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## Building Up by Tearing Down

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Abstract:	<p>This paper analyzes mockery sequences among a group of friends to examine how this discursive practice mobilizes categories to manage stances toward differences and to construct group norms and boundaries. Using discourse analysis, I inspect how non-seriously tearing down or jocularly teasing/mockery participants within a peer group manages the practical problem of ingroup difference by reaffirming shared stances and norms around masculinity. The analysis highlights some of the ways in which groups navigate difference and identity moment-to-moment in interaction, showing how the moral organization of ingroup and outgroup assessments are built in the mundane world of conversation.</p>

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Review

**Building Up by Tearing Down**Jessica S. Robles<sup>1</sup>**Abstract**

This paper analyzes mockery sequences among a group of friends to examine how this discursive practice mobilizes categories to manage stances toward differences and to construct group norms and boundaries. Using discourse analysis, I inspect how non-seriously *tearing down* or jocularly teasing/mockery participants within a peer group manages the practical problem of ingroup difference by reaffirming shared stances and norms around masculinity. The analysis highlights some of the ways in which groups navigate difference and identity moment-to-moment in interaction, showing how the moral organization of ingroup and outgroup assessments are built in the mundane world of conversation.

**Keywords**

discourse analysis, discursive psychology, membership categorization, stance, mockery, morality, masculinity, ingroup

The social phenomenon of groups is highly visible in human society. Whether it's by politics or nation, music preference or sports team, our lives are filled with associations that lump us in with some people and separate us out from others. That groups differentiate from others and expect some internal conformity is a source of productive diversity and community, but also problems and conflict. Scholars have investigated these dimensions of groups across many research areas (e.g., Bond, 2005; Cohen, 1977; Gudykunst, Yoon & Nishida, 1987). But much of this work has

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3 not examined closely the emergent practices of naturalistic groups, or it has focused on the  
4 content of communication (see Tracy & Robles, 2010). What might be learned from inspecting  
5 how ordinary groups manage potential differences as they arise in interaction? What practices do  
6 groups employ to resolve possible troubles and reproduce a shared group identity?  
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12 This paper uses discursive psychological discourse analysis to examine a practice of non-  
13 seriously *tearing down* or mocking participants within a group. This practice of jocular teasing  
14 manages the practical problem of ingroup differences by reaffirming shared stances and group  
15 norms around masculine values and identity. The following sections discuss relevant literature,  
16 describe the methods of this study, present the results of the analysis, and reflect on implications.  
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#### 24 **Non-Serious Mockery and Categorization**

25  
26 Teasing is a way of getting a laugh that also calls out transgressions (to the point that even when  
27 taken as a joke, teasing tends to elicit serious responses). Drew (1987) describes a continuum  
28 between teasing that is accepted with laughter but also seriously rejected, and teasing that is  
29 taken up and extended, showing that seriously responding to teasing content is a way of setting  
30 the record straight even when acknowledging that the tease is joking or humorous. Haugh (2010)  
31 also describes teasing or what he calls *jocular mockery*, which incorporates provocation and  
32 playfulness, using insult to accomplish affiliation. Thus activities such as teasing and mockery  
33 constitute layered or blended frames (Gordon, 2008), cueing both affiliative and disaffiliative  
34 interpretations simultaneously.  
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48 This paper examines how teasing or jocular mockery can accomplish *ingrouping*.  
49 Research in social psychology has shown that ingroups tend to emphasize relative homogeneity  
50 based on shared moral values and worldviews (e.g., Pagliaro, Ellemers & Barreto, 2011), and  
51 theories such as social identity theory, identity theory, and status organizing theory demonstrate  
52 how ingroups orient to their own coherence as a group (e.g., Kalkhoff & Barnum, 2000; Tajfel,  
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3 Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). This paper takes a resonant but more discourse analytic and  
4  
5 discursive psychological approach to these concepts (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 2012),  
6  
7 focusing on how specifics of interaction can finely distinguish ingroup legitimacy in situated  
8  
9 interactions. The practice examined herein will be described as *tearing down*, which draws on  
10  
11 how group members police the boundaries of their self-categorized group (see Edwards, 1991 for  
12  
13 a discussion of cognitive versus discursive orientations to categories).  
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17 Sacks (1992) describes tearing down as a practice in which non-serious insults are traded  
18  
19 in interactions among friends. Categories are defined ways of grouping people; in the example  
20  
21 “the baby cried, the mommy picked it up,” two categories are referenced (babies and mommies)  
22  
23 that belong to a family collection. Sacks further describes the *membership categorization device*  
24  
25 as a way of unpacking how these categories associate with activities in interpretation, in that we  
26  
27 hear the baby as being the baby *of* the mommy who is mentioned, and therefore we hear her  
28  
29 picking the baby up as being occasioned by the crying and as designed to provide comfort.  
30  
31 Categories can be used to praise and blame, and in describing tearing down, Sacks provides the  
32  
33 example of saying “yes Mommy” to a person who is not one’s mother. He calls this *intentional*  
34  
35 *misidentification* (p. 417), a way of pointing up something reproachable or mockable in  
36  
37 contrasting the person addressed (in this case, a peer) with their inappropriately-categorical  
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39 behavior (in this case, some activity ordinarily associated with mothers) (for a similar example,  
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41 see Cameron, 1998).  
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48  
49 Categories do not have to be explicit, but it is a somewhat more difficult analytic task to  
50  
51 work out an implied category. Most work on categories has therefore worked with descriptions  
52  
53 that reference categories rather than how categories are demonstrated or enacted (Reynolds,  
54  
55 2017). Focusing on demonstrated as well as described categories can give insight into how  
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57 communication constructs group membership. Features such as contextualization cues (aspects  
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3 of talk such as prosody and intonation that point to cultural frames of reference and membership)  
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5 (Gumperz, 1989) and references to implicit background knowledge, shared activities, and  
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7  
8 overlapping frames are key ways in which group identity is performed through different styles  
9  
10 and content in talk (Sierra, 2016). Producing mutually-intelligible topics in talk is important to  
11  
12 how relational intimacy is enacted and progressed in interaction (Maynard & Zimmerman,  
13  
14 1984). It is not just the topics themselves that matter, but the way participants collaboratively  
15  
16 negotiate stances toward those topics, and how those topics are managed to do identity, that  
17  
18 gives identity to the group as a whole (see Walton & Jaffe, 2011). Goodwin (2007) describes  
19  
20 how different stances can be produced through aligning and disaligning actions that position  
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22 participants as mundane moral actors in everyday activities. As people interact together, they  
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24 accomplish these stances toward each other, their activities, one another's talk, and the content of  
25  
26 that talk (Tracy & Robles, 2013).  
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32 Groups also build and talk about themselves by contrast with others and by locally  
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34 enacting difference through divergent communication practices (Bailey, 2000; see also Giles,  
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36 Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). When groups talk amongst themselves, as the ingroup, it is often  
37  
38 talk about nonpresent others that does this sort of inclusion/exclusion boundary work, for  
39  
40 example, through gossip (Jaworski & Coupland, 2005). In her research on girl peer groups,  
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42 Goodwin (2002, 2007) showed how inclusionary and exclusionary moves are accomplished *in*  
43  
44 *situ* to finely distinguish who does and does not belong, and to enforce the normative  
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46 expectations of the group. Category-based insults and responses to them are one way peer groups  
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48 negotiate identities, but this often requires keeping interaction within the frame of play  
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50 (Evaldsson, 2005).  
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55 Teasing can function as a form of social control (Kochman, 1983) that may signal social  
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57 transgressions (Drew, 1987), deal with conflict (Norrick & Spitz, 2008), and reconstitute group  
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3 hierarchies (Fine & de Soucey, 2005). By ridiculing and causing embarrassment, groups relate  
4 the individual to the expectations of the larger group and society more generally (Billig, 2001).  
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6 As Goffman (1956) notes, embarrassment occurs when a presentation of self is made public that  
7  
8 appears incompatible with one's desired definition of self; deliberately causing or drawing  
9  
10 attention to such events constitute a ritual for reaffirming a social system. In the current paper, a  
11  
12 masculine identity is reinforced by talk that is about and displays stances toward masculine  
13  
14 topics (or masculinized topics). This constitutes a sort of psycho-discursive practice, or practice  
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16 in talk that implicates psychology, relying on ordinary assumptions about motives that inform  
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18 male stereotypes (even if explicitly proposing to be outside of or resistant to them: Wetherell &  
19  
20 Edley, 1999). The data herein feature men who embrace it, not in an explicit way, but in a tacit  
21  
22 way that goes without saying literally, positioning members as more or less authentic to the  
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24 group (Widdicombe & Woffitt, 1990). Disalignment, disagreement, and potential conflict over  
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26 members' positionings are mitigated through mock insults designed to put members in their  
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28 place and re-establish shared stances and norms of the group.  
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### 36 **Methods**

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38 The data comprise seven years of intermittent collected observations, interviews, audio  
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40 recordings, and video recordings of a group of friends living in a small California suburb (USA).  
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42 In total there are approximately five hours of video, 9 hours of audio, 12 interviews of five  
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44 members over the years, various ancillary documents (emails, text messages, letters, postcards,  
45  
46 etc.) and countless hours of observation. The majority of these were gathered during summer  
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48 periods and in particular between 2008 and 2011. The group is made up primarily of men, with  
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50 women being largely connected to the group *through* men as sisters, roommates, romantic  
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52 partners, band members, and later wives. Day to day members' lives revolve around work and  
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54 work-related concerns while downtime and hobbies revolve around music and drinking. The  
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3 research focuses on five core members (aged late 20s in 2005 and late 20s to late 30s by the most  
4 recent data from January of 2013) herein called Jim, Darren, Dave, Alex, and Mark. The  
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6 researcher was a friend of the group from high school and spent time with them socially, most  
7 frequently in the period from 1998-2000, and regularly but infrequently thereafter. The location  
8 of all research activity occurred primarily at people's apartments or homes. Use of video, audio,  
9 and observations have been selected, constrained or altered in accordance with participant  
10 consent, and all names and identifiable places are pseudonyms.  
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20 The analysis takes a discourse analysis (Ehrlich & Romaniuk, 2014) approach drawing  
21 on discursive psychology and membership categorization (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Stokoe  
22 2012) to focus on how psychological business such as opinion formation and ingroup identities  
23 are accomplished in social action. The analysis also takes the tactic of drawing on  
24 ethnomethodological conversation analysis to examine the ordinary methods by which categories  
25 are motivated in sequences of interaction (a common move in discursive psychology: see Potter,  
26 2012; Tileagă & Stokoe, 2015). All audio and video have been transcribed verbatim using a  
27 simplified form of Jefferson's (2004) notations. From the data were selected 49 sequences in  
28 which participants mocked one another's actions; these sequences were examined for ways in  
29 which they motivated categories and implied their own category memberships. Many topics  
30 emerged as being central to the group's norms and values, therefore serving as ripe moments for  
31 witnessing how members dealt with oppositional stances. This analysis focuses on discursive  
32 teasing strategies that accomplished stances toward masculinity to show how this practice of  
33 jocular mockery polices group members' norms around core values (what to uphold) and  
34 identities (how to be).  
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### 53 **Tearing Down**

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56 The following results describe how mockery was employed to construct participants as a group  
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3 of friends. The analysis discusses three ways in which participants teasingly attribute  
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5 problematic categories to one another by producing stances toward members' actions and  
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7 collaborating to build shared stances:  
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- 10 1. nonliteral descriptions and ascriptions non-seriously and sometimes ridiculously question, for  
11  
12 example, taste in music, occupation, and drinking ability;
- 13 2. stories highlight apparently-factual character flaws regarding, for example, work ethic and  
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15 physical stature;
- 16 3. exaggerated performances challenge identities, for example, related to work, race, and  
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18 gender.  
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24 Through these techniques, the group pointed out, made fun of, marginalized, and then  
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26 defused the threat of non-conforming acts and identities to reinforce a shared masculinized  
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28 identity.  
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### 31 *Nonliteral Descriptions and Ascriptions*

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34 Though all of the examples examined were nonliteral to the extent that they involved designedly-  
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36 nonserious insults, many such teasing instances also drew on factually inaccurate or impossible  
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38 content. This allowed insults to operate under the guise of fake insults that could easily be treated  
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40 as teasing because they contained ridiculous or untrue elements.  
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43 In these data, music is frequently relevant during group interactions, in three primary  
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45 contexts: attending or performing at concerts, practicing and jamming, and listening to music  
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47 recordings. The last is the most common, and typically takes place while people are hanging out  
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49 at someone's house before or after work (people often work several part-time jobs with different  
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51 start times and are often coming and going throughout a day). While conversation is common,  
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53 music is always on in the background and is regularly brought into the talk. The type of music  
54  
55 one listens to has consequences for their identity: excerpt 1 illustrates mocking someone for  
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liking a style of music that is incommensurate with a masculine identity.

**Excerpt 1 “This band is assholes”**

((nearly two minutes of silent smoking while listening to music))  
 1 Darren: this reminds me of fucking- what’s that band  
 2 Modest=  
 3 Craig: =Modest Mouse (.) what’s wrong with Modest Mouse  
 4 Jim: it’s emo.  
 5 Craig: so?  
 6 (2.0)  
 7 Mark: can we change it (.) seriously  
 8 Craig: you guys are assholes  
 9 Darren: this band is assholes  
 10 ((laughter))

Four men sit in one’s backyard smoking and drinking while music plays on an iPod. As frequently happens, a brief lull in the conversation is filled with listening to the music, indexed by Darren’s deictic reference “this” (“this music”) in line 1. Darren’s use of “fucking” projects a complaint or criticism of the music, an accountable action given the music had to have been selected by a member of the group. Craig’s uptake confirms that this is hearable as a complaint or criticism as he requests the account for “what’s wrong with Modest Mouse?” in line 3. Another present participant Jim (whose backyard they are in) supplies the reason by labeling the musical genre as “emo” (line 4), a common short form of *emocore* or *emotional hardcore* which is often contrasted with the form of music from which it originated, hardcore punk rock, the latter which is the preferred music of the group. “Emo” is presented as ‘reason enough’ needing no further elaboration, evidenced by the lack of follow-up (line 6) in response to Craig’s challenge on line 5.

When Mark speaks in line 7, he positions himself with Darren and Jim, aligning with the complaint initiated by Darren and upgrading it to a request to change the music. Though formulated as a request with an inclusive pronoun (“can we”), it is hearable as a fairly bald demand because it is otherwise unmitigated, and the result would be to remove the music

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3 completely, suggesting it is so bad as to be unlistenable. That Craig takes this as a face-threat  
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5 (Goffman, 1967) is evident in his insult “you guys are assholes” (line 8): this functions as a  
6  
7 counter-insult while not taking up the disagreement further (and though he doesn’t comply  
8  
9 immediately, he eventually does so without further prompting). Darren’s next turn in line 9  
10  
11 makes a play on this insult to further emphasize the divergent stance toward the music, and this  
12  
13 is followed by laughter from all, including Craig (line 10), before a new topic is introduced.  
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16  
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18       Though laughter does not occur until that point, throughout the exchange, the tone never  
19  
20 crosses into genuine anger. For example, Darren’s initial use of “fucking” and the later uses of  
21  
22 “assholes” do not index a strong emotional stance. This is partly because they are not produced  
23  
24 with nonverbal markers of negative emotionality, but also because swearing is casual and  
25  
26 common among the group, in this conversation and across interactions. Furthermore, the silence  
27  
28 at line 65, while dispreferred (Pomerantz 1984) in that it provides no response to the previous  
29  
30 demand, is not oriented to as problematic. It is not pursued by Craig for example, and the  
31  
32 postures of the men remain relaxed, their embodiment doing attending to nothing in particular:  
33  
34 they sit slouched in chairs, gazes directed at neutral spaces between one another, engaged in  
35  
36 alternating drags on cigarettes with taking sips of beer out of cans.  
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41       Music is a key dimension of ingroup identity and bias and emotional styles of music are  
42  
43 not seen as sufficiently punk or masculine (Lonsdale & North, 2009; O’Meara, 2003). By calling  
44  
45 out the activity of listening to music that is not valued by the group, participants mark out and  
46  
47 question the membership of anyone who listens to that music. While the comment of “emo” is  
48  
49 treated as a problem, the upshot that closes the sequence is the nonliteral formulation “this band  
50  
51 is assholes.” It is a play on Craig’s defensive counter-insult, suggesting the others are justified in  
52  
53 not liking and not wanting to listen to the music because it is so unlikeable as to be described  
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55 with a ridiculous metaphor. It skirts the issue of directly insulting Craig himself by aligning to  
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3 take a negative stance toward the music rather than toward him directly; but as shown in Drew's  
4  
5 (1987) work on teasing, Craig treats this as casting a stance on his character as well, and  
6  
7 responds to the content of the tease as a serious insult despite the jokey packaging. This is  
8  
9 because, in a way, it is: the others are calling Craig out for listening to a type of music that is not  
10  
11 valued by the group and by the group's valued masculine performance of its identity.  
12  
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15 In addition to music, work and particular jobs or occupations are another dimension on  
16  
17 which participants' masculinity and conformity are measured. Work-related categories come  
18  
19 with a number of mundane moral relevancies (see Jayyusi, 2014; Stokoe & Edwards, 2014), and  
20  
21 the implications for participants' personal and other identities (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998;  
22  
23 Tracy & Robles, 2013) have direct consequences for their efficacy as members of the group.  
24  
25 Work is a chief concern among the group and several members struggle at times to find work,  
26  
27 keep work, or work enough to pay their bills. Excerpt 2 shows an instance in which a sales job is  
28  
29 disparaged.  
30  
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### 34 Excerpt 2 "Press that suit"

35  
36 11 Alex: are you coming back here? ((gazing at Darren))  
37 12 Darren: I don't know (.) work ends at like three am  
38 13 Jim: people will still be here  
39 14 Darren: yea::h but I'll be ex(hh)hausted  
40 15 Jim: oh yeah true (.) you could come and sleep for a bit  
41 16 Alex: yeah I don't- HEY fuckface where you goin  
42 17 ((unintelligible)) ((Kip leaves)) ((Darren leaves))  
43 18 Alex: that little shit ((about Kip))  
44 19 (1.0)  
45 20 Derrick: I have to get up early  
46 21 Alex: yeah I bet  
47 22 Owen: press that suit ((leans over to get a beer))  
48 23 Derrick: shut the fuck up  
49  
50  
51

52 When Derrick claims he has to get up early (preparatory to leaving a party), this is mocked with  
53  
54 "press that suit" (line 22), an exaggeration of the sort of dress Derrick would need for his work,  
55  
56 though it is not literally what Derrick wears to work. Derrick's "shut the fuck up" in line 23  
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58  
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2  
3 treats it as an insult (orienting to the literal dimension of the tease, as discussed by Drew, 1987),  
4  
5 showing that wearing a suit is an activity negatively associated with a certain category of person  
6  
7 with which he is being associated. This can be contrasted with the sympathetic stance shown  
8  
9 toward Darren's more valued blue-collar job in lines 13-16. White-collar work is looked down  
10  
11 on, and members who have those sorts of jobs are mocked despite the fact that work is otherwise  
12  
13 generally seen as necessary and even honorable. Indeed, having jobs that pay less or spending  
14  
15 more time unemployed (to an extent) was frequently treated as a better option than 'selling out'  
16  
17 for a job in customer service or in an office (more examples forthcoming in the analysis).  
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20  
21  
22 Because work is such an explicit critical matter for many of the people in the group (as  
23  
24 well as linking up with related topics such as financial problems, free time, physical pain from  
25  
26 hard labor, schedules, etc.), there were many opportunities to observe similar situations in which  
27  
28 work was topicalized and compared across participants. In almost every situation, certain  
29  
30 members were mocked for having work orientations or situations that seemed to differ from the  
31  
32 norms already established. For example, Dave has a service job at a popular guitar sales shop in  
33  
34 an upper-middle class city, and is regularly teased for working with the public (requiring more  
35  
36 care about his appearance, which is negatively assessed), working at a chain store with high  
37  
38 prices and 'phonies' who don't necessarily understand guitars in a real way, and working in a  
39  
40 richer city outside their town (requiring more money for gas and bridge toll, a car, and other  
41  
42 markers of higher class) (for a discussion of this example, see Robles, 2016). Talk like this  
43  
44 serves to carefully code and differentiate who is and is not conforming fully to the highest  
45  
46 standards the group espouses—who is not centrally in the masculinized category of the group.  
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53 Race, heritage, and other aspects of ethnic identity were also a site of stance contestation,  
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55 particularly in relation to the perceived masculinity of certain races: for example, a perception of  
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57 Samoans as "strong," borne out by numerous praising of "huge" and "scary" Samoans within or  
58  
59  
60

known by members. However, a key ‘trait’ valued and highly relevant to the group’s everyday activities was drinking alcohol, in which masculinity is associated with being able to drink a lot.

In the following example, participants tear each other down around ethnic self-categorizations (for example, lines 5, 8, and 18) and relate them to the perceived ability to drink more alcohol.

This excerpt opened with Jim bringing up his Irish background, and leads to the rest of the group chiming in with their own racial categorizations (see also, Robles, 2015, 2016).

### Excerpt 3 “You’re Japanese enough”

1 Matt: I don’t have any Irish in me  
 2 (0.5)  
 3 JR: ((gasps))=  
 4 Matt: =bu:t=  
 5 Mark: =<get the fuck out>  
 6 Matt: I’ve got German.  
 7 Jim: I’ve got Scottish,=  
 8 ?: =°nobody cares°=  
 9 Matt: =and Scottish  
 10 Dave: I’ve got German and Irish [°dude°  
 11 Mark: [and ] Japanese (.)  
 12 [you’re Japanese  
 13 Matt: [I don’t have any Irish,  
 14 Dave: [a(h)nd J(h)apanese=  
 15 Mark: =you’re Japanese Dave shut up  
 16 Dave: shut u:p man (0.5) I’m only half Japanese  
 17 Mark: [you:’re Japanese enough  
 18 Matt: [that’s still a reason you] can’t [drink  
 19 ? [((laughs quietly)) ] [heck ] ya

One important dimension of identity for this group is race: several of the members of this group are proud of their cultural heritage in some way, and one’s racial or ethnic background is regularly brought up and discussed. Most of the members of the group (and the surrounding locale) have racial identities (claimed, and visible) that are white. Two Mexican-identified participants do not participate in the conversation about their heritage. The only “core” member of the five focused on in this paper who does participate, but who is not obviously and only white, is Dave, who is half-Japanese and who is torn down in particular by Mark, starting with

1  
2  
3 Dave's claim of German and Irish heritage (line 10). As the conversation unfolds, it becomes  
4  
5 clear that Dave's incumbency in one particular category ("Japanese," lines 11, 12, 14-16) is  
6  
7 prohibiting his claiming membership in others. This is formulated in an extreme way that is  
8  
9 factually true to some extent, but also nonliteral, since Dave is not only Japanese. Furthermore,  
10  
11 Dave's reduction to the category Japanese is partly due to the yardstick that is put forward as a  
12  
13 basis of measuring ethnic membership, which is being able to hold one's liquor (lines 18-19). A  
14  
15 negative stance is implied toward not being able to drink. The implication is that Dave cannot do  
16  
17 so and that this is a feature of his being Japanese, thereby defining him in that way, since  
18  
19 German and Irish backgrounds are here associated with drinking (line 22).  
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24  
25 However, Mark has started his mocking before that point with the baldly-stated  
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27 contradiction "you're Japanese" (line 12) which is then repeated with the addition of the  
28  
29 injunction to "shut up" (line 15). When Dave protests by calling himself "only half Japanese"  
30  
31 (implying room for other identities; line 16), Mark calls him "Japanese enough" (line 17). This is  
32  
33 hearable retrospectively as 'Japanese enough to not hold your liquor,' since the next turn offers  
34  
35 this reasoning, but the prior to line 18 it is also hearable as related to Dave's appearance, which  
36  
37 is more physically similar to that of Japanese people (see Paoletti 1998, re: on-sight  
38  
39 categorization). By implication, Dave is also not (fully, visibly) white. Of all the people in this  
40  
41 interaction who claim racial categories, Dave is the only one who is not of an obvious anglo-  
42  
43 European background who joins in. And it is interesting that the person who calls him out on  
44  
45 this—Mark—is another person in the group who is clearly and visibly not white. The  
46  
47 participants treat talking about one's race, or trying to associate with European ancestry, as  
48  
49 problematic for those with non-white bodies. The moral implications of these category  
50  
51 memberships provide the material by which to accept or reject people's actions (see Sacks 1992).  
52  
53 Here, the racial aspect is tied to the masculinization of being able to drink a lot. Other non-white  
54  
55  
56  
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58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 races (e.g., black) may not be treated this way if they were associated with stereotypes about  
4  
5 drinking ability.  
6  
7

8 In these and similar excerpts, categorizations are used to infer undesirable and un-  
9  
10 masculine identity positions—such as the sort of person who like bad emotional music, the sort  
11  
12 of person with a white-collar, not physically-demanding job, or the sort of person who can't  
13  
14 drink much—and these positions are policed through the systematic deployment of insults that  
15  
16 align against a minority stance. While such practices can be seen as a form of light-hearted  
17  
18 teasing—and indeed, their surface realization presents them as such—they reveal significant  
19  
20 potential conflicts based on an intolerance toward differences of opinion and identity, and serve  
21  
22 to moralize and enforce conformity. The next section displays a rather different, more truth-  
23  
24 grounded, basis of mockery, in which the seriousness may be more evident, and therefore  
25  
26 delivery of the tease requires more care.  
27  
28  
29  
30

### 31 *Stories Highlighting Flaws*

32  
33  
34 Other examples of tearing down were not treated as inaccurate or impossible, but focused on  
35  
36 prior events and behaviors grounded in shared understanding of one another's possible flaws and  
37  
38 weaknesses (as defined by the masculine values of the group). These insults had therefore to be  
39  
40 delivered in such a way that emphasized their nonserious or trivial nature such that they could be  
41  
42 seen as less directly threatening. In the following excerpt, which takes place a few years after  
43  
44 excerpt 1, the researcher is hanging out with the group in Jim's wife's parents' backyard. A  
45  
46 sequence is initiated by Jim's announcement (line 1) that he has a new job.  
47  
48  
49

### 50 **Excerpt 4 “A new job”**

51  
52  
53 1 Jim: Hey I just got a new job=  
54 2 JR: =oh yeah?  
55 3 Darren: washin dishes  
56 4 Jim: washing dishes yeah at that new restaurant on  
57 5 second (.) have you been there?=  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3  
4 6 JR: =no  
5 7 Jim: not the best job but (.) it's pretty laid back  
6 8 Alex: [except when you have to wake up in the morning]  
7 9 Darren: [except when you sleep in and [the boss calls you]  
8 10 ((JR laughs))  
9 11 Jim: [except- yeah- ha ha  
10 12 but- but-]  
11 13 JR: oh no  
12 14 Jim: it was fine my boss is cool (.) I don't have a lot  
13 15 of hours right now which kind of sucks but (.) I  
14 16 mean I like the time to myself but I need the money  
15 17 Darren: that's why I love my job I have the whole day to  
16 18 myself [and my job]  
17 19 Alex: [and your] job makes hella money  
18 20 JR: but you get off so late (.) I never see you anymore  
19 21 (.) I just can't wait until two am these days (.)  
20 22 gettin old=  
21 23 Darren: =that and I'm usually sleeping until the afternoon  
22 24 (1.0) ((Jim lights a cigarette))  
23 25 JR: these tiny windows of opportunity  
24 26 Alex: I'm thinkin of quittin my job (.) even though I'm  
25 27 broke  
26 28 JR: I thought you liked that job  
27 29 Alex: at first yeah (0.5) now I'm gettin called at the  
28 30 time I mean it's good money and it was sweet when  
29 31 it was like hunnerd dollars for a Sunday or  
30 32 somethin but (.) too much work ((laughs))  
31 33 Jim: well no matter how much you work anyway you're  
32 34 fucking broke so

36 Here the delivery of the news (line 1) is done for the visitor (JR) and appears to be already  
37 known to the other participants (evidenced by Darren supplying Jim's next turn in line 3).  
38  
39 However, the positive news of having obtained a job and becoming a working agent is obscured  
40 by a series of derisive expansions on (and perhaps ironic counterpoints to) the theme of "laid  
41 back" (line 6). These turns present prior knowledge of a story about a time when Jim slept in and  
42 was called by his boss (lines 7-8). The potentially problematic nature of this story retelling is  
43 mitigated by Jim's "it was fine" (line 12), assessing the act as having been unworthy of note  
44 since his boss "is cool" and apparently did not fire Jim nor give him too hard a time. The tearing  
45 down of Jim is followed up by praising of Darren's job (lines 13-15), which is introduced as a



1  
2  
3 sort of second-story that serves as both collaborative and competitive (Theobald & Reynolds,  
4  
5 2015). Darren's is a late-night job working heavy machinery for a recycling plant; this job is  
6  
7 valorized by all for its long hours, its status as a real job (manual labor jobs being prized over  
8  
9 service or white collar work), and most importantly how much it pays. Alex then follows these  
10  
11 rounds with his own complaints, which simultaneously links to Jim's earlier complaints about  
12  
13 hours (except having too many, lines 24-25, rather than not getting enough, lines 11-12).  
14  
15

16  
17 The *tearing down* which occurs here singles Jim out for actions which could be seen as  
18  
19 violating the worth ethic assumed concomitant with such a valorization of the masculine working  
20  
21 subject. And yet Alex is not 'torn down' for complaining in potentially similar ways. Categories  
22  
23 such as "hard worker," "employed," and so forth are implicitly invoked through the sorts of  
24  
25 complaints made. Complaints about work occur in a code of being grateful for *having* work—  
26  
27 and this is a fine balance. The tearing down of Jim is a performance: a ritual intended to honor  
28  
29 the value of work in the face of its complaints by challenging his (relatively minor) work-related  
30  
31 failings. The tearing down in this case is done playfully and without rancor, but pointedly too,  
32  
33 eliciting an acknowledgement and account from Jim (lines 11-12). Jim's follow up with yet  
34  
35 another complaint could be seen as potentially undoing his prior acceptance of something like  
36  
37 chastisement, but is in fact consistent with the footing work (Goffman 1981) necessary to  
38  
39 maintain the balance by still having a tough, complainable, *masculine* job. Only Darren in this  
40  
41 excerpt (and in most other cases) can get away with being almost entirely favorable about his  
42  
43 job, and so lauded by others, precisely because his job is known to be the most valued (difficult,  
44  
45 requiring skill, long-term, late-night, high-paying, etc.). The following excerpt shows a similar  
46  
47 instance in which members are mocked for some dimension of their work life.  
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53

#### 54 55 **Excerpt 5 "Fuck customer service"**

56  
57 1 JR: How's the cafe  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Owen: O:::h I don't work there any[more  
4 JR: [oh no?=  
5 Owen: I'm at Cliffe's (.) I know  
6 Jim & Mike: ((laughing))  
7 JR: is it not good,  
8 Owen: I have one thing to say (.) fuck customer service  
9 JR: ((laughs))  
10 Owen: that's all I have to say.  
11 Jim: sell out. moving on.  
12  
13

14  
15 In excerpt 5, JR initiates a request for information about work, and is updated on Owen's new  
16 job. Owen, Jim and Mike treat the news as remarkable in some way (with Owen's "I know" and  
17 Jim's and Mike's laughter ratifying accountability) while JR orients to not seeing the problem in  
18 line 6. Owen (supported by the others) denigrates his job in line 7, and treats this as a sufficient  
19 account with "I have one thing to say" and "that's all I have to say" (lines 7, 9). The type of job  
20 is treated as the problem, as something toward which it is expected the others will have a  
21 negative stance. Jim labels the problem in line 10 by calling Owen a "sell out" and closing the  
22 sequence. The type of work is seen as inferior because it involves customer service and "sell out"  
23 implies that is in contradiction with the working class ethos valued by the group.  
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36 A final example occurs during another typical topic of conversation in which participants  
37 compliment the toughness of particular members. For the sake of space, several lines have been  
38 omitted in which participants praise specific aspects of Casey's large and "punk" appearance and  
39 relate specific stories about the (allegedly-justified) violent acts he has committed.  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44

#### 45 Excerpt 6 "Lucky Jim"

46  
47  
48 1 Jon: have you met Casey  
49 2 JR: m (.) I don't think so  
50 3 Darren: you've met Casey  
51 4 Jon: she hasn't  
52 5 Owen: he's a high schooler  
53 6 Jon: yeah (.) but he's the toughest fucking high schooler you've  
54 7 ever-  
55 8 Owen: [oh yeah I wasn't saying]  
56 9 Alex: [that guy is huge]  
57 10 Jon: he's bigger than Marvin  
58 (21 lines omitted)  
59  
60

## Building Up by Tearing Down 18

1  
2  
3 32 Jon: right (.) but he's hella strong and he looks scary as hell  
4 33 Darren: yeah but he's the nicest guy that's the thing=  
5 34 Craig: =what a sweetie ((laughs))  
6 35 Alex: just don't cross him ((opens a beer))  
7 36 Craig: Ji:m.  
8 37 Jon: fuckin J[im  
9 38 Owen: [JI:::::M=  
10 39 Jim: =shut up. (.) that was a misunderstanding=  
11 40 Craig: =you:: got lucky ((gets up to get a beer))  
12 41 Darren: naw but he wouldn't- not JIM  
13 42 JR: °poor [Jim°  
14 43 Craig: [Jim] wouldn't stand a chance  
15 44 Jim: nope. ((raises cigarette in a 'cheers' gesture))  
16 45 (1.0)  
17 46 Jim: he was just messin with me  
18 47 (0.5)  
19 48 Jon: lucky Jim. Jammy Jim.  
20 49 ((laughter))  
21

22 In excerpt 6, after establishing how much Casey matches up to the group's ideals in terms of  
23 physical stature, style and appearance, ability to fight, and (honorable) reasons for fighting (lines  
24 6-35), Jim is presented as a contrast, highlighted by an instance (which is not made explicit here)  
25 6-35), Jim is presented as a contrast, highlighted by an instance (which is not made explicit here)  
26 in which Jim had said something to "piss Casey off" and after which Casey jokingly physically  
27 threatened him. Here, Jim's relative lack of physical stature and fighting ability is indexed by  
28 teasing him for having irritated Casey and commenting on how hopeless he would have been if  
29 Casey had actually fought him (lines 36-48); the basis for teasing Jim is also visible in his  
30 appearance (he is short and skinny), contrastable with the descriptions of Casey and his known  
31 appearance (to those who have met him). Because Jim actually *is* smaller and less strong than  
32 other members of the group, and because the group so values largeness and strength as  
33 masculine, teasing him in this way could cut close to the bone, implying he is not as valued a  
34 member of the group. Thus, the tone in which these comments are delivered, and Jim's 'good  
35 sport' going along with it, serve to take the sting away, as does Jon's comment (line 48) in which  
36 he references a common nickname for Jim (Jammy Jim) which reinforces that the insult to Jim's  
37 size is light-hearted even while it is true.  
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57 This and the previous excerpts illustrate how participants negotiate teasing insults that  
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call out members' differences in ways that might be more factual, and therefore more dangerous. Though the teases are treated as teases and laughed off, they are also oriented to for pointing out facts about people and their transgressions (Drew, 1987). These occasions point out real distinctions that matter: members are reminded when they do not fully and categorically fit in—and no one is going to let this go (such reminders are so common as to almost occur at every interaction)—but tearing down becomes part of the performance of putting up with these differences. The next section discusses an even more ritualized form of this practice, in which the most delicate of differences are mocked in exaggerated performances of otherness.

### *Exaggerated Performances Challenging Identities*

A final set of examples involves participants taking on performed characters and challenging others' identities in mock-insulting ways. These insults were less common, but let participants deal with the most transgressive, potentially-sensitive teases. Excerpt 7 follows on from excerpt 3, in which Mark has been insisting that Dave is “only” Japanese after Dave claimed German and Irish ancestry.

#### **Excerpt 7 “Kombanwa”**

20 (1.0)  
 21 Mark: ↑*kom[banwa]*  
*konbanwa=good evening*  
 22 Jim: [>yeah I don't think<]it's the German or the Irish  
 23 Matt & Jim: ((laugh)) [((laugh))]  
 24 Mark: [*komban[wa]*  
 25 Dave: [(*izt-*)] (.) *VAS IZ DAS*  
*ist=is was ist das=what is that*  
 26 ((laughter))  
 27 Mark: ↑*kombanwa*  
 28 Dave: *das du: ka[ff]*  
*das dummen kopf=the stupid head*  
 29 Mark: [*su:]mise:n* *kombanwa:=*  
*sumimasen=I'm sorry*  
 30 Dave: =*das du kaff=*  
 31 Mark: =*o g↑enki dess [ka*  
*o-genki desu ka=how are you?*

## Building Up by Tearing Down 20

1  
2  
3 32 JR: [((laughs))] are you  
4 33 speakin German at him and he's speakin Japanese at  
5 34 you  
6 35 Mark: °yeah°  
7 36 JR: °you people are crazy°  
8 37 (0.8)  
9 38 Dave: ((laughs)) yeah (.) a Mexican speaking Japanese(.)  
10 39 and a Japanese speaking German  
11  
12  
13

14 This excerpt takes place right after it's mentioned that Dave is identifiable as Japanese mainly  
15 because he cannot hold his liquor. Dave's attributed identity provides resources on which his  
16 friends draw to delimit his category memberships (see Whitehead, 2012) racially as a way of  
17 commenting on his lack of a particular valued masculine trait of being able to drink a lot of  
18 alcohol. Nationally-identifiable languages provide the next strategy marginalizing Dave: the  
19 interaction is expanded after the point of possible completion in line 20 when Mark reopens the  
20 issue by speaking in stylized, mock-Japanese phrases at Dave (lines 21, 24, 27, 29, 31), to which  
21 Dave responds in German insults (lines 25, 28, 30). It is not clear how fluent either party is in  
22 each language; Mark knows Japanese from his time in the military, while Dave learned German  
23 in high school. So it seems unlikely that this interchange functions as a straightforward example  
24 of code-switching that indexes ethnicity (e.g., De Fina, 2007). Instead, the content of their talk is  
25 less important than its function to perform their continued disagreement toward and mockery of  
26 one another. It is notable that the style of Mark's mock-Japanese is lilting with varied intonation,  
27 which could be a subtle feminized performance, while Dave counters with quick, guttural  
28 pronunciations of German—a language often thought of as angry-sounding by Americans, and  
29 which may also be masculinized in this way. These counter-stylizations accomplish disalignment  
30 and index language ideologies in which language is associated with certain affective and  
31 assessable categories of people (see Åhlund & Aronsson, 2015).  
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56 This banter is only closed when the researcher names what they are doing (line 32-33),  
57  
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2  
3 and Dave makes it more explicit by explicating the categories of person and languages (lines 38-  
4  
5 39). Dave acknowledges his own category as “Japanese.” Perhaps because he has acceded to this  
6  
7 point, Mark finally drops his attack. By pointing out who can and cannot claim to be white, the  
8  
9 group members naturalize whiteness as a default characteristic of the group and use race as a  
10  
11 logic for understanding and assessing actions (e.g., Whitehead, 2009), while further reinforcing  
12  
13 the stance toward Dave’s position as someone who is not white and cannot drink a lot of alcohol.  
14  
15 Because this positioning of Dave is serious and could even be seen as cruel, the whole exchange  
16  
17 is done as a tease and finishes in a ridiculous way that even Dave acknowledges as silly,  
18  
19 abandoning his earlier attempts to set the record straight (as Drew, 1987, points out is so  
20  
21 common in teasing).  
22  
23  
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25

26  
27 An even more common orientation to identity in this group involved highlighting gender.  
28  
29 While previous examples have been implicitly related to masculinity, this one is the most  
30  
31 explicit. Even the larger group (beyond the five people focused on herein) is overwhelmingly  
32  
33 male, and women (including the researcher) are typically only accorded temporary and  
34  
35 provisional status as part of ‘the group.’ Far from making gender invisible, this group highlighted  
36  
37 and performed masculinity quite regularly in all of the ways already described: through talk  
38  
39 about masculine-associated work (carpentry, physical labor, etc.), praising the fighting skills and  
40  
41 strength of members, deriding feminism and non-gender conforming women, and even  
42  
43 competing in feats of strength (wrestling, arm-wrestling, and so forth). In the following excerpt  
44  
45 from a party, a woman (Sara, whose house it is) has talked one of the men (Darren) into dressing  
46  
47 up in her clothes. Darren has come back into the room and is being teased by the others.  
48  
49  
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51

### 52 53 **Excerpt 8 “That’s disturbing”**

54  
55 1 Taylor: [slap his ass again]  
56 2 JR: [((laughing))]  
57 3 Alex: ( ) be and then a fuck- oh:: (.) damn brother=  
58  
59  
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## Building Up by Tearing Down 22

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3  
4 Sara: =that's disturbing  
5 Alex: problems  
6 Darren: I have no problems (.) I can get any man I want ((attempts  
7 to sit on Craig's lap))  
8 JR: [((laughing))]  
9 Craig: oh:: fuck ((shoves Darren))  
10 JR: wow  
11 Alex: that man is very secure [with himself (  
I'm just saying)]

12  
13 In this bit of the interaction, participants have been encouraging Darren to act (and encouraging  
14 others to treat Darren) “like a woman” through activities such as Darren sitting on present men’s  
15 laps, others spanking him, and so forth. During the directive on line 1, Darren has returned to the  
16 room after leaving briefly. Alex’s self-interruption and repair signals his noticing that Darren is  
17 now wearing lipstick, and Sara and Alex (lines 4-5) assess this negatively. Darren reframes their  
18 talk and makes an exaggerated pass at Craig, attempting to sit on his lap, which Craig deflects by  
19 shoving him away (line 8). Alex closes this particular sequence with a slightly more positive  
20 assessment of Darren (lines 10-11), after which there is a brief silence and then another  
21 participant is volunteered to dress up.  
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34 In this case, Darren is mocked in a different way, for an identity he does not possess  
35 (based on gender presentation). The goal of mocking him is not so much to police him  
36 individually, but to make an example of him. In this interaction, all the members, either  
37 explicitly or by not disagreeing with the current activity, collaboratively produce a boundary  
38 about what constitutes a man and therefore who might be allowed to temporarily suspend the  
39 rules. In the end, two more men end up dressing up after Darren; none of the three typically  
40 violate gender norms; rather, all of them are acknowledged in the group as being masculine men  
41 who are not typically teased (as some others are) for such failings as having less masculine jobs,  
42 dating infrequently, having less strength and being too skinny (or without much muscle), being  
43 slow to fight when masculinity is threatened, etc. The group as a whole reproduces their strict  
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3 local rules for masculinity, and the teasing is of a certain sort precisely to highlight what's  
4  
5 problematic (displays of femininity by men) and what displays of femininity entail (sexualized,  
6  
7 objectifying behavior), while also acknowledging that these performances are allowed by these  
8  
9 particular men because (1) these men are manly, and probably also because they (2) dressed up  
10  
11 at the request of a woman and (3) performed 'without shame' as a way of denying any attempts  
12  
13 at derision and framing their activity as non-deviant because of their typical (unquestioned)  
14  
15 masculine status.  
16  
17

18  
19 As Goodwin (2002) points out in her more observably oppositional data, in these data,  
20  
21 there were constantly-negotiated power shifts accomplished as part of aggressive moral activities  
22  
23 around peers' actions and identities. While in Goodwin's cases asymmetries were far more  
24  
25 flexible and member statuses more amorphous, in the data examined here, conformity and the  
26  
27 status quo took precedence. Competition certainly reigned, but as a function of already-  
28  
29 established roles and norms. The practice analyzed herein was also done nonliterally, as a way of  
30  
31 glancing at the fact of a difference while warning members to make it disappear and step back  
32  
33 into place (or at least be aware that their differences were noticed). Direct insults like "this band  
34  
35 is assholes" or indirect insults like "you sleep in and the boss calls you" are not meant to be  
36  
37 taken at face value—a band isn't objectively bad, and accidentally sleeping in and missing work  
38  
39 is not a terrible offense—neither is "you're Japanese". As true as the statement may be, its  
40  
41 implication that Dave can be nothing else is logically, even genetically, false. Instead, all these  
42  
43 actions pick on someone in order to make a point. Conflict is not avoided at all cost, but rather  
44  
45 indexed or pointed to in order to dance around it. In this way, a particular moral order is locally  
46  
47 maintained.  
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### 53 54 55 **Building Up**

56  
57 This paper described how a practice of *tearing down*—a form of jocular mockery that rides the  
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1  
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3 line of serious and non-serious—accomplishes *ingrouping*: the construction of a group's identity  
4 based on its members' categorical adherence to masculine norms. Three discursive tearing down  
5 strategies were described: (1) nonliteral descriptions and ascriptions designed to question target's  
6 activities, preferences, abilities, and so forth; (2) fact-based stories about people's flaws; and (3)  
7 exaggerated performances challenging unacceptable identities. In these ways, the group  
8 produced a shared norm of homogeneity by exorcising potentially-divergent values around  
9 masculinity based on stances toward particular topics. Groups need not be identical to identify,  
10 but sufficiently similar (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Here, the mockery has a basis in revealing, and  
11 disassembling, differences of opinion or identity performance. Mockery does affiliation (Haugh,  
12 2010), but there is a more dis-affiliative edge to it: it reveals, and disassembles, differences of  
13 opinion or identity performance.  
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29 The differences themselves are treated as real: some members do not share the same  
30 musical tastes, some members do have different financial and work situations, some members  
31 have different ethnicities and masculinities, some members more or less conform to ideal body  
32 types and displays of manliness, and no one avoids commenting on these in their talk. The goal  
33 is not to hide these things but to diffuse their potential impact, as teasing often does (Drew,  
34 1987). The mockery is a practice that might be about anything, from the trivial to the  
35 consequential, but here it is a ritual that exorcises the threat of being too different. Goodwin  
36 (2002) shows how adolescent girl peer groups do opposition to push unrati ed members to the  
37 fringes or outside of the group, and use more indirect strategies to sanction the behavior of  
38 ingroup members. The latter is similar to what occurs in the data examined here, but in these data  
39 the activity never seems to cross far enough into seriousness to constitute a punishment or  
40 degradation ritual, serving instead more as a warning or reminder to people about what their  
41 roles should be.  
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3 Within the interactions and in interviews with members, no single metadiscursive term  
4 emerged to capture this practice, which is why I use *mockery* from Haugh (2010) and *teasing*  
5 from Drew (1987) generically, and borrow Sacks' (1992) phrase *tearing down*; however, several  
6 recognizable American phrases came up which have similar or equivalent meanings, including  
7 the following: talking shit (or shit-talking), giving [name] shit, picking on [name], and being a  
8 dick. The practice was described as being non-serious, as aiming to get a laugh, and as making  
9 fun of someone or pointing out their flaws. It was described as something "everyone does to  
10 everyone," and as something that one person should not do too much of to a specific other person  
11 (especially if that other person was regarded as someone with a 'temper'). Even in their attempts  
12 to explain this practice, members never treated it fully seriously—even if they acknowledged that  
13 "but [name] is really like that" or "but everyone actually does hate [band]," they insisted it  
14 "didn't really matter" and that "no one really cares," thus maintaining as much as possible the  
15 non-serious frame even outside of the potentially-troubling circumstances in which these events  
16 occurred.

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36 These results have shown some ways in which groups such as this might be formulated  
37 and brought into being through talk. A core and enduring interest in discursive psychology is  
38 how purportedly-mental matters, such as opinions and attitudes, are produced as interactional  
39 practices (Tileagă & Stokoe, 2015). This paper explores how group members' masculinized  
40 preferences and identities are social activities, and thus also contribute to how a key issue in  
41 social psychology: how ingrouping is accomplished in everyday life. Policing the extent to which  
42 members take their place in the syntax of a certain activity (and collections of activities over  
43 time) is a way of drawing the boundaries of a group and letting people know when they are  
44 stepping to close to (or even out of) those boundaries.

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28 covered, for example, political disagreements, gift-exchange dilemmas, and responses to racist  
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