evidently when I pulled out that wad for my [telephone bill

Cara: [and she dropped it

Amie: dropped. and she said I've been trying to talk to the telephone company about it you know and they wont =they won't they said there's nothing they can do for her (.5) oh and she just I just felt so badly for her so I just quietly opened my billfold and put some money on the counter and said here take this [pay your

Beth: [uh huh]

Amie: Pay your bills and she's oh no no no no I didn't tell you that story [to

Beth: [to get

you to give me [money

Amie: [money] No absolutely not thank you but no.

(lines 208-222)

Again Amie uses reported speech to allow the story to be told from the point of view of the gas station attendant, which lends authority to the statements being made. Making a good story and including directly quoted speech is also a strategy for claiming common ground between the speaker and the listener(s) (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Amie reports the woman giving a number of details (for example, that the incident happened on a Sunday at Aldi's, the specific amount of money, her interaction with the telephone company); the details help to ground the story as a reality (i.e. something made up would not have these specifics) and to create a story that engages the listeners. The story itself, told by Amie in large part through the gas station attendant, builds on the establishment of the woman's character done earlier in the conversation; because Amie has established that the woman is "nice" and a hard worker who doesn't want handouts, it follows that the woman would be telling the truth in this story and was not telling it with an ulterior motive (of getting money from Amie). This highlights the importance of sequence in analysis; considering only this particular segment of the conversation would have neglected the rhetorical work done earlier to establish the woman's character, and therefore could have called into question the woman's trustworthiness or motive, as well as whether she is deserving of the charity Amie provides.

Beth and Cara in their overlaps demonstrate their understanding of the purpose and trajectory of the story. Cara anticipates the fact that the woman will be in need of money by filling in the consequence ("she dropped it") before Amie did. Likewise, Beth anticipates the woman's answer to Amie, providing words through the woman's voice that she wasn't telling the story "to get you to give me money." To hearken back to the beginning of the conversation, Amie had made clear that the friends all had political opinions in common, and this story and the anticipatory work done by the friends demonstrates that; because they have similar political opinions and because of mutual knowledge they share about one another, they are able to predict the development and the conclusions of the story that Amie is telling.

The apparent claim that the woman tells the story with no ulterior motive is further supported after Amie delicately (“I just quietly opened my billfold and put some money on the counter”) offers the woman money. Amie emphasizes that the woman was proud and hardworking and not looking for handouts, explaining that she said “oh no no no I didn’t tell you that story to (get you to give me) money. No absolutely no thank you but no.” Once again this establishes the deserving nature of the gas station attendant, particularly in that she insists on taking care of herself, a value the participants admire, and about which they began the entire discussion. Through repetition of the word “no” Amie makes clear the woman’s reluctance to accept any charity, which makes her even more distinct from what the participants referred to as the “takers” (those who are ungrateful or expecting the government or others to take care of them), and thus even more worthy of the charity Amie is giving her. Setting up her own role in this level of charity and at the same time keeping the dignity of the gas station attendant, Amie finishes the story with an emotional reaction and then a general conclusion.

Amie: I said just think
of it as the Christmas elf=cause it was right before Christmas I said just
think of it as the Christmas elf and I pushed it and she started crying [then
Beth: [o:::h]
Amie: ↑I started crying and I just heh heh I just walked out the [store
Cara: [About ready to
cry again
Amie: [yeah yeah]
Beth: You’re both [like
Amie: [I know I know] but I thought well bless your heart you’re out
here working and you’re (1)
Cara: Yeah
Amie: making and yet the other ones are (2) °bitching° because (.) you know
they’re not getting enough free stuff well (.) come on↓
Cara: Yeah
Amie: not everyone’s going to have everything all the time
Cara: Yeah (1)
(lines 222-239)

Amie shares her act of charity in a way that focuses on the receiver rather than herself as the giver, and injects emotion into the situation that creates a feeling of goodwill and hope rather than charity. When Amie reports that the gas station attendant started crying,

she highlights the appreciation she sees, rather than her own generosity and assistance being taken for granted. By joining the gas station attendant in crying (and Cara suggests that Amie is still emotionally involved because she looks like she's ready to cry again), Amie is telling the group that she and the gas station attendant shared emotions, feelings, and reactions, which help put them all in the same 'group' and highlights the importance of the interaction.

At the end, Amie makes the purpose of the story more explicit: it shows that this woman is an exception and the group of "others" they discussed earlier are not deserving of the charity the gas station attendant received because of their attitudes. She finishes with a direct differentiation and general conclusion: "I thought well bless your heart you're out here working and you're... making and yet the other ones are bitching because you know they're not getting enough free stuff well come on." Amie explicitly ties her story as a specific exception while continuing the "us/them" dichotomy; she talks about the woman as working while the "other ones are bitching" and, by implication, not working.

Through this story, Amie is able to sequentially build on the generalizations about the poor made earlier in the conversation in an unusual manner. She shows that some "poor" are ungrateful and undeserving by highlighting the opposite: a poor woman who is neither ungrateful nor undeserving. The story serves several functions to help propel the conversation: it builds on previous conclusions (that the poor have it too easy or are irresponsible) and establishes more specific conclusions (that the poor waste their money from the government and are ungrateful and demanding). Using reported speech and an interaction with another person, Amie supports and reaffirms her own conclusions. The fact that the woman was (as Amie describes) "rough around the edges" and working for \$8 an hour (and ostensibly in the category of "poor" that the participants were previously discussing) but expresses similar disdain for the people using their EBT cards for junk food, provides "cover" for what could otherwise be Amie's "outside looking in" point of

view; in other words, if somebody in the category being judged (in this case “poor” people who need financial assistance) comes to the same conclusions as somebody not in that category, it suggests those conclusions are not the product of privilege but rather are more “objective.” It also removes the conclusions from just being an opinion, instead inserting a logic that, because it comes from “within”, is hard to refute. Finally, the story allows Amie to conclude with a direct condemnation of the “other poor” through the comparison to the worthy gas station attendant: “I thought well bless your heart you’re out here working and you’re... making and yet the other ones are bitching because you know they’re not getting enough free stuff.”

Amie also does significant facework in this section. Earlier, the group had been discussing charity, such as that from and to the Crisis Center, in negative terms, decrying those who ask for donations as well as those who benefit from donations. Yet here Amie describes her own act of charity, which seems to contradict the previous sentiments. However, explaining the woman’s situation in such detail allows Amie to demonstrate that she is a compassionate and giving person *if the object of her charity is deserving*, yet still allows her to hold her ideology of judgment about the work ethic of the general poor without cognitive dissonance.

The reference back to the “other ones who are bitching” (those who think they should be given “free stuff”) allows the group to again reassert their difference and imply their superiority when they talk about how even when they were in the socio-economic category these “others” are, they still were not part of that “other” group.

- Amie: I:I think of the things that I had growing up (1) and I never thought of us of
ever doing without [I think of
 Cara: [I never thought of us as poor but now [looking back at
 it]
 Amie: [If you look
 back at it
 Cara: I’m thinking holy hen [how did my parents do it
 Beth: [holy hen] haha ha
 Amie: Yeah
 Cara: Seven kids
 Amie: Yeah

Cara: You know
 Amie: Yeah we had five kids all went to [ca-
 Beth: [Peanut butter mac and cheese ha
 Cara: [um]
 Amie: Yeah] All went to catholic [school
 Cara: [Scrambled eggs and pork and beans
 Beth: Oh Yeah had that a lot
 Amie: We had tuna fish a lot heh
 (lines 240-257)

This reminiscing about the food they ate as children continues for 2 minutes and 20 seconds (excluded in the transcript), and includes Beth telling a story about how when her mother was going for her degree her father would not babysit them so they went to the neighbors, where they were given pasta with ketchup instead of pasta sauce rather than spaghetti. This section allows them to demonstrate their difference from the “other” group (in other words, how the poor of today are so different from when they were poor in the past), and adds authority to their own opinion. Like Amie in the previous segment, here participants relate their own experiences with poverty, which provides an “inside” point of view and attempts to preclude any accusations of privilege.

The reminiscence also serves a relational function. As they share the common foods they ate while growing up, each at some point gives a specific example of food from their own childhood and the others can relate, having had similar experiences; this demonstrates both self-disclosure and mutual commitment, as they negotiate opportunities for each to talk about their own experiences and at the same time affirm one another with agreement and humor. This development also provides an opportunity for more “playful” time; instead of the intellectual work of making and supporting claims, they can laugh and joke about how they didn’t know spaghetti was supposed to be served with spaghetti sauce until they were nearly grown.

After 17 minutes and 30 seconds, the group makes the first reference back to the “task” that has prompted this particular discussion (namely, the direction from me at the beginning of the recording to choose a political topic and talk about it). Cara specifically asks if they’ve gotten completely off topic, so Beth immediately returns to the book to

read aloud how technology and improvements have made things so much cheaper now, comparing how much time it took to earn enough money to buy products in 1970 compared to 2006. She lists a longer string of more every-day things in this comparison, such as a lawn mower, answering machine, garbage disposal, garage door opener, paint, and even tires (excluded here). As she ends these examples of comparisons, Amie offers a conclusion from the information Beth has presented.

[reminiscing about food from their childhoods]

[questioning getting off topic]

[further facts read from book]

Amie: You know what you know what (.) I think that (.) that also shows that that people have more money to get more things (.3) we have a lot more things than we ever did.

Cara: Well that and people have more money then we had even back then (.5) because and our lives have turned into I have to have (.) it's [not

Amie: [Well look at the commercials on television (I mean) we we have to have computers

[because

Beth: [big screen tvs]

Amie: well it's going to help me get a job (.3)

(lines 272-281)

Amie begins somewhat haltingly, repeating herself, pausing, and acknowledging that this is her own supposition, saying “I think” rather than simply asserting claims as was more common earlier. As she was not as hesitant in her assertions previously, this suggests a difference in this claim from earlier ones. Coming directly from Beth’s direct reading, Amie may be more hesitant to summarize an authority that she has not read than she was to summarize another participant’s story. She may be more comfortable with the latter because of the mutual knowledge and comfort she has by virtue of her friendship, while the former presents a bigger risk of disagreement or correction.

Sequentially, the group does not challenge Amie’s summary. Cara affirms Amie with “well that and” and then adds another conclusion, moving from “we have more things” to “we have more money” in a more assertive manner, bringing back the generalization that has threaded through the conversation: that people think they “have to have” all these things. The movement of agreeing and adding makes it appear as if Cara

is only adding slightly to Amie's comment rather than making a new and stronger assertion of her own. This in turn provides cover to protect her from disagreement, particularly from Amie, with whom she is ostensibly agreeing. Amie does not challenge Cara's addition to her original comment, but rather reinforces it by overlapping the end of Cara's comment. At the same time that Amie is giving her example of computers, Beth is offering an additional thing that people think they have to have: big screen TVs. This comment about big screen TVs allows Beth to take back control of the conversation and transition smoothly into the next piece of information from the book, which broadens from televisions to entertainment systems.

Beth: The single largest increase in expenditures for low income households in the past 20 years has been audio visual systems, up 120 percent. The poor spend less money now on basic necessities of food and clothing.

Cara: Well that's because they get it given to them. (.4)

Beth: Well ↓no (.) They're referencing here that it's the Walmart effect. The benefit (.) you get these people who are opposed to Walmart [right

Amie: [mmhmm

Beth: because it drives small businesses [out of (business)

Cara: [supposedly

Beth: but but the Walmart effect has driven prices of all the basic things [down]

Amie: [down]

Cara: Right

Beth: so that is good for the poor that is good for the middle class it's good for all of them [People with big families]

Cara: [But there but there again] getting back to it though (.) they've got more money to spend on that because they're getting food stamps and

Beth: Yeah

Cara: and handouts at like the Crises Center they're getting handouts even at ↓churches There are [churches that have

Amie: [Well they're getting handouts at the government. [complete]

Cara: [Right] Yeah

(lines 282-306)

Beth distinguishes "audio visual systems" from the "basic necessities of food and clothing" thus suggesting that these audiovisual expenses are luxuries rather than necessities. Beth has an explanation from the book, but Cara first asserts her own explanation, which relates to the theme from the beginning of the discussion – that these "others" have everything given to them. This produces another occasion of disagreement in the group, which is handled similarly to that earlier, inasmuch as the disagreement is

handled delicately and the resolution is negotiated in face-saving ways. Specifically, Beth uses the authority of the book to demonstrate that it is not she, but rather the authors, who disagree with Cara. In using the book she has been reading as support, Beth is drawing from an outside – and expert – source, which may allow her to be more confident in her assertions. Cara does not argue with Beth’s explanation, but instead attempts to subsume Beth’s point by explaining that the reason people have more money to spend on non-necessities at Walmart is because they have more money as a result of the handouts (in other words, they are getting handouts to cover their basic expenses of living, and therefore don’t have to pay for things like food and can instead buy fancy TVs and cell phones that Cara spoke of earlier). This move allows Cara to incorporate Beth’s “Walmart Effect” observations without giving up her own by making them not mutually exclusive; in fact, Cara subsumes Beth’s point in her own so that they no longer have a disagreement but rather a new idea of interrelated claims. Doing so prevents Cara from admitting or appearing wrong and makes the interchange no longer a direct disagreement. It also allows Cara to reassert her point that the group of “others” (the poor) is getting all these things like food stamps and handouts from places like the Crises Center and churches.

As Cara vocally emphasizes “churches” twice, she seems to be changing direction from the role of the government to the problem of the handouts (similar to how earlier when talking about the Crisis Center the group varied between focusing on the poor who are receiving donations and those who are doing the donating). Amie brings the focus back to the agent they were previously focusing on, and suggests that in general the handouts are coming from the government in some way. This clarification allow the group to return to the coherent whole of the narrative theme that they have been developing, which is that the poor are taking too much aid from the government and not being appreciative. It also protects the churches from becoming victims of the group’s critique. Cara quickly agrees with Amie’s recharacterization, demonstrating her

involvement and agreement with the group and with the conclusions already drawn during the interaction.

As Cara was explaining how and why people have more money, Beth seems to agree with a “yeah” in the middle of Cara’s sentence. However, it’s not clear what she’s agreeing with – is she supporting Cara’s entire assertion that government handouts foster the Walmart Effect, or just agreeing that people are getting food stamps and handouts? The outside observer does not know if Beth is agreeing with the addition Cara made to her claim, and therefore cannot infer Beth’s position on handouts – from the government or from places like churches or the Crisis Center. This ambiguity is further complicated when, immediately after Amie clarifies that handouts are coming from the government, Beth talks about encouraging her daughter to use private handouts from the Salvation Army.

- Beth: I did tell our darling daughter though, you [know
 Amie: [Yeah] yeah
 Beth: She’s 19 going on 20 down in Nashville right (.3) that she’s going to be going to school down there and her dad and I said we’d pay her rent (.2) but we’re not paying for food or gas and the thing is I like to tell her (hhh) I said (name) she’s going to be in school you know 36 hours a week and work on the side, I said (name) you better get ↑really familiar with the Salvation Army free meal program and you better get familiar with the food bank °because let me tell you girl you’re going to be broke°
 Amie: Yeah
 Beth: And you’re going to be on your own you won’t live at home
 Amie: She’s going to have a rude awakening isn’t she cause she’s not used to that kind of life ha ha heh
 Beth: No she’s not. And you know you refuse to live at home you refuse to live with your grandma (.5) and so you’re not working to pay your rent it’ll come out of your college fund since you are in a (1.5) college (.) you know approved program certified school right (.5) but the rest of this your food your gas your clothes anything else=
 Amie: =entertainment
 Beth: that you want °you are going to buy girlie° and you’re going to find being in class 5 days a week 8 hours a day (.8) is not going to get you a lot of time for [working
 Amie: [Uh huh]
 Beth: And you’ve got to study and everything else so you better (.) go find out where the Salvation Army free lunch is
 Amie: [Yeah. Right. Uh huh]
 Beth: And just take your little butt down [there.
 (lines 307-334)

Sequentially, the group had been talking about how money can buy more in today's society, and tying the ability of the poor to buy nice non-necessities (like TVs or air conditioners) to the fact that they get handouts from private places as well as the government. Immediately following Amie's clarification that people are getting handouts from the government either in addition to or instead of from churches, Beth begins a story about her daughter and the situation her daughter is in. Like Amie's story about the deserving woman in the gas station at Christmas time, Beth's story also does not have a clear transitional phrase or obvious subject change to identify the movement in trajectory. The relationship between the story and the previous subject matter develops after Beth sets the stage of the daughter's situation, which then leads her to conclude that the daughter will have to take advantage of some of the handouts the group had previously been discussing.

Beth spends a significant amount of time explaining the entire situation, telling the others that her daughter is in school and has rent and tuition covered by her parents but that they have imposed responsibility on her for financing her own food or gas or entertainment. Beth also justifies her daughter's potential problem with being able to pay for food because she will be in classes and studying and not have a lot of time for working. All of this works together to set up Beth as a responsible parent. She is caring for her child's future by providing rent and tuition money, but emphasizes that the parental financial aid comes from the daughter's college fund and therefore is tied to her being in college – or at least an “approved program certified school.” At the same time, Beth demonstrates that her responsible parenthood includes encouraging her daughter to take individual responsibility for other expenses (harkening back all the way to the beginning of the conversation, when the group was discussing the value of independence and personal responsibility). All of this adds to Beth's credibility.

Notably, Beth suggests that her daughter get familiar with private organizations – the Salvation Army or another food bank – rather than a government program; she does

not report that she encouraged her daughter to apply for any assistance from the government to help in her situation. This also allows Beth to continue to participate in the group's criticism of government programs that provide aid to the poor, as her family is not one of those receiving "government handouts." Beth does not explicitly distinguish her daughter from the generalized "other" poor that the group has been criticizing for using services that provide aid; however, her description of the entire situation, particularly the two mentions of the amount of time her daughter will be in school and thus unable to work, suggest that there might be exceptions to the generalizations they had made earlier regarding use of services such as food banks or meal programs.

Beth's extensive explanations and descriptions echo what Amie did when explaining why the woman in the gas station was an exception to their generalizations and thus worthy of aid; in both cases, the person being focused on was specifically described in order to make her an exception, rather than referenced in a general sense as was done by Beth when reading about what low-income families are spending their money on. In this case, Beth spends an additional minute and a half (not excerpted here) talking more about her daughter's situation, explaining that she had worked over Christmas vacation but the money wouldn't last and that the daughter needed to get a job. Again these details support and reinforce the impression Beth is giving of herself as a good mother – helpful and supportive but also teaching lessons to her child – and demonstrate her practical application of the ideology that the group claims (that of personal responsibility) in creating the dichotomy with those poor they have categorized and generalized as "other" (who look to the government to take care of them).

The exceptions to the "othering" have been done with specific situations and specific people – the woman in the gas station and Beth's daughter. Amie allows for the possibility of a widening of the exception, though quickly also reverts to a specific person she knows in a particular situation.

[conversation about daughter's situation]

Amie: You know it: it's amazing how (1) so many of these kids (3) I shouldn't say all of them because there are some that really do (2.5) work hard and then and also do without a lot you know they really do (.) my my nephew is one he's living in a (house) this this poor kid god I feel sorry for him he has a a Master's in economics and international [banking]

Beth: [Ok]

(1)

Cara: You'd think he'd [be able to find] a job=

Amie: [He's waiting] =He's waiting tables (.) in Dallas

Beth: In Dallas?

Amie: In Dallas.

Beth: [I've got]

Cara: [Well] my granddaughter that's in over here at the University she's kept her (.) waitress job out in Wellmen (.) she wait (.) works on weekends usually out there worked over Christmas break and stuff [because

Amie: [but] but the bankers you know banking is not the thing to be in right now

(lines 372-389)

Amie starts to expand from the discussion of Beth's college attending daughter to encompass more "kids" (young adults) who are in similar situations. She begins to talk about how "so many of these kids" do a particular thing or act in a particular way, but then she stops, pausing for three seconds, and then changes course to carve out an exception for "some that really do work hard." This change and marking those who work hard as a distinction from her lumping "all" of "these kids" together suggests that what she was first addressing was how young adults now are also in that category of "ungrateful takers" but stopped herself from over-generalizing to recognize that there are exceptions. While she starts with a more broad idea of a group of people who are exceptions, she almost immediately gets into a specific person and situation, following the pattern of using specifics as exceptions to negative generalizations. Cara does the same when she has a granddaughter who fits into this "hard working" exception, and Beth also indicates that she has an addition to share though she is cut off by Cara's example.

After this segment, Amie continues to focus on her specific example – her nephew – and begins a story (not excerpted in the transcript) that changes the focus from the situation he is in now and the actions he is taking to be personally responsible to a

comparison to Dubai, they realize that they do still have it good here in this country, despite their ideological concerns, and even despite their opposition to the President. The latching between Cara and Amie is another feature of their friendship. The fact that by virtue of that friendship each knows the other has a similar ideology allows them to suggest but not outright state their opinion, and be able to agree with one another. The agreement Amie makes even before Cara explains that she is talking about a “fearless leader” suggests that Amie is able to draw from mutual knowledge and from the sequence to infer that Cara is speaking about the President.

It was just as Amie was warning them not to get her started on their “fearless leader” (presumably referencing President Obama) that I returned to their table, and they immediately asked if I had enough to work with. I asked if they would like to continue talking or if they felt satisfied with their discussion. All agreed that they had had a good discussion, though they each expressed concern that their conversation may not be useful (or as they said, “you may not find what you’re looking for”) because they generally agree on everything and that at times they went off on tangents. I assured them that the nature of my method meant that I was not looking for anything in particular, and that by nature conversations are tangential and varied and that can provide rich data. And as is clear in this chapter, even though they did share ideological outlooks and did go off on “tangents,” the conversation they engaged in was rife with friendship cues, implications for political discussions, and the sequential development holistically and within sections.

This conversation demonstrates a number of features of friendship. The participants could understand inferences without explanation, for example knowing what “that kumbaya stuff” and “fearless leader” means without further explanation. They also referenced shared knowledge, in Cara’s incomplete reference to her experience as a single mother, or Amie referencing a neighbor by saying “we all know who I’m talking about.” The conversation itself featured overlap and latching, which suggests mutual

knowledge and agreement, which in turn is a way of affirming friendship. The friendship is also implicated in the defusion of disagreement, as when participants hedged or qualified their statements, or differentiated their claim so as not to be in conflict.

This conversation also demonstrates an alternative understanding of political topics. Instead of talking about candidates or elections, the group discussed a worldview (on poverty). The group made generalized claims backed up by external sources and reported speech, but used specific first-hand instances as exceptions to their generalizations. They created themselves as a group, or an “us”, by commiserating about their experiences in the past, when they discussed common foods they ate as children, and in the present, often using “we” or “us” when making claims. This was done to differentiate themselves from the “them” of the current poor, for example when they compared cell phones, TVs, and cars. The “us vs. them” also became support for the argument that the poor are ungrateful, as when Cara, talking about how “they” have better cars and phones than she, claimed that she was happy with her way of life, in contrast to those who are demanding more.

From the opening statement that Amie made about not hanging out with people who politically disagree with her, the conversation sequentially developed to highlight the friendship that existed the group and the need to defuse disagreement. Analyzing the entire conversation allows for analysis through the Sequential Inferential Paradigm in specific turns as well as across the conversation. The following chapter addresses the research questions in light of SIP.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter I analyzed a conversation between friends about a political topic, finding a number of important and notable features of this type of discourse. The friends understood inferences without explanation, referenced shared knowledge, overlapped and agreed with one another, and defused disagreement through hedging, qualifications, and differentiation. While not explicitly identified by participants, the political topic chosen by the group developed as a world-view about poverty in general and in their specific community. As they discussed this worldview, the friends used discourse to create an “us” for their group, which they contrasted with the “them” of the contemporary poor. In this chapter I will review these findings through the lens of the Sequential Inferential Paradigm (Sanders, 1995), noting how sequence and inference are taken up and utilized in the conversational development and discussing how the findings, particularly those about relationships, can complicate and supplement the theory.

A Friendly Conversation:

Relevance, Facework and Defusion of Disagreement

The first research question asked: *What are the features of a conversation about a political topic among friends?* The analysis from the previous chapter highlights these features of conversation and Sequential Inferential Paradigm works to explain elements like assumptions of relevancy in conversation, defusion of disagreement, and facework that is done in conversations among friends.

The first major feature of this conversation is the assumptions of relevancy participants make that allow the discussion to progress smoothly. An underlying axiom of SIP, as well as one of Grice’s Maxims (1989), is that people share rules of organization and sequence in their interaction, which then allows them to operate efficiently and to make inferences as the conversation develops. Vital to this axiom is the role of relevance in responses; in an interaction, we assume that a conversational partner’s response is relevant to the preceding comment(s), and make inferences to allow

that possibility. For example, the group was expounding the need to encourage people to lift themselves up and succeed by referencing the saying “give a man a fish and he eats for a day; teach a man to fish and he eats forever.” Immediately following this, Amie uses the transition of “speaking of eating” to begin her discussion of the area Crisis Center. Her first comment explains that it was a place with a suicide hotline, which on its face is not relevant to the previous idea of self-success or to the transition of “speaking of eating.” However, SIP suggests that conversational partners assume relevance, allowing them to transition through her seemingly unrelated introduction to the topic and into the use of the Crisis Center as “a great little free grocery store”, which is more apparently relevant to the issue of eating.

The supposition of relevance also extends beyond the utterance level, to allow participants and observers to understand the trajectory of a conversation. For example, the conversation began by characterizing the poor as part of the “you need to give me” society. After explaining how the local Crisis Center is operating, Amie claims that she heard that some people are having both a ham and a turkey for Christmas. Amie never explicitly says that it is the local poor or even recipients of aid from the Crisis Center who are having both the ham and the turkey. However, the conversation had been developing thematically from the poor in general through the use of the Crisis Center and its donations from the area grocery store and a private person to this discussion of recipients of holiday meat. Participants and observers, considering the purpose of the food bank and the trajectory of the conversation, can clearly infer that the recipients of these benefits are the poor.

Likewise, immediately following the observation about people having both a ham and a turkey for Christmas, the participants reminisced about the Christmas dinners they had when they were first married and what they currently eat for Christmas dinner; assuming relevance, this reminiscing becomes a direct contrast between themselves and the “other” of the current poor. In other words, even without explicitly connecting the

receipt of “ham and turkey” with their conversation about their own Christmases, participants and observers can use the assumption of relevance to link the two threads together, which in turn allows for the inferences of “us vs. them” comparison.

Another important feature of the conversation is the defusion of disagreement observed at several points. This is best understood through the influential meanings postulate (Sanders & Fitch, 2001), which argues that before a turn, a person considers how he or she could be perceived and potential inferences of his or her action by other participants, in order to adapt his or her own utterances to facilitate positive perceptions. The influential meanings postulate relies on the understanding that others use a person’s utterance or action to infer identity or character of the speaker or the relationship they have with the speaker. In this case, the need for defusing disagreement was set up in the very first utterance, when Amie claimed that she doesn’t “hang out” with people who have differing political opinions from herself and, in fact, those that do participate in “that kumbaya stuff” drive her “nuts.” In essence, Amie is situating the relationship with the rest of the group as a friendship (with the inference that friends are those with whom she “hangs out”), specifically a friendship of like-minded individuals with similar ideologies. Understanding that their actions will produce inferences about ideology and group relationship, the participants then must adapt their utterances to indicate agreement, as disagreeing could be tantamount to challenging the relationship (that of friendship) itself.

When disagreement did occur, participants used a variety of techniques to defuse the potential threat of (and potential negative inferences from) the disagreement. For example, when discussing the Crisis Center, Cara challenges Amie’s assertion that a person does not need to prove indigence in order to get food from this “free little grocery store.” In this challenge, however, she qualifies (“I don’t know one hundred percent about that.”) and gives explanations for her challenge (“cause my sister-in-law works there...”). Qualifying and hedging is “safely vague” (Brown & Levinson, 1987), so Cara

provides a potential inference that Amie may have some validity to her claim without actually agreeing with Amie's statement. At the same time she is presenting her own case in a non-threatening way. This becomes a face-saving opportunity for both participants because it allows both to be at least somewhat correct.

Another technique is to mask potential interpersonal disagreement through the use of an impartial source. For example, in response to Beth's report that the poor spend less money now on basic necessities like food and clothing, Cara claims that the reason is "because they get it given to them." The disagreement occurs when Beth explains that the actual reason for this is that the price of basic necessities has decreased. She specifically prefaces her explanation by stating that the book refers to it as "the Walmart effect." By using the book as an external source, Beth can transfer the disagreement to one between Cara and the author, rather than an interpersonal disagreement between the friends. In so doing, she presents herself as the transmitter of information, rather than the promoter of a potentially challenging viewpoint.

Cara's response to Beth illustrates yet another technique of disagreement defusion: disguising disagreement as supplemented agreement. In this case, a person appears to agree but in a following statement they add information that may not be compatible with the original claim. For example, after Beth explains that the "Walmart effect" has driven down prices and is good for the middle class, Cara ostensibly agrees but adds that people have more money because they are getting food stamps. This is essentially Cara's original claim, that the poor "get it given to them", but it is framed as an additional claim that supplements Beth's rather than a restatement of a claim to which Beth has already countered. In this case, sequence is vital to understand the technique as one of disagreement defusion. By tracking each claim in sequential order, an observer can identify the competing claims and the support that follows in a more holistic manner, observing how Cara's original claim gets reframed through the progression of the interaction.

In addition to fulfilling a requirement of friendship (i.e. agreeing with one another on political topics), the defusion of disagreement serves as facework, the action taken to protect one's projection of self-image (Goffman, 1959). The conversational feature of facework is also seen in discourse that is done to present a certain image, such as Amie's story about her charity to the deserving woman in the gas station that presents her as philanthropic and generous. Facework, too, is understood through the influential meanings postulate; people design utterances and action in order to inspire positive inferences about their identity and relationships, essentially presenting a positive face while mitigating face threats to others.

Sequential conversational features also demonstrate how persuasion operates through the meaning-making of a discussion. Sometimes the participants presented premises and evidence in support of a conclusion, making a traditional argument. And often the conclusions went unchallenged, or were further supported by utterances from the other participants. Persuasion, however, is more than simply a change of attitude; the confirming and cementing of opinions serve to further embed these attitudes. In fact, the support and agreement of one another, particularly in light of their self-identification as friends and their adherence to the idea that their friends share similar ideology, can serve a policing function; as policing serves to keep attitudes (at the very least spoken attitudes, if not more internalized) within the expected norms, that too is persuasion.

Assumptions of relevance, inferences, and defusion of disagreement are important features in this conversation. Sequential Inferential Paradigm explains how the unwritten "rules" of interaction affect the progression of a conversation, and allow for inferences by participants. Specifically, the influential meanings postulate is implicated in the instances when participants present a positive face as a means of producing positive inferences about themselves and about the relationship of the group members. This desire for positive inferences, as well as the introductory comment about sharing ideology, creates a need to defuse interpersonal disagreement.

Negotiating a Political Topic: Sequentially Discovering an Ideological Worldview

The next research question, RQ1a, asks: *How do friends make meaning of the term “political topic”?* The theoretical approach of SIP provides a holistic view of the conversation, allowing observation of the way the participants used opposition, generalized claims, specific incidents of exception, and mutual knowledge to express an ideological worldview as a political topic.

Sequence is vital to understanding how the group negotiated their choice and understanding of a political topic. The conversation began with a discussion of what the participants are opposed to – the “we have to take care of them” society. Beginning the conversation by denigrating that to which they are opposed frames the development of the entire conversation, as the participants continue to focus on negative conceptions for their general claims. Through Cara’s story about being a self-providing single mother, the group transitions to a discussion about poverty and the importance of self-reliance, claiming that if it is easy to get through hard times without working, people will not do things to help themselves. Still framed as action and ideology to which they are opposed, the group discusses the acts of the Democratic Party and of a local food bank as a means of distinguishing their own political and ideological views on poverty. The rest of the conversation sequentially develops with general examples of abuses of governmental or private aid and specific exceptions that exemplify their value of self-reliance and responsibility. This use of oppositional support was threaded throughout the conversation, as the group negotiated their understanding and worldview of a political topic.

Specifically, the sequence of the conversation allows the participants to support generalized claims through individual exceptions. Participants make two types of claims in this interaction: claims about the state of people in general and specific claims that referred to known people and places. The general claims (such as the fact that the poor

have more/nicer things) are juxtaposed with the specific claims (for example demonstrated in the story about the woman in the gas station), which serve as exceptions to this general criticism of the poor. The specifics, presented as singular exceptions, reinforce the general ideas; the fact that there are specific exceptions in essence requires that there be a general claim to which they are exceptions. Shifting between claims in this way makes broader claims available in the general cases yet at the same time allows for exceptions to those claims in specific situations, such in the case of Beth's daughter's need for aid from the Salvation Army.

Sequence can also help to make sense of how the group was negotiating the political topic, particularly when they were relying on mutual knowledge or understanding. For example, at the beginning of the conversation Amie refers to "that kumbaya stuff" without ever explaining what that means. She never mentions any governmental policy, and does not invoke the Democratic Party, yet the development of the conversation works to reference the meaning of the phrase. After Amie's statement of opposition to "that kumbaya stuff" the group transitions into talking about the state of being poor today. Following the premises of SIP, one can infer by the sequential ordering of the utterances that there is a tie between "that kumbaya stuff" and the state of being poor today. This inference is supported when Cara agrees with Amie and ties people who promote "that kumbaya stuff" to the "we have to take care of them society." Through the progression of the conversation, we can recognize the inferences the group makes to understand what "political topic" they are discussing.

Likewise, the group often uses the pronoun "them" without distinctly identifying to whom they are referring. Yet the fluency of the sequence of the discussion indicates that each participant shares the understanding that they are discussing "the poor", despite the fact that the word "poor" is not stated until line 47. Without the understanding of the role of sequence and inference through SIP, the discourse analyst would be unable to identify concrete meanings of generic terms the group uses. This also highlights the

importance of the holistic approach of SIP. The conversation as a whole helps to establish meaning; analyzing only one section would miss the implications and definitions that develop later in the conversation.

It is notable that in this case the case study group never mentioned a candidate or even a specific policy. Two of the three recorded conversations in this data collection discussed broader worldviews, informed by ideology. The case study group understood “political topic” to encompass a general ideological outlook on poverty and the role of the government in aid to the poor, and the other group focused on democracy and government power. This conception of politics is different from that generally followed by political researchers, who instead focus on elections, people, or policies. However, broadening the conception to a worldview allowed the group to discuss a number of policies, attitudes, and ideas that may not have been sequentially viable with a more limited political topic.

The tactic of allowing participants to orient themselves to the political topic frees the researcher from the constraint of having to determine whether the context of the conversation qualifies as “political”. As I was interested in what constituted political communication, I did not want to provide a topic, but rather gave them an open prompt. Many of the topics discussed exist in the overlap between the social and the political, and specific reference to the state or government was rare. However, the fact that the participants chose to highlight this worldview when prompted with the frame of a political discussion demonstrates the contextual nuance of political talk; had the prompt not required them to choose a political topic, I would not know if this conversation is in the realm of the political or the social, and in so doing would have neglected the role of ideology in political discourse. Additionally, a shift in orientation to what is political provides researchers with a new vein of research to consider within the realm of political communication. This case and its presentation of an ideological worldview which encompassed a variety of smaller issues in some ways mimics the state of affairs in

politics today – the overarching principal becomes ingrained, and conversations about political topics fall in line with these principals.

The choice of a political topic also has implications for the second research question, regarding sequential development of a conversation about a political topic. Had I prompted the group with what I considered a “political topic”, I would be influencing not only the topic discussed, but also the sequential development of the interaction, in essence creating an artificial conversation.

Seeing the Forest and the Trees:

Analyzing Conversational Progression Through Sequence

The second research question asks: *How does a conversation about a political topic sequentially develop?* To answer this question, I looked at the individual utterances and their contribution to the progression of the conversation as well as how the conversation progressed across the entire interaction.

The Sequential Inferential Paradigm stresses the importance of sequence rather than individual components, and looks at how acts within an interaction contribute to progression and possible resolution of a conversation. In this case, study of sequential progression, rather than analysis of individual utterances, allows an outside observer to understand how the group develops an “other” as the contemporary poor, and extends an “us vs. them” mentality. The creation of this “other” is not done in a single utterance, but rather is entwined throughout the conversation in what is discussed and how it is discussed. By denouncing proponents of “that kumbaya stuff” and claiming that people should be responsible for themselves rather than receiving aid from the government, the group begins to establish the “them” of contemporary poor – a theme that is continually developed through the conversation.

In addition to establishing the “other” as contemporary poor, the group also sequentially creates a (positively valenced) “us” who exemplify the opposite of the (negatively valenced) “them”. This is demonstrated, for example, when the group talks

about what they eat for Christmas (which directly followed the claim that some households were receiving both a turkey and a ham for Christmas). Cara also differentiated the “other” by claiming that their non-essentials, such as cell phones, televisions, and cars, are better than what she owns. The “other” is further distinguished and degraded when the participants reminisce about their experiences in poverty in their youth, establishing that the group – the “us” – was satisfied with “eggs and pork and beans” while the current poor demand (and are ungrateful for) significantly more.

The importance of how particular acts contribute to progression is exceptionally highlighted in the discussion of the Crisis Center, when the participants shift their focus between receivers of the services and the donors giving to the Crisis Center. Amie begins the discussion by talking about the ease of getting food (“you don’t have to tell them your plight...you just go in and ask for food”). Cara hesitatingly disagrees, after which Amie shifts the focus to her neighbor and her neighbor’s requests for donations. After a tangential section where the group jokes about being unable to donate hotel shampoo because they use it, Amie shifts the focus back to the receivers with the repeated claim that anyone can go into the Crisis Center for free food, giving the example of a couple bringing pies to the church supper. Instead of challenging Amie again, Cara changes the frame back to the donors, focusing on how much is donated by a local grocery store. The shift in focus relieves the potential conflict and avoids direct confrontation by allowing each participant to be involved and seem to be in agreement. The disagreement is defused as both Amie and Cara move away from their fundamental clash about the requirements for food recipients to talk instead about the donors, about which they both agree. As this conversation demonstrates, it is important to be able to view not only the component utterances but also how they progress in order to understand the way the discourse develops to decrease potentially face-threatening disagreement.

An important tenet of SIP is to take a holistic view of an interaction. Thus SIP analysis looks at how the individual acts contribute to progression, as well as how the

conversation progresses across the entire interaction. Taking a holistic view of the interaction in its entirety allows observation of the moves between specific and general claims that the group makes. The group begins by speaking in general terms about the contemporary poor, how the Democrats don't want them to succeed, and how instead of giving them aid, we should be "teaching them to fish." The group then moves to discuss a particular instance – the town's Crisis Center and its policies – making more specific claims. The specific claims are used as localized evidence to support the broader claims about the poor in general. For example, the specific claims about people taking advantage of the food bank at the Crisis Center are used to support the following generalized claim that people are not grateful and expect to be given aid. This continues through the interaction, as the group moves from general claim to specific example of personal story and back to general claims, producing a pattern of interaction that is only observable through a holistic view of the interaction.

As a political topic, the group chose to focus on a worldview rather than a specific policy, and that worldview is indicated by the general claims made throughout the interaction. Importantly, all of the participants agreed with one another on the general claims; the disagreements occurred only when discussing a particular location (the Crisis Center) or policy (the Walmart Effect). Thus these moves between general and specific claims allow participants to express their shared worldview, while the specific claims used as support serve as a location with potential for disagreement (albeit defused and face-saving disagreement).

A holistic view also helps the analyst to find patterns of sequence, and to understand the role of a section of the interaction. For example, participants use specifics based on personal knowledge to highlight an individual case of the opposite of their general claims. This is seen in Amie's story about the woman in the gas station who, while clearly placed in the "them" group of the poor by Amie ("she was nice... she was rough around the edges but she was nice"), was an example of the worldview the group

espouses – she was working rather than taking assistance from the government. The use of this woman’s circumstances as a counter-example serves as support for the general conclusions about the poor, explaining a concept by identifying its opposite. The woman in the gas station, while patently not acting as a greedy or ungrateful poor person, is established through her own voice as well as Amie’s as an unusual case, thus supporting the general conclusion that most of the poor are greedy or ungrateful.

Finally, sequential analysis can demonstrate the progression of persuasion. Social Judgment Theory (Sherif et al., 1965) suggests that attitude change is not an abrupt and significant change that happens as an effect of a single successful stimulus, but rather that the change happens incrementally, through a number of small adjustments. Thus the most effective form of persuasion is one that provides a series of more subtle cues for change (or for reinforcement) spread through an interaction and in continuing interactions. In this conversation, for example, the idea of government provided aid is continually disparaged, beginning with ideological opposition and continuing with further explanation as the conversation progresses, using specific examples (such as the Crisis Center or the quality of personal possessions) as evidence.

Through SIP, an analyst can understand how the rhetorical moves of participants contribute to a holistic development of the interaction, as well as how individual acts within the interaction contribute to the progress and potential resolution of a conversation. In this case, the sequence demonstrates how the participants create an “other” of the contemporary poor and compare that other to their own group (i.e. as an “us vs. them” comparison). It also highlights the moves between general claims and support and specific exceptions and the technique of shifting focus to defuse disagreement.

Opening More Doors:

How Relationships Contribute to SIP

We turn to the final research question, which asks: *What role does relationship play in conversational development and inference making?* Contrary to Sanders' (1995) proposition that relationships can be limiting, this analysis shows how relationships operate through sequential development to allow for inferences and options not otherwise available. Friends use mutual knowledge to create a more efficient and sophisticated interaction, which in turn affords additional inferences and provides further possibilities for branches of development. Additionally, relationships help account for failures of sequential progression, reconciling a potential limitation of SIP.

Sanders (1995) proposes that in SIP relationships are based on how each person presents and enacts his or her role identity and the way each person assesses the other's presentation of that role identity. The fact that this group of participants considered their relationship to be that of "friends" is inherent to the study itself; because the call for volunteers was for a group of previously established friends who are comfortable talking about politics together, by volunteering for the study participants were affirming their friendship. The strictures of the roles and relationship were established immediately with Amie's comment about not hanging out with people who have different political views. This comment and the results it produced (such as the need to defuse disagreement) further define what it means to be friends, and limit the ways the participants can enact their roles as friends.

The relationship is further delineated by the creation of the "us vs. them" dichotomy in the discourse. By explaining what she is opposed to (and assuming her friends believe the same by virtue of their relationship), Amie first addressed people who espouse "that kumbaya stuff" and the "we have to take care of them society" as being in opposition to herself and her friends who instead champion "personal responsibility" and independence. As the conversation sequentially progressed, they focused on a "them" of

the contemporary poor, against which the group stood as an “us” opposed to use of government aid. The participants often used collective pronouns such as “we” and “us” and also included one another directly (i.e. “you of all people should be resentful of that”). In so doing, they are affirming the relationship of friends as well as the strictures of the role enactment the friendship entails for each participant.

While participants often used a singular pronoun (“I” or “me”), to declare their own opinions (“I think”) or actions (“I gave her”), they referred to themselves explicitly through the use of “we” 18 times. A prime example of the formation of “we” occurred when they reminisced about former Christmas meals they had prepared in the past; as each of the participants had multiple examples, through this exchange they demonstrated to one another their belonging to that group. Cara concluded that part of the conversation by explicitly creating an “us” group, saying “We didn’t have a turkey and a ham.” Even more common was the use of “they” or “them” 33 times when referring to the contemporary poor of the “other” that they had created. Using these “othering” pronouns also distinguished themselves from the disparaged group of contemporary poor, emphasizing that each participant was not in the group of “them”. They even used “they” to differentiate sympathetic, hard-working people; for example, when relating the conversation with the woman in the gas station through that woman’s voice, Amie said the woman stated “they come in and the junk they buy”, again highlighting the “otherness” of one group of which the speaker (the gas station attendant) is not a part; by doing this she is further stressing the nature of the “other”, as well as imposing an action – using EBT cards to buy junk at the gas station to the entire group of people with government aid as a whole.

Sanders (1995) argues that it is interaction and sequence that allow for inference and conclusion making. However, analyzing interaction between people with established relationships may complicate this assertion. Consider the example Sanders uses and that was discussed in Chapter 1: observing an argument between a married couple about

whether the wife would be upset by the husband spending time with other women. As the conversation develops, the husband gives the example of an ex-girlfriend, to which the wife draws an exception. He then defends the ex-girlfriend, prompting the wife to heatedly ask if he is speaking hypothetically or if he really intends to see this particular woman. Sanders posits that it is the sequence and the interaction itself that allows the woman to make the inference that the husband's question is more than purely hypothetical. While sequence may be a determining factor in this interaction, Sanders does not address the possibility that it is the relationship itself – the fact that the couple is married – that allows the woman, drawing from both her knowledge of and previous interaction with her husband, to infer underlying intentions.

Similarly, in this conversation, the participants made inferences that may be a result of the interaction but also could be attributed to the relationship itself. For example, in her story about the working woman in the gas station, Amie used a variety of conversational and sequential moves that establish the woman's character as well as indicated the future direction of the story: she addressed the fact that the woman, while poor, is still working; she used the woman's own words to disparage the taking of government aid; she explained in detail the woman's experience in the grocery store and money dropping out of her billfold. This sequence itself could allow participants to infer that Amie is going to end the story by explaining her own charity and the woman's reluctance to take it. Clearly the others make a similar inference, as they are able to overlap or precede Amie with almost the exact words Amie uses. An additional possibility, however, is that by virtue of their friendship and their knowledge of Amie's character, the friends could make predictions of Amie's actions not wholly dependent on the sequential development of the interaction itself. This consideration goes beyond understanding relationships as locations for previous interactions that provide specific knowledge, to include the everyday interactions that coalesce into an understanding of a person and of the relationship that is influential in and of itself.

The fact that the participants are self-identified friends also allowed for actions and sequential options that may not otherwise be available. They were able to anticipate, overlap, and refer to experiences the others have had. The fact that they are friends allowed for more personal and emotional self-disclosure, in this interaction and in previous interactions (Planalp, 1993). For example, Cara felt comfortable disclosing to these friends information about her past experience as a single mother who took responsibility for raising her children without the help of the government; in a conversation with strangers or people with whom she does not have a relationship, Cara may choose to not share this personal information, which in turn would change the sequential development of the conversation. Additionally, while Cara's disclosure was not extensive, the other participants' actions suggest that they were familiar with the more personal details, as they did not ask questions and were able to add elements to the story itself. This prior disclosure also allows for possibilities in sequential development that may not have been available in absence of the relationship. Had Cara not been friends with the others but still desired to tell her story, she would have had to invest significantly more into the explanation of her situation and relate it even more explicitly to the conversational topic. The relationship with the friends provided space for Cara to disclose personal information previously, which she can utilize in this conversation referentially, in turn opening space for further development of the underlying ideology (that of self-providing and independence from the government).

Similarly, the fact that these self-identified friends were able to use mutual knowledge also affected the sequential development of the conversation. Mutual knowledge is apparent when one person in the conversation evidences in the interaction that he or she knows the same things as the other person. In these cases, friends could refer to mutual places, persons, events, or objects with little or no extra explanation, assuming the conversational partner would understand the reference; acquaintances referring to the same things would have to explain who or what they were referencing

with more detail (Planalp, 1993; Planalp & Benson, 1992). An example of this occurred when talking about the local Crisis Center: Amie referred to a woman in her neighborhood who helps lead the organization, mentioning “we all know who I’m talking about” and then stating “you know she’s a raving she (.) anyways”. Amie gave no more information about who the woman is beyond her neighborhood location and the fact that she works at the Crisis Center, but the friends affirmed that they knew who Amie was referencing and ostensibly could fill in the blank as to what a raving _____ she is. By referencing something with which the entire group is familiar, Amie created branching possibilities that would not otherwise be available for continuing development: in this case the group could have shifted focus to talk about the neighborhood woman, or they could have discussed her “raving” ideology, or used the evidence Amie presented through her interaction with this woman as they discuss the Crisis Center. Additionally, like the example of Cara as a single mother, Amie’s reliance on the group’s mutual knowledge allowed her to reference the source of her information without having to invest significantly into establishing the woman or the back-story.

In fact, the group’s relationship as friends, and the use of self-disclosure and mutual knowledge that accompanies that, significantly affected the sequential development because, as explained by Planalp and Benson (1992):

As friendship progresses, people become virtual experts about one another and reap all the communication advantages of experts. They are able to ask more sophisticated questions, notice inconsistencies in the other’s stories, remember more of what the other says, determine what is important and anticipate consequences of events. (p. 499)

Friendship allows for more efficient and sophisticated interaction, affords inferences that may not otherwise be available, and provides additional possibilities for branches of development that would not necessarily be available to those without that relationship. Friendship allows messages to be uniquely tailored and individualized, and participants can make allusions to partner’s background, past experiences, and shared information to support a claim or develop a conversation. This element of relationships and the effect

relationships have both on inferences and sequential development provides another level of complication for Sanders' consideration of relationships in SIP.

The role of relationship can also reconcile a potential limitation of SIP. The principles of SIP cannot account for failure of sequential progression, such as abrupt topic changes. In this interaction, there were two occasions where a participant began a new branch of conversation without clear and understandable sequential reference: Amie's beginning of the story about the poor woman in the gas station, and Beth's story about her daughter's situation and need for aid from the Salvation Army. Immediately prior to Amie beginning her gas station story, the group was reminiscing about old oversized cell phones. The pause following that reminiscing was only 1.5 seconds, and then Amie immediately began with "I don't know if I told you guys this story or not..." In the case of Beth's story, the group was previously talking about the Walmart effect and the fact that people have more money to spend on electronics because, as Amie explains, "they're getting handouts at the government." Cara overlaps Amie with an agreement and with no pause in the conversation Beth immediately follows that statement with "I did tell our darling daughter though..." and the information about the daughter's need for further assistance while going to school in Nashville. In both of these cases, the sequential development is not clearly perceivable. However, perhaps due to their friendship and the ease of conversation among friends (i.e. the communication expertise from use of mutual knowledge and self disclosure) the otherwise abrupt subject changes become co-opted as part of the natural progression of conversation, and the interaction continues to flow smoothly.

Sanders (1995) worries that relationships may inhibit conversations because, by virtue of their knowledge of one another, participants will standardize their sequences into predictable patterns. However, rather than creating mundane and repetitive interactions, in this case the relationship of friendship added advantages of self-disclosure, mutual knowledge, efficiency, and smoothness of transition.

This is not to say that friendship trumps sequence, nor that sequence would trump the influence of friendship. Rather, the examination of both can be cooperative and interdependent. Likewise, the question being researched affects the level and detail of focus on sequence and friendship. However, the present research demonstrates the value in considering both sequence and friendship, as well as the interaction of the two, on everyday conversation between friends.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This study began with the goal of investigating actual communication and real world interactions to examine the mechanisms behind the quantitative knowledge of political communication research and to add to understanding of political persuasion. Research in persuasion and political communication has been almost exclusively effects-based, often focused on an individual. This “snap shot” approach isolates a moment of an interaction to see how persuasion works in an individual or as an action between sender and receiver. Studies in political persuasion have tended to focus on the macro level, looking at campaign advertisements or elected officials or candidates and determining persuasive effects. When taken up in the research, interpersonal communication has generally been viewed as a channel or conduit, looking at the effects of interpersonal communication (by and large between strangers or family members) on political outcomes (i.e. actions, opinion, or knowledge).

While this work adds significantly to our understanding of political persuasion, ever-changing polling, even in absence of intervening events, suggests that politics are more than just elections and candidate speeches, and that what people say or do on an everyday basis with friends can be just as – if not more – influential. However, research on interpersonal persuasion suffers from a similar critique, in that it tends to limit relationships to a context, arguing that relationships affect persuasion either by allowing people to rely on attributes common to the relationships (i.e. doctor/patient) to formulate less specifically targeted persuasive messages, or as a resource allowing people to use personal knowledge as a result of the relationship to shape messages. While instructional, this perspective neglects the fact that relationships themselves are a foundational basis for interpersonal influence, and everyday interaction can be highly persuasive. In fact, researchers have observed influence from relationships, such as creating an information shortcut to obtain and spread political knowledge, but again tend to relegate the relationship as a means to an end.

Because of this, researchers should expand their understanding and study of political persuasion. Outside of a lab environment, persuasion is complicated by real world variables, including relationships, which increase complexity. Interpersonal communication should be considered as more than simply a channel for transmission, because that view ignores the role of communication as a way of making meaning and developing an attitude or opinion. Additionally, while previous research has tended to focus on a strategic persuasive effect, persuasion in the real world need not be strategic or even intentional to have an influential effect. Interpersonal discussion is a way of world-building or figuring things out through a process of everyday discourse; though it is not strictly measurable as an outcome or effect, this interpersonal interaction is still important to consider in the study of persuasion. Finally, I suggested a more inclusive understanding of what “politics” means in order to know what – beyond campaigns and elections – are potential places for further investigation. In so doing I explained the boundaries of what makes something political, advocating for the use of context in determining whether an interaction should be studied as political. It followed that, in order to remove potential researcher bias and to provide an alternative orientation to potential political discourse, the participants in this project determined the choice of a political topic for discussion.

As a theoretical framework for this study, I utilized Sanders’ Sequential Inferential Paradigm, which, rather than focusing on success or failure of a particular persuasive attempt, instead examines systematic bases individuals use to fashion discourse to influence others. The framework of SIP looks at interaction rather than individuals, taking a social perspective to the study of persuasion. With the axiomatic principle that all members of a culture share and operate within rules of organization and sequence, SIP looks at conversational progression rather than component acts individually, arguing that sequence is a principal influence over what happens in an interaction. In addition to sequence, the theory also considers the inferences participants

make in an interaction, which are affected by social considerations and in turn affect how an individual acts, as explained in the influential meanings postulate.

The role of relationships in SIP is limited; relationships are considered generally in light of previous interaction and the sequential progression of the interaction itself. Sanders suggests that relationships may be inhibiting for influence because people with relationships, who communicate more often with one another, may standardize the sequences in their interaction, in turn inhibiting their ability to change and thus exert influence. However, I argued that a relationship itself allows for inferences and sequential progression that may not be available when interacting with strangers. Thus I expand SIP in a way that would complicate the consideration of relationships, and move the theory beyond use in compliance gaining situations and into meaning-making in an interaction.

Methodologically, I employed discourse analysis as a means of investigating interaction. Discourse is an organizing framework that allows meaning-making interactions to progress smoothly, and is also a way for people to socially present themselves. Participants act within unspoken rules of communication, making inferences based on genre, context, relationships, and experience. Discourse analysis provides observation of sequence, which in addition to being important as a mechanism that influences development and direction of a conversation, also allows aid in understanding utterances and illocutionary force. This in turn helps illuminate what inferences are being made or what is meant by an utterance.

Discourse analysis allows for a fuller understanding of the complexity of attitude expression through talk. Methodology should suit the problem at hand (Meyer, 2001), and considering the need for a more complicated and nuanced understanding of how political persuasion and relational influence are manifested in interaction, qualitative discourse analysis acknowledges the complexity of expression and relational maintenance at play and draws from the interaction itself. Finally, this method allows for

an understanding of turn-taking, sequence, and inference made by participants, as well as observation of relational aspects of an interaction, making it ideal as a method to investigate the study's research questions.

Participants for the study were recruited from area political groups and university students. Interested participants were asked to come in friendship groups of three to five people, all of whom were comfortable talking about politics with one another. The participants self-identified as friends, rather than being given any test of friendship, allowing participants to have learned already from one another through their relationship and any interactions it engendered. Due to the nature of the both the call and the societal preference in the United States not to talk about politics with friends, recruitment resulted in only three groups of participants.

Groups met at a comfortable and neutral location, were prompted to "choose a political topic and discuss it", and then left alone for up to thirty minutes for the discussion. Participants self-identified what they found to be political topics, providing the framing and contextualization to categorize the topics and the discourse itself as political. Interaction was audio recorded and transcribed through Jeffersonian transcription for content and for intonation, pauses, overlap, latching, and laughter. Because of the rich and highly contextualized nature of the interaction, I found that attempting to break up the conversation and transcribe and analyze only parts of each interaction neglected the intricacies of sequence and interaction. With the richness of the data, I chose to focus on one conversation as a case study, which allows for a nuanced and in-depth view of the interaction. After determining that one fully analyzed case would provide a holistic view of the entire conversation and allow for observation of sequence and inference, I chose a critical case that filled the theoretical categories and provided illustrative interactions from which to draw for analysis and conclusions.

To present the analysis of the entire conversation, I segmented the transcript based on natural breaking points such as pauses or subject changes, analyzing the entire

conversation in progression. In the analysis I found a number of features of friendship. Participants understood inferences without explanation and referenced shared knowledge, demonstrated through overlap and latching and significant agreement throughout the conversation. Friends also diffused disagreement by hedging, qualifying their statements, or differentiating claims so as not to be in conflict.

Groups were only prompted to choose a political topic, in order to broaden the possibilities of topics for political persuasion beyond that chosen by researchers (i.e. elections and campaigns). In this case study, participants did not define a political topic, but sequentially developed their conversation around the issue of poverty and government services. Holistically, the political topic coalesced into explication and examples of a worldview and ideology, made through generalized claims and specific located examples.

In this interaction, Sequential Inferential Paradigm was implicated in a variety of ways. The axiomatic assumption of relevance influenced turn-by-turn utterances as well as the trajectory of the conversation. The Influential Meanings postulate is highlighted in the defusion of disagreement and the techniques used by participants to save face. The holistic view that SIP espouses allowed for observation of the creation of an “other” used in an “us vs. them” mentality entwined throughout but never explicitly addressed. It also provided an overview of the techniques of general claims supported by localized evidence, and first-person examples as exceptions to the general claim that were used throughout the conversation. The fact that the participants are friends provided an ability for complex inference making, based potentially on previous interactions or on understandings developed by virtue of the relationship itself. Friendship allowed for sequential options that might not otherwise have been available, including abrupt topical changes.

Limitations and Future Directions

Some limitations of this study are common to qualitative research or case studies in general. For example, volunteers for research studies tend to be better educated and more intelligent, have higher social-class status, and be more sociable than non-volunteers (Gall et al., 2003). In this study specifically, there was a clear lack of diversity; all participants had at least a college education, all were white and middle class women, and all were highly politically informed and involved (indicated through their involvement with the county Republican Party and through their conversation itself). As a qualitative project that is not meant to be generalized to an entire population, lack of diversity is not fatal to the analysis or discussions. However, groups of friends with other characteristics from these may provide additional insights and observations to those reached here.

The fact that this group was comprised entirely of women may have gender implications that, due to the constraints of the project and the interest of the research, are left largely unexplored here. The role of gender in political communication is highly limited, in no small part because most of the research has been quantitative and either uninterested in a gender variable or insignificant in gender differences. However, when looking qualitatively at actual discourse, the gender of participants may influence the word choice and entire interaction of a group. Differences in communication between men and women have been widely noted and a number of observable differences have been researched. For example, Fishman (1978) and Hirschman (1973) note that women have a tendency to ask questions, working to facilitate the flow of conversation, encourage and reinforce responses from others, and use group based pronouns (such as “we”) (Maltz & Borker, 1982). Scholars think of women’s conversation as interactional, wherein they are supporting, expressing, and negotiating their relationships even when criticizing or disagreeing. Conversations between women tend to be more cooperative, with back-and-forth movement between participants. Though women are concerned with

politeness and decorum, they also tend to interrupt one another often, not to grab the floor but rather to encourage elaboration or clarification. An observation particularly relevant here is that women reference and build on previous utterances, creating continuity in conversation (Maltz & Borker, 1982).

Some research in gender differences in communication looks at the interaction between men and women, observing differences in what they say and how they say it, and also in the way each interprets the actions of other women and men. Other research has noted the way women interact in absence of men, for example finding that criticism, competition, and “talking smart” (i.e. expressing knowledge as a counter to a previous statement by a partner) when done in a homogenously female group is done in a more playful and indirect form (Abrahams, 1975). Conversation between women has a clear progressive development and comes from cooperative interaction, even through the use of narratives in an interaction (Maltz & Borker, 1982).

Much of this can be seen in the research group for this project that was composed of only women; for example, the sequence and development was cooperative and there was participation by all members of the group, even when one participant was relating a longer narrative. Likewise, disagreement when it occurred was handled delicately through facework, minimizing the potential conflict and continuing the atmosphere of cooperation and participation. On the other hand, there were some more masculine features displayed, such as use of some conversational mechanisms for controlling the topic of conversation and direct declarations of fact or opinion with less common qualifiers (Maltz & Borker, 1982; Zimmerman & West, 1975). These features may simply be indicative of interaction among these particular people, but it could also be a result of the political nature of the interaction; future research could explore the interaction between gender and political communication with additional heterogeneous and homogenous gendered groups.

Participants in this case study were highly involved in politics, volunteering at the county level for a major political party. This, too, may have an impact on the nature of the discussion. People who are less educated or less politically involved or informed may be swayed by a more informed friend, or may reference concepts at a more vague level. Even the understanding and establishment of a “political topic” may change in a group of this nature, being more influenced by, for example, popular media or television news channels. This current work leaves unexplored at this time the possible complications that could arise with a different configuration of participants, including less politically informed groups, groups that are hetero-ideological, homogenized groups of the same culture, or heterogeneous groups that cross culture. Further studies should explore discourse used in political discussions in more diverse groups.

A case study explores more naturally occurring phenomenon or lesser-known situations without preconceptions, and can provide a basis for developing theories or applications. However, it is difficult to generalize findings to other situations. At best, “if the case is conceptualized as an example of a broader phenomenon the case’s significance can be seen in terms of the light it sheds on that phenomenon” (Gall et. al, 2003, p. 437). In this study, for example, while the conclusions about the way friends interact when discussing a political topic is not generalizable to other interactions, it does serve as an example of more naturally occurring talk and illustrates the importance of sequence on interaction. Furthermore, this study and additional similar studies with open-ended prompts and qualitative analysis can lead to studies that provide generalizable results through quantitative analysis.

Another limitation to this study involves the difficulty in recruitment. While the use of a case study analyzed in full obviates the need for a wide range of participants, the fact that so few responded to a call to discuss politics with a group of friends can limit the ability to study political interaction among established friendship groups. There is a potential cultural complication here as well, as US culture contains a taboo of talking

about politics, particularly with people you know will disagree with you. Potential future work in cultures and countries without this degree of polarity and fear of disagreement surrounding political topics could result in easier recruitment and potentially different techniques regarding disagreement. This would also provide an opportunity to observe a group of participants who have differing ideologies or differing levels of political information, allowing further investigation into diverse interactions.

The difficulty in recruitment also highlights the need for better methods to capture naturally occurring political talk among friends. Simply targeting political groups, such as College Republicans or Democrats, and going to group meetings does not accomplish the same goals; the relationships among members of these groups are often different from friendship. In this study, while I used political groups as a resource for recruitment, I emphasized the importance that the participant-group be friends and have a relationship outside the organization. An ideal situation, beyond the bounds of money, time, and IRB considerations, would be to be able to capture political talk as and when it occurs in the real world. For example, researchers could hide audio recording equipment on volunteers (with differing levels of political involvement, to investigate potential differences resulting from established political knowledge or interest), record several weeks of regular interaction that are supplemented by diaries (to record daily situational factors and to identify conversants and the relationship), and isolate and transcribe implicated conversations (anything considered political or a “matter of public concern” as well as anything identified in the diary as political from the participant’s point of view).

This would allow for a variety of studies addressing a number of research questions, which could be analyzed in a variety of ways. One can use discourse analysis, looking into the features and progression of political talk, as was done in this study. The conversations can serve as individual case studies, or can be compared to one another to observe similarities and differences depending on factors such as group construction or cultural considerations. The conversations can be coded for grounded theory or as a

means of quantifying conversational data. Quantitative work, based on coding of the conversation and the diary entries, can look at common features of interaction, number of conversations about a political topic that naturally occur, types of relationships that are most or least likely to talk about politics, and themes and subjects within talk, among others.

This is not to say that discourse analysis itself is not sufficient as a method of study of political discourse. In fact, qualitative research of this nature is more sensitive to the complexities of social phenomena, acknowledging the confounding variables presented in the real world, and giving insight into everyday interactions (Meyer, 2001). In a call for additional political discourse analysis research, van Dijk (1997) explained:

A detailed discourse analysis of such everyday political practices... not only contributes to our understanding of these (discursive) practices per se, but also of their relations with the social and political context and its detailed properties, including the constraints on discourse as well as their possible effects on the minds of the public at large. It is precisely this integrated analysis that also offers a more adequate insight into the complexity of political processes, institutions and systems, that is, the kind of objects of analysis political scientists are interested in. (p. 41)

Using discourse analysis to explore interaction can contribute to the scholarship of discourse analysts, communication scholars, and political science researchers, and provides an opportunity for sophisticated and nuanced discovery surrounding political talk.

Considerations from this study suggest further research should be done exploring understandings of “political topics” on both a qualitative, discourse-based level, and a quantitative level. Discourse analysis can illuminate how people engage one another and how their conversations about a political topic develop, while quantitative research can explore the generalizability (and level of “public concern”) of topics generated by participants. Political communication researchers, then, may need to broaden their definition of political communication to include worldview-type political topics. As an

aid in establishing the contextual nature of a topic as political, researchers also may want to use the technique of allowing input from participants themselves.

Likewise, in future persuasion studies researchers should broaden their understanding to consider alternative understandings of the meaning of persuasion. Interaction-based study should supplement the effects-based and “snapshot” approaches to examine how persuasion develops throughout an interaction rather than just in one moment or event. Persuasion research should also expand beyond intentional effects-based (i.e. incitement of attitude or behavior change) studies to include the influence of meaning making in interaction as a way of developing, testing, or solidifying attitudes. Similarly, this research should look to everyday interaction as a location for influence. Lastly, further work should be taken to continue developing Sequential Inferential Paradigm and using it as an alternative way to examine and evaluate interaction-based persuasion.

Contributions and Implications

In addition to the contribution of the method of discourse analysis outlined above, this study also contributes to persuasion in general, to political communication, and to friendship research in a number of ways.

Expanding Persuasion Research

One way this study contributes to the study of persuasion is by reviving and expanding Sequential Inferential Paradigm to help researchers analyze persuasive interaction. SIP had previously been used for compliance gaining research, as that teleological interaction clearly has a sequential progression in pursuit of a behavioral goal (Sanders & Fitch, 2001). This study expands SIP by demonstrating its application to persuasion in general (rather than just compliance gaining), as the act of persuasion in interaction is inherently sequential. Within the theory, I complicate and supplement the consideration of the role of relationships, specifically friendship, as a persuasive force, suggesting that relationships allow for sequential options, such as abrupt topic changes

and relational-based inferences, which may otherwise have been unavailable to participants in an interaction under this theory.

This study also expands consideration of persuasion to include the influential force of meaning-making, rather than limiting study to stimulus and effect causality in a lab environment. This understanding goes beyond the previous persuasion research that focused on strategic persuasive attempts, which looked only at the “snapshot” of a persuasive attempt and its effect. Everyday discussion can be highly influential, despite not having an anticipated or even observable outcome of behavioral or attitude change. This meaning-making expansion of our understanding of persuasion acknowledges the complications that result from real-world variables, complementing laboratory research with examination of the process of communication.

Similarly, this study demonstrates that persuasion is more than just attitude or behavioral change. It also includes the creation, adoption, adaptation, or cementing of attitudes. Everyday conversation with friends is an opportunity to try out and get feedback on opinion, as well as a way of understanding the attitudes or opinions (and, according to the conclusion-evidence approach to argumentation, the reasoning behind those attitudes or opinions). In other words, persuasion includes the process of development and confirming and cementing opinions. Likewise, the policing of expressed opinions done by others in a group discussion can also be persuasive, as a way of isolating or delegitimizing minority opinion and strengthening and embedding majority-favored attitudes.

This expansion of persuasion in turns requires supplemental research methods, particularly qualitative methods such as discourse analysis, in order to better understand and explore everyday interactions. Typically work in persuasion and political communication has been quantitative, which provides significant insight into issues, such as effectiveness of a persuasive attempt, and provides broad conclusions or comparisons, but does not investigate meaning-making or the role of everyday conversation. This

study provides an alternative way to research an expanded conception of persuasion, using discourse analysis to explore everyday communication among friends about a political topic.

Growing Political Communication Research

This work also contributes to the study of political communication in general, by addressing the meaning of “political”. Often the research has begged the question of what a political topic is; researchers, by determining the topic themselves, assume that the topic is political without testing understanding of it as such by the participants. Considering the common definition of politics as “matters of public concern [and] issues dealing with the common good” (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002, p.8), more topics of consideration (as “political”) can stem from participants, rather than by the researchers. Participants themselves can determine a matter of common concern, as it is the discussions of a matter itself that determines its public nature and commonality of concern. In this case, rather than being a specific party, candidate, or even policy, participants understood a political topic as a worldview and ideology surrounding poverty in general and the nature of government aid. Consideration of a “political topic” as a worldview provides opportunity for wider discussion than specific prompting for discussion of, for example, the food stamp program or Medicaid. Having participants self-identify the topic as political also aids in the contextualization and understanding of the framing of the discourse as political.

Previous research on interpersonal communication in political communication and political science is limited, and often approaches interpersonal communication as simply a conduit of information for political mobilization or education. Among this research, most studies have either studied strangers or family, with little expansion into other relationships. Some research, particularly that of Karen Tracy (2007, 2011), has taken an interaction-based approach, using rhetorical and discourse analysis to look at “ordinary democracy” as communicatively enacted in local government meetings. Like Tracy’s

work, this study recognizes the power of talk itself as influential, and the importance of interaction as a developmental process in political communication. Thus this study furthers Tracy's approach to political communication as a discursive phenomenon, and brings the consideration of relationships in political communication beyond family or community, to include friendship.

Finding the Power of Friendship

Finally, this study provides insight into the persuasive force that friends can have through everyday conversations about politics. Previous research has established that friends can be highly influential in the adjustment or development of attitudes or actions, though much of that work considers relationships as a context for communication, in which people use attributes and generalizations or personal knowledge to construct their messages. However, relationships have influential force in and of themselves (Carl & Duck, 2004), and also provide persuasive force through credibility and identification. Thus this study contributes to the friendship literature by addressing the influence that friends have on one another, at the same time as it contributes the role of friendship to the political persuasion literature.

In addition to creating change, conversations between friends also can be a sounding board for trying out new ideas, or as a way to attain an attitude or behavior. However, based on this study I propose that the persuasive power of friends can also serve to embed already developed opinions. In fact, friends may be too influential, disallowing significant opinion variation within a group, which then entrenches the "acceptable" attitude. While this can be done to minority opinion in any network, the power of friendships and the noted effect friends can have on attitudes and behavior suggests that this action of silencing minority opinion may be even more powerful when done in a group of friends. As seen in this study, friendship in political communication can also serve a policing function, wherein friends establish the acceptable attitude and communicatively enforce adherence to this understanding. This is particularly

concerning in our modern culture, where we see significant polarization of political opinions, bolstered by polarization in media, which in turn leads to polarization of friends' political talk. Combined with the fact that Americans tend to not talk about politics except with those with whom they already agree, this suggests that these polarized opinions, rather than being challenged or used for deliberation, may continue to be entrenched through political conversations with friends.

However, friends can serve as a resource for political campaigns, if political consultants and researchers recognize the relational considerations and power in everyday political conversation. Research on Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) campaigns has found that interpersonal interaction with strangers significantly increases the likelihood of voting. This is also empirically supported by the deliberate efforts (and success) of the Obama campaign in 2008 and 2012 to increase Democratic voter turnout. Tapping into the persuasive power of friendship and everyday discourse, political campaigns can target volunteers to talk to their friends about voting as a civic duty in order to increase voter turnout. Likewise, rather than attempting to completely change attitudes in our highly polarized society, candidates can instead appeal to those who already support them. Training volunteers in sequential and incremental persuasion and focusing them on discussion with like-minded friends can reinforce attitudes, and may even raise the saliency of political opinion (and therefore likelihood of voting) in less politically interested individuals. Perhaps the future of political persuasion is buzz marketing.

APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPT

- 1 AMIE: I don't hang out with people with different opinions on political (.5) things
 2 CARA: Me too.
 3 AMIE: I.I.I think its I.I don't know whether that's a sign of the whole society or
 4 because we're becoming such (mumbling) but this whole this whole
 5 kumbaya stuff just drives ↑me nuts
 6 BETH: heh heh heh ha ha
 7 CARA: Yeah, see (.) I just (.) I can't deal with that.
 8 AMIE: Well it makes me feel good. You(.) you know (.5) (mumbling) it doesn't
 9 mean that everyone needs to be slathered with it I. I. I.
 10 CARA: I (.) I
 11 AMIE: It's not what our country was founded on
 12 CARA: No. It[wasn't
 13 AMIE: [The feel good was not what our country was founded on
 14 (our country was build on) independence. Independent thought
 15 independent from (.) the government (.2) being able to do your own thing
 16 (.) Um (.) Take care of yourself personal responsibility
 17 CARA: It's (.) yeah (.2) I I can't do the (.) I have very little tolerance for the (.)
 18 the (.) we have to °we have to take care of them° society. I'm sorry (.) I
 19 was a single mom
 20 AMIE: [You of all people
 21 CARA: [For many years
 22 AMIE: should be resentful of that
 23 CARA: I am. For many years I worked two full time jobs to keep a roof over my
 24 kids' head (.) food in their bellies and clothes on their backs cause [their
 25 father
 26 AMIE: [not to mention the other people you [brought in
 27 CARA: [yeah
 28 AMIE: you took in other kids [too.
 29 CARA: [Yeah. Their father wouldn't (.) their
 30 father would not support them he said you wanted the divorce (2.5) you
 31 wanted the divorce (1.5) You wanted the divorce you know therefore its
 32 (.) you know (.2) it's up to you to figure out how to take care of them. And
 33 he (.5) And this was before the time that you go you go to child services or
 34 where ever and they say ok fine we'll take care of you I went had to go to
 35 court well that meant that I had to miss days off work to take him to court
 36 to get my child support (.) So I have absolutely no sympathy and [I mean
 37 BETH: [So that could be
 38 CARA: no sympathy for those who say (.hh) °the government has to give me° or
 39 you need to give me
 40 AMIE: I think the more you I think the more that you make it easy for someone
 41 (1) to (1.5)
 42 BETH: get by without [working
 43 AMIE: [to get to get through hard times the easier that you
 44 make it the less they want to get out of it.
 45 CARA: The less they want to do to help [themselves.
 46 AMIE: [to get out of it right. Benjamin
 47 Benjamin Franklin said that being poor should not be easy.
 48 CARA: Exactly. (2)
 49 AMIE: Should not be easy. Cause that's that's part of it you don't
 50 BETH: If it's easy it's easy to stay poor versus if it's [not easy
 51 AMIE: [then what's the (gap)?

52 CARA: And see and right now that's that's where did I read I just read over the
53 weekend that basically (1) °the Democrats actually hate poor people° and
54 the reason this person said they hate them is because that they want to
55 keep them poor
56 AMIE: [If they really cared
57 CARA: [if they actually cared] about them they would want to see them lift
58 themselves up and [succeed
59 BETH: [succeed
60 CARA: [succeed
61 AMIE: [Give a man a fish he eats for a [day]
62 CARA: [Yeah]
63 AMIE: teach a man to fish and he
64 eats forever
65 CARA: Exactly.
66 BETH: Exactly, that's the whole that's the whole business.
67 AMIE: And.. all the [hhhh] oh god
68 BETH: [hahaha]
69 AMIE: when I go by (.) speaking of eating when I
70 go by °(crisis)°
71 BETH: Where?
72 AMIE: °Crisis Center°
73 BETH: Oh, ok.
74 AMIE: You know when that place first started out, I. I thought about maybe
75 volunteering because it was kinda a (.) a (.) as it started out it was a place
76 where you could call (.) a hotline kinda thing for people that were talking
77 about [suicide or
78 CARA: [Right
79 BETH: [Mhmm]
80 AMIE: Right.
81 CARA: And they still have that.
82 AMIE: Right and they still have that part (.) but I don't think that's what it's
83 primarily used for now primarily it's used for (.) a great little free
84 ↑grocery store for people. You don't have to get any (id) you don't have
85 (.) you don't have to tell them your plight don't have (.) you just go in and
86 ask for food.
87 CARA: [Well
88 AMIE: [And they] just give [it to you.
89 CARA: [Well I don't know] I don't know one
90 hundred percent about that cause my sister in law works there and she said
91 (.) she volunteers there and she said that they were going to train her and
92 then she got sick (.) train her to interview these people (.) to make sure I
93 guess there is a need so I think there is [some sort of
94 AMIE: [Well that's
95 ↓different] then because one of the gals who kinda heads it up lives in my
96 neighborhood
97 CARA: °Ah, ok.°
98 AMIE: We all know who I'm talking about.
99 CARA: heh heh heh ha ha ha ha
100 AMIE: She uh (1) you know she's (a raving) she (.) anyways (.) I asked her one
101 time I said so 'cause she's always [wanting us to give
102 CARA: [donate
103 AMIE:
104 food and you know do you=if you're going someplace bring all your

- 105 shampoo bottles from the hotel. You know (.) Do (.) and I said well we
 106 use that ↓
 107
 108 **50 seconds omitted** (*talking/laughing about fancy shampoos in hotels*)
 109 AMIE: Oh yeah, oh yeah. But she's but you know it's always (hh) °oh because it
 110 makes us feel good° and I asked I said well (.) if I went in and she said oh
 111 yeah you could get you could get whatever she said in fact (.) just the
 112 other day (1) this older couple came and they were going to a church
 113 supper and they needed something to take so they wanted to know if we
 114 had a couple of pies for them to take to the church supper ha ha ha heh (2)
 115 CARA: Well do you know (.) °[the grocery store] donates a [tremendous amount
 116 of food for them
 117 AMIE: [Oh
 118 yeah oh yeah]
 119 CARA: A tremendous amount of food ↓
 120 AMIE: I know I know. (1) Well and then there was some place that gave them a
 121 bunch of money (.) some (1) some private ↑ person ↓ gave them a bunch of
 122 money before Christmas and (.) this one person was saying about how (2)
 123 um how many homes now were going to have a turkey and ham for
 124 Christmas.
 125 BETH: A turkey and a ham?
 126 AMIE: Yeah.
 127
 128 **52 seconds omitted** (*talking about what they had for Christmas dinners when*
 129 *they were younger, and not having a turkey and a ham*)
 130
 131 BETH: No reason to have ↑ that
 132 CARA: Exactly
 133 BETH: And I think that's probably the issue (.) people aren't grateful
 134 CARA: They're not.
 135 AMIE: It's just expected. Once again it's just [expected.
 136 C: [It's just like It's like supposedly
 137 the poor in this (.3) country (1) have nothing well I've seen them
 138 AMIE: [except the
 139 [cell phones
 140 CARA: [I've seen them with I've seen them with better cell phones than
 141 mine (.) um (.) [newer
 142 AMIE: [well and they've got better ones [than ↑ mine hahaha
 143 C: [newer newer newer cars
 144 than ↑ mine (.5) big screen TVs that ↑ I don't have. Heck my TV that I
 145 [watch
 146 BETH: [The thing is that you're poor and just don't ↑ know it.
 147 CARA: Evidently. Evidently. I like my kind of poor ↓ though.
 148 BETH: heh heh
 149 CARA: Give me give me my horse give me my horse [and I'm happy as well
 150 BETH: [see you have a
 151 horse you're not poor you're rich] you have a horse (all in higher register)
 152 CARA: They all=and they all have at least one air conditioner (.) in their ↑ homes
 153 BETH: See that's what I was going to say this this book this Steven War book I
 154 was reading the other day was talking about...
 155
 156 *B pulls out book about the myth of the shrinking middle class and terminally*
 157 *wealthy and terminally poor. People move in and out of poverty and ultra*
 158 *rich move in and out of that category. Reads stats about affordability of*

159 *items and what percent of households in 1970 vs 2005 had various*
 160 *appliances – dishwasher, VCR, personal computer, cell phone. Cost of*
 161 *things have decreased. Others agree and laugh about statistics.*
 162 *C has an old 1980s cell phone in a bag in her basement. B says she doesn't think*
 163 *that's coming back and can be thrown out. Laugh, then brief pause (1.5)*
 164 *then immediately into following dialogue.*
 165 (1.5)
 166 AMIE: I (.) I don't know if I told you guys this story or not but before Christmas
 167 there was this I went into this one (.) I always call them Kwik Trips but
 168 you know gas station [(sort of thing)
 169 CARA: [Mmhmm
 170 BETH: Ok↑
 171 AMIE: And uh this (.5) gas (station) and there was this uh (1) to get my pop my
 172 daily pop and I was over at the fountain and it said we do not take G. O.
 173 (4.5) I can't remember [the initials
 174 CARA: [EBT]
 175 BETH: [EBT]
 176 AMIE: EBT cards for fountain drinks [so I
 177 CARA: [Which is
 178 AMIE: I asked [the
 179 CARA: [↑ food stamps.
 180 AMIE: I ask the [gal
 181 BETH: [it is food stamps
 182 AMIE: what is EBT I.I don't (.) I don't know what that is and she said °oh food
 183 stamps she said (believe)° and this lady bless her heart (.5) she (1) she was
 184 kinda rough around the edges you know but she was nice and she was
 185 working (.5) you know (1) and she was nice. And she said °you wouldn't
 186 believe the people who come in here with food stamps° or your card now
 187 you know now it's a card but they come in: and the junk they buy with
 188 that and yet here's Aldi's just right down the street and they could get real
 189 food
 190 BETH: Right.
 191 AMIE: you know.
 192 BETH: For [nothing]
 193 AMIE: [She said] yeah [she said it makes me so mad
 194 CARA: [At an inexpensive price
 195 AMIE: she said I am (.) I (.) I uh °am separated from my husband° and I just
 196 moved to town a few months ago she said °I told myself I'll be° darned if
 197 I'm going to take government money (1) I'm working even though I'm
 198 making like eight dollars or something an hour° she says but I'm working
 199 and then she told me this story I felt so bad for her she pays everything by
 200 cash
 201 BETH: Right
 202 AMIE: And [she
 203 BETH: [David Ramsey
 204 AMIE: Right yeah and she said uh (.) that she had this forty dollars put aside for
 205 her phone bill and (.5) on a Sunday on a Sunday she'd gone to Aldi's (.5)
 206 and she pulled out her money and paid for her groceries she said evidently
 207 when I pulled out that wad for my [telephone bill
 208 CARA: [and
 209 she dropped it
 210 AMIE: dropped. and she said I've been trying to talk to the telephone company
 211 about it you know and they wont =they won't they said there's nothing
 212 they can do for her (.5) oh and she just I just felt so badly for her so I just

213 quietly opened my billfold and put some money on the counter and said
 214 here take this [pay your
 215 BETH: [uh huh]
 216 AMIE: Pay your bills and she's oh no no no no I didn't tell you that story [to
 217 BETH:
 218 [to get you to give me [money
 219 AMIE: [money] No absolutely not thank you but no.
 220 I said just think of it as the Christmas elf=cause it was right before
 221 Christmas I said just think of it as the Christmas elf and I pushed it and she
 222 started crying [then
 223 BETH: [o:::h]
 224 AMIE: ↑I started crying and I just heh heh I just walked out the [store
 225 CARA: [About
 226 ready to cry again
 227 AMIE: [yeah yeah]
 228 BETH: You're both [like
 229 AMIE: [I know I know] but I thought well bless your heart
 230 you're out here working and you're (1)
 231 CARA: Yeah
 232 AMIE: making and yet the other ones are (2) °bitching° because (.) you know
 233 they're not getting enough free stuff well (.) come on↓
 234 CARA: Yeah
 235 AMIE: not everyone's going to have everything all the time
 236 CARA: Yeah (1)
 237 AMIE: I:I think of the things that I had growing up (1) and I never thought of us
 238 of ever doing without [I think of
 239 CARA: [I never thought of us as poor but now
 240 [looking back at it
 241 AMIE: [If you look back at it
 242 CARA: I'm thinking holy hen [how did my parents do it
 243 BETH: [holy hen hahaha]
 244 AMIE: Yeah
 245 CARA: Seven kids
 246 AMIE: Yeah
 247 CARA: You know
 248 AMIE: Yeah we had five kids all went to [ca
 249 BETH: Peanut butter mac and cheese
 250 CARA: [um]
 251 AMIE: Yeah] All went to catholic [school
 252 CARA: [Scrambled] eggs and pork and beans
 253 BETH: Oh Yeah had that a lot
 254 AMIE: We had tuna fish a lot
 255 BETH: The only thing I refused to eat was those awful ham and beans the navy
 256 beans with ham.
 257
 258 *Talk about food they ate as kids, including pasta with ketchup instead of pasta*
 259 *sauce for spaghetti.*
 260 *B tells story about mother going into the extension to get her degree and father*
 261 *wouldn't babysit them so they went to a neighbor – laugh and agreeing*
 262 *Asking if they got completely off topic.*
 263 *Immediately back into the book talking about how technology and improvements*
 264 *have made things so much cheaper, comparing how much time it took to*
 265 *earn enough to buy products in 1970 compared to 2006 – lawn mower,*
 266 *answering machine, garbage disposal, garage door opener, paint, tires.*

267
268 AMIE: You know what you know what (.) I think that (.) that also shows that that
269 people have more money to get more things (.3) we have a lot more things
270 than we ever did.
271 CARA: Well that and people have more money then we had even back then (.5)
272 because and our lives have turned into I have to have (.) it's [not
273 AMIE:
274 [Well look at the commercials on television (I mean) we we have to have
275 computers [because
276 BETH: [big screen tvs]
277 AMIE: well it's going to help me get a job (.3)
278 BETH: The single largest increase in expenditures for low income households in
279 the past 20 years has been audio visual systems, up 120 percent. The poor
280 spend less money now on basic necessities of food and clothing.
281 CARA: Well that's because they get it given to them. (.4)
282 BETH: Well ↓no (.) They're referencing here that it's the Walmart effect. The
283 benefit you get these people who are opposed to Walmart [right
284 AMIE:
285 [mmhmm
286 BETH: because it drives small businesses [out of (business)
287 C: [supposably
288 BETH: but but the Walmart effect has drive prices of all the basic things [down]
289 AMIE: [down]
290 CARA: Right
291 BETH: so that is good for the poor that is good for the middle class it's good for
292 all of them [People with big families]
293 CARA: [But there but there again] getting back to it though
294 (.) they've got more money to spend on that because they're getting food
295 stamps and
296 BETH: Yeah
297 CARA: and handouts at like the Crises Center they're getting handouts even at
298 ↓churches There are [churches that have
299 AMIE: [Well they're getting handouts at the
300 government. [complete]
301 CARA: [Right] Yeah
302 BETH: I did tell our darling daughter though, you [know
303 AMIE: [Yeah] yeah
304 BETH: She's 19 going on 20 Down in Nashville right (.3) that she's going to be
305 going to school down there and her dad and I said we'd pay her rent (.2)
306 but we're not paying for food or gas and the thing is I like to tell her (hhh)
307 I said (name) she's going to be in school you know 36 hours a week and
308 work on the side, I said (name) you better get ↑really familiar with the
309 Salvation Army free meal program and you better get familiar with the
310 food bank °because let me tell you girl you're going to be broke°
311 AMIE: Yeah
312 BETH: And you're going to be on your own you won't live at home
313 AMIE: She's going to have a rude awakening isn't she cause she's not used to
314 that kind of life ha ha heh
315 BETH: No she's not. And you know you refuse to live at home you refuse to live
316 with your grandma (.5) and so you're not working to pay your rent it'll
317 come out of your college fund since you are in a (1.5) college (.) you
318 know approved program certified school right (.5) but the rest of this your
319 food your gas your clothes anything else=

320 AMIE:
 321 =entertainment
 322 BETH: that you want °you are going to buy girlie° and you're going to find being
 323 in class 5 days a week 8 hours a day (.8) is not going to get you a lot of
 324 time for [working
 325 AMIE: [Uh huh]
 326 BETH: And you've got to study and everything else so you better (.) go find out
 327 where the Salvation Army free lunch is
 328 AMIE: [Yeah. Right. Uh huh]
 329 BETH: And just take your little butt down [there.
 330 AMIE: [And you better learn to
 331 love peanut butter sandwiches
 332 AMIE: Oh and mac and cheese and whatever versus this money she blew last fall
 333 on (.2) dinners out at [you know whatever
 334 CARA: [You know what you know what] all
 335 of her ↑wages she's ↑blown?
 336 BETH: Well she did she made 1000 dollars over Christmas [she did
 337 CARA: [Yeah]
 338 BETH: She worked her little butt off over Christmas and she made 1000 dollars
 339 and um [she hasn't started work yet
 340 CARA: [how much of it did she save?
 341 BETH: She uh she took 800 with her to Nashville (.2) and a 150 dollar gift card
 342 from her uncle for Christmas (.2) and (.2) uh [she
 343 CARA: [Was it for a
 344 grocery store? Ha ha [ha ha
 345 BETH: [A generic] you know, American Express generic
 346 Visa prepaid gift card thing and (.) uh (.) so she took that with her (.) and
 347 she's been there a week as of (2) last Friday so she's been there just over
 348 [a week
 349 CARA: [Mmhmm]
 350 BETH: and hasn't started working yet she doesn't want to go to Chick Fil A and
 351 these other applications haven't gotten back to her and I told her I said
 352 °darling
 353 AMIE: oh yeah
 354 BETH: that 800 bucks you took ↑with you it's you're going to ↑find it's gone
 355 real ↑fa:st [if you're not careful]
 356 CARA: [mmhmm]
 357 BETH: so you ↑better be getting a j-o-b ↑jo:b
 358 CARA:[mmhmm]
 359 BETH: I'm looking mom I've got you know I've got an ↑interview blah blah blah
 360 CARA: [mmhmm]
 361 BETH: Who knows. (1)
 362 AMIE: Wow. (1)
 363 BETH: So ↑hopefully she'll figure it ↑o:ut (.5) 'cause I'm not ↑inclined to sink
 364 good money after bad
 365 CARA: Yeah (.)
 366 AMIE: You know it:it's amazing how (1) so many of these kids (3) I shouldn't
 367 say all of them because there are some that really do (2.5) work hard and
 368 then and also do without a lot you know they really do (.) my my nephew
 369 is one he's living in a (house) this this poor kid god I feel sorry for him he
 370 has a a Master's in economics and international [banking]
 371 BETH: [Ok] (1)
 372 CARA: You'd think he'd [be able to find] a job=

- 373 AMIE: [He's waiting] =He's waiting tables (.)
 374 in Dallas
 375 BETH: In Dallas?
 376 AMIE: In Dallas.
 377 BETH: [I've got]
 378 CARA: [Well] my granddaughter that's in over here at the University she's kept
 379 her (.) waitress job out in Wellmen (.) she wait (.) works on weekends
 380 usually out there worked over Christmas break and stuff [because
 381 AMIE: [but] but the bankers you know banking is not the thing to be in
 382 right now
 383 CARA: No, that's true.
 384 BETH: I guess not.
 385 CARA: But I mean yeah and she [she's the one that
 386 AMIE: [He's the same] one that was (.) was
 387 being held in Dubai remember the story about ↑Dubai
 388 CARA: [Oh yeah]
 389 AMIE: He had to ↑escape in the middle of the night from Dubai (.) they were
 390 they were gonna
 391 BETH: Is this your nephew?
 392 AMIE: Yeah.
 393 BETH: What's ↑this I don't remember ↓this.
 394
 395 *A Tells story about experience of nephew and B of other people they know in*
 396 *UAE, where they want the American's passports before they get paid,*
 397 *followed by conversation about the hierarchy in Dubai where Emirates*
 398 *are at the top and other people are almost like slaves because they bring*
 399 *people in, take their passports, and they have no rights and then the*
 400 *companies go out of business so these people have no money and no*
 401 *electricity. Emirates are beyond the laws – the laws of the country do not*
 402 *apply to them. Everyone else is a second class person. Americans are*
 403 *protected somewhat – Americans are considered next, then British, then*
 404 *everyone else, who is treated like dirt, no free speech or anything.*
 405 *They joke about how they wouldn't survive if they were thrown in prison in*
 406 *Dubai, laugh and overlap a lot. Then two second pause.*
 407
 408 (2)
 409 BETH: But anyway it's just awful different (.) it is awful different over there [and
 410 you gotta watch it]
 411 AMIE: [We forget how] we forget [how
 412 CARA: [Actually how good we've got it
 413 AMIE: Aw geez [yeah
 414 BETH: [We really do↓ (1)
 415 AMIE: I.I.I. (.)
 416 CARA: Even if we do have a uhhmm=
 417 AMIE: =mmhmm=
 418 C: =for a=
 419 AMIE: =uh huh=
 420 C: =fearless leader
 421 right now (.5)
 422 AMIE: Don't get me ↑started don't get me ↑started

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