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## **Drawing on the words of others at public hearings: Zoning, Wal-Mart, and the threat to the aquifer**

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines two public hearings on a zoning proposal that would allow the construction of a Super Wal-Mart Center on a field over the town's aquifer. Many citizens speak out against the zoning change because of the risk to drinking water, as well as other issues. Citizens face the speaker's problem of how to make their presentations convincing, given the technical matters involved and the fact that Town Board members have likely already heard about these issues. Some speakers draw on the words of others in their presentations. Using another's words allows the speaker to cite an authoritative source or to respond to what another has said, to evaluate it, and often to challenge it. Speakers use other devices in addition to quotes, such as formulations, repetition, and membership categorizations to develop their evaluative stances in the reporting context. The study's focus is the discursive construction and rhetoric of using others' words for the speaker's own purposes. (Public hearings, risk, reported speech, quotes, Wal-Mart, discursive analysis, rhetoric)\*

### INTRODUCTION

This study examines participation at two public hearings before a Town Board in upstate New York. The hearings were called to solicit public input on a proposed zoning change. Zoning issues are not typically the stuff that excites the passions of the citizenry to turn out to public hearings, but this proposal would allow for the construction of a Wal-Mart Super Center on an environmentally sensitive site. The proposal calls for a Wal-Mart to be built on a vacant lot, extending the town's commercial development along a fast-growing traffic corridor. While Wal-

Mart has become a lightning rod for many issues,<sup>1</sup> what is unique to this case is that the Super Wal-Mart would be built over the town's aquifer. This ground water has been designated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a sole-source aquifer, meaning that it is the town's only source of drinking water (Miller et al. 1998). Storm-water runoff from large parking lots such as those found with "big box" stores is one of the major sources of water contamination in the United States. The proposed Wal-Mart location and the corresponding threat to the aquifer are the main issues that galvanized many local residents to speak out at these public hearings. Many of the participants spoke about the risk involved in going forward with the proposal. Given that risk can be seen as a technical or scientific matter, how do ordinary citizens talk about risk? One strategy was that some participants drew on the words of others in the course of their presentation. We will focus on these speech practices of using another's words, or quoting, in talking about risk during public hearings.

#### RISK, PUBLIC HEARINGS AND THE SPEAKERS' PROBLEM

We are becoming a "risk society" (Beck 1992). Having entered an era of reflexive modernity, we think more in terms of risk (Giddens 1991). It is not that there are more risks today than in the past, but that we are more conscious of them. The discourse of risk enters into several of the speakers' presentations, explicitly or implicitly, at the public hearings. Some speakers downplay the risk by pointing to technological solutions. The magnitude of the risk is an issue over which the public is divided, though a large majority speaks out against the zoning change.

#### *Credibility*

Perhaps the central problem that citizens must overcome in speaking before the Town Board is that of not being taken seriously, particularly when addressing scientific or technical information (Cohen & Buttny n.d.). Traditionally risk assessment has been seen as a technical, scientific matter best left to experts within the technical-scientific communities. Risk communication has been conceived of as experts assessing the risk and then informing the public of those risks (Parr 2005). Grabill & Simmons's critical review of risk communication studies draws upon Foucault's theories on the role of institutional power in the production of knowledge to illustrate how the field of risk communication maintains the expert/public distinction that reinforces the "exclusion of citizens from meaningful participation in the construction of risk" (1998:420). The literature addresses the public's non-expert status in terms of a tension between "objective and subjective risk" or "technical rationality and cultural rationality" (Krimsky & Plough 1988; Rowan 1995; Peterson 1997, ch.5; Cox 2006, ch. 6), between "scientific expertise and (the public's) local knowledge" (Roth et al. 2004), or between "factual claims and value claims" (Beck 2000). The public, associated with the latter terms in these dichotomies, is generally considered uninformed and/or irrational. Participants' "local knowledge" gets taken as mere opinion, not fit for

decision making (Roth et al. 2004). The one-way view of risk communication, from expert to public, closes off consideration of the public's beliefs, values, power, and influence on the meaning of risk.

### *Cynicism*

Public meetings and hearings are perceived by the public in seemingly contradictory ways (McComas 2001, Tracy & Dimock 2004). Such public gatherings can be seen as sites for democratic participation and involvement. This is the democratic ideal of ordinary folks getting up at a public meeting, having their say, and possibly influencing decisions. On the other hand, meetings and hearings are also seen as giving the illusion of public input and influence. Decisions have already been made by governmental agencies behind the scenes, so meetings or hearings are merely forums for defending or legitimizing prior decisions, or allowing a public venting. Citizens get positioned as reacting to agency proposals – which are cynically viewed as already-made decisions. Discussions are limited to exclude social issues. Large public meetings preclude discussion or give and take on issues. The one-shot public meeting, rather than ongoing contact between governmental agencies and stakeholders, does not allow for joint decision making. These difficulties in achieving effective public hearings play into the public cynicism that fuels the broader decline in public trust in governmental institutions in the United States (Belsten 1996). Such loss of trust and cynicism often result in citizen apathy, the feeling of being patronized, or frustration with governmental bodies.

The cynicism of the Cortlandville citizens is likely fueled by their lack of trust in Wal-Mart specifically, and big business generally. Indeed, many of the speakers address Wal-Mart's problematic credibility, illustrating the public's increased concern over risks generated by the profit-making interests of big business (Douglas 1992:15). The erosion of trust in government and big business extends into science and technology – an effect of the public's perceived role of these institutions in recent large-scale environmental disasters and their aftermath (Wynne 1996:31; Jamison 2001). The public's eroding trust in authoritative voices of science and technology, big business, and government motivated us to ask what discursive resources speakers draw on to make their case at the public hearing, and how they function in the public's co-construction of risk.

### USING THE WORDS OF OTHERS

During their presentations at the public hearings, some participants quote the words of others. Drawing on the words of others serves as a “discursive resource” for the speaker (Holsanova 2006). Quotes may come from what has been said earlier in the meeting, or said sometime earlier, or even from written documents. Quoting an authority, for instance, may bolster an argument or allow one to apply it to the current dispute.

Drawing on another's words or reporting speech involves a "double-voiced discourse" reflecting both the quoted speaker and the present speaker (Bakhtin 1981) – "double-voiced" in that the speaker employs the quoted discourse for his or her own purposes in the present. In other words, we need to consider not only the reported speech of another, but also the "reporting context" involving the reporting speaker and the audience to whom this is addressed (Vološinov 1971:153). The reporting context draws our attention to how another's words are used by the speaker in the present circumstances.

Another's words can be appropriated for use in various ways. Consider the traditional distinction between direct and indirect speech. Direct speech conveys "the content plus the form," while indirect speech focuses on "the content of the original utterance" (Günther 2002:348; also see Lucy 1993:18–19). Direct speech purports to reproduce what another person said, or even how it was said. It functions for involvement in that the listener is shown rather told what happened (Tannen 1989). It can also serve for detachment or distance from what another said (Hill & Irvine 1993:7); one is merely "animating" another's words (Goffman 1981:144–45). Direct speech may have a theatrical quality in that the reporting speaker can perform not only the words, but also the prosody, voice quality, or embodied behaviors of the reported speaker (Li 1986; Bauman & Briggs 1990). Indirect speech, in contrast, captures the propositional content of another's speech rather than the exact words. Indirect speech is a kind of paraphrase or summary in the teller's own words; it reports the idea conveyed in another's discourse. The notion of indirect speech has been critiqued (Sternberg 1982; Coulmas 1986), but this is tangential to our concerns here.

Both direct and indirect quotes report the speech of an individual. But reported speech can also be used to capture the discourse of an aggregate, a kind of "plural" or "choral" speech (Mayes 1990:333). For example, the speech of an aggregate of Wal-Mart supporters is summarized in the following: "Most importantly, perhaps we are often told that '*Super Wal-Mart will bring lower prices and items ranging from produce to automotive repairs to our community.*'" This is not attributed to a single individual but to an indefinite aggregate of others who make such a claim. A related notion that also summarizes the speech of an aggregate is "prototypical speech" (Payne n.d.). Prototypical speech captures the voice of an aggregate through the words of a prototypical member. The voice of Wal-Mart gets conveyed through the prototypical speech, "Wal-Mart says '*they can handle it, they can do this and that with the runoff.*'" Here the reporting speaker attributes this claim to Wal-Mart *qua* corporation. Another use of quotes involves what one "could," "would," "should," or "will" say, which has been termed "hypothetical speech" (Mayes 1990; Myers 1999). A speaker envisions what our grandchildren will say: "When you put your names on that vote, remember if your grandchildren are gonna look at this vote and say '*Who are these people? What were they thinking of when they allowed this place to build on the aquifer?*'" This type of quote makes no pretense to report faithfully what others

have said, since it has not been said yet – it gives voice to what may be said sometime in the future.

This typology of quotations distinguishes between whether the quote purports to capture others' words or summarize their idea, whether it was said by an individual or an aggregate, and whether it was actually said or was hypothetical. These latter two distinctions raise the question of what we should call the phenomenon. The familiar labels, "quotes" or "reported speech," suggest that one is re-presenting what has been said through the actual words or through the propositional content. But clearly this representational function is problematic. With choral speech it is highly unlikely that everyone in the aggregate said those words – not to mention hypothetical speech, which involves a counterfactual statement. Even when another's words are captured verbatim, the quote is always "partial" and "selective" in that some aspects of original are not depicted (Myers 2004:138). On a more basic level, when another's speech is taken out of its original context, reanimated by another person, and used in the reporting context for different purposes, then the meanings of the original utterance have been altered (Vološinov 1971). These considerations have led Tannen (1989:99) to argue that "even seemingly 'direct quotation' is really 'constructed dialogue,' that is, primarily the creation of the speaker rather than the party quoted." Reported speech is "recontextualized" in the reporting context (Sternberg 1982; Shuman 1993).

In drawing on the words of others, one is doing more than merely reporting; one is also, at least implicitly, editorializing or commenting on those words (Bakhtin 1981, 1986). To comment on prior speech or a written text by the current speaker is to assess or evaluate it. This evaluation may be done as internal or external to the narrative (Labov 1972). The speaker may explicitly comment on what another said externally to the narrative itself. Also, the speaker's word choice or the prosody in restaging the words can internally indicate his or her evaluative stance toward this speech.

This evaluative stance made relevant by the reported speech suggests that we need to consider how the quote is located within larger discourse structures, such as narratives (Bauman & Briggs 1990) or argument sequences (Holsanova 2006). Using another's words can work as a form of evidence or as a way to hold another responsible (Hill & Irvine 1993). Direct reported speech can convey an air of objectivity in that recipients can "see for themselves" what another said (Holt 1996). Reported speech can serve various functions within larger discourse structures: to dramatize or document a point, to epitomize a condition, to hypothesize a position, and so on. Also, reported speech can create a portrait of the other through giving voice to another, thereby positioning self and other (Basso 1979; Buttny 2004, chs. 4–6). Drawing on the words of others can serve as an effective rhetorical device in forming one's argument (Myers 2004:137).

We will look at drawing on the words of others as a possible solution to the speaker's problem. Quoting others allows the speaker to adopt the footing that

“It’s not only me that’s saying this” (Dickerson 1997). That is, the citizen may quote technical experts or documents and their informed judgment about the aquifer, the local economy, Wal-Mart, traffic, and the like. A second way to address the speaker’s problem is through appeal to various local voices, lay judgments, or public opinion. That is, speakers can draw on the voices of local rationality or the ethos of the family, community, or place. In addition to the speaker’s drawing on these discursive resources of experts or public opinion, we need to examine how these resources are used by the speaker. This invoking another’s words allows speakers then to respond with their own words. A key part of the practice of quoting others is to take an evaluative stance toward those positions for the speaker’s own purposes in the reporting context.

THE STUDY: DRAWING ON THE WORDS OF OTHERS AT A PUBLIC HEARING

*Analytic perspective*

Our perspective in studying public hearings is discursive constructionism (Buttny 2004). We are interested in both the speaking practices employed by the participants and the discursive realities claimed, contested, or co-constructed. Actions, events, or future states of affairs can be accounted for in multiple ways – as problematic or not, and with varying shades of risk. An interesting feature of talking about risk is the malleability of “the problem” among different interlocutors and the different discursive resources they draw on to make their case. All agree on the importance of safe drinking water and protecting the aquifer; the disagreement arises on how to accomplish this through talk.

Rhetoric provides a useful lens for the discursive analysis of how events are portrayed and persons get positioned. In public hearings a citizen’s account is not simply a neutral representation of events; obviously there are interests at stake (Potter 1996) that lead to certain rhetorical practices. Rhetoric can be seen at work in the positionings that persons take up, their positioning of others, and their discursive construction of events (Bora & Hausendorf 2006). Discursive constructionism highlights how speech activities such as quotes, evaluations, arguments, and category selection result in persons’ sense of the reality of the issue. We are interested in not only the content of the problem, but also in how problems get interactionally constructed.

In the course of making their presentation at the public hearing, participants at times draw on another’s words as reported speech or as a quote from written documents. To anticipate the argument, we look at the words of another as a discursive resource for the speaker. We also examine how these resources are used by current speakers for their own rhetorical purposes. This provides us with a way to understand participants’ construction of risk.

Given our concern with the speaker’s problem in talking risk at the public hearing, our research questions are:

1. What discursive resources do speakers draw on in using the words of others?
2. How do reporting speakers use these quotes in their presentation? What is the speaker's evaluative stance toward the reported discourses? How do these quotes fit into the larger discourse structures such as the speaker's argument?
3. Given that the participants are broadly addressing the future risk, what types of claims are made about risk?

### *Data*

Our data come from two public hearings before the Town Board of Cortlandville, New York in 2004–2005. These hearings were called to solicit public input on a proposed zoning change. The Town Board routinely audiotapes its meetings and hearings. These recordings were used to make transcripts of the two public hearings. Given the length of these hearings of approximately three hours, the transcription focuses primarily on the words spoken. We attended these hearings, listened to the audio recordings, and read over the transcripts a number of times.

The two public hearings were held in the town's meeting hall during September 2004 and February 2005. Public hearings are an intriguing site bringing together a cross-section of citizens from the community and interested outside parties. We provide a brief sketch of the people and place. The Town Board members are middle-aged to old, white male, and all Republicans. In fact, all of the participants were white, and with few exceptions, middle-aged to old. Attorneys were present representing the Town Board, Wal-Mart, Lowe's (another big-box store chain), and other interests. Participants came from Cortlandville, Cortland, and other nearby communities. Many of the participants were from a local environmental group, Citizens for Aquifer Protection and Employment (CAPE). CAPE began about three years earlier in opposition to the proposed Super Wal-Mart and is composed of academics from the local college, retired citizens, church people, union organizers, and others from the area. Also present were members of the business community, as well as other citizens with no apparent group affiliation.

Approximately 100 people attended each of these hearings. In the meeting hall most of the seats were occupied, though a number of people stood along the outer walls of the room. The hearing was moderated by the Town Board's attorney. He solicited volunteers from the audience to speak. Citizens spoke while standing near their seats to the Town Board members, who were seated in the front of the room, facing the audience. These presentations appear to be a series of speeches with little response or discussion from Town Board members or those in the audience, other than occasional laughter, heckling, or applause. Most of the speeches are short, ranging from 14 seconds to 7.5 minutes, with average length of just under 3 minutes. Some of the presentations were written out and read; others were delivered extemporaneously, and a few were identified as unprepared or impromptu. Each public hearing lasted approximately 90 minutes.



*Quotes from technical sources*

One strategy for citizens to deal with the speaker's problem is to bring in technical resources in stating their position on the proposed zoning change. By "technical" we mean the varying levels of competence necessary to use or cite a specialized discourse, such as engineering, legal, or scientific. Drawing on such technical voices or resources can add authority or credibility to one's presentation. We also need to consider what the speaker is doing with these quotes. In the following we see the speaker, B.M., drawing on a passage from the town's "Land Use Plan," (also referred to as "Clough Harbour," the firm that prepared the document; see Clough, Harbour Associates 2002).

(1) (2/16, 17) (Note: Participants' names are changed or initials are used.)

B.M.

01 On page four of chapter four of the Land Use Plan, the following comments were  
 02 made by Clough Harbour and for this area which includes the polo field and I  
 03 quote, The amount of impervious surfaces allowed by future development and  
 04 redevelopment of the area should be limited to protect aquifer recharge. Clough  
 05 Harbour also gave the following advice, quote, investigate possible zoning  
 06 modifications to the current business district to make sure zoning is consistent with  
 07 land use planning objectives and aquifer protection. Future land use in this area  
 08 should undergo increased levels of scrutiny before development is allowed to occur  
 09 to safeguard the aquifer and its recharge areas. Land use activities and operational  
 10 activities may need to be more thoroughly regulated,' end quote. I don't see how  
 11 this zoning proposal reflects quote, increased scrutiny, or more protective  
 12 regulations. It will allow for business as usual, which is ad hoc, unplanned  
 13 development that serves the interests of developers, landowners, and real estate  
 14 agents, not the interest of workers and the community at large.

In selecting these two passages from the town's planning document to read (lines 3–4 and 5–10), B.M. contrasts the soundness of what is written in the plan to his sense of the direction of the zoning change proposal. For emphasis he formulates a condensed version of the recommendations from the plan, *quote, increased scrutiny, or more protective regulations* (lines 11–12), and claims that the zoning proposal falls short of these. The implied criticism here is that the Town Board commissioned this Land Use Plan a few years ago, accepted it, and now appears to be ready to depart from it. The contrast of the quote from the Land Use Plan with the proposed zoning makes relevant his sense of what the latter will lead to, which he calls *business as usual, which is ad hoc, unplanned development* (lines 12–13). So the quote works as part of his argument; the quote is used to draw a contrast and to challenge those behind the zoning change.

The passages selected from the Land Use Plan are interesting for how they discuss the risk or threat to the aquifer. Risk gets articulated here by a language of vulnerability: *protect aquifer recharge* (line 4), *aquifer protection* (line 7), and *safeguard the aquifer and its recharge areas* (line 9). This discourse of risk frames the aquifer as vulnerable to *development* – for example, *future development and redevelopment of the area should be limited to protect aquifer recharge* (lines 3–4) (also see lines 7–10). Through these discursive constructions

we see the classic tension between development and environmental protection. As will be seen, this tension gets played out in various ways throughout the public hearings through various quotes and evaluations.

Another instance of quoting a technical document to criticize the zoning proposal is seen in the following. A.Z. quotes from the zoning document up for consideration:

(2) (9/22, 14)

A.Z.

1 Your revised zoning code says that in the B3 district you would in quote, want  
 2 well planned, well designed commercial uses and parking areas that serve the  
 3 motoring public and which are generally compatible with each other and with and  
 4 which are not detrimental to adjoining uses or the orderly flow of on-sight or off-  
 5 sight pedestrian or vehicular traffic, end quote. I think- I can think of nothing more  
 6 incompatible with Walden Place than building a huge store with a thousand parking  
 7 spaces in its backyard. I can think of nothing more detrimental to the residents of  
 8 Walden Place than having traffic flow on both sides of its building twenty four  
 9 hours a day.

A.Z. contrasts what is written in the proposed zoning change to the likely consequences for Walden Place, a retirement community adjacent to the proposed Super Wal-Mart site. He uses a negation of the same words from the document: *compatible* (line 3) to *nothing more incompatible* (lines 5–6) and *detrimental* (line 4) to *nothing more detrimental* (line 7). The implied criticism is that the consequences of the zoning change would be inconsistent with what is written in the zoning code.

A.Z. “recruits” the Town Board’s own words, as written in the proposal, against the Town Board – to undermine their proposal (Antaki & Leudar 2001). A.Z. articulates his assessment in a parallel structure, *I can think of nothing more incompatible with Walden Place* (lines 5–6) and *I can think of nothing more detrimental to the residents of Walden Place* (lines 7–8). These assessments are each “extreme case formulations” designed to magnify the risk and to counter the proposed zoning change (Sidnell 2004).

While most of the opponents to the zoning change cite the threat to the aquifer, in this presentation the risk is said to be from traffic, threatening the pedestrians and the locale of Walden Place: *building a huge store . . . in its backyard* (lines 6–7) and *traffic flow on both sides of its building twenty-four hours a day* (lines 8–9). Each of these accounts of future consequences contains conflicting elements that are hearable as problematic: a *backyard* with a *huge store*,<sup>2</sup> and a *building* – a retirement community – with *traffic flow on both sides . . . twenty-four hours a day*.

Quotes from written documents get interpreted by the speaker not only through the bit that is selected and taken out of the original, but also by how the quote is used rhetorically – as we have seen above, to contrast with likely negative consequences of the zoning proposal. Quotes need to be seen within larger discourse units, such as the argument or narrative being developed by the speaker.

The main dispute in these public hearings could be framed in terms of risk – aquifer protection versus economic growth/development. Yet many proponents of the zoning change and economic development mention the value of aquifer protection, and many opponents of the zoning cite the importance of economic growth. Good drinking water and a strong local economy are valued by all, but differences arise over the amount of acceptable risk, and also what constitutes a threat to the aquifer. In the following excerpt we see the Lowe’s attorney, L.A., paying homage to aquifer protection, but quickly moving into their problem with lot-size coverage (lines 1–3):

(3) (9/22, 2) (Background note: L.A. is attorney for Lowe’s<sup>3</sup>)

L.A.

01 While Lowe’s certainly understands and agrees with and applauds the idea of  
 02 aquifer protection, we think that this sort of an arbitrary and fairly restrictive lot  
 03 coverage um proposal really doesn’t necessarily accomplish the objectives. Uh, I  
 04 assume that the board is aware that somewhere earlier in the process a letter was  
 05 uh submitted by P.R. under Cortland County Water Conservation District,  
 06 which I understand uh he indicated that storm water management and aquifer  
 07 protection in this area can be very effectively handled even allowing lot coverages  
 08 up to eighty-five and ninety-five percent. And the point I think that Mr. R is  
 09 making is that the key in this situation is not developing some arbitrary lot  
 10 coverage number, but the key is how well designed is the storm water management  
 11 district and that really is the critical component because again in our view and I  
 12 think it is backed up by Mr. R and other experts uh you can adequately design a  
 13 storm water management system that will more than uh address your concerns  
 14 about aquifer protection and still allow very significant lot coverages and if you  
 15 have a bad system it doesn’t matter what the limitation is on lot coverages it’s not  
 16 going to protect the aquifer uh so we think that you should focus more on that than  
 17 on lot coverage numbers.

L.A. quotes from a letter from a local water quality expert, P.R., to construct his argument. In this presentation it is not clear whether L.A. is directly reading from a portion of the letter or is reading from his brief, in effect a summary quote from the letter (lines 6–8). One way or the other, having quoted from the letter, he then formulates *the point* (line 8) or *the key* (line 10) of Mr. R’s words. He attempts to use the quote to rhetorically align *our view* (i.e., that of Lowe’s) with that of *Mr. R and other experts* (line 12). Who the *other experts* are, however, is not specified.

In quoting from the letter from the water quality expert, L.A. contrasts the storm-water management system to lot size coverage (i.e., the amount of green space within each lot). The presumption here is that the zoning change will be passed, and only the details of lot size coverage need to be worked out. This raises the puzzle of how the different sides can have such differing views on the amount of risk involved from the zoning change and the Wal-Mart development.

In the following excerpt we see that Wal-Mart’s attorney, like the one from Lowe’s, pays homage to protecting the aquifer:

(4) (9/22, 10)

W.A.

- 1 We understand the board and the people's concern with the aquifer and we feel that
- 2 the best way to protect the aquifer would be through engineering designs, not green
- 3 space ratios. As indicated in the aquifer ordinance, the best way to protect the
- 4 aquifer is through a variety of design, engineering, and maintenance plans. So we
- 5 look to the board to not only do lot coverage but look at those issues as well.

Again, we see there is a broad consensus of the value of safe drinking water, but the differences arise over how to accomplish this, the means to the end. Implicit here is that Wal-Mart does not want zoning restrictions on the size of its lots. The attorney quotes from the technical document, the aquifer ordinance, in the attempt to redirect the direction of the Town Board. As with the Lowe's attorney, there is the presumption that the zoning change will be enacted.

The quotes used thus far (excerpts 1–4) have been taken from written documents. Quotes from written documents and from oral utterances have many aspects in common: The quote may be performed directly or in summary; and there is selectivity in what portion of the prior discourse gets quoted and in how the quote gets interpreted and evaluated by the reporting speaker. In the following, T.B. uses reported speech to formulate what the attorneys have said (excerpts 3–4) and then responds to them:

(5) (9/22, 26)

T.B.

- 1 It's not very often that I get to have the opportunity to give a lawyer some advice
- 2 hhhhhh[hh ((audience laughter))
- 3 [but ah there are two attorneys here ( ) one with respect to
- 4 Lowes and the other one in respect to Wal-Mart what I heard from both of them
- 5 was that by engineering you can take care of all of these problems with the
- 6 aquifer. Now I've been a practicing engineer for sixty years and the advice
- 7 I would have you give to your client is that you can't solve all problems by proper
- 8 engineering there are some problems that simply cannot be solved by engineers.
- 9 You might carry that back to your client ((audience applause))

In terms of reported speech, we again see the format of reported speech of others combined with the speaker's challenge. T.B. uses reported speech (lines 5–6) seemingly to summarize the gist of the two attorneys' engineering solutions to the aquifer problem. Interestingly, each of the attorney's solutions bases its assertions on quotes from written documents: the letter from P.R. (excerpt 3) and the aquifer ordinance (excerpt 4). Yet T.B. deletes reference to these two more credible sources and instead attributes the solution to the attorneys. T.B.'s version of what the attorneys have said raises the question of how reported speech formulates these prior utterances. Even though reported speech is supposedly the words of others, the way those words get formulated fits into the reporting speaker's purposes – reported speech as construction of some prior discourse (Tannen 1989).

T.B. is able to challenge the attorneys' claims first of all by citing his identity, or membership category, as *a practicing engineer for sixty years* (line 6). In

addition, T.B. is the supervisor of the Town Board. Having established credibility, he then moves to challenge or contradict what the attorneys have said. Other presenters have drawn on technical sources as written documents: the Land Use Plan, the zoning proposal, a letter from a water quality expert, and the aquifer ordinance. T.B. identifies himself as a technical source and is able to use this credibility to raise doubts about the attorneys' solutions.

In this excerpt we see not only drawing on the words of others and the speaker's evaluative stance, but also making identities or membership categories relevant. In addition to T.B.'s identifying himself as an engineer, he implicitly invokes the stereotype of self-interested lawyers for large corporations such as Lowe's and Wal-Mart. These categorizations and the implicit meanings they invoke are part of the speaker's evaluation in the reporting context.

*Quotes to contrast local and outside sources*

A second kind of discursive resource that participants draw on in addressing the speaker's problem is the words from local sources. "Local" voices can carry an ethos by invoking the familiar, the community, tradition, or a sense of place. The local often gets articulated in opposition to "outsiders" – a rhetoric of "us" versus "them."

Reported speech can take different forms. In the excerpt below the presenter uses three different kinds of reported speech in her discussion of risk and the aquifer:

(6) (9/22, 16)

R.P.

01 ... this is our water other than our air what- what's more important? Ehh, I mean  
 02 you cannot replace water and if I can remember something my Dad told me,  
 03 which was Steve, he said, Never gamble with what you can't afford to lose. Can  
 04 we afford to lose this aquifer? You can't ship in other water from other places. You  
 05 cannot replace this. So think when you gamble, and it- and it is a gamble.  
 06 Wal-Mart says they can handle it they can do this and that with the runoff, is that  
 07 a guarantee? In two hundred years in a hundred years, are we gonna be sure? And  
 08 are we gonna be sorry? When you put your names on that vote remember if your  
 09 grandchildren are gonna look at this vote say Who are these people? What were  
 10 they thinking of when they allowed this place to build on the aquifer? This is our  
 11 water. We have nothing else. That's all.

Here the speaker R.P. elaborates on the importance of protecting the water by directly quoting her father's advice about gambling (line 3), and then labeling the aquifer issue as a gamble. This quote from her father is almost a kind of proverb or wise saying; no one could disagree with it. R.P. then applies this wisdom to the current zoning proposal through the rhetorical question, *Can we afford to lose this aquifer?* (lines 3–4). Notice that she uses the same words, *afford to lose*, as in the quote from her father – in a sense applying her father's words of wisdom to the present circumstances. She also uses her father's term *gamble* to characterize the zoning change.

R.P. continues by envisioning a kind of interactive exchange with Wal-Mart. She gives voice to the Wal-Mart defense to her criticism: *Wal-Mart says they can handle it they can do this and that with the runoff* (line 6). It is ambiguous here whether she is referring to the Wal-Mart attorney's presentation (see excerpt 4) or whether this reported speech is a prototypical summary quote of the Wal-Mart position. The very way she summarizes what Wal-Mart said implicitly raises doubts about their claims: *they can do this and that* conveys a dismissive quality to their position. R.P. raises more skeptical doubts by responding to the Wal-Mart position by posing a series of three more rhetorical questions (lines 6–8). Here we can see how reported speech opens a space for R.P. to respond with her evaluative stance toward Wal-Mart.

A third kind of reported speech is seen as R.P. envisions the future after the Super Wal-Mart has been built. She does this through a hypothetical quote of the Town Board members' grandchildren: *What were they thinking of when they allowed this place to built on the aquifer?* (lines 9–10). This hypothetical speech of their grandchildren *could*, *would*, or *will* be uttered sometime in the future. Environmental discourse often invokes a temporal dimension (Harré, Brockmeier & Mühlhäusler 1999), in this case the future consequences of the Wal-Mart built over the aquifer. Imagining their grandchildren saying in disbelief, *What were they thinking?* draws on a popular phrase to sarcastically criticize a bad decision – as R.P. sees it, allowing a Wal-Mart over the aquifer. This popular saying presumably originated in the mass media. Goodwin 2003 identifies this use of lines from mass-media discourse in one's speech as "unattributed imported speech." Interestingly, while the voice of the grandchildren constitutes a local source, their words come from the mass media.

These three kinds of reported speech can be heard sequentially in a kind of constructed dialogue: (a) a direct quote of her father's words of wisdom, *never gamble with what you cannot afford to lose*, (b) which gives rise to Wal-Mart's defense though the summary quote, *We can handle it*, and (c) a projection into the future, the grandchildren's questioning the Town Board's decision through the hypothetical quote, *What were they thinking?* By giving voice to these different positions, R.P. is able to use them dialogically for her own evaluative stance in her presentation. The magnitude of the risk gets articulated through the reported speech of her father's wise words and the imagined disbelief of the future grandchildren.

One way to present the voice of the local is in contrast to the outsider. As we see in (6), the local voices are family identities – *my Dad* and *our grandchildren* – in contrast to the outsider, Wal-Mart. We see this opposition of local voices to the outsider again in the following excerpt:

(7) (9/22, 26)

O.A.

- 1 ... but we've got Wal-Mart and big businesses on one side who tell you that they  
2 can take care of everything. We have another group over here who's not entirely

- 3 sure of that and I don't think there's anyway that you can be entirely sure  
 4 it's not ( ) and if it's not, if there's even a tiny tiny chance that our water will  
 5 be contaminated we can't let it happen.

O.A. uses a prototypical summary quote to epitomize Wal-Mart's and big business's claims about protecting the aquifer (lines 1–2). Notice the similarity here to (6) in giving voice to Wal-Mart, *Wal-Mart says they can handle it*, while in excerpt 7 O.A. animates the Wal-Mart and big business voice as *they can take care of everything*.

The quotive or “introducer” (Johnstone 1987:34) O.A. uses, *who tell you*, to indicate the reported speech displays her skepticism toward the quote. That is, the very way she introduces the quote tells the audience how to take the reported speech: as doubtful or even deceptive. As such, the quotive needs to be seen as part of the reporting context, not only introducing others' words but also acting as a “contextualization cue” to how the quote should be heard (Gumperz 1982; Johnstone 1987:44).

O.A. then contrasts this to the view of *another group over here* (line 2) who are skeptical of these assurances. The implied reference to this *group* is the local environmental group, CAPE, whose opposition to the zoning change and the Wal-Mart is well known. O.A. describes her own position by using a similar locution in her description of CAPE, *not entirely sure* (line 2 and 3). O.A. states her evaluative stance: If there is any risk to *our water* (being) *contaminated* (lines 4–5), then do not make the zoning change. So we see this binary here between the local group and *our water* on the one hand, and Wal-Mart's and other big businesses' questionable claims about the water on the other.

Reported speech can be used to directly challenge what a prior speaker has just said. For instance, in the following excerpt, we see L.M. challenge the veracity of a statement from the Lowe's attorney (lines 8–11):

(8) (9/22, 6)

L.M.

- 01 My name is L.M. This isn't on is it? You know, I want I want to be  
 02 respectful to Mr. H from Lowe's but when it comes right down to it I don't I  
 03 don't know if you're Syracuse or Rochester but it's not Cortland where you're  
 04 from and this is our community and this is where we're from. And so it vitally  
 05 important even though I know that you and your company have concerns I can  
 06 tell you absolutely with a hundred percent certainty that our concerns go much,  
 07 much deeper than that and they always will because this is where we live and this is  
 08 where we hope to raise our children ((loud noise)). . . I know it's not uh, it's not a  
 09 truth when you made a statement that protecting the aquifer doesn't have anything  
 10 to do with and you can correct me on what you said with the amount of concrete  
 11 coverage because it does have everything to do with that.

Immediately prior to this excerpt, the attorney from Lowe's, Mr. H, had just finished his presentation. L.M., the next speaker, paraphrases the attorney's claim by using a summary quote, *protecting the aquifer doesn't have anything to do with . . . the amount of concrete coverage* (lines 10–11). L.M. then directly chal-



lenges the attorney's claim by contradicting it (line 11). Notice how she transposes the reported speech attributed to the attorney, *doesn't have anything to do with* (lines 9–10) to her claim that *it does have everything to do with that* (line 11). This transposition and negation of the quoted material is also seen in excerpt (2). L.M. dialogically frames the issue of risk by substituting the extreme case formulation, *doesn't have anything to does have everything*. Extreme case formulations often get used to counter an interlocutor's position (Pomerantz 1986).

In the course of paraphrasing the Lowe's attorney's position, L.M. embeds a clause within her reported speech, *and you can correct me on what you said* (line 10). L.M. seems to be attending to the potentially face-threatening aspects of using the attorney's words and directly contradicting his claims, especially her preface to the reported speech, *I know it's not uh, it's not a truth when you made a statement* (lines 8–9). L.M. is framing the reported speech as untrue, if not a lie. L.M.'s embedded, *correct me* can mitigate this charge somewhat. So we get not just the reported speech, but how to take the reported speech – via this frame of being untrue.

Another form of drawing on prior speech is to use another's key word or phrase. We see L.M. do this with the term *concerns*. In the course of Mr. H's prior presentation (not shown here) he used the word *concerns* five times – for instance, *we do have some uh comments and concerns about the what we see in the current zoning proposal* and *our uh concerns uh a-address three different areas*. While L.M. does not attribute the term *concerns* to Mr. H, given the immediacy of his presentation, the reference to the prior speaker seems obvious. L.M.'s use of *concerns* here may be called, following Goodwin 2003, an “unattributed reference to prior speech,” or “incorporated reported speech” (Günther 2002:367).

L.M. uses the notion of *concerns* to rhetorically contrast Lowe's and the community: *I know that you and your company have concerns. I can tell you absolutely with a hundred percent certainty that our concerns go much, much deeper than that* (lines 5–7). L.M. seems to be drawing on the word *concerns* somewhat ironically, in the sense that *concerns* has become a kind of politico-corporate buzzword – a way of euphemistically referencing a corporation's perceived problems or wants. So as L.M. avows that the town has *concerns* too, and this can be heard to confront how Lowe's is positioning itself. The implicated contrast here can be heard as between the identities of corporation and local community, between outsider and insider, or between profit motive and the place where we live.

Toward the end of her somewhat lengthy presentation, L.M. comes back full circle to reference *concerns* again:

(9) (9/22, 7)

L.M. And so we- we have bigger concerns than whether Lowe's comes or bigger concerns than whether Wal-Mart comes it really has nothing to do with that it's time now to do something proactively we need to get our water stabilized we need to get it protected.



So returning to the unattributed reference to the attorney's term *concerns* allows L.M. to draw another contrast between Lowe's, and now to include Wal-Mart, and the *bigger concerns* of protecting the town's water. In a sense, she appropriates the term *concerns* as her community's own, transposing it from Lowe's concerns to "our" *bigger concerns*. She formulates the issue, or *bigger concerns*, as *get our water stabilized . . . protected*.

The criticism has been leveled that public hearings do not allow for discussion among participants, a give and take on the issues (Chess & Purcell 1999; McComas 2001). In our data we see that reported speech allows participants at least to formulate the position of others and to respond to it. As a communicative practice, reported speech allows one to give voice to another's position, and then, in the next slot, to challenge it. In excerpts (6–7), we saw the quote attributed to Wal-Mart followed by challenges to it; and in excerpt (8) we saw a summary quote of the attorney followed by a direct challenge. To put this format schematically, we have "[reported speech of other] + [challenge]." So reported speech is a practice by which citizens can make public hearings somewhat more dialogical.

In the following excerpt an editorial from the local newspaper is quoted, not for technical details but to underscore the big picture:

(10) (2/16, 11)

R.R.

- 1 Finally let me quote from the Cortland Standard's December 29 editorial when
- 2 they wished for the Cortlandville Town Board I'm quoting, the wisdom to bring to
- 3 fruition the town's efforts to enact a zoning ordinance that supports responsible
- 4 development while insuring that protection of the water supply is its first
- 5 responsibility. Insuring that protection of the water supply is its first
- 6 responsibility. Please have courage and do the right thing and say no.

This quote invokes the above mentioned, widely accepted values in the community of protecting the drinking water and developing the local economy (lines 3–5). But the editorial prioritizes water safety. R.R. then repeats this key passage of prioritizing the "protection of the water" for emphasis (lines 5–6). A number of times, we have seen this practice of repetition of a key phrase or word from a direct quote in developing the speaker's evaluative stance.

He concludes his evaluation by calling for action from the Town Board. Interestingly, R.R.'s call for action attempts to move the debate beyond technical details into a moral sphere. He invokes the virtue of *wisdom* from the quoted editorial and adds his own, *courage*. He repeats the line from the editorial with the moral admonition *first responsibility*, then adds his own imperative, *do the right thing* (line 6), itself another instance of "unattributed imported speech" (Goodwin 2003). The implication is that the Town Board members must feel pressure from special interests, such that it would require moral fortitude to *say no*.

## DISCUSSION

We have argued that an impulse for drawing on the words of others at public hearings comes from the speaker's problem – the problem of how participants can be credible or convincing, given the technical matters and the fact that the Town Board has likely already heard about these issues. Now we turn to our research questions, with an eye to how our findings shed light on the speaker's problem. As regards the first research question, the discursive resources participants draw on, we saw participants draw on the words of others in various ways. Some speakers use direct quotes from written documents such as technical sources (e.g., the Land Use Plan, the zoning proposal, a letter from a water-quality expert, the aquifer ordinance) or from a local newspaper editorial. These speakers must have done their homework and planned to quote from these written sources at the hearing. Such sources provide evidence or credibility in presenting one's position. Speakers also directly report the speech of another individual – what *my Dad* said or what a prior speaker at the hearing said. Another kind of resource was summary quotes of an aggregate of others – for instance, what the two attorneys said – or a summary quote of the aggregate taking the form of the prototypical voice of the other, here Wal-Mart or other big business. Finally, we saw a hypothetical quote of what the grandchildren will say – not a reporting but an imagining of speech. These different sources, whether of prior texts, claims made by prior speakers at the hearing, or remembered or imagined statements made by others, can provide material for a participant to deal with the speaker's problem.

More important than the discursive resources drawn on is our second research question, what speakers do with others' words, how they evaluate and use them in the reporting context. In broad strokes, drawing on other's words can be used to invoke a source in support of one's position, or to single out another's statement with which to disagree. We know that speakers shape others' words for their own purposes (Vološinov 1971). As a way to get at how the current speaker's evaluation of the quotes is developed, we looked at the other devices used in the reporting context. We saw speakers use devices such as formulations, repetition, and membership categories in combination with the quotes in developing their evaluative stances. Speakers formulate the significance or gist or upshot of the quote (Heritage & Watson 1979). After quoting another, the speaker can move to formulate what those words mean – interpret them for the audience. For instance, the Lowe's attorney quotes a local water-quality expert and then formulates in his own words *the point* or *the key* of what Mr. R is saying. Formulations of other's words allows the speaker to build an argumentative point and develop an evaluative stance in such a way that it appears that it comes from what others have said.

Formulations can also be done in the reporting context in the "extreme case" (Pomerantz 1986; Sidnell 2004). Speakers may use extreme-case formulations not only in summarizing what another said (*protecting the aquifer doesn't have*

*anything to do with*, excerpt 8), but also in challenging another's claims (*it does have everything to do with that*, excerpt 8), or in criticizing a proposal (e.g., *nothing more incompatible . . . nothing more detrimental*, excerpt 2). Formulating in the extreme case allows the speaker rhetorically to disparage or counter other positions.

Another device a number of speakers used in the reporting context was repetition. We saw speakers repeat a key phrase from their quotes and then apply it to the current situation in developing the speaker's evaluative stance – for instance, repeating a phrase from the Land Use Plan (excerpt 1), a newspaper editorial (10) or Dad's advice (excerpt 6) to challenge the zoning, or to call for action. Especially artful was L.M.'s repeated use of the Lowe's attorney's *concerns* in contrasting the outsider, Lowe's, to the *concerns* of the local community (excerpts 8–9). Through this repeated usage, L.M. transposes the word from the attorney's term to *our concerns* (Bakhtin 1986:88, 91). Another use of repetition is negating key terms from the quote from the zoning proposal: *generally compatible* and *not detrimental* become repeated and negated in an extreme case (discussed above) as *nothing more incompatible* and *nothing more detrimental* (excerpt 2). So the repetition of a term or phrase from the quote becomes a way to underscore a key item during a presentation, to apply it to the current circumstances, or reaccentuate it for the speaker's own purposes (Tannen 1989).

A third practice in the reporting context involves invoking various membership categories in positioning self or others (Holsanova 2006). The binary of local community members vs. the outsider, the corporate entity Wal-Mart, gets drawn on in forming or evaluating the quotes. We have seen the use of what Wal-Mart or big business *says* (excerpts 6–7) or what their representatives, the attorneys, have said (excerpts 5, 8–9). Local identities get invoked to articulate the critical position toward the zoning change – for instance, the family references *my Dad* or *grandchildren* (excerpt 6), the editorial from the local newspaper (excerpt 10), implicit reference to the local environmental group CAPE (excerpt 7), or the retirement home Walden Place (excerpt 2). But the evaluation of identities is not simply the binary of local vs. outsider. We saw locals being critically evaluated in the reporting context – *developers, landowners, and real estate agents* (excerpt 1), or implicitly the Town Board itself for not following the Land Use Plan (excerpt 1) or the ideals of the zoning proposal (excerpt 2). Giving voice to these various membership categories allows the speaker to show what these others are saying and then respond to them through the speaker's evaluation.

So these three devices of formulation, repetition, and membership categorization become ways in which speakers develop their evaluative stances in combination with the quote in developing their arguments in the reporting context. Each of the excerpts involves the speaker challenging the zoning proposal, Wal-Mart/Lowe's or their attorneys, or the direction of the Town Board. This argumentative challenge gets accomplished through drawing on the words of others

and these practices of evaluation. These three devices involving using another's words are part of a response to others' positions or to what others have said at the hearing. Reporting speech allows the presenter to respond to what another has said, such as responses to the attorneys or even to an aggregate of opposing speakers. Even the quotes from written documents can be seen as responses to what others have said or to the current positions in the dispute.

Turning to our third research question on the construction of risk, we note that each of the excerpts can be heard as invoking risk in one way or another. Most of the participants were against incurring the risk of allowing the construction of a Super Wal-Mart over the aquifer. None of the participants we examined actually used the term *risk*, though their arguments or positions reflected their sense of risk. Voices were drawn on to frame the issue as a *gamble* that we cannot afford to lose (excerpt 6). The Land Use Plan was quoted to invoke the language of the aquifer as vulnerable and requiring *increased levels of scrutiny . . . to safeguard the aquifer* (excerpt 1). A newspaper editorial was quoted to exhort that *ensuring . . . protection of the water supply is its first responsibility* (excerpt 10). Even those participants who were for the zoning change and the development addressed the risk issue by quoting experts or documents to show how the risk could be properly managed (excerpt 3–4). Risk was envisioned as broader than the threat to the aquifer, as also coming from increased traffic (excerpt 2) or changes to the community (excerpt 8). The participants' construction of risk happens interactively and dialogically through the abovementioned practices (Parr 2005).

Unlike many prior studies of risk communication, these public hearings did not involve a conflict between technical experts and the local citizenry. Rather, the citizens grappled with a *mélange* of voices from technical, legal, environmental, and ultimately political sources. For the public, the threat to the aquifer is not a transparent fact to be read off some measurement instrument. Rather, the risk gets interactionally worked out through dialogical processes, through quoting experts or technical documents, responding to others, or invoking prior or future voices.

In conclusion, a caveat: We are not claiming that this practice of drawing on the words of others is the key to communicating risk at public hearings. Rather, we are saying that reanimating another's words can aid ordinary citizens in facing the speaker's problem in addressing risk. Speakers can invoke an authority in support of their position or to challenge the proposed zoning change. Also, drawing on the words of others renders the encounter more explicitly dialogical, as a response to or evaluation of some prior speech or written texts.<sup>4</sup>

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Among the issues Wal-Mart has been criticized or taken to court for are paying low wages so its employees must receive government assistance; hiring illegal immigrants; sex discrimination in pay against female employees; creating sprawl, driving small businesses out, and supporting sweatshop labor in China and other countries (Head 2004, Dicker 2005).

<sup>2</sup> The name "Walden Place" naturally evokes Thoreau's *Walden*. What could be more discordant than a Super Wal-Mart being built next to Walden Pond?

<sup>3</sup> The Lowe's attorney is at the hearing because if the new Super Wal-Mart is built, then Lowe's will occupy the site of the present Wal-Mart.

<sup>4</sup> This zoning change proposal is yet to be decided. As we write in July 2006, Wal-Mart is in the process of preparing the Final Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Another public hearing will be called for comment on this before a final decision is made by the Town Board.

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