

## CHATTING ABOUT BOYS AND OTHER IMPORTANT THINGS

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**Abstract :** The paper compares two same-sex, spontaneous, teenage conversations, between 16-year-old girls and between 16-year-old boys. The speakers have the same background, upper middle class. The focus of the paper, which is based on The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT), is on topic choice, interactional behaviour and the use of pragmatic markers. The study shows that the girls spent most of the time talking about boys and sex, while the boys were more preoccupied with sports and drinking episodes. As regards interactive behaviour, the boys proved to be even more supportive than the girls. What most distinguished the two conversations was the great number of hedges in the girls' conversation as opposed to the predominantly assertive response markers in the boys' conversation. All in all, the study showed that gender differences are less obvious in teenage than in adult talk.

**Key words:** teen talk, topics, interaction, pragmatic markers

### INTRODUCTION

The language of English-speaking adolescents has attracted far less attention than that of adult speakers until very recently, and while the earlier studies tended to focus on specific adolescent groups (eg Labov 1972, Cheshire 1982, Romaine 1984, Hewitt 1986, Eckert 1989), the interest is now widening to the language of English-speaking adolescents more generally.

Jennifer Coates' characterization of adult female and male friends' same-sex conversations can be summarized as follows (cf Coates 1996, 1997):

FEMALE TALK	MALE TALK
centres on personal topics	centres on impersonal topics
is other-oriented	is self-oriented
is collaborative	is competitive
is 'all-in-together'	is 'one-at-a-time'
is like a jam session	is like short monologues
reflects reciprocal self-disclosure	reflects separateness
expresses solidarity	is argumentative

Figure 1: General characteristics of adult female and male talk

In this paper, I have used this list of characteristics as a starting-point for a comparison of two same-sex teenage conversations, one female and one male, focussing on:

- topic choice
- interactional behaviour
- the use of pragmatic markers

#### THE MATERIAL

The two conversations are part of the Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT), which can be briefly described as follows (see also Andersen & Stenström 1996):

COLT is:

- a half-a-million-word corpus of spontaneous conversation
- produced by 13 to 17-year-old boys and girls from various London districts
- with varying social backgrounds, ranging from lower working to upper middle class
- recorded in 1993 by student recruits equipped with a walkman and a lapel microphone
- and a log book for information about who they were talking to (sex, age and relationship) and in what situations (at home, on the bus, at school etc)

Figure 2: Characteristics of COLT

On the basis of what is known about the recruits with regard to borough of residence and school borough, it has been possible to work out a socioeconomic index, comprising five socioeconomic groups, where 1 is the highest and 5 the lowest (cf

Andersen 1995). Information about socioeconomic belonging is only known for the recruits, however, but it can be assumed that the friends who take part in the conversations studied here have a similar background, not only due to the usually strong peer-group ties among teenagers but especially due to the fact that they are all students at the same boarding school.

To make the comparison as reliable as possible, the conversations also had to be as homogeneous as possible and could consequently not be chosen entirely at random. They have the following characteristics in common:

- they are roughly the same length
- the recording situations are identical
- the speakers are the same age
- they have a similar socioeconomic background
- they go to the same school

The atmosphere in the two speaking situations is relaxed, and even if the students are aware of being recorded, which in fact is openly referred to in the girls' conversation, they do not seem to mind. Nor does it seem to have a hampering affect on what they talk about or the way they talk. The two recruits, Kate and Carl, who recorded the conversations, are both 16 years old, and both have been classified as belonging to group 2 on the socioeconomic index scale.

The girls' conversation (Text B 142704) consists of 5333 words, which corresponds to roughly half an hour's talk. Except Kate, there are three speakers: Tess 16, Lucy 16 and Sandy 16. The conversation takes place in Kate's study. The boys' conversation (Text B 141705) is all male and has almost exactly the same length as the girls' conversation, 5321 words. This conversation, which takes place in Carl's study, has four other speakers: Dick 16, Tim 15, Rupe 16 and Chris 16.

## TOPICS

It has been pointed out in several studies that women and men discuss different topics in same-sex groups. Coates (1997: 119), for instance, argues that men prefer to talk about impersonal topics, such as current affairs and sports, and that they, unlike women, avoid 'self-disclosure'. This study shows that what may be true for adults in general is not necessarily true for teenagers.

### *The girls' conversation*

The girls begin their conversation by commenting on the mess in Kate's study, where the bed clothes are in a pile on the floor. Tess confesses that she too has been sleeping on the mattress with a bare duvet for a couple of weeks.

The main part of the girls' conversation is devoted to boys and sex. This part is also more lively than the rest. When Kate announces that one of the boys at the school has invited her to a party at his place the following weekend and it turns out that Tess

used to go out with the same boy, Kate gets very excited and interrupts Tess immediately (indicated by the square brackets):

[1] Kate: [*You got off with Foxy?*]

Tess: Yeah I used to like, we used to see each other sort of [and I]

Kate: [For a  
long time?]

Tess: No, no well the weird [part]

Kate [How long?]

Tess: It was like spaced, it was just like, I dunno, not long at all [just a]

Kate: [Well  
roughly] how long

Tess: couple of things we saw each other, and then over a space of about two months we saw each other probably about three times

Kate: Oh,

Tess: but it wasn't like a long thing but like, I, the time that I spent like it just used to be constant pauses, it used to be terrible and so we used to get off with each other like ... B 142704: 32-41

A brief chat about another, very good-looking boy with dark hair, who the girls would have liked to get into contact with, if only they had had his address or phone number, leads over to the question of who should be sent a Valentine's card:

[2] Tess: if you're still going out with Foxy, *would you send a Valentine's card* to anybody else?

Kate: Oh.

Tess: Yeah?

Kate: I don't know cos there's no one else I'd really want to send a va-

<laughing>Kim<name> only</> no I would never send a card B 142704: 94-97

Tess' unexpected confession that she is upset for not receiving any pornographic mail reminds Kate of a brilliant idea that came up earlier in the day of how to earn pocket money in an easy way:

[3] Lucy: Yeah we could charge the removes for their first kiss.

Kate: Yeah we're gonna start a little business. Up for it? Up for it, yeah? You just say, you know, five quid for a cuss behind the bushes. B 142704: 112-113

Kate and Tess are apparently not entirely new to the game:

[4] Kate: *I got off with someone for his hat.* He had this wicked in Geneva had this amazing Boss hat and I snogged him for it. And he goes to me, it was a Boss h= you know Boss the, the make the clothes and the perfume and everything? He had this really nice cap, and it was a really smart cap, I just really liked it and he was a bit of an ugly well he wasn't ugly he was just really gormless and I said erm he must have been about twenty something and I said to him, can I have your hat, he said no it's from a friend it's sentimental or something B 142704: 119

Towards the end of the conversation, Kate reads out a letter that she had received from a secret admirer. It is a very sweet letter, which points to Kate's popularity among the boys, but in this context it causes nothing but laughter.

Quite a large part of the girls' conversation is taken up by gossip about their female schoolfriends. When Kate told the story about the Boss hat, for instance, Tess asked:

[5] Tess: *Was Lottie there?*

Kate: actually no that was the night she was really pissed off because, erm, people were paying more attention to me than they were to her I don't know why it's because I decide that I'm gonna be really outgoing and I really do and I was really loud and really boisterous and she's quite resigned like that and she thought I sh= bit shagged off with me, and then like I was doing, there was this really good looking bloke and he was like we, we'd given each other eyes over the bar in this pub and Lottie goes well if you don't hurry up with him I'm gonna go and have him, if you don't hurry up, you know, and just like marched over I said Charlotte give me a break B 142704: 119-125

Other girls are mentioned in passing, LB, for instance, who 'did a classic fall' over a bean bag, an extremely comical incident which caused a great deal of laughter.

Girls want to **look good** and are of course interested in boys' opinion about their looks:

[6] Kate: *Foxy didn't think that Lottie was stunning.*

Lucy: Who's Lottie?  
 Kate: You know, my best [friend]  
 Lucy: [Oh] <unclear> nice to say.  
 Kate: N=, no no no no cos he you know, he's not gonna say no I  
 don't think, [he just said]  
 Lucy: [I know but]  
 Kate: I don't think she's that incredible.  
 Tess: I think she's very pretty, don't you Lucy?  
 Lucy: I think she's [<unclear> yeah]  
 Kate: [He goes well maybe] the photos just don't  
 compliment her and said yeah but they think they did they're really  
 complimentary B 142704: 260-269

Talk about **school activities** is reduced to one single event, the upcoming choir performance. The event as such, however, turns out to be less important than what to wear. Kate has got a problem: she has no black skirt, and none of her friends can lend her one.

### *The boys' conversation*

The mess in Carl's study is not referred to by a single word. Talk related to the situation centres instead around food, where and what **to eat**:

[7] Tim: *... I missed supper and I'm fucking [starving]*

Dick: [Yeah I] know I'd forgotten  
 what time supper was  
 Carl: Haven't you been home Timmy?  
 Tim: No, meal. B 141705: 114-117

Unlike the girls, the boys spend a lot of time talking about things related to school activities. To begin with, Carl is upset about having to move into a new house, where the rules are obviously much stricter than in his old house:

[8] Carl: ... *the first two weeks in a new house it's gonna be like prison* I swear <unclear> it's just gonna [all your boots]  
 Tim: [it's gonna] it's gone really power crazy isn't it?  
 Dick: Not power crazy it's just gone keeno crazy.  
 Tim: Yeah it's gonna look after us so well.  
 Carl: Well I don't blame cos in other [words]  
 Tim: [Yeah]  
 Carl: everyone's gonna shout on his head but I mean, you've gotta have boots in these special lockers. We're not allowed to have towels in our rooms. They gotta be in a special drying room, so you can't, we're not allowed to have kettles in our room not allowed to B 141705: 13-19

How to arrange the upcoming house entertainment causes a long debate, and, in this connection, girls are in fact mentioned - in passing:

[9] Carl: *Ah then it should be house entertainment.*  
 Chris: Mm.  
 Rupe: **D'you have all the girls don't you?**  
 Carl: Yeah ...  
 Chris: What house entertainment?  
 Tim: Organize a pissup.  
 Carl: What did we do last year: We did a fashion show or something.  
 Tim: [Oh]  
 Chris: [It was crap]  
 Rupe: [I remember that]  
 Dick: [It was so embarrassing]  
 Rupe: I re= I remember [that was]  
 Tim: [Gotta think] of something else to do.  
 Carl: You're right. B 141705: 150-171

Talk about work is not unusual. The fact that Rupe has been working hard all day is commented on, though not without irony:

[10] Carl: *Oh god you really have been sucking.*  
 ...  
 Dick: Oi oi oi Rupert Rupert no don't worry he [did have]  
 Carl: [joke]  
 Dick: he did have one break. Right he did have one break.  
 Rupe: Yeah. B 141705: 81-94

**Drink** is a topic that is discussed on two occasions. The vodka bottle incident causes excitement. One of the boys, who is not present in Carl's study, had kept a bottle of vodka in his cupboard. Rupe and Tim found it, took it and blamed it on their friend Charlie. This is the story in brief:

[11] Tim: ... so I opened his cupboard up, there's *half there's that half bottle of vodka* there and a medicine bottle  
 Rupe: So we chucked the bottle,  
 Tim: Mister [subtle]  
 Chris: [What] what did you what who's erm [<name>]

Rupe: [So we were] just gonna hide it and wait until he realized [and sort of <unclear>]  
 Tim: [And we told him] we told him Dicks' going to tell him that erm Charlie [<unclear>]  
 Chris: [Charlie came in]  
 Rupe: since this morning us two this morning yeah. And tidy it up ... So he thinks Charlie's been <nv>sound effect</nv>  
 Carl: Oh he'll shoot you. B 141705: 188-193

There is also the incident when Dick was talking to Ozzie in the bar:

[12] Dick: <unclear> drink last night he was going *oh it's really nice, cider yeah*, eight point two percent, two point seven, two pound seventy nine for a litre bottle, he goes, he's got this other stuff in there some promotional special offer one point seventy-nine for a litre, eight points eight point two percent.  
 Chris: What is it?  
 Rupe: I dunno gets you very pissed up though. B 141705: 283-285

The boys, too, gossip about schoolfriends, but only their male friends, some of which are not exactly friendly, it appears. Dick had a bad experience when he wanted to see a football match on TV:

[13] Dick: Well you see, all see them Van den Berg he's <unclear> and their fucking faces they come in yeah, right, *you wanna wait for this bloody football* na I just wanna watch the Chelsea please can I just watch the Chelsea, no piss off, please just let me watch the Chelsea please just once let me watch the Chelsea, and they turned the telly off and said *right*, you've turned the channel over and telly doesn't go back on. [Fucking annoyed!]  
 Carl: [Mm]  
 Dick: The fucking so sad one is going right you're clearing up house fuck off! I'm not fucking clearing up the house and he goes, right that's it you're clearing up the house for the rest of your life!  
 Carl: Bet you were well fucked off. B 141705: 219-222

Charlie's name crops up on various occasions. The fact that he has a nephew who is going to the same school causes a great deal of merriment:

[14] Dick: Thing is what really, what really made me laugh is when he when I first talked to him I go wh= I go where are you staying and *he said I'm staying at Charlie's house*  
 Rupe: Yeah.  
 Carl: And I didn't I thought shit why's he <unclear> with Charlie, cos I didn't know who he was.  
 Chris: My god!  
 Carl: And I just looked <unclear>  
 Rupe: <nv>laugh</nv> <shouting> He's staying at Charlie's house? How come you didn't get fucking get in last night?</>  
 Carl: Is he in lower sixth or?  
 Dick: Uncle Charlie can't <unclear>  
 Carl: He's he's he's gonna be unfuckingtouchable. You imagine some other dick and Charlie go round in the middle of the night and so, they come through the window. B 141705: 381-392

Judging by this conversation, the boys seem to spend quite a lot of time watching **sports and films** on TV. They first discuss a football match between Leeds and Chelsea and then an even more exciting Italian match:

[15] Rupe: *Did anyone watch Italian football* when that bloke took the penalty hit both posts?

Chris: [Yeah and it and it still didn't go in and he went bang! bang! and the goalkeeper went oh and it still didn't fucking go in.]

Rupe: [<nv>laugh</nv>]

Chris: Sad.

Tim: Oh but it was getting a really exciting game I missed supper and I'm fucking [starving]

Dick: [Yeah I] know I'd forgotten what time supper was. B 141705: 110-115

Summing up, Table 1 gives an overview of what the girls and the boys talked about and approximately how much of their conversations was devoted to each topic:

Table 1: Topics of conversation

Topics	The girls	The boys
	%	%
sex	45	-
school activities		34
school friends	26	29
drink	-	14
looks	12	-
sports	-	12
the situation	17	11

While the other sex occupied the largest part of the girls' conversation, it had no place at all in the boys' conversation. Girls were only mentioned very briefly in connection with organizing house entertainment. But contrary to what is generally said about males, the boys too gossiped about friends, albeit male friends (cf Johnson & Finlay 1997).

Unlike the boys, the girls mentioned school activities only in passing. They spent a few minutes talking about the imminent choir performance, but the main worry in that connection was how to dress properly. Moreover, the girls never mentioned drink or watching sports and films on TV, topics that were high on the list in the boys' conversation.

This shows that Coates' statement (1996) that women's stories are other-oriented, while male stories are self-oriented, ie that women talk about others while men talk about their own exploits, does not entirely match the two teenage conversations studied here. But it is certainly true to say that the girls' talk centred more on personal topics than the boys' talk. And while the girls tended to disclose their personal feelings, when telling a story (eg 'the Boss hat'), the boys did not; they were either ironical ('the vodka bottle) or matter of fact ('Ozzie in the bar'). It can be argued, however, that the boys' use of swearwords signalled self-disclosure on the part.

## INTERACTIONAL BEHAVIOUR

I studied the teenagers' interactional behaviour in terms of:

- overlapping speech
- giving feedback
- swearing

### Overlapping speech

According to Coates (1997: 112, 126), the general tendency for adult female friends' conversations is to be like 'jam sessions' and for adult male friends' conversations to be like short monologues (cf Figure 1). This tendency is not reflected in the two teenage conversations studied here.

The boys, too, construct stories together. One example is [11], where the overlaps are clearly supportive:

[11] Rupe: So we were just gonna hide it and wait until wait until he  
 realized [and sort of <unclear>]  
 Tim: [And we told him] we told him Dicks' going to tell him that erm  
 Charlie [<unclear>]  
 Chris: [Charlie came in] B 141705: 191-193

Tim takes over from Rupe, and Chris completes Tim's utterance. In fact, the tendency to stick to a one-at-a-time floor is less pronounced in the boys' than in the girls' conversation, as Table 2 shows:

Table 2: Overlaps

	Total	interrupt	try&fail	support	other	
Girls	69	9 13%	5 7%	5 7%	50 72%	
Boys	78	15 19%	1	12 15%	51 65%	

Overlapping speech was more frequent in the boys' conversation, which, in turn, resulted in relatively more frequent interruptions and supports. This is in contrast to, for instance, James & Clarke (1993: 231), who state that 'most research has found no significant difference between the genders in number of interruptions initiated, in either cross-sex or same-sex interaction'. I take it that this refers to adult conversation, however, since very little research has been devoted to teenage conversation. (See Eckert 1993 for cooperation in girls' talk.)

James & Clarke also state that women and men may use overlapping speech for different functions, in that 'women more often than men use overlapping speech to show involvement and rapport' (1993:231). This study indicates that teenage girls and boys may be more alike in this respect. However, how to distinguish overlap from interruption is not entirely obvious. Tannen (1993: 176) emphasizes that 'to understand whether an overlap is an interruption, one must consider the context (cooperative overlapping, for instance, is more likely to occur in casual conversation among friends' than in a job interview. Cooperative interaction is exactly what took place in the present conversations, where the occurrence of interruptions was due to

the topical context and speaker involvement; the more involved the speakers, the more interruptions. An excellent example of this was illustrated in [1], from the girls' conversation.

### *Feedback*

Feedback was given in both conversations in the form of minimal responses (mhm, yeah, no), brief utterances of agreement and laughter.

Table 4 gives an indication of the distribution:

Table 4: Feedback

	Laughter	Minimal response
Girls	21	5
Boys	34	6

These figures show that the boys were at least as cooperative as the girls, which does not correspond to the general characteristics of adult conversational behaviour as summed up in Figure 1.

### *Swearing*

Two previous studies of the use of taboo words in COLT conversations (Stenström 1995, Bynes 1998) confirm that there are still differences in swearing behaviour between boys and girls: it is the boys who favour the 'real' swearwords, while the girls restrict themselves to weaker taboo words. The boys and girls studied in these two conversations were no exceptions:

Table 3: Swearing

Swearword	Girls	Boys
fuck	-	13
fuck off	-	2
fuck'em	-	2
shit	4	6
bloody	1	3
bastard	-	3
oh/my God	4	3
	9	32

The boys swore nearly four times as often as the girls, and they used strong swearwords, especially forms of fuck, five times as often as the much weaker (oh) God, which made up half of the girls' inventory. The girls, too, used the strong swearwords, but much more sparsely.

It is interesting to see where and how the swearwords were used. God, for instance, which some people do not regard as a swearword at all, was either used to signal surprise:

[16] Lucy: Did you know Sue-Anna's sixteen on, actually I think it was on  
 Kate: Rec= recently?  
 Lucy: maybe yesterday?  
 Kate: **Oh my God!** She's young! B 142704: 184-187

or emphasis:

[17] Tess: **God** the heat is just unbelievable B 142704: 74

*Shit*, too, was used as an emphaser, but apparently signalling a somewhat different emotion:

[18] Tess: **Shit!** <unclear> my skirt. B 142704: 245

The favourite swearword in the boys' conversation, fuck in various forms, occurred typically in high-involvement style, as in the episode where Dick told the others about the hostile schoolmates who did not allow him to watch football on TV (example [13], which is partly repeated here for the sake of convenience):

[13] Dick: The  **fucking** so sad ones is going right you're clearing up  
 house  **fuck off!** I'm not  **fucking** clearing up the house and he goes, right  
 that's it you're clearing up the house for the rest of your life!  
 Carl: Bet you were well **fucked off**. B 141705: 219-222

The word fuck appears in two forms, fucking and fuck off, both of which are used for two different things. The first instance of fucking is used as an intensifier of the adjective sad, while the second instance emphasizes the entire proposition (I'm not clearing up the house). The first instance of fuck off can be paraphrased by 'go away' and the second by 'mad'.

Following de Klerk (1997: 147), one characteristic of swearwords is that 'they are part of a shared linguistic code, reinforcing group membership, and indicative of shared knowledge and interests.' She also finds that 'in a coeducational environment, the greater awareness of gender differences seems to increase the pressure on males to conform to gender stereotypes, and indicate maleness via linguistic bravado.' (1997: 152), and she emphasizes that 'male adolescents are more keenly aware of the need to use expletives as a symbol of masculinity.' (ibid). The boys who took part in the conversations studied here are certainly in a coeducational environment, but that does not explain their use of strong swearwords in a same-sex conversation. On the other hand, 16-year-old boys are obviously very much aware of the need to prove their masculinity even in a same-sex group.

## THE USE OF PRAGMATIC MARKERS

Everybody uses pragmatic markers to keep the conversation going, to put it simply, (cf interactional signals and discourse markers in Stenström 1994), but teenagers seem to use them more frequently than adults, and their inventory of markers is only partly the same. One typical teenage marker is the 'looseness marker' like, another the invariant tag innit, which is not represented in this data, however (see Andersen 1997, Stenström 1997).

### *Distribution*

The pragmatic markers studied in the two conversations appear in Table 5:

Table 5: Pragmatic markers

Marker	Girls	Boys
yeah	40	53
really	40	7
like	32	3
just	28	12
you know	18	4
oh	17	21
no	13	12
well	13	8
right	8	7
Q-tags	7	2
mhmm	6	3
I mean	5	7
actually	4	4
I think	3	
sort of	2	1
OK	1	4
apparently	1	3
	237	140

There is a considerable difference in frequency of use, not only between the individual markers but also between the girls and the boys. Not surprisingly, yeah was the most frequently used marker totally speaking. Yeah is also the only marker that was significantly more often used by the boys. What is particularly noticeable is the large discrepancy between the girls and the boys when it comes to the use of markers that typically serve as hedges (just, like), empathizers (you know), and intensifiers (really). The remaining markers, which serve mainly as interactional signals (yeah, oh, no, right, mhmm, OK) and discourse markers (right, OK) and sometimes as empathizers (yeah, right, OK) are more common in the boys' conversation.

### *Multifunctionality*

It is a well known fact that pragmatic markers are multifunctional, in that each marker can be used for more than one function, and that each one can do more than one thing at once. For instance, yeah does not always/only serve as a response, and really does not always/only serve as an intensifier.

The most interesting thing about yeah is that it is used as an empathising tag in story-telling, more or less equivalent to you know, a function that was particularly common in the boys' conversation. One example is [19], where Carl tells the boys about a film he had been watching on TV:

[19] Carl: There's this there's this one bloke **yeah** he walks around with a grenade tied to his neck **yeah**, and this bloke goes, why does he walk around with a grenade and ... B 141705: 345

Yeah was also used as a question, as was illustrated in example [2], part of which is repeated here:

[2] Tess: If you're still going out with Foxy, would you send a Valentine's card to anybody else?  
 Kate: Oh.  
 Tess: **Yeah?**  
 Kate: I don't know cos ... B 142704: 94-97

Really was generally used either as an intensifier or an emphaser, as illustrated in [5]:

[5] Tess: Was Lottie there?  
 Kate: actually no that was the night she was **really** pissed off because, erm, people were paying more attention to me than they were to her I don't know why it's because I decide that I'm gonna be **really** outgoing and I **really** do and I was **really** loud and **really** boisterous and she's quite resigned like that and she thought I sh= bit shagged off with me, and then like I was doing, there was this **really** good looking bloke and ... B 142704: 119-125

From a syntactic/semantic point of view, *really* is described as an 'intensifier' when modifying an adjective (*really pissed off*, *really outgoing*, *really loud*, *really boisterous*) and as an 'emphasizer' when cooccurring with a verb (*I really do*; see eg Quirk et al 1985). From a pragmatic point of view, too, *really* in [5] reflects Kate's wish to intensify/emphasize what she is saying. The girls, in particular, use *really* for this purpose, and not in order to 'avoid saying something definite' by hedging, which Coates (1996: 152) seems to identify as the only function of *really* in her adult female conversations. As regards *you know*, too, it is apparently used as an empathizer (cf Stenström 1994: 64) assuring hearer involvement rather than as a hedge in the majority of cases.

In this material, hedges were typically realized by *like* and *just*, which often occurred together, particularly in 'awkward situations', such as when Tess was asked to describe her relationship to Foxy at the very beginning of the girls' conversation:

[1] Tess: It was **like** spaced, it was **just like**, I dunno, not long at all [just a]  
 Kate: [Well  
 roughly] how long?  
 Tess: couple of things we saw each other, and then over a space of about two months we saw each other probably about three times  
 Kate: Oh.  
 Tess: but it wasn't **like** a long thing but **like**, I, the time that I spent **like** it **just** used to be constant pauses, it used to be terrible and so we used to get off with each other **like** ... B 142704: 32-41

## CONCLUSION

Reconsidering the generalizations about female and male talk presented in Figure 1 and judging by the two conversations studied in this paper, we can venture to make the assumption that talk produced by teenage boys and girls is more alike in many respects than that of adult male and female speakers. For instance, both the boys and the girls in this study disclosed their personal feelings, although they did so in different ways, the girls by using hedges, empathizers and 'innocent' intensifiers, the boys, largely, by using swearwords, all of which can be said to create rapport, albeit in somewhat different ways. Moreover, the boys did gossip about their male schoolfriends just as much as the girls gossiped about their female schoolfriends.

On the other hand, as regards choice of topic, the study showed that, while the girls were preoccupied with boys and sex, their looks and what the boys thought about them, the boys appeared to be more interested in school activities, drink, and sports and films than in girls. What distinguished the girls' conversation from the boys' conversation more than anything else, however, was the use of pragmatic markers, for instance, the fact that the girls dominated in the use of hedges, while the boys dominated in the use of assertive response markers.

What was particularly interesting to notice was that overlapping speech was more common in the boys' conversation, that they interrupted each other, but also supported one another, more often than the girls, and also that the boys were more keen than the girls to give feedback in the form of minimal responses and laughter.

Clearly, no conclusions can be drawn from a small-scale study of two conversations. Yet, my knowledge of the COLT material tells me that patterns similar to the ones found in this study will be met with in many of the other conversations.

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