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Abstract

This study examines the use of irony in young men's stories about romantic and sexual experiences. Because romantic experiences are central in the constitution of a heterosexual self, and because they are increasingly formulated in relation to traditional masculine norms and the simultaneous avowal and disavowal of effeminacy, they reveal an oscillation between complicity and resistance to hegemonic masculine norms. This oscillation is explored in stories about promiscuity, seduction, and vulnerability. Critical discursive analyses reveal how young men discursively pivot between complicity and resistance to traditional masculine norms, how this oscillation functions in the accomplishment of their romantic identities, how a sense of conventional masculinity is reclaimed, and what these processes reveal about the shifting nature of hegemonic masculinity in contemporary culture.

Keywords

masculinity, irony, discourse, narrative, romance, identity

One of the more vexing challenges facing masculinity research is articulating the distinction, particularly at the level of social practice, between complicity and resistance to hegemonic masculinity. Connell's (1995) anti-essentialist theory avoids equating hegemonic masculinity with stereotypical male character types or behaviors. Rather, he interprets hegemony as societally endorsed positions or maneuvers that allow men to achieve power over women and subordinate masculinities. Despite this, masculinity researchers have for decades defined the hegemonic bloc in terms of restrictive emotionality, competitiveness, achievement, antifemininity, sexual virility, homophobia, and self-reliance (see Bird, 1996; Mahalik et al., 2003; Thompson, Pleck, & Ferrera, 1992). These criteria, though useful as broad heuristics, often fail to correspond or map on to men's everyday social practices. Depending on the contingencies, norms, and performative styles operating within a given sociohistorical context, a range of different, and even opposite, social practices can signal either (or both) complicity or resistance to these hegemonic ideals.

The precarious relationship between hegemonic ideals and quotidian social practices is especially pronounced in contemporary Western culture, where textual and visual media increasingly and creatively lampoon traditional masculine stereotypes although not necessarily rejecting them outright (Benwell, 2002; Brayton, 2007; Messner & Montez de Oca, 2005). Traditionally nonhegemonic

forms of masculinity, such as displaying relational sensitivity, househusbanding, and even manscaping, have begun to shed their once feminine-friendly facades, bluffing their way back into the hegemonic realm, thereby reinscribing the hegemonic tendencies that they seek to subvert. A range of social practices has emerged that simultaneously subvert and reinforce traditional masculine norms, thereby circulating new ways of being masculine that do not necessarily refute subordinated forms of masculinity but rather hybridize them within the confines of the traditional hegemonic bloc (Allen, 2007; Demetriou, 2001). As Connell (1995) forewarned, and as Demetriou (2001) has elaborated on, the flexible, resourceful, and inscrutable composition of hegemonic masculinity has enabled it to increasingly accommodate nonhegemonic masculinities and, in so doing, ensure its perpetuation.

This hybridization has been documented in a range of studies that have exposed the ways that men are becoming adept at resisting heroic and macho forms of masculinity, often with irony, playfulness, nonchalance, or self-effacing candor (see Allen, 2007; Benwell, 2002;

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Brayton, 2007; Korobov, 2005, 2006; Korobov & Thorne, 2006, 2007; Messner & Montez de Oca, 2005; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). For example, Benwell (2002), Brayton (2007), and Messner and Montez de Oca (2005) have each uniquely revealed the incipient "laddism" in various media gambits that mix a conservative frat-boy ethos with feminine-friendly lifestyle advice and faux self-deprecation. In remarking on the "generous nonchalance" in heterosexual college-aged men's stories about heterosexual breakups, Gilmartin (2007) and Allen (2007) have reported how men work to appear romantically invested, but in ways that are casual, retractable, and easily jettisoned. In two similar studies, Korobov and Thorne (2006, 2007) identified that young men would openly display vulnerability in talking about romantic problems but would playfully mitigate the seriousness of such problems so as to appear nonchalant and at times mildly amused by their own and each other's troubles. The common thread in these studies is that for heterosexual White males, the heroic and macho hegemonic ideals are seldom embraced straightforwardly but rather are supplanted by an everyman form of masculinity that despite its equitable and disarming persona, strategically reinscribes traditional hegemonic ideals.

One of the burgeoning areas of research in which this strategic reinscription is notable is in the arena of young men's romantic relationships. Many of the initial psychological studies of men's romantic relationships construed male intimacy from a deficit perspective, based on findings that young men's heterosexual experiences tended to be defined by lust, objectification, and a pursuit of sexual gratification (see Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Pleck, 1995; Pollack, 1998). More recent studies, in contrast, have begun to unearth themes of intimacy, vulnerability, and companionship in young men's talk about romantic relationships (see Chu, 2004; Graber, Brooks-Gunn, & Galen, 1998; Korobov & Thorne, 2006; Tolman, Spencer, Harmon, Rosen-Reynoso, & Striepe, 2004; Way, 2004). Deborah Tolman and colleagues (2004) have argued that adolescent male heterosexuality is no longer simply a unilateral drive toward acquiring belt notches but is a complex and contradictory process shaped not only by the pressure to conform to sex-role stereotypes but also by yearnings for intimacy and emotional connection with females. Psychologists have argued that the negotiation of such pressures constitutes important identity-building projects for young men, particularly during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Allen, 2007; Arnett, 2004; Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002; Korobov, 2006; Korobov & Thorne, 2006, 2007; Redman, 2001; Tolman et al., 2004). What psychologists have not fully explored is how these negotiation processes actually unfold in the lives of everyday men.

The purpose of this study is to examine the constitution of young men's romantic identities through a discursive analysis of their conversations with close male friends about romantic and sexual experiences. Because romantic experiences play a central role in the constitution of a heterosexual self (Redman, 2001), and because they are increasingly constituted in relation to both laddism and the simultaneous avowal and disavowal of effeminacy, they offer unique glimpses into the real-time oscillation between complicity and resistance to hegemonic masculine norms (Allen, 2007; Korobov & Thorne, 2006; Redman, 2001). This oscillation is likely to be evident discursively in the form of mitigating or distancing strategies such as irony, nonchalance, humor, and parody. These discursive strategies make romantic heterosexualities possible, because they allow men to transact conflicting contemporary gender norms that encourage men to be sensitive, thoughtful, and emotionally responsive but also seductive, confident, and controlling (Allen, 2007; Korobov & Thorne, 2006). Formulations of irony are potentially useful, therefore, as psychosocial tools for negotiating these disparate sets of norms. The focus of this study is on how young men discursively pivot between complicity and resistance to hegemonic ideals, how this oscillation functions in the accomplishment of young men's romantic identities, how a sense of conventional masculinity is nevertheless reclaimed, and what these processes reveal about the chameleon-like nature of hegemonic masculinity in contemporary culture.

Formulations of Irony

Although irony is but one discursive method in which romance can be hybridized into the hegemonic bloc, the relative lack of attention irony has received within the context of men's everyday conversations makes it apropos for analysis. Verbal irony is defined broadly as a strategic incongruity or dissimulation between different levels of meaning (Giora, 1995; Ivanko & Pexman, 2003). Unlike the traditional "oppositional view" of irony (see Grice, 1975), where irony is seen as a figure of speech that conveys the opposite of its literal meaning, the view adopted here is that irony does not cancel out the indirectly negated message, nor does it necessarily implicate the opposite meaning of the negated message (Clift, 1999; Giora, 1995). Rather, ironic statements keep both the explicit and implicated messages in play so that both meanings can be rhetorically honed for interactive purposes. Applied to this study, the idea is that irony allows young men to indirectly articulate one type of masculine position while at the same time partly (but not fully) denying or mitigating it.

From a critical-gender perspective, the use of irony underscores the negotiations that men make in positioning themselves between the conflicting pressures of normative masculinity and the moral orders of particular social interactions (Frosh et al., 2002; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Within the context of men's friendships, irony is potentially useful for creating homosocial intimacy (Kaplan, 2006). Irony engenders a way of engaging that illuminates Bakhtin's (1981) notion of "heteroglossia," which refers to the ability of speakers to affiliate despite the presence of competing norms by inscribing multiple voices into their discourses. Heteroglossia captures the way we often design our talk as if it should appear in quotation marks, as nonliteral or tongue-in-cheek. For men, being able to assemble a range of voices through irony enables them to flexibly negotiate the dual challenge of appearing sensitive, intimate, and vulnerable while also acquiescing to traditional hegemonic ideals.

A Discursive Orientation

Analyzing this flexible negotiation necessitates a close, discursive analysis of conversational interaction. During the past decade, there has been an increasing amount of theoretical and analytic attention to masculinity from a discursive orientation (Edley & Wetherell, 1997; Korobov, 2004, 2005, 2006; Korobov & Bamberg, 2004; Moissinac, 2006; Riley, 2003; Speer, 2002; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Discursive work has been instrumental in revealing how traditionally hegemonic norms are not only discursively produced and reproduced but also how they are routinely denied, inoculated from challenge, and mitigated through irony, humor, and parody. In exposing the plausibly deniable features of masculinity, discursive work has concretely illustrated Connell's (1995) argument concerning the flexible, formidably resourceful, and inscrutable composition of what is hegemonic about masculinity. Whereas traditional psychological methodologies often conflate "hegemonic masculinity" with "heroic masculinity," discursive work has revealed that what is sometimes most hegemonic are masculine positions that are knowingly nonheroic, that is, the ironic varieties that casually and playfully parody traditional male stereotypes. For this study, a discursive approach allows for sensitivity to the ways that young men use irony to rhetorically insulate their romantic identities from appearing overexposed to traditional masculine ideals.

This Study

Twelve group discussions were conducted with 3 young adult male friends per group, plus an adult male moderator. Each of the 36 participants was between the ages of

18 and 23 ($M = 19.8$ years, $SD = 0.8$ years) and was living away from home while enrolled in a public university in northern California. Although the study was open to young men from any ethnic group and sexual orientation, the large majority (89%) of the sample self-identified as either Caucasian or White; the remainder declined to state ethnicity or indicated either Asian or Latino descent. The entire sample self-identified as heterosexual. As predominantly White and heterosexual young men having recently transitioned from high school into college, the young men in this study represent a unique slice of the gender order. Arnett (2004) has argued that the college years represent a protracted period of intimacy exploration in Western culture that tends to require considerable volition, versatility, and tolerance for uncertainty. Because these young men tend to live in very close quarters, they are likely to have many opportunities to play out and experiment with the meanings of their romantic and sexual experiences. The capriciousness of the college dating scene may also encourage the exploration of fresh alternatives and the trying out of new masculine identities. These young men may choose friends precisely because they have no firsthand knowledge of who one was prior to college, thus increasing the chance that a variety of intimacy skills and masculine positions can get tried out in improvisatory ways.

Small and casual group discussions were chosen, as opposed to one-on-one interviews or dyadic conversations, thus creating a more open, collective, and dispersed context in which to share stories about potentially delicate topics without causing individual men to be feel on the spot or singled out (Kaplan, 2006). Because romantic experiences are one of the most frequently discussed topics within young adult peer groups (Connolly & Johnson, 1996; Feiring, 1999), a collaborative friendship context seemed germane for eliciting rich, and sometimes competing or contradictory, stories about romantic experiences. Each triad was required to have known each other for at least 6 months and to have been "good friends" at the time of the group discussion.

Participants were enlisted informally through general requests for volunteers in both upper and lower level social science university courses. The study was described as a research project looking at how young adult same-sex friends talk about their romantic experiences (which included serious dating, casual dating, hooking up, etc.). Participants were told that they would participate in a group discussion where they would be asked to talk openly and casually about their own and their friends' romantic experiences. All of the group discussions took place in a comfortable room in the alcove of the psychology building. Each conversation was audio recorded with permission and fully transcribed (see the appendix for transcription

conventions). Participants were promised (and given) \$15 each for their participation. Each group discussion lasted approximately 1.5 hr and generated a total of approximately 980 pages of transcribed dialogue.

Analysis

Coders were initially asked to sort romantic/sexual stories by themes. To generate themes, coders collectively worked through a random subset of stories (ones not used to obtain reliability) and were asked to generate captions that described the gist of each story. These captions were used to generate a smaller list of probable categories, which were eventually winnowed to three types in order to avoid redundancy between insufficiently dissimilar categories and to make coding manageable. The following analyses focus on these three themes. First, many of their experiences focused on *promiscuity*, reflected in stories about no-strings-attached casual sex, “friends with benefits,” hook-ups with “crazy” women, and so on. A second theme was *seduction*, which involved stories that centered on the tactics and pursuit strategies men used to attract women—that is, their prowess, glibness, bravura, or what is sometimes euphemistically referred to as “game,” as in the sports metaphor “he’s got game” (see Brooks, 1997; Levant, 1997). Finally, the men often talked about being “messed up” or “fucked up” as a result of romantic rejection or failure. These stories thematized *vulnerability*, though the vulnerability was often mitigated, as were the orientations to promiscuity and seduction in the other stories, through irony. Independent coders reliably differentiated these three story themes ($\kappa = .86$).

To identify irony, a perusal of the extant discourse analytic, sociolinguistic, and psycholinguistic literature was performed in order to compile a list of conversational phenomena that have been identified as ironic rhetorical devices (see Clift, 1999; Colston & O’Brian, 2000; Dews, Kaplan, & Winner, 1995; Gibbs, 2000; Ivanko & Pexman, 2003; Korobov, 2005). Although not exhaustive, this preliminary list did provide a rich and very complex entry point for inductive coding. After many rounds of analysis of subsets of data by multiple coders, only those rhetorical devices that sufficiently formulated irony, had distinct boundaries from other devices (so as to avoid redundancy), and that had somewhat recognizable methods of formulation were retained. Two additional independent coders were then utilized to obtain interrater reliability between these forms of irony ($\kappa = .80$). Table 1 lists the types of irony retained and used in the overall analysis of the conversations. To emphasize the transparency of analysis, instances of demonstrable irony were underlined in the text of the extracts that follow, with the corresponding type of irony (from Table 1) listed in the

right-hand margin. The analyses that follow examine two stories for each of the three themes and illustrate how distinct types of irony proved useful in handling the tensions therein.

Theme 1: Promiscuity

Contrary to the expectation that men will openly and straightforwardly boast about their promiscuous behavior, the vast majority of the young men’s talk in this study *problematized* promiscuity, albeit with a heavy lacing of irony, as is exemplified in the following story. Gus and Hank cotell a story of a recent conversation between the two of them in which Hank’s hypersexual behavior is questioned.

This exchange is littered with irony. Gus uses irony to indirectly (and simultaneously) problematize and valorize both Hank’s promiscuous behavior and his attitude about changing it; Hank, conversely, uses irony to mitigate the seriousness of his promiscuous behavior and expose Gus’s capricious and tongue-in-cheek criticism of it. In general, both guys appear to be caught in a dilemma regarding promiscuous behavior. In using subtle but powerful ironic discursive formulations, Gus tells the story in such a way that he is able to straddle two contradictory positions regarding Hank’s promiscuity. The first position is that Hank’s promiscuity is the kind of *problematic* thing that Hank might want to get help for. And Hank might be the kind of guy who, at another level of criticism, doesn’t seem to get this. Gus’s other position, however, is that Hank’s promiscuity is entertaining, and thus good fodder for promoting homosociality.

Hank’s use of irony to straddle dual masculine positions is most apparent near the end of the exchange, where he uses irony to occasion two potentially contradictory positions. The first position concerns the homosociality issue, clearly stating that Gus encourages this behavior because it is funny (line 10). But later, in his exaggerated report of Gus’s rhetorical question “NOW WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO DO THAT?” he shows, by emphasizing the mocking inflection in Gus’s rhetorical question, that he sees Gus’s sarcastic criticism. Although it promotes homosociality, it does so at Hank’s expense. In defending against the naïveté of missing Gus’s critical stance, Hank uses ironic understatement to downplay the personal implication of his promiscuity, thus inoculating against Gus’s criticism while not taking it too seriously. He shows that he understands the danger of appearing too promiscuous but uses understatement to avoid committing himself to the serious pursuit of changing it. Gus similarly uses irony to both comment on the seriousness of hypersexual behavior (one might want to get help for it) while avoiding committing himself to any serious intervention with Hank. Both men are thus able to

Table 1. Types of Irony

Term	Definition	Example
Understatement	Irony through understatement or euphemism	"I think I'm gonna stop being so easy"; "His behavior is less than desirable"
Overstatement	Irony through overstatement or hyperbole	"That's the best idea I've ever heard"
Asteismus	Polite or gentle mockery where a speaker catches a certain word and reinterprets it with a twist in meaning or with ironic intent	Mark: "I've been feeling really <u>troubled</u> by what I said to you earlier"; John: "I'm sure you've felt so <u>TROUBLED</u> "
Paralipsis	Drawing attention to (and potentially criticizing) something by passing over it or by being vague or nonchalant about it	"Let's not get into what you said to my mother, let's talk about tonight"; "Getting help for your life-threatening addiction might be something to consider"
Jocularity	Jesting, punchy, or witty banter, often at another's expense	"Have them wax your back while you're at it"; "Your testicles are in her trophy case"
Rhetorical question	Questions stated for effect or provocation; often conveys sarcasm.	"Now why would you want to do that?"
Enantiosis	Coupling opposing or contrary descriptions together or in succession in a way that seems paradoxical.	"You're so condescending, it turns me on"
Sarcasm	Sharp, satirical, or caustic talk designed to cut, mock, or give pain	"Great idea!" "I hear they do fine work"
Accismus	Feigned refusal of something you really want	"I couldn't possibly take such charity from you"
Catachresis	The incorrect or improper use of a word; an illogical mixed metaphor often used to convey alienation or emotion.	"I will speak <u>daggers</u> to her"; "After we said goodbye, my <u>leg</u> ached like never before"

playfully straddle dual masculine positions, that is, recognizing what is good for the guys while also acknowledging that they understand the dangers of unmitigated alignment with traditional masculinity.

The promiscuity stories told in this study seemed not so much to celebrate sexual desire or conquest per se but rather problematized it, albeit in tongue-in-cheek ways. In this next story, Scott positions himself as ambivalent about a very normatively masculine experience, that is, a seductive sexual encounter with a young, attractive, and consenting woman.

Scott uses irony in this excerpt to manage the tension between the traditional masculine press to pursue sex with an attractive and consenting woman, even if it means pretending to be interested in a relationship with her, and the nonnormatively masculine press to resist a sexual encounter if it requires a dissimulation of intent. Scott uses irony to inoculate himself from appearing manipulative about wanting something stereotypically masculine, revealing yet again the dangers of adhering too obviously to stereotypical masculinity. With understatement (coupled with the idiomatic "it's all:: go::od") and asteismus in lines 4-5, Scott playfully positions his desire as part of

a normative script (hanging out means making out), thus externalizing the threat of looking bad for hooking up in a manipulative way. From here, Scott employs a variety of ironic feigned refusals in the form of accismus to parody his indecision about acting on sexual desire. The accismus reveals both stereotypical lust and desire, thus securing a stake in traditional masculinity, but does so playfully so that it can be retracted if challenged, thus building in an awareness of what is societally moral. Finally, Scott employs enantiosis (line 29) to show that he is, ironically, happy to discover that Asia is, in fact, crazy, which makes his touching her breasts a result of her unhealthy psychological state and not his manipulation per se.

The irony in Nick and Dane's receipt is also telling. In line 23, Nick completes the second part of Scott's attempted resistance, thus revealing through enantiosis the disingenuousness of Scott's resistance. Nick helps us see how it is feigned resistance, thus positioning Scott as complicit with the traditional masculine norms of promiscuous desire. With jocular irony, Dane responds with "well of course YOU did," with an emphasis on "you" that constructs Scott's promiscuous behavior as emerging

Excerpt 1

Participants: Hank (H), Cory (C), Gus (G), Moderator (M)		Type of Irony
1.	G: The other morning we were walking back from the dining hall	
2.	and he said uh "you know I've been doing some thinking"	
3.	and I'm like "oh yeah Hank <u>whatcha been THINKING about?</u> "	Asteismus
4.	an' he's like " <u>I think I'm going to stop being so easy</u> " ((laughter))	Understatement
5.	an' I'm like "huh" <u>I'm like "why?"</u> an' he's like "well I've <u>never</u>	Rhetorical question
6.	<u>turned down sex in my life</u> ((laughter)) <u>I don't care who it is, I just</u>	Overstatement
7.	<u>I just can't</u> " ((laughter)) and I'm just like "huh ((1.0)) <u>I dunno</u>	
8.	<u>maybe you should go</u> (.) <u>maybe you should go to a meeting or</u>	
9.	<u>something</u>	Paralipsis
10.	H: UHH (.) I believe he urged me not to stop because it's funny	
11.	G: may::be	
12.	H: yea::h	
13.	M: so you actually (.) now what's your version the story of that walk	
14.	back? Did you actually bring it up just like that?	
15.	H: yeah pretty much (.) I believe I said (.) used the phrase " <u>stop being</u>	Understatement
16.	<u>so easy to bed</u> " but other than that (.) ya know (.) and he laughed	
17.	and said " <u>NOW WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO DO THAT?</u> " and I said	Rhetorical question
18.	"yeah" it just kind of seemed (.) OH I brought it up cause <u>it kind of</u>	
19.	<u>seemed like ya know somethin' that I should maybe ya know try to</u>	
20.	<u>work on?</u>	Understatement
21.	M: you're serious?	
22.	H: well ((laughter)) it's a good uh <u>CONCEPT</u> to go towards	Understatement

from Scott's own personal way of acting on desire rather than being simply the product of the hanging-out-means-making-out cultural script. Nick's "why would you?" rhetorical question (line 31) and Dane's sarcastic "whadda' good man" (line 37) further deflate, though indirectly, Scott's attempt to evade traditional masculine norms. As was the case with Gus in Excerpt 1, challenging a male friend's alignment with traditional masculine norms is delicate. Like Gus, Nick and Dane demonstrably have an interest in partly encouraging complicity with hegemonic masculine ideals, as the viability and circulation of hegemonic ideals in male friendship groups enables homosociality. Challenging these ideals too directly is thus dangerous. But challenging them indirectly, through irony, is a useful tool for male friends (like Gus, Nick, and Dane) to police how masculinity is distributed in homosocial settings. Although Nick and Dane have a stake in positioning Scott within the traditional hegemonic bloc, thus promoting homosociality, they must also be critical of such positioning, because being critical satisfies the dictum to appear cautious about unchecked acquiescence to traditional masculine norms.

Theme 2: Seduction

Like promiscuity stories, experiences that thematized seduction were often not framed in straightforwardly heroic or traditionally masculine ways, but instead were

problematized, usually through ironic self-deprecation. In this first seduction story, Kyle talks about a recent attempt to lure a woman back to his place for a sexual encounter. Though unsuccessful, the story becomes interesting with how the seduction seems *intentionally* unsuccessful and how the botched experience is coconstructed with his friends so as to transform it from a failure into a collective triumph.

At stake in this story are Kyle's seduction skills, which Kyle formulates in a *knowingly* glib and unadorned way. Kyle assumes the position of the underachieving pickup artist who admittedly dispenses ironically overstated pickup lines ("hey let's go back to my place"; "are you coming home with me?"; "so are you coming over soon?") so intentionally lacking in creativity or romance that they clearly violate the masculine dictum to display gamesmanship. They are overstated because they are strategically exaggerated, over the top, and curt. Of interest, he and his friends are entertained by this violation of masculine norms (Terry in particular finds it "funny"—see lines 13 and 31). Kyle's lack of game would make sense were it the case that Kyle had absolutely no interest in Jaime other than as a hook-up. This does not appear to be the case, as Kyle himself spends the bulk of the story constructing a position of interest. From lines 13-29, he notes that it was "weird" that she lied to him and "weird" that she left early to avoid him. He also finds it strange that she hung out with his close male friends, although he assures us, perhaps as part of some unspoken code of

Excerpt 2

Participants: Nick (N), Dane (D), Scott (S), Moderator (M)

Type of Irony

1.	S:	I didn't wanna be in a relationship with Asia (.) and I	
2.		didn't wanna (.) I dunno (.) it just it wasn't worth it to me	
3.		(.) and so I told her straight up you know " <u>let's just be friends</u>	
4.		<u>let's just hang out (.) it's all:: go::od</u> " ((laughs)) and of course	Understatement
5.		((laughing)) <u>hangin out means like make'n out</u> and so she	Asteismus
6.		came over to my room one day and she started like talking bout	
7.		like <u>why we should be together</u> and I'm like ((deadpan)) " <u>no: no</u>	
8.		<u>I can't you know this (.) is (.) bad (.) I can't be with you</u>	Accismus
9.		((everyone laughs, 2.0))	
10.	S:	yeah that's what I was thinking (.) but so anyway she was trying	
11.		to convince me to get together in a relationship (.) and that I can't	
12.		pass this up and so ((laughing)) she took off her top n'said you	
13.		know "look at my boobs (.) touch my boobs"	
14.		((everyone laughs, 2.0))	
15.	N:	she's like "now do you wanna be in a relationship?"	
16.	S:	I was like ((deadpan)) " <u>oh no please stop</u> "	Accismus
17.	M:	she did this with a straight face?	
18.	S:	oh she was dead serious	
19.	D:	she was crazy	
20.	S:	she is crazy (.) <u>awesome huh?</u> (.) an' she was all like "look	Sarcasm
21.		at me you know (.) how can you not want this?" and I'm all	
22.		((deadpan)) " <u>no I can't I can't</u> " and so I try to not to touch=	Accismus
23.	N:	<u>=but:: nope (.) you did</u>	Enantiosis
24.	D:	<u>well of course YOU did</u>	Jocularity
25.		((everyone laughs, 2.0))	
26.	S:	I'm looking at these boobs you know like ((deadpan)) " <u>I can't</u>	
27.		<u>no I MUST but I can't</u> " and I try to get her to leave an she like takes	Accismus
28.		my hand and puts it on her boob an I'm like "oh my god (.)	
29.		<u>this girl IS crazy (.) YES (.)</u> but yeah (.) but NO we didn't get	Enantiosis
30.		together or anything like that	
31.	N:	((laughing)) <u>why would you?</u>	Rhetorical question
32.	S:	I finally got her to leave and put her shirt back on (.) an' that's	
33.		pretty much it	
34.	M:	so nothing more happened (.) you didn't take more advantage	
35.		of that situation?	
36.	S:	I didn't take advantage of that situation	
37.	D:	<u>whadda' good man</u>	Sarcasm

loyalty, that his friends would not hook up with her. His interest in her seems warranted, which occasions the moderator's jocular retort of "I think you got dissed" (line 30). Being dissed is ironic, given the incongruity between Kyle's halfhearted pursuit and his seeming jealousy. Even Kyle orients to this incongruity, mocking himself in line 34 with the two-part jocular rejoinder, where the first part ("an she did") orients to his interest in a successful outcome and the second part ("?not") deflates it through the idiomatic "not" tag.

If Kyle is displaying interest in Jaime, even ambiguously, what function does his ironic and self-deprecating story of failed seduction achieve, other than a laugh or the

opportunity to display nonchalance? At the end, Terry and Kyle offer a clue in noting that it is the "trying" that counts. Kyle's receipt of "I tried" in line 36 is arguably ironic. After all, Kyle's seduction repertoire is blissfully lazy. His gamesmanship is entirely lacking. He is not *really* trying but rather is being ironic about the entire project of trying. One way to understand the logic of telling an ironic story about failed masculine seduction is to interpret it on a broader gender-political level. The story reflects what Messner and Montez de Oca (2005) argue is men's increasingly unstable status in contemporary culture when it comes to understanding how to initiate romantic endeavors. Being ironic and self-mocking about

Excerpt 3

Participants: Kyle (K), Terry (T), Cal (C), Moderator (M)

Type of Irony

1.	K:	like two weeks ago I went over to Ali's house and there was this	
2.		girl Jaime that I'd hooked up with in the past a few times (.) an I	
3.		was trying to get her to go back to my place but <u>she wasn't really</u>	
4.		<u>having it</u> ((laughter, 1.0))	Understatement
5.	M:	what were you saying to try to get her to come back?	
6.	K:	<u>tha:::t's the thing uhhh(hahuh)</u> ((laughs))	Paralipsis
7.	T:	I was there (.) I can vouch (.) [it was like	
8.	K:	[yea what'd I say?	
9.	T:	pretty much that=	
10.	K:	<u>=just "hey let's go back to my place"</u>	Overstatement
11.		((laughter, 2.0))	
12.	T:	it's " <u>are you coming home with me</u> " an she's like "nope (.) I'm	Overstatement
13.		going to sleep" an well the funny thing was that she was supposed	
14.		to be at home (.) <supposedly> (.) an so we show up to our buddy's	
15.		house and she was there (.) or she jus left and was on her way home	
16.	K:	yeah she was (.) I knew she was there though (.) like originally but	
17.		like I thought for sure she wuddah left by then (.) it was like two	
18.		hours later	
19.	C:	it was kind of surprising pretty much	
20.	K:	so I called her and I was like "what are you doing?" and she was like	
21.		"I think I'm gonna go home pretty soon (.) I haven't been drinking	
22.		tonight" an like an hour later I called my other buddy (.) and he was	
23.		like "yea we're wasted (.) come over (.) we have a keg" (.) so we	
24.		went over to his house an it was just like (.) like our close like guy	
25.		buddies and <u>her</u> (.) so it was I dunno (.) it was ki::nda weird (.) like	
26.		I know she wasn't like hookin up with any of the guys though (.)	
27.		but like cause it is all our close friends but (.) it was just kind of	
28.		weird that she was there right after I'd talked to her and she said	
29.		she was going home	
30.	M:	<u>I think you got dissed</u> ((all laugh, 1.0)) is that what you think?	Jocularity
31.	T:	oh:: I thought it was pretty funny when we were going home and he	
32.		calls her on the phone an he's like " <u>so are you coming over soon?</u> "	Overstatement
33.		((laughter, 2.0))	
34.	K:	<u>an she did (.)?°not =</u>	Jocularity
35.	T:	<u>=not</u> ((laughing)) yeah you tried	Asteismus
36.	K:	<u>I tried</u> (.) n'that's all that counts	Asteismus

such complexities is one way of coping with this tension, or more broadly, with the erosion of the masculine press to have well-honed seduction skills.

Kyle's lazy seduction can thus be viewed as a misogynistic, albeit tongue-in-cheek, backlash against women's increasing autonomy and social power. Rather than risk being genuinely humiliated, either via rejection for actually trying or by appearing genuinely (not playfully) ignorant about the evolving rules of gender relations, men might opt for a kind of boys-will-be-boys defensive ironic posture. The obvious playfulness and staged certitude of quips like "hey let's go back to my place" inoculates it from charges of blatant sexism. When seen in this light, the "trying is all that counts" adage is not an endorsement for a serious and thoughtful approach to figuring out how to appropriately talk to women but is a kind of laddish pity-party. Trying is futile, in other words,

so one might as well have a laugh. It allows men to indirectly define themselves as victims, as the purveyors of a now endangered form of seductive masculinity.

In short, for the young men in this study, orienting to masculine seduction usually involved reveling playfully in one's failed seduction, which meant ratcheting it up through humor, self-effacing candor, and nonchalance so as to display confidence in the midst of rejection. In this next story, Ben assumes an openly ironic and self-deprecating posture as he conarrates a story in which his interest and advances towards a "freshman" female are potentially thwarted when she refers to him as a "friend" on a social networking Web site called *Facebook*.

Ben strategically ironizes each aspect of the story that has the potential to threaten his alignment with traditional masculinity, that is, her young age (line 5), his failed gamesmanship (line 9), his subsequent preoccupation

Excerpt 4

Participants: Ben (B), Chris (C), Kevin (K), Moderator (M)

Type of Irony

			Type of Irony
1.	B:	that was the night that we took the Night Owl home	
2.	K:	an you tried to hook up with one of our friend's little sisters	
3.	C:	co::ld	
4.	K:	a freshman	
5.	B:	<u>a fa:resh::man</u> (.) that's right	Asteismus
6.	C:	((laughing)) <u>oh that's not bad</u>	Sarcasm
7.	M:	how old is she?	
8.	K:	he got denied though (.) many times	
9.	B:	((laughing)) <u>l::didn't even try</u>	Understatement
10.	K:	((laughing)) hahahheh	
11.	K:	dude <u>you were talking about it the WHOLE next day</u>	Overstatement
12.	B:	I was talking about her (.) yeah	
13.	K:	no (.) <u>you were talking about her the WHOLE next day</u>	Overstatement
14.	B:	yea I was talking about her (1.0) okay I was (.) <u>GUILTY</u>	Sarcasm
15.	M:	he got rejected?	
16.	K:	uh I guess (1.0) nah (.) not really but	
17.	B:	no man (.) <u>she made me her friend on Facebook the next day</u>	Jocularity
18.		((everyone laughs, 3.0))	
19.	K:	[NO DUDE (.) come on	
20.	C:	<u>[OH YEAH (.) A FRIEND (.) YOU'RE IN</u> dude	Overstatement
21.	B:	<u>fuck(huh) yeah::</u> ((laughing))	Overstatement

with her despite being denied (line 14), and her lack of romantic interest in him (lines 17 and 21). His friends collude in this project, playfully mocking her young age (line 6), his excessive interest in her (lines 11 and 13), and her lack of obvious romantic interest in him (line 20). Yet, at each of these junctures, he displays just enough ironic self-deprecation to stymie his friends' critiques. In short, every aspect of failure that could potentially weaken Ben's masculine prowess is inoculated against and subsequently transformed into fodder for Ben's personal project (which is equally masculine) of appearing witty, courageous, nonchalant, self-reflexive, good-natured, and entertaining. In other words, there is nothing *necessarily* lost in terms of masculine status by playing up romantic failure. The key, though, is to play it up well, with all the weapons of rhetoric. In so doing, the hegemonic ideals are reinscribed into what appears, at least on the surface, to be an experience that might threaten one's masculinity.

As intimated in the analysis of Excerpt 3, this kind of celebration of romantic failure contains a healthy dose of covert misogyny. It enables the relative stability of male power over women in heterosexual relationships. In other words, failure *can* be cool for men, both personally and homosocially, if they can ironize their failure and build in an image of confidence, independence, and nonchalance about such failure. Managing romantic failure for women, on the other hand, is trickier, because success in a romantic relationship is a central feature in the ideology of Western heterosexual romance for young women (Fine,

1988, Tolman, 2002). In contrast, men do not have to succeed at romance in order to satisfy the dictates of traditional masculinity; they simply have to "get laid." This opens up quite a bit of space for men to playfully negotiate the meaning of romantic failure. Doing so is potentially misogynistic, because it can perpetuate a heteropatriarchal system in which men have more freedom to fail romantically, and thus more power because there is less at stake in terms of threat to their gendered status.

Theme 3: Vulnerability

Unlike promiscuity and seduction, being vulnerable breaks with canonical hegemonic ideals. But like the stories about promiscuity and seduction, stories about vulnerability were also strategically mitigated. In this next story, Sid is doubly vulnerable. He formulates fear not simply about being rejected by a woman he likes but, more centrally, he seems inhibited in talking about his fears to his male friends. This reluctance to disclose, and the receipt of it by his friends, is formulated in strategically ambiguous ways.

Positioning oneself as afraid of being rejected by a woman is delicate relational work. Disclosing this to one's male friends is even trickier, as evinced by Sid's ironic use of "leg" to refer to his heart. The use of catachresis is instrumental in allowing Sid to go on record with his pain, but in a way that satisfies the traditional masculine expectation that pain ought to be physical and not emotional. And by framing his dissimulation as part

Excerpt 5

Participants: Sid (S), Rion (R), Andrew (A), Moderator (M)

Type of Irony

1.	S:	I think I'm like also concerned about (.) like being hurt	
2.		like if she like rejects me (.) I'm trying to like prepare myself	
3.		you know (.) even if it happens like don't like get too sad	
4.	A:	that's the worst fool	
5.	S:	that's why <u>my leg hurts</u>	Catachresis
6.	M:	I don't get that	
7.	A:	((laughing)) yeah me neither	
8.	S:	like (.) right here ((points to chest)) it hurts (.) but I can't say it	
9.	M:	oh your HEART hurts?	
10.	S:	mmhuh (.) so I just say <u>my leg hurts</u>	Catachresis
11.	R:	((laughing)) <u>ahh:: you poor fucker (.) you sad boy</u>	Sarcasm
12.	S:	'cuz I don't like when I'm home (.) I don't wanna like talk about	
13.		her all the time (.) to these guys 'cuz they have their own stuff to	
14.		do (.) cuz I feel like I'm selfish when I just talk about my stuff	
15.		like asking them about her=	
16.	A:	=((laughing)) <u>right (.) cause Sid is the most selfish person ever</u>	Sarcasm
17.	S:	I know and I know it's good to get advice once in a while but	
18.		I feel like I talk about her all the time	
19.	A:	fool I said you can <u>tell us anytime (.) 'cept when da' game's on</u>	Enantiosis
20.		((laughter, l.0))	
21.	S:	yah but it's just like (.) like kinda hurts right now (.) <u>like my leg</u>	Catachresis
22.	R:	<u>OH he's sprung</u>	Jocularity
23.	M:	it hurts that you don't know what's going on?	
24.	S:	like how should I express this you know (.) what if I was just "oh	
25.		my heart hurts because of her" you know I think that'd be annoying	
26.		to them I think (.) you know	
27.	M:	well hold up ((to Rion and Andrew)) would it be annoying?	
28.	A:	[NO	
29.	R:	[Ahuh yup(haha) ((laughs))	Accismus
30.	A:	I'll talk to you fool (.) you lemme know what's up	
31.	R:	<u>fuck(ha) I'd go to sleep(hahuh) ((laughing))</u>	Accismus
32.	S:	((to Rion, laughing)) see (.) <u>I ain't EVER talking to you</u>	Overstatement

of the project of not wanting to be a burden to Rion and Andrew, he can indirectly position their lack of receptivity as the potential motivation for acquiescing to traditional masculine norms. Because Sid positions Rion and Andrew as ensconced within a traditional male mindset, and because Sid cares about their feelings, his dissimulation can appear altruistic. As such, Sid can nevertheless claim, albeit indirectly, some nonhegemonic turf, because it is still possibly true that he could be more open about his feelings were he talking to different people. Through irony, Sid can thus eschew traditional masculinity by displaying vulnerability, but in a way that nevertheless acquiesces to traditional masculine norms, while at the same time partly mitigating this acquiescence by making it appear both altruistic and fitted to his friend's expectations to avoid heavy emotional dialogue.

With irony, Rion and Andrew voice two very different responses. On one hand, they display understanding (line 4) and to some extent encourage him to be open and honest with them (lines 11, 16, 19, and 22). But note, in

each of these pivotal moments, they lace their encouragement with heavy irony. In line 11, Rion empathizes with Sid's burden, but does so in a playfully mocking way with the infantilizing "ahh::" "poor fucker" and "sad boy." In line 16, rather than directly affirm Sid's lack of selfishness, Andrew sarcastically plays into it. In line 19, Andrew's ironic tag of "'cept when da' game's on" playfully mitigates his open invitation to "talk any time." And in line 22, Rion's "OH he's sprung" is a jocular way of both empathizing and teasing Sid for being in a whipped and openly vulnerable state. And in the two places (lines 29 and 31) where they seemingly discourage Sid's openness, there is also a heavy lacing of irony. In line 29 and 31, Rion playfully (signaled through laughter) uses accismus to feign disinterest in hearing about Sid's problems, thus exposing Sid's vulnerability and insulating Rion within traditional masculine values. But because this is done ironically, it implicitly negates itself. In all instances of receipt, and in a series of tit-for-tat maneuvers, Andrew and Rion use irony to sidestep an obvious alignment with

both hegemonic and nonhegemonic ideals. Like Sid, they discursively orient to both positions without directly committing to either.

In this final excerpt, Terry talks about being led on and rejected by a woman. He admits, albeit sarcastically, that he was mistreated (line 13). To mitigate the rejection, Terry insinuates that he was able to enjoy some sexual activity with her before it ended (lines 14 and 20). Of interest, his friends subvert his attempt to put a positive spin on it and instead position him back within a space of vulnerability and rejection.

Terry's uses of hedges, the passive voice, and certain bald evaluative phrases ("she rejected me," "she just led me on," "she just let me go") in his narration in lines 1-6 and then again in 8-10 works to position Terry as a vulnerable victim of this woman's capriciousness. Even his attempts to balance this position out by ironically referencing that there was some sexual payoff for his efforts (and that he could have gotten more) is enervated through concessions such as "I mean I guess yah" that admit to his being mistreated, modifiers such as "I did get *some* . . ." that downplay the extent of the sexual activity, and laughter (lines 13 and 16) that softens both of his claims about sexual activity. Surprisingly, this kind of self-emasculatation was not uncommon in the overall corpus of conversations, particularly when the talk was about failed romantic experiences. The men who narrated their rejection would, like Terry, often use irony to pivot between a vulnerable position where they make clear their suffering and a more masculine position of nonchalance. References to sexual play, as is the case in Terry's story, were often built in alongside the nonchalance to balance the vulnerability.

More interesting was the way this oscillation between vulnerability and traditional masculinity was almost always taken up by the other two male friends in ways that seemed mocking but that doubled as an indirect way of protecting their vulnerable friend. For instance, Cal's "by the way" nonchalant insertion of pejorative information about this other woman's capricious dating life works as ironic paralipsis. Because Terry already knows this (line 8), it is likely that Cal is not simply relaying what is obvious but rather is indirectly deriding her character, thus telling Cal that he is better off without her. He is also potentially critiquing Terry for having been attracted to her in the first place. As such, there is a double-edged quality to Cal's irony. This double-edged ironic critique surfaces again in line 18 with Kyle's quick-witted "happy about getting rejected," which gently mocks Terry for being perhaps too gracious or happy about being mistreated. It also acknowledges that he was, in fact, rejected, thus admitting that Terry had good reason for being vulnerable. In line 27, Kyle interrupts

Terry's rationalization with the rushed-through and matter-of-fact hyperbolic jab of "cause she wasn't cool an she was playing you." Though the jab is definitive, the irony is complex. Although it is a criticism of her, and thus a way of reminding Terry that he is better off without her, its placement as an interruption in Terry's defense of his interest in her allows it to double as a criticism of Terry for being so myopic and easily duped. Although Kyle could have been far more direct in displaying care or empathy for Terry (in lines 18 and 27), the irony allows the concern to go on record, but in a way that is traditionally masculine (involves teasing and appearing frustrated and thus protective). Terry's ironic rejoinder in line 29 signals that he too can use irony to appear hegemonic about issues that are ostensibly nonhegemonic.

Discussion

The analyses of young men's stories about romantic and sexual experiences identified that contrary to the expectation that male friends would acquiesce to the traditional masculine press to boast, display lust, or objectify their female partners, or the experiences with them, the young men often used irony to pivot between complicity and resistance to such a press. This equivocation emerged through irony, evincing a knowing self-reflexivity that made it difficult to determine whether the young men were complying with or resisting normative masculinity. That romance-based heterosexual masculinities emerged in ways that ironized traditional masculine norms is instructive for contemporary conceptualizations of hegemonic masculinity. Rather than challenge oppressive gender relations, irony reconfigures power in more ordinary and nonchalant ways and hybridizes the discursive performances that formulate such reconfigurations back into the hegemonic bloc. For the men in this study, irony is a strategy for rearticulating power at a more prosaic or quotidian level of social practice.

The analysis of such rearticulated social practices lends empirically grounded weight to discussions about the use of irony and play in masculine gender construction, discussions that to date have largely been confined to more macrolevel cultural analyses. The microlevel analysis of young men's conversations in this study revealed a creative supplanting of old-fashioned heroic hegemony. The irony, particularly within the context of stories about seduction or vulnerability, often occasioned a victim identity that worked to efface the young men's agency in the romantic challenges or failures that were narrated. This is not to suggest that in the end the young men came full circle and were simply endorsing (traditional) heroic masculinity. Rather, they seem to be experimenting with new ways of being cool or heroic

about romance. As Allen (2007) notes, romance is no longer reserved for effeminate or sensitive men. When intermingled with hard masculinity, in this case through the subtleties of irony, romance can be formulated by ordinary men to expand the horizons of what is normatively masculine.

Expanding normative masculinity seems to involve resisting looking straightforwardly or obviously heroic or hypersexual while working to safeguard the traditional masculine values of appearing confident, secure, and knowing about what is at stake in displaying one's views. As Wetherell and Edley (1999) have noted, one of the more subtle ways for young men to reclaim the control and autonomy associated with old-fashioned hegemonic masculinity is to appear like ordinary everymen, flouting the social expectation that their romantic and sexual agenda is simply about mastering seduction and gamesmanship. Such mastery requires a level of discursive socialization that involves navigating the ideological dilemma between acquiescing to a transparent conformity to stereotypical masculine norms and working to avoid the perception that one's resistance to such norms (in the form of irony) somehow portrays one as romantically bereft. Through ironic bluffs and winks, the young men deflate the bravado of heroic masculinity while not appearing to be genuinely nonheroic. As intimated earlier, such maneuvering seems to reflect an emerging "crisis" in masculinity in which young men are encouraged to be independent, confident, and secure in their masculinity while simultaneously not taking themselves too seriously, while also being advised to reform or abandon their oppressive habits, to be more open and tolerant, and to practice sensitivity and compassion.

This dilemma may be especially pronounced during late adolescent and early adult romantic and sexual identity development. As societal strictures in Western cultures loosen and psychological moratorium becomes more normative as a viable identity status well into young adulthood, there is less pressure on young adult men to definitively define their masculinity within the context of their romantic endeavors. Instead, this protracted period of intimacy exploration tends to normalize exploration and mandate gender norm versatility. What therefore seems especially relevant during the young adult years is the ability to avoid the appearance of either overindulging or underindulging in traditional masculine norms when talking about romantic and sexual experiences. Young adulthood is thus a peculiarly unique time for exploiting the luxury of discussing romantic experiences in ways that transact the puerile and prurient. The use of irony to position one's identity while discussing such topics appears to be a finely tuned discursive practice that allows young men to straddle more than one age-developmental position within a variety of situations and

in the midst of a variety of expectations that swirl within conversational interactions.

Moments of irony are thus highly illustrative of what is normative for young men as they talk about romantic experiences. Presumably, one would not be ironic about nondelicate or prosaic topics. Irony reveals that the topic (e.g., romantic and sexual experiences) is sufficiently cumbersome so as to be relationally threatening if mishandled. One's masculine status is, in other words, at stake. By examining this handling in real-time storytelling, we see how young men rhetorically finesse positions about delicate topics and, in so doing, how they socialize each other's identities as part of the overall maintenance of their friendships. The use of irony to reconfigure hegemonic masculinity has as much to do with identity development as the maintenance of homosociality.

Given our limited sample size and its demographic homogeneity—largely White, heterosexual, college-age men, there are limitations regarding the generalizability of our findings. There is evidence to suggest that playfulness around traditional masculine norms may be especially salient for young White men but not necessarily for men of color (see Messner & Montez de Oca, 2005). Because of the stereotypical association of hypersexuality, seduction, and machismo with men of color, there may be tighter strictures that encourage less playfulness, self-deprecation, and irony concerning traditional masculine norms. There may be more to prove, in terms of garnering power as a man of color, making transgressions to traditional masculine norms too risky. As such, men of color may not as easily identify with playfulness and ironic self-deprecation and, as such, may be less likely to incorporate such performances into their social practices. This remains an open research question, as are questions pertaining to the impact of socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and age.

It is important to consider whether the context of the adult-moderated group discussions pressed for irony. This setting may have been an optimal climate for being open and playful about delicate topics. Because most of the stories had already been told in previous settings, the threat of teasing, ridicule, or rejection is lessened. And because the stories are being produced as part of a research agenda, it additionally gives the young men some distance from their stories, allowing them to try out irony, candor, and self-deprecation as part of the performance of good research participants. The presence of the audiotape may have exacerbated this. Clearly, future research will have to be more innovative in capturing a variety of conversations in a variety of settings. It is also important to compare patterns of irony in other kinds of stories in order to determine whether being ironic is specific to romantic and sexual stories, or more generalized.

To conclude, it is instructive to consider how we should think about what is currently hegemonic about masculinity. This study has reported that for young, heterosexual, White males, traditionally hegemonic ideals may be partially reclaimed by (ironically) subverting heroic and macho masculine positions for an everyman form of masculinity that specializes in self-deprecation, playfulness, ordinariness, and nonchalance. This recouping of hegemony is thus not only a media phenomenon but is alive in men's everyday discursive practices. Being hegemonic in a constantly changing landscape of gender relations entails the ability to manage a variety of social and cultural expectations within specific contexts while neither overindulging or underindulging in traditional masculine norms. By examining these projects in detail, we can productively begin to identify hegemonic practices as the gradual fine tuning of a range of discursive techniques that allow men to maintain *multiple* masculine positions within a variety of situations. To do so in ways that become routinely normalized and canonized is to effectively guarantee, as Connell (1995) argues, an iterative process of dominance for men.

Appendix

Transcription Conventions

(.)	Short pause of less than 1 s
(1.5)	Timed pause in seconds
[overlap	Overlapping speech
?	Rising intonation/question
°quieter°	Encloses talk that is quieter than the surrounding talk
LOUD	Talk that is louder than the surrounding talk
<u>Underlined</u>	Emphasis
>faster<	Encloses talk that is faster than the surrounding talk
<slower>	Encloses talk that is slower than the surrounding talk
((comments))	Encloses comments from the transcriber
Rea:::ly	Elongation of the prior sound
=	Immediate latching of successive talk
[. . .]	Where material from the tape has been omitted for reasons of brevity.

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