Born into a complex world full of dynamic occurrences, processes, individuals, and other forms of entities, one universal constant occurring within all conscious lifeforms is the concept and formation of identity. In order to attain such nebulous paradigms, individuals ascribe certain traits to their character, drawing upon past experiences and enlightenments to formulate a sense of self through a fledgling identity.

With one’s power as the catalyst, individuals channel their identity into the words they speak, the genre, communication tools, and narratives shared serving as reflections and expressions of identity. As the mind and identity of a sculptor is expressed through the works of clay, stone, metal, and ice that are given shape the hands the artist, so too is the identity of an individual expressed in the manner of speech that arises from their chosen form of social power.

In order to study the correlations between identity, power, and methods of communication of which I hypothesized, I recorded, transcribed, and analyzed the interactions between myself and my friends and family in the form of ethnographic fieldnotes. In this comprehensive analysis, I will draw upon my previous work found within the fieldnotes, as well as upon Scot Fabius Kiesling’s article, *Power and the Language of Men*, Deborah Tannen’s “Put Down That Paper and Talk To Me!”: Rapport-talk and Report-talk, and Susan Seizer’s *On the Uses of Obscenity in Live Stand-Up Comedy*.

Regarding both of the recorded scenarios, the recording for Fieldnotes 1 catalogues an informal gathering between myself and several of my friends. Brooklyn, a close friend of mine and Southern Indiana resident; James, a sophomore here at IU, a Fort Wayne local, and fellow philosophy enthusiast; and Cam, a six foot five, gentle giant from Fort Wayne; My friends and I recorded this conversation late at night and unlike typical conversations, we did have a set location, mingling between Cam’s dorm room, Brooklyn’s room situated across the hallway, and in the hallway adjoining the two. This alternating locale provided the conversation a very informal sense to it which is also reflected in the casual usage of explicit language that accompanied it. Conversations would bounce back and forth, individuals taking and relinquishing control of the conversation naturally, individuals would sometimes shift locations...
and initiate separate conversations, and at several points, individuals would break out into dance, and sing as well.

In contrast, the second recording consisted of myself, my sister Susie, my mother Kathryn, and my father Mark. The setting of our conversation was equally inverse, as all of the participants congregated and remained seated around a round table, lending the interaction a more formal air to it, possessing more reserved, socially correct word choice, and a more defined structure. As opposed to the more communal authority demonstrated in the first recording, within the second recordings, individuals would take interrupt and take control of the conversation abruptly, serving to guide conversation more forcefully away from and in the directions of topics at the discretion of the current “leader” of conversation. As a result of a more established and “quiet” environment, the various types of power and categories of speech utilized were far more varied and observable as opposed to the more sociable and relatively similar practices seen within the first recording.

Despite their differences across both recordings, individuals interrupt the flow of conversation and exercise social power to take control of their respective conversations. While the general expression of power in consistent across both conversation, the types of social power utilized and the type of speech used are very different.

In regards to the types of social power expressed in social interactions, Kiesling describes power as “an action that modifies action” (Kiesling 370). In the scenarios elaborated upon later on, a conversational participant takes control of conversation, changing the direction of conversation in order to prevent further inquiry and progress in an undesired direction. The process by which power is used to change a social body’s behavior differs in motivation and the ends of the instigator. In order to analyze the aforementioned variations, Kiesling categorizes social power and exhibitions that arise as an expression of it into one of seven categories, those being physical, economic, knowledge, structural, nurturant, demeanor, and ideological powers.

Glancing at Fieldnotes 1 Transcript, Sequence A lines 1-3, Brooklyn casually inquires about the history and relationship between Cam and the individual he is dating. Should the conversation have progressed naturally, Cam would likely have elaborated further, yet this is not case. In this particular moment, Cam expressed social power in order to seize leadership of the conversation and halt further inquiry into his private affairs. In order to do so, Cam utters, “This
is—This is getting recorded” (Fieldnotes 1, Transcription A Line 4). Regardless of whether or not the recording served as the catalyst to his silence or was simply a hasty and nonconfrontational excuse to justify his secrecy, most important is what this does to the social scenario. Conversation is inherently collaborative in nature. In refusing to continue along one particular course of dialogue, Cam temporarily jeopardized the fundamental nature of the dialogue as his expression of power ran the risk of being seen as aggressive and confrontational in nature. It is apparent that Cam demonstrated and exercised one of Kiesling’s categories of powers and that his ends were ultimately authoritarian in nature. Consequently, one might be hasty to categorize such an expression, and in said haste, may fail to consider the full scope of the situation.

The words with which individuals express themselves in any given social dynamic carry weight as they are the most obvious medium employed in communication, yet as is the case with Cam in the excerpt chosen above, words alone fail to convey the greater picture. Cam likely recognized the potentially adverse effect his expression of power could have on the social dynamic and adjusted his physical behavior accordingly. He offset the potentially aggressive aspects of such an expression of power, Cam used fluid and exaggerated body movement to lend an almost parodic element to his delivery; violently shaking his head with unnecessary speed and angle of motion as he stepped away from the group in conjunction with dramatic, exaggerated hand motions, all of which he sustained through lines 3-9. By doing so Cam avoided a potential conflict and was still able to pursue his personal interests in privacy whilst preserving the informal social structure and levity of the scenario.

Admittedly, Kiesling’s categorizations are a little vague as to how to categorize behavior. While Cam expresses decidedly confrontational power, and his ends were partially in his own self-interest, he also sought to preserve the general levity of the situation and utilized humor to do so. As a result, I would argue that Cam exemplified demeanor power in this situation. Kiesling defines demeanor power as “the power of solidarity: moral authority, being liked, being a ‘good guy’. The process of demeanor is not normally addressed by views of power, because the actions in this type of power act on emotions. Thus a person exhibits demeanor power when others feel happy, entertained involved, respectful, etc.” (Kiesling 370). Rather than trying to dissuade others through force or status, he sought to distract and entertain through laughter. In doing so Cam behaved in accordance with his own identity because of his reputation as
humorous and relaxing presence. Cam’s usage of humor is the reason why he was able to pivot the conversation, and why other categories of power would not be as effective.

In recording 2, Kathryn exhibits similar intentions to Cam in Fieldnotes 2, Transcript A line 48, but expresses a different form of power to accomplish her desired ends. In lines preceding 48, I, Ben, had grown increasingly catty and mocked Susie in an increasingly juvenile and negative manner. Kathryn recognized this and took action in order to defuse the contentious situation. She changed the conversation with a simple interjection, exclaiming, “So how do you think you pronounce the main character’s name, Kvothe?” (Fieldnotes 2, Transcription Line 48) Much like Cam’s line in Fieldnotes 1, the words spoken within the line itself aren’t particularly gripping or insightful, it’s what the words accomplish and the intentions behind them that are of the most consequence.

Unlike with Cam’s case, it’s relatively easy to determine the type of power exemplified here by Kathryn’s words. As can be expected of a mother witnessing a fight or argument break out between her children, Kathryn intended to resolve the conflict by ensuring the conflict never started to begin with. She sought to help both myself and my sister get along and restore the usual flow of conversation. According to Kiesling, “Nurturant power is the process of helping another as in teaching or feeding” (Kiesling 370). As such, an expression power performed in order to resolve conflict and help one’s children is a near exact definition of nurturant power.

While it may be fairly simple to determine the nature of Kathryn’s selected type of power, what is far more difficult is to do describe and determine what instrument and process she used to restore the positive atmosphere. Unlike in Cam’s situation, there is no clean category akin to humor, as was employed by Cam, nor a simple explanation of why such a statement was successful. For help in this matter, I turn to Deborah Tannen’s “Put Down That Paper and Talk To Me!”: Rapport-talk and Report-talk as it provides a general framework that can help elaborate further on the effectiveness of Kathryn’s statement. As is reflected by the title, the central point of Tannen’s article is on the difference between report-talk and rapport-talk. In general, Tannen describes report-talk as being largely impersonal, a means to preserve status and individualism. Inversely, rapport talk is a very personal form of speech focused on building and maintaining emotional bridges with other individuals. With this in mind, Kathryn’s statement is very clearly a form of rapport-talk, even aside from the benevolent intentions discussed above,
that much is obvious from the content of her words. She specifically referenced a previous topic of interest to me, Ben, in order to get me to stop. In order to do so, Kathryn had to observe and make note of my passions and enthusiasm for the book we had been discussing, but she also had to have been aware of the most proper way to engage me in conversation. Both of these require the careful attention and personal knowledge that characterize rapport-talk. Aside from its nature as rapport-speech, I am unaware of a further genre or speech tool to describe it as other than interrogative dialogue of a rapport-based nature.

Whilst the words Kathryn stated may have been rapport-talk, I would argue that Cam’s statements were examples of report-talk. According to the guidelines Tannen establishes, report-talk is “a means to preserve independence…done by holding center stage through verbal performance” (Tannen 190). While the words and actions Cam utilized were performed to ease tension in a friendly and personable often seen within rapport-talk, such practices are not restricted to that manner of speech alone. Cam essentially establishes his independence from the established conversational norms, instead opting to seize control for himself. He did this by making himself the center of attention utilizing humor to convey his wishes. This lines up verbatim with the definition of report-talk.

Another interesting correlation between both examples can actually be found in Susan Seizer’s article *On the Uses of Obscenity in Live Stand-Up Comedy*. Despite the fact the both Kathryn’s and Cam’s scenarios certainly appear to have little to do with the professional practices of comedians not the usage of obscenity, they each exemplify one of two different traits and objectives stand-up comedians share. According to Seizer, one goal of stand-up comedians is to use “comedic speech that will deviate from the norms and standards of public speech,” which creates idiosyncrasies between expectation and what the comedian performs (Seizer 222). Furthermore, “[t]heir [comedians] language is joined by what they communicate through several of the other social codes that speak through behavior-dress, posture, gesture, spatial organization”[1] (Seizer 223). This is exactly identical to Cam’s practices in scenario A line 4 of the transcript for Fieldnotes 1. In order to mitigate the abrupt nature of his interruption in the conversation, Cam juxtaposes the expectation of behavior expected following the usage of social

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1 Note: Brackets are inserted in this quotation around the word ‘comedians’ in order to inform the readers that ‘comedians’ clarifies the meaning of the word ‘Their’. 
As I hypothesized, both Kathryn and Cam found their identities within their ability to communicate intimately and engagingly with the other conversational participants, akin to the stand-up comedians Seizer wrote about. This identity is then expressed through one of the forms
of power Kiesling discusses, before being made manifest in one of the forms of speech discussed in detail by Deborah Tannen.

Works Cited: