

Inviting collaborations in stories about a woman

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ABSTRACT

Stories provide rich environments for understanding how invitations to action, and responses to them, are delicately managed and consequential for shaping just how “the story” evolves as a form of social organization. The present analysis focuses on SEVENTEEN INVITED COLLABORATIONS, as “Two guys” co-author gossip about an absent woman, and on the distinct interactional dilemmas that arise as morally indignant references are occasioned, initially avoided, and yet gradually pursued as resources for escalating affiliation and intimacy. At noticeably risky moments, as the story gets reconfigured – from a reporting about “last night,” to sexualized fantasy enacted through stereotypic portrayals of uneducated Southern males – speakers’ intoned and animated VOICES are revealed as methodically deployed, prosodically constructed, and increasingly choral practices for shaping story trajectories: artfully crafted resources for contextualizing and negotiating concerted actions in ordinary conversation. The analysis concludes by addressing the question: Are these gossiping actions “sexist”? (Storytelling, gossip, morality, invitation sequences, prosody, conversation analysis, vernacular performances, sexism)*

Ordinary stories are complex speech events, organized over time through an array of concerted actions between storytellers and story recipients. The interactional materials examined here are drawn from an extended portion of a single story’s construction co-authored by “Two guys.”¹ The story begins with W reporting, *I went out with Melissa last night* – a mutual acquaintance, an absent woman who is the central character of the story.² In response to W’s description of Melissa’s concern with changing her dress, T makes reference to *cleavage* as the first of several sexual assessments offered about Melissa’s body and appearance. As this story gets reconfigured from *last night* toward a collaboratively produced sexual fantasy involving Melissa, the analysis focuses on how W and T work together, yet apart, when pursuing and avoiding story trajectories. Two systematically employed resources figure prominently in this story transformation: (a) INVITATION SEQUENCES, enacted through (b) PROSODICALLY VOICED ACHIEVEMENTS.

The emergence of this conversation will be shown to be a consequence of how W and T coordinate their relationship by repeatedly inviting and responding to each other's actions (Davidson 1984, Drew 1984, Bergmann 1987, Sacks 1992, Beach 1996). Talk about Melissa unfolds across four contiguous story environments: (i) reporting and invoking knowledge about her; (ii) offering descriptions of her demeanor and body; (iii) soliciting commiseration for troubles she is reported to have caused; and (iv) characterizing and visually inspecting her from the perspectives of "Southern redneck stereotypes." In this process, just what "the story" eventually amounts to is the product of SEVENTEEN INVITATION SEQUENCES comprised of initiations, extensions, acceptances, and at times rejections of one or the other speaker's invitations.

These invitation sequences will be shown to be the vehicles by which W and T repeatedly strive to influence and maintain control of what the story will be about, and the paths it will follow, across alternative and sometimes competing courses of practical action. Indeed, "gossiping" may promote distinct interactional dilemmas: Whose story will be told, and in what ways? And how do gossip partners delicately manage the "morally contaminated character" (Bergmann 1993:99) of treating Melissa in mocking fashion and as a sexually envisioned object? The issue of relational "intimacy" is particularly germane for gossip partners: Although the mutually private disclosure of indiscreet information implies a "high degree of intimacy" (Bergmann 1993:153), contingent actions, such as T's persistent attempts to drive the story toward increasingly sexual and thus intimate talk, are not without their problems.³ It will become clear that T INVITES W's involvement in the sexual domains he is proposing – just as T's actions are treated by W, especially at the outset of the story, as improprieties or breaches of acceptable conduct. Gradually, however, W contributes in producing sexual characterizations that he clearly avoided earlier in the interaction. This evolution, from a teller's reconstruction of an event to gossiping together, will be shown to approximate an EXPANDED AFFILIATIVE SEQUENCE in which "a regularly occurring progression is: DISATTENTION followed by APPRECIATION followed by AFFILIATION" (Jefferson et al. 1987:159, 163). Such affiliation was clearly not planned, but it occurs despite W's acting as though he is the *big bro* that Melissa reportedly would like him to become (see line 20), implying a brother-sister relationship wherein W would understandably NOT appreciate the sexual orientations toward Melissa that T is eager to pursue.

Second, the successive invitation sequences are not simply embedded within, but actually enacted through, moments where W and T rely upon various intonations, personifications, and even crudely constructed VOICES as central resources for inviting collaboration. The "Two guys" data are particularly heuristic for advancing understanding of how speakers INVITE AND PURSUE AFFILIATION AT DELICATE OR RISKY MOMENTS – key junctures wherein what they are proposing ventures into potentially controversial territory. During such moments, numerous

prosodically marked and animated voices, of THOUGHTS as well as BEHAVIORS, will be revealed as W and T design their talk to ensure both attention and affiliation from each other.

One particular aspect of storytelling, evident in “Two guys,” is how a story may come to be told by teller and recipient together, in and through reenactments of voices employed to characterize events involving Melissa. Attention is thus drawn to “concerted actions,” in conversational storytelling, through exemplars of VERNACULAR CHORAL PERFORMANCES.⁴ Of special relevance to the “Two guys” data are longstanding concerns with story moments wherein voiced, paralinguistically marked actions are hearably deployed as resources for contextualizing utterances in the midst of stories about removed (i.e. past or future) events and activities (cf. Voloshinov 1971, Labov 1972, Goffman 1974, 1981, Bakhtin 1981, Gumperz 1982, Coulmas 1986, Bergmann 1987, Tannen 1989, C. Goodwin 1990, Holt 1996). When speakers are reporting on their own and others’ talk, behaviors, and/or circumstances, voiced dramatizations and even embellishments have been evidenced as actions seeking to objectify and justify speaker’s enactments (M. Goodwin 1990a,b, Hill & Irvine 1992, Holt 1996).⁵ Thus reportings are not simply informational but inherently EVALUATIVE: As speakers reveal alignment toward characters or scenes being depicted, voiced constructions allow tellers to emerge as essentially faultless “heroes/heroines,” while those being reported on are, not surprisingly, made out to be wrongdoers (Bergmann 1987, Sacks 1992).

Freese & Maynard 1998 have examined PROSODY as an interactional resource for contextualizing the valence of good or bad news – sequentially organized activities strongly associated with emotional displays of joy and sorrow (cf. Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 1996a,b).⁶ These findings make clear how matters of “affective significance” are methodical and precisely voiced achievements in interaction, “prosodic devices [that] are highly multifunctional and achieve their significance through an interaction with lexical, sequential, and situational information” (199). Of course, such insights extend well beyond news deliveries to all occasions of social interaction; and they are adapted here to moments where the telling and receiving of stories are revealed as frequent and choral activities in everyday life. Through a multiplicity of intoned and animated voices, apparent in the data, actions such as inviting and confirming specialized knowledge about (and evaluations of) a non-present woman add prosodic life to surrounding syntactic and lexical features, transforming otherwise drab characters and scenes into envisioned possibilities of special, here-and-now significance.

THE STORY AND ITS VOICES

The story excerpt below is the initial one minute and three seconds of a fifteen-minute videotape from the San Diego Conversation Library (SDCL).⁷

- (1) SDCL: Two guys, 1–56
- 1 W: °So a.nywa(y).° ((00:00))
 2 (0.3)
- 3 T: °So an:ywa:y.°
 4 (0.8)
- 5 W: >I went out with Meli:ssa las(t) ni:ght.<=
 6 T: =↑T'uh hu:[: h ?]
 7 W: [We: we]nt to: u:h.(0.2) >In n' Out?<
 8 T: Uh huh,
 9 W: pt .hhh An(d) uh >she's all like<
 10 ↑I'm uncomfortable in my dre:ss:
 11 le'me go ho:me and \$cha:[: n g : e]\$!!!
 12 T: [Uh HAH HAH]
 13 HAH ↓HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH\$!!!
 14 .ehh(gh)?=Too: much cle:av [a g e ?] ((00:15))
 15 W: \$[Y:(h)es.]\$=
 16 = \$hu: [: (mph) \$]
 17 T: [Mm: ?mm:] =
- 18 W: = .hhh So anyways she goes hom:e an' sh– I– I d– drive her over.
 19 .hhh An' she cha:nges: >and she's like,
 20 ↑I want you to meet Moo:kie I wan:t him to be my big bro:.
 21 ↓All this other< (.) cra:p.=
 22 T: =>Uh who was she– sayin this to: ?<=
 23 W: =Y'al– all her do:rm– buddies y[a know.]=
 24 T: [Uh huh.]=
 25 W: =>An' it w(a)s like< ↓<o:h Go::d.>\$phh. .h(g)hh\$=
 26 T: =O:h n[o: : :]
 27 W: [Y e:]s:. \$hh'Anywa:ys\$.hhh u:h, ((00:30))
 28 I'm like (.) to:t(a)l'y– fa:llin' asleep
 29 in her room cuz she's takin forever cha:ngin.
 30 >And she comes back like,< ↑How do I lo:ok.: =
 31 =↓I'm like <o:h no: !>
 32 \$Like .hh\$ let's not– \$(h)et's not start this off
 33 on the wr(h)o:ng foo:t, =ya know?\$
 34 .hhh(sf) (.) So anyw[a:ys.]
- 35 T: >[I do]n't think she's that good loo:king do you?<=
 36 W: =°Hm um.° (hh)
 37 (0.2)
- 38 T: >Sh:e'(s) got a nice litt:le– bo:dy< ((SD))
 39 ↓[but that's ab]out it.° = ((SD))
- 40 W: [Mm: h:m.] =
 41 W: =pt>(We–) an' she got cute little br[easts.]< ((SD)) ((00:45))
 42 T: >[\$[Hu–.hh] h
 43 I AIN'T GO'N– KI:LL 'ER!\$< ((SD))
- 44 He(g)h::[: =↑heh heh heh heh heh ↓hah hah hah hah hah]
 45 W: [(D)a:mn ri::ght. \$p(h)mph\$ ↓ If the opportu– the] ((SD))
 46 opportu:nity did ar:i:se, but = ((SD))
- 47 T: =U:h:=m: ? [(h)m::,]
 48 W: = [nothin] e:lse? did. = ((SD))
- 49 T: =Ha ha ↑ HA::H \$But nothing else ro[se.]\$=
 50 W: [.hh]
 51 W: = [Heh ha:h ha:h ha– ha– (eghk egkh egkh egkh)
 52 T: = [>Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha .ih:gh::!<
 53 (.)O::[gh– o::h, b:]a:d.=
- 54 W: [O::hh my \$Go::d.]\$ ((01:00))
 55 W: =But anyways, \$s–huh huh,\$ >.hh So anyways we go to In n'
 56 Out ((continues))

As regards the way that VOICES are captured in transcription, normal transcribing conventions are employed here to capture such paralinguistic features as marked emphasis (underlines>, stretches (colons), intonation (question marks, commas, and periods), and pitch resets (arrows). In contrast, the feature “Southern Drawl” (*SD*) is entered as “scenic detail” through double parentheses in lines 38–48. In these moments, both T’s and W’s voices reflect a hearable “regional accent/dialect,” contrasting significantly with surrounding talk. Although analysis of the work achieved by such accents is raised below, I decided to register such accents as an aid to readers’ understanding.⁸ The sonorous enactment by T and W of these voices is one of several key moments examined within this story; but we begin at the beginning – how W enters into his story and begins to tell it to T.

Analysis will proceed by segmenting the story into four discernible involvements, in which INVITING COLLABORATIONS are apparent and embedded within and across the following actions: (a) invoking shared knowledge; (b) mocking, laughing, and crude humor; (c) continued mocking and pursuit of commiseration; and (d) choral performance of Southern redneck stereotypes.

INVOKING SHARED KNOWLEDGE

From story inception to completion, unique and shared knowledge may be utilized as a resource by both tellers and recipients in jointly shaping the course that a story-in-progress takes. This is the case in ex. 2, as W initiates a story by reporting about *las(t) ni:ght*.

- (2) SDCL: Two guys, 5–8
 5 1→W: >I went out with Meli:ssa last ni:ght.<=
 6 2→T: = ↑T’uh hu:[: h ?]
 7 3→W: [We: we]nt to: u:h, (0.2) >In n’ Out?<
 8 4→T: Uh huh,

W reports *I went out* in 1→, then references a first name with no further identification (see Sacks & Schegloff 1979, Bergmann 1987), and intonationally marks a vowel through emphasis and stretch; he thus treats T as an informed and knowing recipient expected to recognize *Meli:ssa* (C. Goodwin 1984). A notable feature of this story entry device (Jefferson 1978) is that W’s reporting about a non-present woman leaves suspended the matter of just what T is to do with it; speakers routinely withhold stating the upshot of their reportings, leaving for recipients the tasks of “determin[ing] the consequences of a report for some proposed or projected arrangement” (Drew 1984:131). Rather than articulating details about the nature of his relationship with Melissa, W only hints at them, and he also leaves ambiguous just what activities *las(t) ni:ght* might have entailed.

Although such actions fail to make explicit both the kind of reporting that W is making a bid to tell about, and the way T might proceed as responsive to W’s story preface, it is clear that W’s 1→ is of particular consequence as this story emerges. First, the intonation employed by W provides some indication of the story-worthiness of Melissa for T – and thus of what T might be expected to remember.

Second, though less clearly discerned, W appears to solicit T to affiliate with a storytelling that W has only initiated and “unofficially” proposed (Drew 1984); W thereby INVITES T to participate as a knowledgeable “consociate” teller (Lerner 1992). Numerous opportunities are thus made available for T to respond to, share, change, rearrange, and ultimately influence the unfolding content and structure of W’s entitlement to HIS experiences with Melissa (Sacks 1992).

This is evident in 2→, where, without hesitation, T’s $\uparrow T'uh hu::h?$ accepts W’s invitation for involvement. However, T’s utterance is not a typical *Uh huh* acknowledgment token functioning only as a CONTINUER (Schegloff 1982, C. Goodwin 1986). It is not simply a recognition that W’s 1→ is part of an extended series of turns to which T is attentive, but for which he neglects the opportunity to repair or comment. With hearable intensity, T relies instead on a voice resonant with, but also extending, W’s prior *Meli:ssa* reference. Through intonational shift, the token *uh huh* is compounded by a turn-initial *T'*, with continued intonational contour, emphasis, and stretch. In this manner, although T’s $\uparrow T'uh hu::h?$ strongly encourages W to proceed with his proposed story in 1→, it projects considerably more than a “go ahead” for W’s continuation. First, it ASSESSES W’s 1→ as having some special significance – import with which T identifies, and about which he claims implicit knowledge (Pomerantz 1984, C. Goodwin 1986).⁹ Second, it INVITES W to attend to the kind of analysis that T is making of unstated but apparently known and special matters about Melissa – a response which extends T’s role from passive hearer to more active coparticipant in the opening few moments of this story.

The schematic below summarizes the active and situated character of the FIRST AND SECOND INVITED COLLABORATIONS examined thus far in ex. 2:

- 5 1→ W: Story preface & invitation
 6 2→ T: Acceptance & confirmation
 Extension & invitation

As T responds to W’s story preface and intonationally marked invitation in 1→, he accepts (yet also seeks) to extend the story through a similarly voiced invitation. In these ways voiced invitations, and responses to them, can be understood as embedded actions consequential for coordinating teller–recipient status: which topics are raised and pursued, and by whom, and at what junctures in the emerging story. This initial pair of utterances offers a glimpse of how stories pursued by tellers may themselves be redirected through recipients’ queries and related actions. As a consequence of W’s own reporting, T aligns with the telling; but he also attempts to drive and thereby alter just how the story might emerge, or what it is eventually “about” (Mandelbaum 1989).

Teller rejects recipient’s invitation

Clearly, a delicate balance exists between W’s inviting T to attend to his reporting, and, in turn, his being attentive to T’s next-positioned and displayed inter-

ests. As the story continues, W is now faced with the question of how to respond to the assessment and invitation projected by T's $\uparrow T'uh hu::h?$

- (3) SDCL: Two guys, 7–8
 7 3→ W: [We: we]nt to:'u:h, (0.2) >In n' Out?<
 8 4→ T: Uh huh,

In 3→, W responds by reporting a visit to “In n' Out” (a fast-food hamburger chain), soliciting with inflection T's local knowledge about a restaurant. Notice, however, that W disattends by NOT invoking and inviting T's shared knowledge, or further contributions regarding Melissa. Rather, W's story continuation claims entitlement to experiences that only he can reveal; this allows W to maintain control of just where the story will proceed, IN LIEU OF pursuing a trajectory of involvement just nominated by T's $\uparrow T'uh hu::h?$ in 2→. Having left his initial reporting ambiguous in 1→, W is now in a position in 3→ to monitor and possibly to reject T's contributions in 2→. Unofficially, as Drew 1984 has suggested, reportings like W's 1→ can be designed not only as a resource for influencing recipient's coparticipation, but also for avoiding or mitigating rejection (cf. Davidson 1984, Maynard 1989). At the outset of “Two guys,” the nature of W's reporting retains various options for dealing with T's next response – for example, if what W has reported somehow conflicts with recipient's knowledge, understanding, and/or special interests in a proposed relationship such as W's and Melissa's.

A schematic of actions from ex., involving the THIRD INVITED COLLABORATION, is:

- 7 3→ W: Rejection
 Story continuation & invitation
 8 4→ T: Acknowledgment & withholding of elaboration

This reveals how W essentially REJECTS the opportunities created by T's prior invitation to talk more directly and immediately about Melissa, but ACCEPTS T's encouragement to move the story forward. This action solicits T's alignment AS RECIPIENT to the telling as W now constructs it – a path which T's non-elaborated *Uh huh* (4→) receipts, with acknowledgment but without further elaboration.

As interactions comprising the outset of this story reveal, both W and T share knowledge about Melissa, as they also seek to regulate and shape story trajectories. That such moments neither stand alone nor lack interactional predicaments will become evident as this analysis proceeds; actions inviting story involvement, and those attempting to co-author story trajectories, are recurrently problematic as the story about Melissa progresses. Indeed, with W and T, a tenuous relationship will be shown to develop: A teller invites recipient's involvement, but simultaneously displays unwillingness to relinquish control of the story-in-progress. In the ways that W and T essentially compete for topics, asynchronous orientations to the events of *last night*, with Melissa as the central character, gradually emerge.

MOCKING, LAUGHING, AND CRUDE HUMOR

In 1→ below, W's *she's all like* previews a characterization of Melissa's demeanor:

- (4) SDCL: Two guys, 5–17
 5 W: >I went out with Melj:ssa las(t) ni:ght.<=
 6 T: =↑T'uh hu:[: h ?]
 7 W: [We: we]nt to:'u:h.(0.2) >In n' Out?<
 8 T: Uh huh,
 9 1→ W: pt.hhh An(d) uh >she's all like<
 10 ↑ I'm uncomfortable in my dre:ss:
 11 le'me go ho:me and \$cha:[: n g : e]\$!!!
 12 2→ T: [Uh HAH HAH]
 13 HAH ↓HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH\$!!!
 14 .ehh(gh)?=Too: much cle:av [a g e ?] ((00:15))
 15 3→ W: \$[Y:(h)es.]\$=
 16 =\$hu: [: (mph) \$]
 17 4→ T: [Mm:?mm:]=

In uttering *she's all like*, rather than *she said*, for example, W does not preface Melissa's exact words, but does convey a particular sense of the speech situation on which he is REPORTING (Coulmas 1986, Holt 1996). By clearly attributing the locution to Melissa, W exceeds a mere reporting with ↑*I'm uncomfortable in my dre:ss: le'me go ho:me and \$cha::ng:e\$!!!* This intonationally marked and falsetto version is hearably mocking of Melissa's concerns with her clothes, and need to change them¹⁰ – not a complimentary action, but instead offering up Melissa as the “butt” of the story (Mandelbaum 1989).

Although it is not possible to determine with full certainty that W is embellishing, it can be observed that W's final *\$cha::ng:e\$!!!* is marked with laughter: Rather than a direct reconstruction of Melissa's laughing behavior (M. Goodwin 1990, Ch.9), this chuckle-like action is built in real time by W, specifically for T's hearing, as an INVITATION for shared laughter (Jefferson 1979, 1984b, 1985, 1988, Jefferson et al. 1987, Glenn 1989). Here T's ACCEPTANCE to laugh (2→) occurs immediately, in overlap, as an upshot of his closely monitoring of the unfolding character of W's personification of Melissa's way of talking (and concerns with her dress) as inherently laughable. Notice also that T's 2→ is not just prolonged but also resounding in its extreme loudness – creating a momentary suspension of W's telling by offering a contribution on its own merits. Three consequential features of 2→ are evident.

First, in accepting W's invitation to laugh, T displays a recognition of W's reported predicament, and thereby affirms W's prior mocking personifications as legitimately derisive.

Second, the hearably overbuilt character of T's laughter is itself projective (Streeck 1994), moving the talk forward as an “accessory activity, performed as a way to arrive at some specifiable outcome” (Jefferson et al. 1987:165). An outcome of special significance for T is Melissa's *cle:avage?* (line 14):

- (5) SDCL: Two guys, 12–17
- | | | | | |
|----|-------|--|----------------------|-----------|
| 12 | 2→ T: | | [\$Uh HAH HAH] | |
| 13 | | HAH ↓HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAHS!!! | | |
| 14 | | .ehh(gh)?=Too: <u>much cle:av</u> [a g e ?] | | ((00:15)) |
| 15 | 3→ W: | | [\$Y:(h)es.]\$= | |
| 16 | | = <u>\$hu:</u> [: (mph) \$] | | |
| 17 | 4→ T: | | [Mm:? <u>mm:</u> .]= | |

The emphasis and stretch evident in *cle:av* is voiced through a coarse and even vulgar intonation. However odd such an utterance may appear upon initial inspection of this interactional environment, it is actually typical of gossip activities where the “MORALLY INDIGNANT, TO THE POINT OF MALICIOUS inflection running throughout gossip is one of its characteristics” (Bergmann 1993:100). It is not possible to determine from what perspective W’s prosodically marked assessment is being offered: Is he simultaneously envisioning what Melissa’s dress may have been revealing as he utters *Too: much cle:avage?*, querying what W saw when he was with Melissa? Is he offering an interpretation of how Melissa regarded the way she was dressed? Nevertheless, it is clear that he is being sexually suggestive and thus driving the story toward sexual considerations. In this specific sense, he participates now not just as a story recipient but, more fully, as a “gossip producer”:

Gossip producers indicate early on, through evaluative accentuation and the choice of appropriate descriptive terms, how they want their story interpreted. Should the recipient agree with this evaluative commentary, such a mass of speculative and foolish remarks arises that an outside observer could easily get the impression that the information served the gossipers only – as a pretext for idle speculation, mischief, and mutual moral indignation. (Bergmann 1993:100)

Finally, a third consequential feature of 2→ is that T not only accepts but EXTENDS W’S INVITATION WITH AN INVITATION OF HIS OWN. As with ex. 2 above, though here immediately following affiliation through marked laughter, T once again raises a delicate topic (and pursues W’s collaboration, as addressed below) as a voiced achievement.¹¹ In this moment, however, *cle:avage?* is considerably more explicit, “a precipitously initiated escalation . . . designed for two parties familiar with the phenomenon” (Jefferson et al. 1987:187). With upward intonation, T invokes W’s shared knowledge not just as a re-performance (Jarmon 1996) of W’s 1→, but as a thematic and incremental shift in FOOTING (Goffman 1981): from W’s reconstruction about Melissa’s clothing, and toward her body parts (*cle:avage?*). In essence, T works to “sexualize” the story by providing a sexually relevant analysis of a potentially non-sexual issue (i.e. Melissa’s reason for changing her dress).

Through 1→ and 2→ in exs. 4–5, the FOURTH AND FIFTH INVITED COLLABORATIONS are occasioned and thus apparent as this story unfolds:

- 1→ W: Mocking personification
 Invitation to laugh/align
 2→ T: Overbuilt laugh acceptance/affiliation
 More explicit & sexual evaluation/escalation & invitation

Responding to laughter and sexual commentary

W is now once more a recipient of T's invited reference to Melissa, dealing here with *cle:avage?* in 2→, an offering remaining on topic but only crudely so en route to driving W's story toward increasingly sexual matters. In 3→, W overlaps with *\$Y:(h)es.\$*:

- (6) SDCL: Two guys, 14–17
 14 .ehh(gh)?=Too: much cle:av [a g e ?] ((00:15))
 15 3→ W: \$Y:(h)es. \$=
 16 =\$hu: [: (mph) \$]
 17 4→ T: [Mm?:mm:]=

This lexical reference is uttered at precisely the moment when W recognizes the upshot of T's post-laughter contribution. Although W does not claim the fullest possible alignment to the sexual commentary offered by T, neither does he reject T's prior invitation to laugh; rather, he joins in as vulgar co-participant, "demonstrating an understanding of the impropriety itself . . . By producing such an object, recipient thus becomes implicated in the sort of mentality which produces such talk; i.e. affiliates to the impropriety" (Jefferson et al. 1987:168). It is also a striking feature of line 15 that W's *\$Y:(h)es.\$* is a choral enactment which briefly affirms T's prior and crude reference; that is, the coarseness initially displayed by T in line 14 is prosodically echoed by W's resonant response to it. That this juncture of the story begins to reveal choral "turn sharing" (Lerner 1996) is apparent as well: The speakers both design their overlapped actions in voiced synchrony with the other, as properly simultaneous and informal manifestations of co-constructed intimacy. Though these finely coordinated displays are fleeting at this point in the story, such collaborations escalate as the story continues.

Immediately next, however, W's *\$hu::(mph)\$* (line 16) is a tepidly humorous and de-escalating acknowledgment, especially when contrasted with both T's boisterous laughter preceding it and W's own *\$Y:(h)es.\$* alliance. In so uttering, W transitions BACK to his story and AWAY from T's explicit offering – a move now designed as rejection to further affective collaboration with T (Jefferson 1979). In this way, W works to stop T's continuation dead in its tracks; he thus retains a tellership put-on-hold as W momentarily, as recipient, gives in to T's incremental contributions. As W attempts to shift the story focus with *\$hu::(mph)\$*, in contradiction with T's overlapped *Mm?:mm:* (4→), the tenuous relationship between teller and recipient status is once again recognizable.

In the very midst of W's pursuit of story, then, T augments *cle:avage?*, and is responsive to W's *\$Y:(h)es.\$*, by recruiting yet another prosodically constructed device: With *Mm?:mm:*, T verbalizes distinct appetizing qualities by animating a voice which dramatizes T enjoying looking at, mouthing, and/or relishing the

taste of something delicious and edible. (In contrast, see lines 40 and 47, addressed below.) Since the unquestionable focus is his appreciation for Melissa's *cle:avage?*, T once again extends his pursuit of affiliation by shifting from crude invocation of body parts to personifying visual/oral contact with them. It's clear that, by inviting W's further participation in this way, T is not simply acknowledging and passively encouraging W's collaboration. The proposed alternative is an attempt literally to add flavor to a sexual project T has now exposed, an involvement which W does not fully disattend (in contrast with ex. 2, above), but with which he displays minimal alignment.

Through the actions only summarized below, the SIXTH AND SEVENTH INVITED COLLABORATIONS, with the environments in which they emerged, can be observed:

- 3→ W: Acceptance via echoed confirmation/invitation
De-escalation/shift back to story
4→ T: Animated visualization/escalation & invitation

To summarize, it is important to emphasize that, in 3→, W briefly claims alignment with the initial offering by T of an explicit solicitation to collaborate as an ally in pursuing sexual topics. This jointly produced and noticeable shift, through attribution and confirmation of Melissa's *cle:avage?* as enticing, marks the onset of an expanded framework and "language game" (Wittgenstein 1958, Levinson 1979, C. Goodwin 1984; M. Goodwin 1990, Chaps. 9–10). Within this participation framework, teller–recipient distinctions increasingly blur: W and T momentarily construct sexual sarcasm together as a co-authored resource for organizing story-in-progress. And through choral turn-sharing, Melissa also emerges as sexually appealing in physical appearance, an activity resonant with (but not duplicative of) being reported by W as being unnecessarily concerned with changing her clothes. It is now clear that these interwoven plot-lines are enacted through a series of voiced achievements, triggered initially by W's animated voice and giving rise to T's coarse response and W's echoing of it in 3→. While W attempts to de-escalate and move back to story with *\$hu::(mph)\$* (line 16), T's flavorful *Mm?:mm:* in 4→ simultaneously provides a further invitation for W's involvement.

CONTINUED MOCKING AND PURSUIT OF COMMISERATION

The story resumes with W's *So anyway*, a recurrent transition device by W (see lines 1, 18, 27, 34, 55). As an upshot of W's prior *\$hu::(mph)\$* (line 16), rejecting T's extension and invitation in line 17, W moves quickly to provide a second and animated preview of Melissa's conduct in 1→ below:

- (7) SDCL: Two Guys, 18–34
18 W: =.hhh So anyways she goes hom:e an' sh– I d– drive her over.
19 1→ .hhh An' she cha:nges: >and she's like,
20 †I want you to meet Moo::kie I wan:t him to be my big bro:.

has distinguishable features. First, it is prefaced by $\text{>An'it } w(a)s \text{ like}<$, where W moves to report not what he said in the midst of Melissa's excitement, but rather his here-and-now version of THEN-AND-THERE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS. Second, W's dramatized $\text{o::h } \underline{Go::}d$ is hearable as a means of swearing to emphasize his intense reaction.¹³ Third, W's guttural $\text{\$phh. } h(g)hh\text{\$}$ displays that he is now able to reflect on the humorous features of the trouble; he is able to take this trouble lightly, and to show himself as TROUBLES-RESISTANT (Jefferson 1984b) in managing the problem. Although such laughter in the midst of speaker's utterance is a common feature of trouble-reportings, it was noticeably absent in W's initial reporting (1→). Yet laughter is employed at this moment as a resource – conjoined with an apparent display of being somewhat disgusted with the very thought of this past event – to re-solicit what has obviously been treated by W as T's withheld commiseration. In 3→, line 26, T does not share W's laughter; but he clearly offers the reassurance and commiseration that W was pursuing, with his prior $\text{O:h } \underline{no::}$, a commonly provided serious response that displays recipient's receptivity to the trouble-as-reported (Jefferson 1984b).

Over the course of ex. 7, W's and T's voices again converge, but now to produce chords of a different timbre, namely of a troubles-reporting and sharing by W, and subsequent consolation from T. Focus shifts here to W as a central figure whose trying experiences qualify him for the empathy that T initially delays through clarification but eventually provides. These troubled thoughts and feelings are built both lexically and prosodically by W, and in these ways made available to T as vocalized improvisations that allow for teller and recipient momentarily to confirm particular senses of both past and present social experience.

With a hearably agonizing and confirming Ye::s , W next acknowledges T before moving the story forward in 4→. This elaboration again occasions the complainable nature of his telling-thus-far, achieved in part by utilizing formulations such as $\text{to:t(a)l'y- } \underline{fa:llin' } \text{ asleep}$ and $\text{takin forever } \underline{cha:ngin}$ to legitimize the extremity of his predicament (Pomerantz 1986). As W extends the story about Melissa, he actually shifts back in time from the prior few moments (see ex. 7, 1→ through 3→), where Melissa had ALREADY changed, to W's reporting:

- (8) SDCL: Two guys, 27–34
 27 4→ W: [Ye:]s: \\$hh'Anywa:ys\\$.hhh u::h,
 28 I'm like (.) to:t(a)l'y- fa:llin' asleep
 29 in her room cuz she's takin forever cha:ngin.
 30 >And she comes back like,< ↑How do I lo:ok:.=
 31 =↓I'm like<o:h no:!!>
 32 \\$Like .hh\\$ let's not- \\$l(h)et's not start this off ((00:45))
 33 on the wr(h)o::ng foo:t,=ya know?\\$
 34 .hhh(sf) (.) So anyw[a:ys,]

Here W's gripe about Melissa's taking so long to change becomes exacerbated by his delineating the interactional circumstances in two key ways. First, W's version of Melissa's ↑How do I lo:ok: appears designed less for W's opinion and more for his approval – not exactly a reenactment, but similar in character to lines

10–11, where Melissa is in both instances personified as inappropriate and evaluated by W as imposing. Second, notice that what W said in response to Melissa (4→) is not actually reported. In lieu of what W SAID, T is provided with what W THOUGHT via ↓*I'm like* < *o:h no:!*> The ↓*I'm like* is carried over from his previously uttered actions (see line 28), prefacing additional and clearly unspoken prior THOUGHTS which are verbalized here for the first time. In the ways that W exhibits his orientation to Melissa's emergence THEN and NOW, he offers further evidence to T that dealing with the entire evening required an effort on his part. By working to make his present story more interesting – and more aligned with his constructed role, as something like “an uninterested participant barely tolerating Melissa's actions” – he leaves unstated the possibility that he did not actually have those reported thoughts IN REAL PAST TIME, and thus he treats them as inconsequential for the kind of reporting he is attempting to achieve. Moreover, as W's laughter indicates in 4→ (lines 27, 32–33), he reports to T not only another version of his trouble with Melissa, but also, importantly, HIS ONGOING RESISTANCE TO AND CONTROL OF IT (Jefferson 1984b).

As this story emerges, the NINTH AND TENTH INVITED COLLABORATIONS are evident:

- 3→ W: Pursuing/inviting delayed commiseration
 Troubles-resistance
 T: Offering commiseration
 Troubles-receptive
 4→ W: Mocking personification
 Invitation to laugh/align/commiserate

Analysis now turns to the final excerpt. Here, touched off by a problematic assessment of Melissa by T, increasingly affiliative activities emerge, in which W and T collaboratively produce a sexual fantasy about Melissa.

CHORAL PERFORMANCE OF UNEDUCATED SOUTHERN MALE STEREOTYPES

We are now in a position to examine the final portion of the story from ex. 1: a series of voiced actions that propel talk about Melissa into a realm of fantasized interactional possibilities. This segment begins and ends with *anyways*, as W repeatedly resumes teller status. Once again, however, T's involvement as shared gossip producer promotes the emergence of a co-constructed sexual fantasy, replete with new SOUTHERN characters and distinct choral voices enacted by W and T:

- (9) SDCL: Two guys, 34–57
 W: ...
 34 .hhh(sf) (.) So anyw[a:ys,
 35 1→ T: >[I do]n't think she's that good loo:king do you?<=
 36 2→ W: =°Hm um.° (hh)

- 37 (0.2)
- 38 3→ T: >Sh:e'(s) got a nice litt:le- bo:dy< ((“Southern Drawl”/SD))
- 39 ↓°[but that's ab]out it.° = ((SD))
- 40 4→ W: [Mm: h:m:.] =
- 41 = pt >(We-) an' she got cute little br[easts.]< ((SD))
- 42 5→ T: >\${[Hu-.hh] h
- 43 I AIN'T GO'N- KI:LL 'ER ! \$ < ((SD))
- 44 He(g)h::[: = ↑heh heh heh heh heh ↓ hah hah hah hah hah hah]
- 45 6→ W: [(D)a:m n ri::ght. \$p(h)mph\$ ↓If the opportu- the] ((SD))
- 46 opportunity did ar:i:se, but= ((SD)) ((01:00))
- 47 7→ T: =U:h:=m:? [(h)m::.]
- 48 6→ W: =[nothin] e:lse? did. = ((SD))
- 49 7→ T: =Ha ha ↑HA::H \$But nothing else ro[se.]\$ =
- 50 W: [.hh] =
- 51 8→ W: =[Heh ha:h ha:h ha- ha- (eghk egkh egkh)
- 52 T: =>Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha .ih:gh::!<
- 53 9→ (.) O::[gh- o::h, b:ja:d. =
- 54 9→ W: [O::hh my \$Go::d.]\$
- 55 W: = But anyways. \$s-huh huh,\$> .hh So anyways we go to In 'n
- 56 Out ((continues)) ((01:12))

Before W continues, T (1→) offers a markedly different form of serious response than *O:h no::* (line 26), his prior reaction to W's initial trouble-reporting in ex. 7 (3→); he does not provide the shared laughter and/or commiseration W was pursuing. Rather, T offers > *I don't think she's that good loo:king do you,* < = – a blunt negative assessment of Melissa's appearance, inviting W's agreement (Pomerantz 1984, Jefferson, 1984a). Although T and W earlier echoed appreciation for Melissa's “cle:avage” in lines 14–15, T now critiques her “good looks” as a hackneyed image (i.e., “she's got a great body, but isn't good-looking.”) This straightforward assessment is in contrast with the critical evaluations of Melissa thus far provided by W, but it is responsive to W's immediately prior complaint (ex. 7, 4→) about Melissa's concern with her appearance. Furthermore, now that W has topicalized how Melissa “looks,” T's blunt comment also preempts W's incipient resumption of a story – yet another redirection by T, away from W's reporting about the events of *last night*.

However, as is evident in W's softly spoken *°Hm um°* (2→), agreement is at best minimally offered, and it is possibly disaffiliative in the way it is partially withheld. The predicament here – one that is also oriented to by T as potentially troublesome, in his next (0.2) pause (2→) – might be described as follows: Despite W's own criticisms of Melissa, he nevertheless has spent time with, and may be entering a brother-sister relationship with, a woman whom T has just described as not *that good loo:king*.¹⁴ Furthermore, while T has emerged as gossip producer as well as recipient, W treats as inappropriate such a blunt assessment of the central character whom W did “go out with,” and thus initially established entitlement to report about.

At precisely this moment, T (3→) utters > *Sh:e'(s) got a nice litt:le- bo:dy* < ↓°[but that's ab]out it.° =, using a distinctly “Southern Drawl” voice to reenact

his prior reference (i.e., [not] “good looking” → [but] “nice little body”). The utterance produced by T is also fraught with syntax tailored to what an uneducated person might say (e.g., *She:’(s) got*). BUT WHY THAT VOICE AND SYNTAX IN THIS ENVIRONMENT? It appears that T is backtracking from, and compensating for, W’s prior weak agreement; but he is also initiating a new and illusionary trajectory for their talk.

By shifting to a “Southern Drawl” voice, T distances himself from his own blunt and critical assessment. This is one resource for disowning and avoiding ownership by not taking full responsibility for one’s actions (see Beach 1996, Ch.4). Speakers have long been routinely shown to shift “codes” by enacting various features of speech communities of which they are or are not members (cf. Hymes 1974, Gumperz 1975, Rampton 1995, Auer 1998). Thus, examining how Western Apaches alter their language by jokingly imitating “the Whiteman,” Basso (1979:13–14) describes how various imaginary actions comprise “an expository form of social portraiture,” in which jokers

adapt them to their own expressive purposes and the fluctuating requirement of particular social occasions ... Each portrayal of “the Whiteman” is a novel creation, a personally signed original, a fresh depiction of a familiar subject that is at once a product of its creator’s intellect, his mimetic versatility, and the specific interpersonal circumstances that have prompted him to stage an imitation in the first place.

Here T’s “Southern” enactment is occasioned by W’s withholding (and certainly neither affiliative nor ecstatic) response to T’s blunt assessment. In essence, T symbolically invents yet another crude assessment in ex. 9 (3→), but from a character representing a stereotypical regional and social category: “Southern” males who are assigned an uneducated, even prejudicial “attitude, temperament, and demeanor” (Basso 1979:43; see also Kirby 1978, Williamson 1995).¹⁵ In this sense, T is displaying his vernacular understanding about what it SOUNDS like to DO being (Sacks 1984) an uneducated “Southern” man, and what in practical action that amounts to, as they provide crude assessments of women’s physical appearance (e.g. where “nice” is tantamount to “little body” but large *cle:av-age?*). Their treatment of women, which T is role-playing through a gravelly, abrasive voice, devalues females by treating them as visually inspected, physical objects subject to males’ sexual fantasies.

Furthermore, by transitioning away from his blunt assessment, and from the troubling aftershocks that are apparent in W’s response, T proposes a make-believe drama wherein he makes Melissa out to be the “butt” of his personification. Parallels observed by Basso regarding Apaches (1979:42, 76) are once again revealing:

Within this world of counterfeit characters and simulated social encounters, the Apache joker is able to take moral liberties he cannot take outside it

[– characteristics which are] consistently unflattering and downright defamatory ... In short, the world of joking provides moral cover for immoral social acts.

Much as in Bergmann's descriptions of exaggerations, where "gossipers ENJOY playing with taboo modes of expression and turns of phrase that offend good taste" (1993:117), T also INVITES W to collaborate with him in constructing this illusionary world. That he is successful in doing so is evident in 4→, where W's (*We*–) *an' she got a cute little dress* offers immediate agreement and recognition of the "stage" that T's portrayal has set and his own invited role within it. This concerted action by W is brought off through a prosodically echoed and even more distinct drawl, as well as by grammatical repetition (*she got*) of the initial portion of T's just prior utterance. Although W does change focus from T's *bo:dy* to *dress* – a description remaining thematic with his original version of Melissa's dress (see line 10) – *cute little* adds to this emergent spectacle, in which her body is on imagined exhibition (as did *nice* in T's prior turn). By shifting "footing" (Goffman 1981) together through chorally produced "Southern Drawl" voices, it appears that T and W are both making themselves less responsible for the stances they are taking and the experiences being depicted.

Just as T's prior "Southern Drawl" enactment favorably provokes a more expanded and aligned response from W, so in 5→ T's chuckled and loudly produced $\$[Hu-.hh] h IAIN'T GO'N-KI:LL 'ER !\$$ plays off and extends the voice that W enacted. This unrefined, coarse contribution once more illuminates the acted-out figure(s) syntactically (*AIN'T GO'N*), but through a curious semantic formulation: What does not wanting to *ki:ll 'er* have to do with her *nice little body* and *cute little dress*? One can only surmise that characters such as these portrayed by W and T, who obviously give high priority to "nice little bodies," might also have uses for them even when *she's [not] that good loo:king* (ex. 9, 1→). It is in reference to this implication that T's immediate and extended laughter (line 44) appears to be produced – while also inviting W to laugh along as further confirmation that T's reference was understood and appreciated.

In ex. 9 (1–5→), INVITED COLLABORATIONS ELEVEN THROUGH FOURTEEN are apparent:

- 1→ T: Blunt assessment/invitation
- 2→ W: Rejection-implicative response
- 3→ T: "Southern Drawl" (SD) enactment/invitation
- 4→ W: Acceptance/escalated affiliation via SD/invitation
- 5→ T: Acceptance/escalated affiliation via SD
Laughter/invitation

Inviting and confirming a sexual allusion

The implication that women with nice bodies are useful EVEN IF they are not good-looking, followed with considerable laughter by T (5→), is evident and utilized by W (6→) in yet another re-enactment:

- (10) SDCL: Two guys, 42–49
- 42 5→ T: >[Hu-.hh]h
 43 I AIN'T GO'N- KI:LL 'ER!\$ < ((SD))
 44 He(g)h:[: = ↑heh heh heh heh heh ↓hah hah hah hah hah hah]
 45 6→ W: [(D)a:mn ri::ght \$p(h)mph\$ ↓if the opportu- the] ((SD))
 46 opportunity did ar:i:se, but. = ((SD)) ((01:00))
 47 7→ T: =U:h:=m:? [(h)m:.,]
 48 6→ W: =[nothin] e:lse? did. = ((SD))
 49 7→ T: = Ha ha ↑HA::H \$but nothing else ro[se]\$ =

Through overlap, W's (D)a:mn ri::ght offers strong agreement with T. Next, \$p(h)mph\$ not only shares T's laughter but also invites T's involvement by pre-viewing an in-character, lower-intoned voice speaking directly to what he would do if an (implicitly sexual) *opportunity did ar:i:se* with Melissa. In 7→, T produces U:h:=m: (h)m:., an animated visualization similar in intonational shape and contour to T's previously examined Mm:?m:m: in line 17, displaying knowing (perhaps even savory) recognition of what W's *opportunity* referred to, and inviting further elaboration of it. However, W's next play on words, *but nothin e:lse? did*, could not have been anticipated by T. In 7→, as a resource for displaying his understanding of W's intentional pun – the punchline or missing piece of the puzzle to which W's prior and intoned voice referred (Sacks 1978) – T “confirms the allusion” by laughing at and repeating W's “inexplicit conveyence”: Although just what did not *arise* is left unspoken,¹⁶ “It also shows this process itself being overtly recognized and marked by the participants . . . a contingent part of the larger sequence in which it occurs and DOING something in it” (Schegloff 1996:183–84).

As this excerpt draws to a close, the shared, simultaneous laughter produced by W and T (8→) spews out as a chorus affiliating with, and ostensibly admiring, the sexual humor which “opportunity arise/arose” made available:

- (11) SDCL: Two guys, 49–56
- 49 7→ T: = Ha ha ↑HA::H \$ but nothing else ro[se]\$ =
 50 W: [.hh]
 51 8→ W: =[Heh ha:h ha:h ha- ha- (eghk eghk eghk eghk)
 52 T: =[>Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha .ih:gh::!<
 53 9→ (.) O::[gh- o::h, b:]a:d.=
 54 9→ W: [O::hh my \$Go::d.\$]
 55 W: =But anyways. \$s-huh huh,\$ >.hh So anyways we go to In 'n
 56 Out ((continues)) ((01:12))

Just WHAT is laughable here also remains unarticulated, but it is apparently and intersubjectively understood by W and T in reference to the immediately prior allusion. So it is the case that T's O::gh- o::h, b:a:d and W's overlapped O::hh my \$Go::d.\$ independently yet chorally reference their prior actions intensely (see also line 25, note 10). These actions reveal finely grained co-orientations to prior and personified evaluations of what their actions have proposed and amounted to, in two key ways.

First, Heritage 1998 has revealed how *oh* producers may not only display changes in knowledge states about topics being discussed, but also decided shifts in ORIENTATION to what is being attended to and thereby noticed. Having shifted out of the characters they have created, W and T comment on a “breakout excursion” that they have jointly created and briefly resided within – a flurry of collaboratively produced actions exemplifying perspectives of uneducated, distinctly “Southern” male characters.

Second, it appears that W and T mutually recognize their prior “Southern Drawl” actions as to improper conduct-in-interaction, not just by “public” standards but even to themselves as audience of their own deviant actions. As prior moments revealed how W and T increased their vulgarity in unison, the actions in ex. 11 (9→) emerge as quickly delivered modes of verbal sanctioning – verbal “hand-slaps,” as when “a gossip producer interrupts his reprehensible activity and turns back, as it seems, to the path of virtue” (Bergmann 1993:116). Doing this qualifies W and T as culpable speakers holding one another momentarily accountable. By constructing an APPROPRIATE and censorious reaction to INAPPROPRIATE behavior, they retroactively “cleanse” themselves of the breaches they have co-produced (Jefferson et al. 1987:172).¹⁷

A summary of actions in ex. 11 (6–9→), reveals INVITED COLLABORATIONS FIFTEEN THROUGH SEVENTEEN:

- 6→ W: Agreement/inviting intentional pun
- 7→ T: Animated visualization/escalated invitation
Confirming prior allusion/inviting laughter
- 8→ W: Acceptance/extended shared laughter
T: Extended shared laughter
- 9→ T: Collaborative assessment/shift to close activity
W: Collaborative assessment/shift to close activity

While W and T’s collaboration in 9→ is similar to laughing at a tasteless joke or bad pun (Sacks 1978), their nearly simultaneous production reveals how they work together to close prior and constrain further topical elaboration – an orientation clearly displayed as W once again moves back to his story with *But anyways*..

The story continues

The story about Melissa continues for one minute. Although the details extend beyond the present analysis, invited collaborations are repeatedly enacted in ways that should by now be quite familiar to readers: In the initial forty seconds, W reports they didn’t go to “In n’ Out” after all, because Melissa is vegetarian; but he personifies her in mocking fashion and moves next to a “Southern Drawl” voice, announcing that he will then take her on a “tour” of the city. The implication is clearly sexual and inviting of T’s participation, as evidenced by T’s echoing with a crude and escalated reference to “eating meat.” In response, W briefly confirms T’s reference in “SD” before de-escalating by moving to yet another

personification of how “cool” Melissa thinks W is – a reporting for which W seeks commiseration, and which T visually animates in savory fashion.

During the last twenty seconds, an unusual reporting occurs: Before shifting away from talk about Melissa, W constructs himself as an “older brother,” giving Melissa advice about staying away from another man because he is “evil.” She responds by stating that she had “already found out,” and she proceeds (as W tells it) to describe how she was nearly “date raped.” This reporting by W is also designed as invitational, soliciting by disclosure a response of empathy and disgust provided by T. Then T quickly shifts to a telling about “his truck” with which W aligns, now as recipient to experiences that T is uniquely qualified to reveal.

GIVING VOICE TO COLLABORATIVE INVITATIONS IN STORIES

Story and gossip emergence can be understood as a consequence of delicately managed invitation sequences, embedded within and enacted through repeatedly voiced achievements. Invitations to action and responses to them are delicately managed throughout occasions such as “Two guys,” where sexualized references are introduced and pursued as resources for escalating affiliation and attempted intimacy. It is striking that, in slightly more than one minute of storified involvements comprising the W and T interaction examined herein, SEVENTEEN INVITED COLLABORATIONS have been shown to have distinct consequences for shaping just what “the story” evolves into as a form of social organization; NINE of these are initiated by W as original teller, and EIGHT are employed by T as gossip recipient, actively engaged in sexualizing both W’s reportings and Melissa’s body (e.g. as visually inspected and animated). Taken as a whole, these contiguous moments and the voices that contextualize them represent ongoing and nearly simultaneous achievements by BOTH W and T, as each speaker attempts to solicit, redirect, and at times actively avoid the other’s contributions while the story emerges.

By elucidating the interactional organization of such finely grained “gossiping” moments (Bergmann 1987), we can generate important insights about how speakers coordinate solutions for contingent and thus unanticipated repercussions as talk unfolds. “Two guys” makes it clear that pursuing and escalating affiliation are risky activities with practical consequences – moments where a speaker’s own actions precipitate the necessity carefully to monitor and regulate next response, and thus just what “intimacy” might be progressively amounting to. Some brief reminders should suffice. First, from W’s opening and invitational action (line 5), opportunities for T’s involvement are created which gradually shift the story focus well beyond where W is taking it. Second, in response to W’s own mocking personification of Melissa (lines 9–11), T crudely solicits W’s alignment in pursuing sexually intimate talk TOGETHER about Melissa’s “cleavage” (not just about W’s experiences with her *last night*); W’s *Y:(h)es.* echoes this in approval, en route to further escalation. Third, T’s own blunt assessment of Me-

lissa (line 35) introduces one form of “improper talk” with which W disaffiliates. This prompts T (via his “Southern Drawl” voice) to avoid ownership of the very assessment that he had forwarded; by so doing, he successfully invites W’s “doing being” an uneducated Southern male with him.

An inspection of these instances, and others in the data examined, provides ample evidence to suggest that attempts to share ownership and to move talk toward increased intimacy necessitate the coordination of shared knowledge – which, IN ITS COURSE, may prove to be an inherently ambiguous and relational undertaking. To invoke shared knowledge is to invite recipient’s involvements in the pursuit of affiliation; yet the offering of an invitation ensures neither its acceptance nor the ability to ward off unanticipated and even competing story trajectories. Consequently, there are few if any guarantees that a story will emerge in just the fashion proposed by either teller or recipient. Rather, just how intimacy is to be pursued, and how appropriate types of intimacy are to be calibrated – in light of W and T’s own relationship, AND with Melissa as central character – are occasioned actions marked by contingent and recurring bids to pursue and/or avoid particular trajectories and “language games.”

Invitations, then, are voiced practices for pursuing and negotiating collaborative opportunities as stories unfold, especially when “gossip” receives focal attention. Voiced actions are revealed herein as key resources, both to optimize the effectiveness of pursued gossip and to mitigate inherent gossiping problems as W and T co-construct their social relationship: “Participants use prosody as a semiotic resource for converging upon a shared evaluative orientation . . . prosody also serves the reconstitution of parties’ relationships to one another” (Freese & Maynard 1998). By giving voice to invited collaborations, participants orient to “stories” as constantly shifting pathways for sharing (and being restrained from sharing) experiences, not as sterile semantic scripts removed from the interactional environments of which they are an integral part (Beach & Metzger 1997). These involvements are literally brought to life through the enactment of personified thoughts, behaviors, and characters, i.e. UNIQUE SOCIAL IDENTITIES that display their own “voices” (Urban 1984). At risky or delicate moments, W and T employ diverse prosodic resources to shape evolving interaction by ensuring affiliation with the trajectories they pursue – routine devices for inviting and accomplishing an array of social actions that extend well beyond “reported speech,” e.g. invoking and confirming intersubjective knowledge about non-present Melissa, animating Melissa’s voice in mocking fashion, seeking and offering shared laughter, pursuing and offering commiseration, and soliciting collaboration on proposed sexual images or possibilities.

Just as the general movement from Disattention to Appreciation to Affiliation (Jefferson et al. 1987) seems applicable in this single exemplar of an EXPANDED AFFILIATION SEQUENCE, so is it not coincidental that W and T’s voices become progressively more resonant and, eventually, finely coordinated choral performances in their own right. Escalated affiliation is achieved through prosodically

intoned and animated invitations: artfully crafted resources for coordinating inherently COLLABORATIVE streams of articulated thoughts and enacted behaviors. Produced chorally and thus “in concert,” these actions reveal the enactment of what might otherwise be cast into the realm of inaccessible mentalistic processes – as sexual interests, perceptions, thoughts, attitudes, feelings, ideas etc. – that INDIVIDUALS possess (Heritage 1991, Engestrom 1995, Middleton & Engestrom 1997). Instead, they reveal how stories are COMMUNICATIVE phenomena, the organization of which excludes the possibility of acting alone.

ARE THESE GOSSIPING ACTIONS “SEXIST”?

Although “gossip” has historically been associated with caricatures of female communication, the materials examined here reveal that “men hardly take a back seat when it comes to gossip . . . Much points to the fact that men and women do not significantly differ in their actual productivity of gossip” (Bergmann 1993:59, 67). To a proverb asking “Why is gossip like a three-pronged tongue?” the Babylonian Talmud answers: “Because it destroys three persons: him who disseminates it, him who hears it, and him who is its subject” (Bok 1984:94).¹⁸ Clearly it is not news to suggest that both men and women routinely speak about non-present others in exaggerated, derogatory, even “sexual” fashion. But just how similar and different their gossiping actions are remains to be convincingly evidenced, though scholars are beginning to give considerable empirical attention to “gendered” activities as social accomplishments (cf. Crawford 1995, Coates 1996, Johnson & Meinhof 1997, Canary & Dindia 1998, Jones 1999, Hopper 2000). In the present analysis, it should not be overlooked that the “Two guys” data are heuristic not only for the interactional patterns they reveal about invitations and voices, but also for the implications regarding “sexism” that they allow us to address. This discussion ends with a brief consideration of three key issues regarding the query: “Are these gossiping actions sexist?”

First, even a cursory inspection of “Two guys” promotes the strong likelihood that many readers will draw “sexist” conclusions: Both W and T, each in his own subtle way and at times in unison, engage in evaluative actions – repeatedly mocking and depersonalizing Melissa, and eventually making her out to be a visually inspected sexual object. By reconfiguring the stage and ground of this story through play and fantasy (Bateson 1972), W and T can be heard and seen to behave at Melissa’s expense (activities which continue as the story is further elaborated); yet only considerable additional analysis will divulge the precise ways that the findings herein can be generalized to stories co-authored by other men about other women. Thus Hopper 2000 observes how women are frequently personified by men in ways designed to make them “look bad,” at times through vulgar and sexual language. But one must not conclude prematurely that men behave differently from women when talking privately about the opposite sex. Preliminary collections, drawn from systematic and direct observation of natu-

rally occurring interactional materials, reveal that women can be equally crude in their interactional conduct toward non-present men, and even one another; women have no privileged status when it comes to typifying and acting toward members of the same and/or opposite sex (Jefferson 1997).

Second, unequivocal as W and T's "sexist" activities may appear, it is entirely another matter to evidence that – or how, or even whether – THESE STORY PARTICIPANTS treat one another's actions as acceptable, inappropriate, or even sexually perverse. Therein lies an essential distinction worth noting: the critically important distinction between observer-imposed and evaluated social order (e.g., "This interaction is clearly sexist") vs. the analytical demonstration that such order is demonstrably relevant (and thus procedurally consequential) for interactional participants. Interestingly, attributions of sexism can exist despite the fact that W and T need not treat THEMSELVES as wrongdoers, excluding one another as actual members of the cultural subgroups which they only role-play (i.e. uneducated "Southern" males). Although both W and T rely upon sexual references and characterizations as resources for organizing the evolving story, THEY do not necessarily display recognition that such enactments are "sexist." Indeed, they may be the last to know of – or alternatively, to recognizably admit and commit to refrain from – such "improper" actions. A case could be made that, if W and T displayed such orientations, they did so in only fleeting, even token, fashion.¹⁹ Consequently, and central to the prior analysis, it cannot be discounted that it is not such external evaluations to which W and T are orienting in the first (i.e. locally occasioned) instance, but rather the routine problems inherent to telling and receiving stories and co-producing gossip about everyday experiences – e.g. soliciting and maintaining attention and alignment, coming off as faultless evaluators of a non-present woman, negotiating ongoing identities and relationships. Interactionally, then, both W and T might be understood as increasingly PREOCCUPIED with evaluative and sexual matters in the ways their voices, and the actions constructed through them, are tailored to the very circumstances in which they are themselves caught up and implicated (see Sacks 1992, Beach, 1993, 1996, Jefferson 1997).

Finally, it is possible that close analysis of "Two guys" might yield insights about SEXISM AS A PRACTICAL ACTIVITY, tracing the ONTOGENESIS of sexual perversion, in which ordinary social behaviors expose the interactional yet privatized anchoring of "sexism" in the murky, largely unexplored waters of societal (mis)conduct. But "Two guys" does not provide definitive answers to "sexist" problems. Nor do these data dismiss the need to reveal analytically how speakers' actions are occasioned by, and anchored within, ordinary yet finely coordinated achievements in everyday conversation – activities such as invitations for collaboration and responses to them, co-enacted through multiple voices that have consequences for unfolding interaction – through which speakers involve and distance themselves on occasions when potentially delicate or risky topics arise, "sexist" or otherwise. As the story progresses, and as W and T crudely rely on

each other to act “as though” they lack education and refinement, basic questions may indeed arise: Are they actually disclosing their own inability to refrain from these actions? To what extent is there a fine line between “taking on roles” and “being those persons,” where acting like a typified other amounts to practicing at least some of those same behaviors? The distinction is razor-thin, and the resemblance is (for many) dangerously isomorphic.²⁰ Yet the primordial nature of such matters as “crude references” or “sexual fantasy” can be understood only as thoroughly interactional achievements – essential grounding for revealing omnipresent and diverse activities, routinely co-enacted by some speakers but storified as inappropriate and “sexist” by others.

NOTES

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The transcription notation system employed for data segments is an adaptation of Gail Jefferson’s work (see Atkinson & Heritage 1984:ix–xvi; Beach 1989:89–90. The symbols may be described as follows:

:	Colon(s): Extended or stretched sound, syllable, or word.
<u> </u>	Underlining: Vocalic emphasis.
(.)	Micropause: Brief pause of less than (0.2).
(1.2)	Timed pause: Intervals occur within and between same or different speaker’s utterance.
(())	Double parentheses: Scenic details.
()	Single parentheses: Transcriptionist doubt.
.	Period: Falling vocal pitch.
?	Question marks: Rising vocal pitch.
↑ ↓	Arrows: Pitch resets; marked rising and falling shifts in intonation.
◦ ◦	Degree signs: A passage of talk noticeably softer than surrounding talk.
=	Equal signs: Latching of contiguous utterances, with no interval or overlap.
[]	Brackets: Speech overlap.
[[Double brackets: Simultaneous speech orientations to prior turn.
!	Exclamation points: Animated speech tone.
-	Hyphens: Halting, abrupt cut-off of sound or word.
> <	Less than/greater than signs: Portions of an utterance delivered at a pace noticeably quicker (> <) or slower (< >) than surrounding talk.
OKAY	CAPS: Extreme loudness compared with surrounding talk.
hhh	H’s: Audible outbreaths, possibly laughter. The more h’s, the longer the aspiration.
.hhh	Aspirations with periods indicate audible inbreaths. H’s within parentheses mark within-speech aspirations, possible laughter.
ye(hh)s	
pt	Lip smack: Often preceding an inbreath.
hah, heh, hoh	Laugh syllable: Relative closed or open position of laughter.
\$	Smile voice: Laughing/chuckling talk between markers.

¹ It will become clear that the title “Two guys,” though generic, is nevertheless fitting. This video-recording was made by a friend of T and W’s (who was also a member of their fraternity), and with their full knowledge, by setting up a tripod and leaving the room. Melissa’s actual name does not appear to guarantee anonymity; she is a recent pledge in a sorority, and (in line 20) she is reported to have expressed an interest in having W as her *big bro* – a traditional sorority practice. An extended discussion of “single” vs. “aggregate” studies of ordinary conversational activities is available elsewhere (see C. Goodwin 1984, Schegloff 1987, Jefferson et al. 1987, Mandelbaum 1989, Beach 1996).

² Bergmann (1993:49, 52) has observed that, since “A gossips to B about C ... the reciprocal relationship of acquaintance forms the central relational structure of the gossip triad.” Gossiping,

then, comprises a distinct form of social organization within more encompassing “stories” and “narratives” about everyday life activities.

³ As observed by Jefferson et al. (1987:160),

The introduction of “improper talk” may have an interactional basis . . . a display that speaker takes it that the current interaction is one in which he may produce such talk; i.e. is informal/intimate . . . By introducing such talk, a speaker may be initiating a move INTO intimate interaction from a status he perceives as non-intimate so far. Speaker may be offering an INVITATION to his co-participants to produce talk together whereby they can see themselves as intimate; together they will be constructing intimacy. [Last emphasis added.]

⁴These kinds of interactional possibilities represent what M. Goodwin (1990:81) describes as a “dynamic field of action.” Later she writes:

By telling a story a speaker is able to bring alive in the midst of ordinary conversation what is in essence a vernacular theatrical performance; the teller enacts the characters whose exploits are being recounted and, with talk of a different type, sets the scene for those events, provides necessary background information, and comments on their meaning. By incorporating such dramatic and aesthetic elements, stories become a central locus for artistic performance within talk; and folklorists and others interested in verbal art have devoted considerable attention to them. (p. 230).

⁵Thus Holt 1996 has examined a collection of instances where speakers reconstruct “direct reported speech” (DRS) from prior conversations as devices for dramatizing involvement (Labov 1972) and enhancing it (Tannen 1989) throughout the course of telling stories. In the ways that DRS gets invoked – e.g. in syntactic construction and prosodic/intonational markings designed to portray direct reportings of others’ talk – it is also clear that recipients are provided with “evidence” of prior scenes and activities. Such information aids in “lending an air of objectivity to the account” (Holt 1996:242) when, for example, speakers stress the importance of their own or other speakers’ actions in the midst of constructing stances regarding complaints and disagreements – actions which routinely justify the appropriateness of current speaker/tellers’ positions while making others out as (more or less) wrongdoers.

⁶ The enjoyment, eagerness, and excitement associated with good news is produced through faster speech rates, wider pitch ranges and shifts, and in general increased animation (e.g. loudness and liveliness). In contrast, bad news is delivered regrettably, with reluctance or difficulty, marked by softer, lower intonation as well as reduced speech rate and pitch range.

⁷ The beginning of the recorded conversation, °*So a:nywa(y)*°, apparently marks transition back to the speakers’ focused interaction which was under way (but not necessarily about Melissa) prior to our setting up the tripod.

⁸ Despite my attempts to describe “hearable” moments to readers, I recognize the limitations of text, and I can only offer audio copies of this excerpt for those interested in repeated listenings. Please send requests and correspondence to me at the address given at the beginning of this article.

⁹ T’s ↑*T’uh hu:h?* attributes special meaning to W’s prior reporting about Melissa, but it falls short of treating this news as “something remarkable” – moments where utterances like *Oh: wo(h)w* are particularly well suited as one type of assessment that also encourages continuation (C. Goodwin 1986:207).

¹⁰ Though equivocal, the intonational shift and falsetto voice enacted by W could also be heard as at least “feminine” and possibly even “whiny” – two orientations that reinforce a cultural stereotype in which males describe females as overly conscious of, and picky about, their clothing.

¹¹ It is quite possible that T’s prosodically marked *cle:avage?* emerges as one candidate feature, implied about Melissa, with which T’s prior ↑*T’uh hu:h?* (line 6) may now be heard to have been preoccupied. In this projective and escalated sense, in stepwise fashion, T’s first voiced invitation gives rise to a subsequently voiced outcome of extended laughter.

¹² This depiction by W might actually be heard as a “downgrade” to what in real (past) time was likely a COMPLIMENTARY ACTION on Melissa’s part (Pomerantz 1978, 1984): When people announce that they would like others to meet an individual, it is typically because that individual is being made out to be praiseworthy; the action reflects well on the person to be introduced, but also on the person initiating the introduction. In this sense, W’s actions are somewhat euphemistic: He appears not to report the scene as it actually occurred, since it is unlikely that he responded to Melissa as though her

actions were unimportant and imposing on him. Some lack of comfort might be expected on such occasions; however, by “telling it like it wasn’t,” W creates (for T’s hearing) a version whereby he was simply “putting up” with Melissa’s exuberance.

¹³ Through *o::h Go::d*, this may also reflect one instance where “invoking the deity” is utilized in environments where speakers lack control—produced unthinkingly, yet turning to “divine assistance” to remedy dire and/or potentially problematic situations (Beach & Johnson 1997).

¹⁴ There is an inherent ambiguity here, first for W and T, but also for analysts. Analytically speaking, trying to figure out what is going on or has gone on in social interaction reveals an “overhearer’s problem” (Schegloff 1984:50, Metzger & Beach 1996, Beach & Metzger 1997). In this case, it is not possible to “read W’s mind” to determine his intentions toward Melissa (e.g. whether he will begin “dating” her, whether or not he “really” likes and is attracted to her, and does or does not want a sexual relationship). Such knowledge can only be assessed in the ways participants make information available to one another, and subsequently to analysts for their inspection. Without such data, we can only hear W’s *°Hm um°* as weak agreement, which T’s next pause appears to confirm—amounting to apparent ambiguity, the source of which remains speculative. What is available, however, consists of the aftershocks revealed as subsequent talk-in-interaction.

¹⁵ Issues of “Northern” prejudice against Southern (and other regional) dialects, as representing both ignorant and racist styles of living, are also presented in the film *American Tongues* (Kolker & Alvarez 1986).

¹⁶ I can think only of two possibilities regarding what did not “arise,” and either one would implicitly make sense within the course of the sexual fantasy as W and T constructed it: Melissa’s “dress,” and/or W’s penis. Once again, it is not possible to determine either the precise sense in which it was offered by W or heard by T—yet another empirical ambiguity for participants and analysts alike.

¹⁷ Having momentarily forgiven themselves, they are free to “sin” again. Yet there is little if any evidence for a case that W and T’s actions amount to anything approximating “confession,” “guilt,” or “remorse”; there are no systematic or elaborated attempts to take their culpability seriously, or to commit themselves to refrain from future excursions of this sort. In fact, quite the contrary is the case, as is apparent in the story excerpt below, occurring approximately two minutes later in the conversation, where a series of extensions by W and T eventuate in their formulating themselves as improper and “bad” (5→ & 6→). After T’s report about a woman he had been dating who is “so cool,” but not good-looking and in whom he has since “lost interest,” the initial utterance by W responds to T’s reporting that he got along along well with this woman in crowds, but *one on one we don’t .hh find a lot to talk about*:

SDCL: Two guys, 121–48 (00:28)

- 121 W: It’s ha:rd ta- (0.2) it’s hard li(ke) for the first
 122 couple da:tes when you’re not attra:cted to someone. ta=-
 123 =Yea:h,
 124 W: .hhh To find conversa:tion,
 125 (0.4)
 126 T: .hh But it was co:ol.
 127 (0.3)
 128 W: .hh °Yeah°,
 129 (0.5)
 130 1→ W: .h >That’s why I just spend m:y whole time mo:win’,
 131 on my first da:te. = <
 132 2→ T: =.hh \$HAH HA HA HA HA HA!!!\$ = .egh- >Let’s sk:ip,
 133 the ta:lk:in, an’ do the ACT:ion. < ((‘Southern’ Drawl/SD))
 134 3→ W: That’s ri:ght, ((SD)) ph. h(g)h, >After that we’ll develop
 135 the relationship after we see [whether or not it’s worth it.] =
 136 4→ T: [U : : : : m? h m m : : : : !!]
 137 3→ W: =\$Ya know [.h(g)h\$
 138 4→ T: [° >Let’]s go see how good you can (give us).° <=
 139 5→ W: That’s ri:ght, (0.2) ’Cuz it might not be worth the ti:me. =
 140 =\$phh Ho ↑ho: ho. = [That’s so ba:d.\$]
 141 6→ T: [O : : : : : h h] h h h h [h h h.!!!
 142 5→ W: [eghh

143 That is so ba:[:d,!=
 144 7→ T: [.hh >So what time, are we supposed to get up
 145 tonight.
 146 (.)
 147 T: [[Or in the morning
 148 W: [[.hh Two:::

In 1→, W enacts a voice depicting his strategy for avoiding difficult or uncomfortable conversations with women on dates. T's uptake (2→) to W's invitation for collaboration results in overbuilt laughter and a SD voice which is aligned, yet also extends and redefines, the character W had portrayed – a voice that W next (3→) and melodiously echoes, en route to yet another extension, where *worth it* is clearly tied with T's prior *ACTion*. This move is confirmed and extended yet again by T in 4→, while being intersubjectively acknowledged with laughter by W in =*\$Ya know [.h(g)h\$*. It is at this point (5→) that W twice treats his final extension as *ba::d*; and T in 6→ comes off as not just sanctioning but shaming W. This is followed immediately by topic shift (as in ex. 5), as W continues his story about Melissa.

¹⁸ This proverb is also quoted in Bergmann (1993:49), where a detailed and insightful discussion of the historical roots of “gossip” is provided.

¹⁹ As discussed, features unique to “Two guys” are moments of displayed awareness by W & T, as they appear intentionally to pursue sexual references and innuendos, and in lines 53–54 as they corroborate in treating their prior actions as *b:a:d*. But so doing has been shown to have as much to do with laughing at themselves as with verbal sanctioning or confession of wrongdoing; moreover, they repeat their actions later in the conversation (see note 17).

²⁰ As an analyst, I do not condone actions like those displayed by W and T. As a male examining other males' voices and dispositions toward women, I have hoped to demonstrate that the kind of data examined herein, and the analytic methods employed to dissect and unpack the ordered composition of talk-in-interaction, can be employed as a resource AND FORUM for investigating many topics involving both sexes.

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