Mocking Masculinities

The use of humour to engage boys in gender equality

MA Gender Studies Thesis

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As long as

major forces

(both ideological and structural)

***exist to impede gender equality**,*

humour

will be an important weapon

in ideological and social struggles

for

(and against)

equality.

Case and Lippard 2009:252

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The use of humour to engage boys in gender equality

Abstract

This thesis explores the ways humour is used in a workshop aimed at challenging normative gendered assumptions and dominant masculine discourses among a group of adolescent boys in a London school. Using examples from the field, it will show how humour is used by both the workshop participants and the volunteers running the workshop in the negotiation of status in a contested space of hierarchical masculinities. As the context is one in which norms of masculinity and gender are themselves the themes of discussion, the role of humour is examined as a discursive strategy that can be both constitutive and subversive of those norms. The analysis shows that humour can be an invaluable tool to initiate discussions that challenge dominant masculine discourses, elucidate the social pressures on which they are founded and present alternative performances of masculinity. However, humour is a risky, context-sensitive strategy that can have conflicting or ambiguous effects, while non-humorous discourse can be an equally purposeful strategy, particularly when used tactfully in combination with humour.

Introduction

While we may see humour as an activity done for the sake of playful fun, it serves complex and varied social functions of which we are not always conscious (Martin 2007). Nonetheless, a common historical trend and continuing daily reality exists across cultures in which humour is often at women's expense (Kotthoff 2006). A growing body of literature in recent decades explores the role this trend plays in establishing and reinforcing sexist beliefs and behaviours and how it helps constitute and maintain structures of gender inequality (Ford et al. 2008; Ryan and Kanjorski 1998; Thomas and Esses 2004; Kotthoff 2006; Bergmann 1986). Beyond overtly sexist

examples of humour found in media, entertainment, politics or everyday interactions, conversational humour has been conceptualised as a substantial force in the negotiation and confirmation of specific gender identities (Kotthoff 2006). In this aspect, humour "plays a significant role in the accomplishment of gender as taken-for-granted reality" (Mackie, 1990:12) and forms part of broader social patterns of the marginalisation of women in language and speech (Kotthoff 2006).

Thanks in part to its resistance to the misogyny pervasive in humour, feminism has a decidedly humourless reputation. Stereotypes that link feminist thinking with a lack of a 'sense of humour' led to one study attempting to empirically discredit this notion (Franzini 1996). In reality, humour has long been used as a tool by women aiming to resist feminine expectations (Crawford 2003) and deconstruct and subvert systems of male dominance (Bing 2004; Case and Lippard 2009). This is part of a long tradition among people of marginalised groups to draw attention to and criticise the systems through which they are oppressed using irony, satire, parody and other forms of humour.

Much of the literature on humour and inequality, or humour and social change, implicitly suggests that humour's role in the formation of structural inequalities is inherently antagonistic around a subordination-subversion binary. That is, humour is used as a tool of subordination by dominant groups on one hand, and a tool of subversion and resistance by the subordinated on the other. While such a binary may reflect a broad range of observations and theoretical conceptualisations of the social effects of humour, it excludes possibilities to reimagine how humour might be used by those in dominant groups to engage in social change and the deconstruction of the unequal systems from which they benefit. For example, the American stand-up comedian Kenny DeForest draws attention to his privileged identity as a straight white man in a humorous way[1], and the occasional video can be found circulating the internet featuring men making fun of their own privileged male identities, or sexism in general. Such instances, though rare, suggest that humour is finding furtive ground among some men who use it to support feminist goals. While "scattered research hints at the emancipatory potential of women's humour" (Crawford 2003:1424), little research has looked at the transformative potential of humour produced by and/or directed at men.

[1] For example, in his guest appearance on the *Two Dope Queens* podcast, WNYC, December 27, 2016, http://www.wnyc.org/story/bonus-episode-flapping-wind/

In an era in which more men than ever appear to be becoming actively engaged in gender equality, this thesis will explore the potential and difficulties of humour used by feminist-aligned men for transformative change. In order to do so, it will critically account for the complex ways in which humour constructs the social norms that are being challenged, and acknowledge that humour is more dominantly a force in maintaining—rather than dismantling—existing power structures (Mackie 1990). Specifically, it will explore these themes by examining an intervention in a group of adolescent boys in a London school in which male volunteers facilitated workshops aiming to explore and challenge gender stereotypes, masculinities, sexist attitudes, 'rape culture', and harmful behaviours such as sexual harassment (some instances of which, according to one of the teachers at the school, had been occurring in this particular year group). Although humour is not necessarily a conscious strategy in these interventions, when it comes to interactions between people, it is often a social inevitability (Martin 2007) and these workshops therefore provide appropriate and valuable research objects for the analysis of humour as a strategy in engaging boys in issues relevant to gender (in)equality.

This thesis consists of two chapters. In the first, I explore the context for my analysis using theories of masculinities and the superiority theory of humour, as well as a review of relevant literature on the uses of humour, particularly in settings similar to the one I will examine. I then develop a methodological approach that critically accounts for biases and assumptions that are common in both humour research and critical studies of men and masculinities. In the second chapter I analyse and discuss the research material and demonstrate the ways humour is constitutive of dominant masculine discourses while also offering potential for their deconstruction in a number of ways.

Background, theory and methodology

Background to the intervention

Various factors seem to collide in the context of my analysis and I will briefly sketch them out. Taking the educational setting as a starting point, my research is based within an ethnically-diverse, affluent, private, coeducational, Catholic school in a southern borough of London. It is a space governed by the explicit and implicit rules

of the school as a formal educational institution; authority is ostensibly with the teachers (although pupils are far from passive subjects in such settings (Kehily and Nayak 1997)). It is also a context in which "gender is embedded in the institutional arrangements by which a school functions" (Connell 1996:213), with students organised in structural ways around a male/female binary. For example, girls wear skirts and a blouse, boys wear a shirt, tie and school blazer. In sports, girls play netball and rounders, boys play rugby and cricket. This is a system I am familiar with from my own experience as a male growing up within the British education system. Beneath these overt structural gender binaries, the British school experience continues to be heavily influenced around sets of traditional dualistic gendered social norms to the point that "schooling not only *reproduces* but also *produces* gender identities" (Swain 2005:214).

My research is focussed on two workshops taking place within these school structures, which represent a departure from normal routines for a group of year 8 boys (aged 12-13). These workshops were not run by the school's regular teachers, but by young male 'facilitators' from outside. Previously unknown to the students, the facilitators must establish themselves anew and momentarily for each group they work with. The four facilitators involved in my research are all men in their late twenties and early thirties who volunteer or work for an organisation called *The Great Initiative*, which works in the London area to "challenge stereotypes of masculinity and to engage men and boys in the movement towards gender equality"[2]. The two workshops were part of a project called "Inspiring Male Action on Gender Equality in Europe" (IMAGINE), which is funded by the *European Commission* and trains young (pro)feminist men (aged approximately 18-30) in three countries (the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK) to deliver workshops like the one I analyse here. These workshops target boys aged 11-18, whether in schools, sports clubs or other relevant community partners such as youth clubs, and aim to foster discussion on issues relevant to gender inequality and masculinities in a way that challenges sexist beliefs and behaviours towards girls/women, as well as towards other boys/men who are often marginalised by dominant standards of masculinity commonly found in Western adolescent peer culture (Connell 1996).

[2] *The Great Initiative* website homepage, accessed August 11, 2017, https://www.great-men.org/

The rationale of using young (feminist-aligned) men to deliver these workshops is that they will act as role models and be more effective than, say, older men, women or other people whose identity differs significantly from the target group; they are "close enough in age to the boys to be relatable, but distant enough to command their attention"[3]. The workshops are also designed to work with exclusively male groups, which aims to provide a 'safe space' for boys to discuss their experiences and feelings on potentially sensitive issues such as attitudes towards sex, girls and women. The context of the workshops is therefore within the confines of institutional school norms and their structures of gender, while also aiming to open up space for dialogue that challenges the kinds of beliefs and attitudes that are embedded within and reinforced by those very structures. It is around this contradiction that I intend to examine humour as a tool to engage boys in the discussion on issues related to gender equality.

Masculinities

While my problematization is that of the potential for humour in productively engaging boys in a way that challenges harmful gendered beliefs or behaviours, it is important to understand the context that constitutes those beliefs and behaviours. To that end, Raewyn Connell's influential work on masculinities provides important insights. Connell's development of the field in her 1995 book, *Masculinities*, sought to theorise the gender relations that exist among men, rather than only between women and men. She argued that men encompass masculinities in a variety of ways—that is, there are multiple masculinities—and "at any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted" (Connell 2005:77). Within a hierarchical framework, masculinities are fragile and in need of continual affirmation and repair (Kenway 1995) through the gendered performances of language and behaviours (Cameron 1998). While few men may actually embody the hegemonic masculine ideal, most are complicit in its acceptance as a strategy and its claim to authority, and benefit from its 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell 2005).

One of the areas the study of masculinities has had a significant influence is the study of boys in education, whereby it has been widely noted that the impact of schooling on the construction of boys' masculine identities is extensive and profound:

[3] IMAGINE project proposal to the European Commission, 2015 –Unpublished

> Some writers describe schools as a 'masculinity factory', or as 'masculinity making devices', where boys learn that there are a number of different, and often competing, ways of being a boy and that some of these are more cherished and prestigious, and therefore more powerful, than others. (Swain 2005:214)

Although non-conforming masculinities are recognised as an important aspect of young male identities, pressure to conform to group norms and achieving status through the performance of an 'acceptable' or exalted form of masculinity is a strong and near-ubiquitous force across Western adolescent male peer cultures (Swain 2005). In configurations of contemporary European/American culture, the acceptable form is usually one that privileges characteristics such as "humour, daring, resistance, competition, physical strength and prowess, assertive heterosexuality and active sexuality, homophobia, aggression and derision" (Francis and Skelton 2005:29).

Recognising that "masculinity does not exist in isolation from femininity" (Crawford 2003:1423), such behaviours are part of the broader systems of gendered meanings, relations and performances. Indeed, they serve to either explicitly or implicitly distance boys' identities from that which is feminine (Connell 2005). Subordinated masculinities therefore tend to be those which are "symbolically assimilated to femininity" (Swain 2005:221), while dominant masculinities assert their heterosexuality (and thus masculine dominance) through the use of homophobic language and behaviours that also serve to police the behaviour and sexuality of other boys (ibid).

Masculinities theory and the concept of hegemonic masculinity have been productive in conceptualising the subjectivities of men and boys in a broad range of settings. However, 'masculinities' has gone beyond the walls of the academy and finds itself a well-established concept within the wider gender discourse to the point that it is now common to find public policy and civil society interventions that draw upon and use the language of masculinities theory (Flood 2015). The IMAGINE project is itself informed by concepts such as hegemonic masculinity and aims to "transform masculinities"[4]. This suggests an understanding of masculinity as something that is "fluid rather than fixed, as uncertain and unstable" (Dalley-Trim 2007:200) and that

[4] IMAGINE project proposal to the European Commission, 2015 –Unpublished

each boy in an IMAGINE workshop embodies a masculine identity that is flexible, negotiable and open to change through discussion and the representation of alternative masculinities in the form of the facilitators.

It is assumptions such as these, which reify 'masculinities' as a *pre-existing* structure in which the possibilities for male subjectivities (or analyses/interpretations of those subjectivities) are constrained, that has attracted some criticism in the field of critical studies of men and masculinities (Beasley 2012). This is doubly binding in the case I examine here, in which both the intervention (IMAGINE) and my own analysis of it risk being built on assumptions grounded in masculinities theory. The risk is that this double-bind in the construction and reinforcing of 'men' as a taken-for-granted category, within which a range of relatively static 'masculine' subjectivities regulate themselves and each other against an implicit hegemonic 'ideal', tacitly reifies a gender binary and excludes the kinds of possibilities offered by postmodernist thinking. This is a conceptual dilemma across much of the field of critical studies of men and masculinities and one that continues to evade resolution (ibid). The predicament is that while masculinities theory fails to encompass the radical problematization of gender/sex that has been so influential in feminist scholarship in the past two decades, it does provide a convincing explanation for much of the observable and lived experiences of male subjectivities, particularly within the confines of specific contexts such as schoolboy peer groups. For that reason, it remains a valuable analytical tool for my research.

It's funny, hegemonic masculinity

It is widely accepted that humour's role in the construction of gender is significant (Crawford 2003; Hay 2000; Kotthoff 2006; Mackie 1990). This is perhaps not surprising, given the asymmetrical nature of gendered power relations and the ways humour has, through psychological, sociological and ethnographic studies, been linked to the negotiation of power and status (Martin 2007), including that of hierarchical masculinities (Kehily and Nayak 1997). To help frame the relation between humour, power and masculinity, I will briefly explore key analytical and theoretical concepts of humour, how humour is used as a discursive strategy in the negotiation of status/power, and examples of how this is manifested in masculinities, particularly in the context of adolescent boys in school.

Most humour researchers agree that humour requires “a deviation from some presupposed norm, that is to say, an anomaly or an incongruity relative to some framework governing the ways in which we think the world is or should be” (Carroll 2014:17). Incongruities do intuitively appear to encompass the kinds of things we consider funny; irony and sarcasm, which play on reverse-meanings; puns, which derive from double-meanings; satire, which creates joviality out of the serious; overstatements and understatements which, either overtly or implicitly, flout expected norms or perceived truths (Long and Graesser 1988). However, not all incongruities are funny, and many can in fact lead to anxiety, fear or anger such as violence that violates norms but leads to tragic rather than humorous ends. Other conditions have therefore been suggested as necessary prerequisites to humour. To that end, some humour theorists claim that all humour, even seemingly innocuous forms, derives from a place within human psychology that causes us to experience mirth by establishing superiority over others. This view, known as superiority theory, suggests that humour is *always* an aggressive act—ranging from playful to hostile—that aims to assert the superiority of the person producing it over a real or hypothetical ‘other’ (Martin 2007). While this seems counterintuitive to the positive association people usually have with humour, superiority theory provides a useful analytical framework linking the cognitive workings of humour with the ways it is seen to contribute to patterns of inequality in societies and status-based hierarchies such as masculinities.

One obvious way superiority manifests in humour is the perpetuation and validation of harmful prejudices and stereotypes, for instance, through jokes around gender, race, culture, ability or sexuality. There is substantial evidence that disparaging and prejudiced humour correlates strongly with harmful attitudes and other discriminatory behaviours (e.g. Ford et al. 2008; Ryan and Kanjorski 1998; Thomas and Esses 2004). Such forms of humour can also serve to normalise prejudice and create societal tolerance for discrimination (Martin 2007). In addition, less overt examples of humour’s subordinating nature can play more subtle roles in the negotiation of power. For example, humour has been shown to be used more by those with higher status (including those in more senior positions in a professional environment), and often in a critical or corrective way of those with lower status, while those in lower-status positions are more likely to use self-deprecatory forms of humour (Martin 2007). In studies of group conversations, Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) showed how humour is used to establish status early on in group conversations.

Research into the gendered nature of these humorous power-plays has therefore, unsurprisingly, found differences between how women and men use and respond to humour (e.g. Aillaud and Piolat 2012; Drucker et al. 2014; Mickes et al. 2012; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2001). For example, several studies observed that men tend to use more sexual humour, and they use humour in more competitive ways to gain status, while women tend to use it more to build rapport and create group cohesion (Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2001). Such observations, understood from a constructionist perspective, can be explained as a result of humour being constitutive of and constituted by the social construct of gender (Crawford 2003; Hay 2000; Kotthoff 2006). However, the limitations on a focus on gender difference have been highlighted, not least by the argument that there are far more gender similarities than differences and "in some senses, researchers, through their epistemological assumptions and methodological choices, create the very differences they seek" (Crawford 2003:1415). Supposed sex differences might therefore be better framed as being reflective of "linkages among gender, status and power" (ibid:1415). Indeed, individual differences have been shown to reflect relative positions of power rather than gender (ibid), suggesting the post-hoc nature of denotations of 'feminine' and 'masculine' or 'women's' and 'men's' humour that often accompany this kind of research. Taking humour as a strategy in negotiating power, rather than being inherently 'gendered', it is nonetheless involved in the construction of a (gendered) hierarchical concept such as masculinity (Barnes 2012; Kehily and Nayak 1997). Several studies have mapped out some of the ways humour and masculinities interact, which I will explore in the setting of the classroom as a socially produced context whereby "relations of power are produced and circulated" (Dalley-Trim 2007:204).

Rebelling against the authority of the school or teacher is one strategy boys use to gain status among themselves (Swain 2005), and humour is a useful tool to this end. Measor (1996) noted how boys' raucous laughter and joking completely undermined a gender-segregated sex and reproductive health class. She points to one example in particular in which a health worker delivering the lesson showed the boys a speculum and asked them what it is. Measor (1996:279) argues that one boy's response, "it's a dick pincher!", aimed to embarrass the instructor and gain the upper hand by flouting the acceptable norms of formal classroom language. She goes on to suggest that "making loud jokes that could be heard publicly and showing oneself unresponsive to the control of a woman, could all win status in an informal culture" (Measor 1996:284).

This kind of implicit subordination of women also manifests in humour directed at girls within peer groups in ways that Dalley-Trim (2007) suggests acts to silence, sexualize and subjugate them. In one exchange in her analysis, in which two boys are discussing motorbikes, one of them says, "Tiffany wants to be a motorbike so Matthew can ride it" (ibid:208), denoting the perceived female position as sexual object. Other attempts at humour served to trivialize girls' contributions to the class or simply to ridicule. As well as subordinating girls, attempts at humour such as this also serve to reinforce (heterosexual) masculinities of the boys (Dalley-Trim 2007; Kehily and Nayak 1997).

While some of the status-making humour among adolescent boys is deployed towards girls or an outside figure such as a teacher, much of it targets other males within the male peer group. In her observation of co-educational classes in an Australian school, Dalley-Trim (2007) frames competitive exchanges between boys as 'verbal sparring matches' in which the use of disparaging humour is the main weapon in the fight for dominance. She points to one example, in which one boy jokes that another does not have a penis, as illustrative of the ways humour and references to the physicality of the body can be focal points for the performance of masculinity. Far from being confined to the playground, these exchanges proved disruptive to the class and other students.

A theme common to much of the humour used, whether to rebel, in sparring matches, or other exchanges, is sex and, specifically, heterosexual success. Much of the humour in ethnographic studies of boys seems to 'boast' the sexual prowess or virility of the person producing the humour, or lack thereof of others. For example, Measor observed how boys reacted to a condom in the sex education class, with most jokes centred on competition over penis size or claims of the joker's copious sexual activity. Heteronormativity—that is, 'compulsory' and assumed heterosexuality alongside disavowal of homosexuality—has been repeatedly shown to be as an essential element in the hegemonic discourse of boys' masculinity in Western contexts (Barnes 2012; Crawford 2003; Dalley-Trim 2007; Epstein 1997; Huuki, Manninen, and Sunnari 2010; Measor 1996), with jokes related to heterosexual success a prominent factor in "status hierarchies amongst the boys and winning a place at the top of the hierarchy" (Measor 1996:279).

As an exclusionary tactic, humour can be used to ridicule and humiliate anyone who fails to conform with behaviours and identities not considered acceptable by the

dominant group. This can have the less visible but equally forceful effect of policing others into conforming with implicit group norms rather than risk the emotional pain of being laughed at and therefore losing status (Martin 2007). Such uses of humour can moderate deviant behaviour of those in the 'in-group', and can have an exclusionary or 'othering' effect on individuals or groups that differ from behaviours or identities considered acceptable (Swain 2005). The most pervasive and harmful effect of this is the level of homophobic humour noted in the literature. Reflecting on one study, Crawford (2003) suggests that young men's characterisation of other men as 'gay' was not only othering, but also served as a display of their own heterosexual masculinity. Similarly, in their classroom ethnographies, Kehily and Nayak (1997:83) suggest that "homophobic displays not only consolidate the identities of the heterosexist individual but speak to the wider hyper-masculinity of the peer group".

A range of studies continues to show how both girls and subordinate boys are targets of comic displays, with a culture of compulsory and competitive heterosexuality providing the benchmark of male dominance. Epstein (1997) suggests that this demonstrates the inherent inseparability of misogyny and homophobia as two parts of the 'othering' force of masculinities. It is through such mechanisms that the negotiation and maintenance of boys' masculinities uses the guise of humour to inflict visible and invisible acts of violence (Huuki, Manninen, and Sunnari 2010). This fits with a view of (all) humour as an act of aggression aimed at asserting one's superiority over others.

Some research on educational programs supporting the rights of girls shows that such interventions can be seen by boys as a direct threat that puts their masculinity 'under siege' (Kenway 1995). The result is often a male reassertion of masculinity as an act of resistance to projects considered feminist. However, there is relatively little research on how boys respond to initiatives that aim to foster discussion on dominant discourses of masculinity themselves, with the notable exception of Barnes' (2012) ethnographic study of an Irish Catholic all-boys school. Her analysis of the "Exploring Masculinities" program shows that while this intervention sought to confront harmful beliefs constituted by dominant masculinities, humour was not at all supportive of this aim. On the contrary, the boys used humour to resist and undermine the aims of the workshop using the kinds of homophobic and misogynistic comic displays already discussed. This meant the lesson's aims were not taken seriously, and made it "impossible for any boy to reopen without setting himself up as a target for

ridicule" (Barnes 2012:247). Humour used on the part of the instructor (who was one of the boys' regular teachers) served to legitimise status-seeking displays of masculinity (despite his seemingly genuine concerns for the issues addressed by the program) and his embodiment of a "deeply traditional masculine role model" (ibid:244) was seen as integral to this, and makes a notable contrast to the use of younger, feminist-aligned men in the IMAGINE program.

Solidarity, subversion and the paradox of humour

Most people's day-to-day experiences of humour seem incompatible with the various antagonistic and violent forms described above. Laughing with friends and joking with colleagues or strangers can appear to be strategies aimed at creating social cohesion, not superiority. To that end, humour is thought to have a range of prosocial effects, as well as potential in subverting power and creating social change. While these functions of humour seem incompatible with the superiority view of humour, I will explore them below and discuss how they remain embedded within—and constitutive of—systems of power.

One of humour's most emphatic prosocial functions is creating solidarity and strengthening relationships within groups. Joking can be a way to share personal experience, highlight similarities and create bonds, having a positive impact on social cohesion, and even seemingly aggressive teasing between friends can build rapport and solidarity (Martin 2007). Rather than being a purely aggressive act, humour can therefore be seen as an affinity-seeking behaviour used in supportive ways, for example, using self-deprecatory humour in a personal anecdote to acknowledge vulnerability and show support for others with shared experiences (Crawford 2003). Similarly, humour can help people broach topics or ideas that might be controversial or cause embarrassment without appearing to fully endorse that idea if it turns out to be rejected or ridiculed by others. If something is said that is not well received by a group, there is the option of disavowing it as 'just a joke', or its non-seriousness being implicit (Martin 2007). In this way, humour can be used to 'test the water' regarding people's attitudes and to save face if a statement is denounced by others in a group. In the context I will analyse, this function of humour has the potential to allow boys to discuss topics of gender and masculinity in a way that might go against the group norms or challenge the status quo.

The social benefits of humour have led to the examination of its pedagogical potential in recent decades. Educational benefits attributed to it include creating better student engagement, higher information retention, better interpersonal connections, greater mutual respect, greater student receptiveness to ideas, and reduced anxiety on challenging topics (Banas et al. 2011; Garner 2006). While humour has traditionally been seen as disruptive and not part of 'good' teaching practice, "many educators in recent years have recommended that teachers introduce humour into the classroom" (Martin 2007:350). Indeed, in her study of a sexuality education class, Allen (2014) shows how joking can be used productively in teaching to make light of potentially embarrassing subjects or simply to lighten the mood of a class, with the aim of increasing student engagement.

Given its apparent effects as a tool for social cohesion, humour has been framed as one of two basic 'modes' of discourse. Its counterpart, the serious mode, is thought to be used to convey a coherent idea through clear language and the avoidance of ambiguity, but is less successful when the interaction involves individuals with conflicting views or disparate taken-for-granted realities (Martin 2007). In such instances, the humorous mode is able to acknowledge and make light of incongruities that could lead to confusion or antagonism that might jeopardise relationships. This has clear relevance for educational scenarios in which both teachers and students must convey ideas and information with the class. This is all the more pertinent in a context that aims to challenge normative mind sets such as the one I will examine. The serious mode, on the other hand, can be used to convey information logically but might have less success in discussions that have multiple 'truths' depending on one's view of social reality. The distinction between humorous and serious modes of discourse is an analytical approach I will draw on in interpreting the humour used by instructors in the classroom, and instances where the facilitators seek to avoid or supress humour.

In the same way that a dominant group might use humour to subordinate, it can also be used by marginalised groups to affirm their own in-group identities, which is evident in the plethora of comedians who use black, gay, female and other marginalised identities to draw attention to everyday experiences of oppression to comic effect. Similarly, in day-to-day interactions, humour can be a tool of quotidian resistance. For example, in Kehily and Nakay's (1997) observations of male humour targeted at female classmates, she also noted the occasional act of humorous defiance from the girls—the simple act of laughing at the boys' immature behaviour can be seen

as disarming and subversive. Jokes that celebrate female experience, challenge stereotypes or emphasise the absurdity and fragility of patriarchy serve as everyday sites of resistance (Bing and Scheibman 2014; Case and Lippard 2009; Holmes and Marra 2002).

However, while the use of humour as a tool of subversion is well documented, its revolutionary capacity for social transformation has been questioned (Mackie 1990:14). This is perhaps, as Case and Lippard (2009) suggest, because when such humorous assaults are directed at dominant individuals or groups, they fail to amuse those on top and therefore fail to undo dominant societal forces. Such 'failures' of humour intuitively support the superiority view, which suggests that humour must make us feel in some way superior to others in order to successfully elicit mirth. The 'success' of humour is therefore dependent on the respective social positions and politics of the individuals using humour and their audience. Nevertheless, Case and Lippard (2009:1) suggest that in order to successfully employ humour to engage those in dominant positions, "humorous assaults on patriarchal ideology" should make the structures and systems the targets of jokes, rather than individuals producing and benefitting from those systems. A constructive way to do this, they suggest, is making a joke of the absurdity of inequalities.

Humour's many prosocial effects—seen from a superiority perspective—are explained as creating superiority through the strengthening of an 'in-group' over an implicit 'out-group' or 'other'. Furthermore, comic displays can be understood as part of a performance of superior wit or intellect. Simply having a good 'sense of humour' in general has been shown to be a valued and likable personality trait, which in turn leads to greater influence over others (Martin 2007), demonstrating how friendly, affinity-seeking or 'innocuous' humour plays a part in maintaining status and contributing to feelings of superiority. Such examples of ingratiating humour can form a key status-seeking strategy within a framework of hierarchical masculinities.

Importantly, humour is rarely serving only one social function at a time. It might be creating solidarity with an 'in' group, while serving to police the behaviour of 'deviants'. In a classroom, it might be subversive to the authority of the teacher, while aiming to raise the status of the student producing the humour in a way that, far from being 'defiant', is fully complicit in systems of normative masculinity (Kehily and Nayak 1997). It is these conflicting and often paradoxical qualities of humour that make it both funny, because of the playfulness of incongruous meanings, and non-

innocent, through its various self-serving social functions. As Martin (2007:55) points out, it is a "paradox that humour can be both aggressive and prosocial at the same time, a theme that is central to the superiority theory". Furthermore, it is these "unique properties of humour [that] make it a valuable tool of gender deconstruction" (Crawford 2003:1427). In the framework of masculinities, this means recognising the unequal power relations among men are constituted, in part, by humour, which opens up critical space for men themselves to engage in the deconstruction of those power relations, including through humour. This seemingly paradoxical nature of humour comes into clear focus in the context I will examine; that is, how humour might be used to challenge normative (gendered) beliefs in a social space in which it also constitutes and regulates those beliefs.

Methodology

Much of the early humour research has been criticised for methodological problems. In particular, studies that attempt to artificially create humour in a lab environment, for example, by showing jokes to research participants, rely on material that is detached from a 'real' social context. Particularly pertinent examples are lab-based studies that showed marked differences in the use of humour between men and women by asking research participants to review pre-fabricated jokes. Many of the quantitative studies that backed up this conclusion have been criticised for failing to recognise the gender bias in the choices of jokes used. Furthermore, pre-fabricated jokes represent a tiny fraction of the everyday humour people use and, from a social perspective, have very different forms and functions to humour used in free-flowing conversation (Martin 2007).

Such methodological pitfalls, particularly those uncovered by research on the topic of gender differences, led to the rise of more qualitative analyses of humour in its 'natural' environment; that is, spontaneous humour[5]. The turn towards qualitative methods and constructionist interpretations in the past few decades parallels a similar turn in methodological approach within critical studies of men and masculinities, which Connell called the 'ethnographic moment' in masculinities research (Pini and

[5] Although quantitative and lab-based research continues in this area with interesting discussions on gendered aspects of humour (e.g. Aillaud and Piolat 2012; Drucker et al. 2014; Mickes et al. 2012; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2001).

Pease 2013). Following these qualitative and context-sensitive approaches that value experience and opinion, and conceiving humour as a mode of discourse rather than a static pre-fabricated object, provides a more feminist-oriented approach to humour research, and an approach I find appropriate for this research.

For the case I analyse in the second part of this thesis, I therefore collected research material through participant observation of two IMAGINE workshops that took place in May 2017. As well as taking field notes of observed patterns of behaviour and non-verbal discursive cues (video recording was not permitted by the school), I recorded the audio and transcribed the recordings of the two workshops, each of which lasted approximately three hours and included two facilitators, around 24 boys and at least one teacher present at all times. Because the two workshops ran in parallel, I divided my time evenly between them, switching classroom several times to get a sense of the different approaches and styles of the facilitators, the responses of the boys and the general moods and atmospheres in the respective sessions. I conducted follow-up interviews by telephone with three of the facilitators. In this way, I was able to draw on my own observations and interpretations of the workshops and, through semi-structured interviews, understand the facilitators' own accounts of their approach to delivering the workshops and their incorporation (or exclusion) of humour.

Humour is subjective. What one person finds funny might not necessarily amuse someone else. While some researchers take cues such as laughter for their analyses of humour, and although I will certainly do so, I find this somewhat constraining, particularly if 'attempts' at humour fail to elicit laughter from the group. As a minimal requirement, I consider moments as humorous if they appear in some way incongruous in meaning, but other factors such as intonation of the voice, timing and non-verbal gesture will also be important cues. Interviews with the facilitators will provide a deeper insight into their own use humour. To a point, however, this research will necessarily be dependent on my own 'sense' of humour and interpretations of it. Discussing humour with insights from only the facilitators (and not the students) also limits my interpretations to those based on opinions of individuals in positions of relative power (including me). While in-depth interviews with the students would be one way to address this, that was not possible. This analysis should therefore be cautious to draw conclusions about the effects humour has on students or over-valorising the efficacy of humour as a discursive strategy in meeting the goals of the IMAGINE program. In light of these limitations, interpretations of humour will

therefore be framed as a discursive strategy in relation to the theories that account for its social functions, recognising the ambiguity, nuance and potential for misunderstanding that is inherent in humour.

By interviewing self-identifying (pro)feminist men of around the same age as me, the identity 'gap' between researcher and participants appears to be small. However, the cultural, social and personal backgrounds of the interviewees was not homogenous, nor necessarily aligned with my own. Nevertheless, the political nature in which IMAGINE (and therefore its volunteers) acts, is aligned with the political nature of this thesis as part of a field of research aiming to understand and challenge structures of societal oppression. While any conceivable political/identity alignment between me and the interviewees might make for relatability and the willingness of the participants to share opinions, it also risks participants making assumptions about me and vice versa, leading to a potential lack of critical distance as a researcher (Pini and Pease 2013). The approach to the interviews therefore needed to be self-critical and reflexive upon the ways my assumptions might influence the framing of questions and how participants' assumptions influence their responses.

Although various lines of identity interact in the context analysed—most notably, class and ethnicity—this analysis will focus on masculinities. This is because masculinity has consistently been observed as one of the most significant pressures in status hierarchies in schools in the Western context. Furthermore, while the workshops did touch on privileges related to class, race and ability, its core focus on gender makes a 'gendered' exploration of it politically relevant and important.

While the IMAGINE project and my research are both motivated by the understanding "that women as a group are disadvantaged compared with men and that addressing gender inequality is a critical political task" (Pini and Pease 2013:4), some work in the field of men and masculinities has been criticised for reinforcing, rather than challenging systems of male dominance, for example, by centring men or failing to meaningfully destabilize the construction of gender (ibid). It is therefore with a critical view that I relate my case to the theories and analytical tools discussed in this chapter, acknowledging my own partial position as a researcher interested in the transformative potential of humour; a potential that I must necessarily recognise may not in fact exist.

In summary, my methodology involves participant observation and interviews, with an emphasis on the analysis of context-specific, situated instances of humour,

which is conceived as a mode of discourse used (unconsciously) to assert superiority—in this case, within a framework of hierarchical, status-based masculinities.

IMAGINE: Analysis and discussion

The sheer prevalence of humour in the two IMAGINE workshops suggests it is a phenomenon worthy of examination. Both workshops featured moments of raucous laughter, excitable giggling and frenetic bouts of humour. They also had moments of seriousness and calm. Indeed, during the three hour sessions, the atmosphere fluctuated between highly excitable and subdued, with all kinds of gradations in between. However, while both workshops followed the same format, the levels of joking and laughing were markedly higher in one than the other. This contrast between the tones of the respective workshops provides a useful basis for analysing the ways humour is either included or excluded, in what ways, for what means, and to what ends.

Owen and Jake[6], two volunteers for the Great Initiative ran one workshop in a fairly collaborative style in which the speaking and managing of boys was shared evenly. The other workshop, which took place in a separate classroom, was largely run by Luke, who works for the Great Initiative and coordinates the IMAGINE program. Luke has the most experience in delivering sessions like these and did the majority of the facilitating of his workshop, with occasional input from another volunteer, Eric. There was always one teacher from the school present (and sometimes two), who took the opportunity of being relieved of usual teaching duties to manage their own paperwork at the back of the room, occasionally interjecting when they felt the boys' loud or disruptive behaviour required their attention.

The workshops began with the facilitators organising their respective groups into a circle. They introduced themselves and asked each student to say their name, how they were feeling and, in Luke's workshop, an interesting personal fact, before discussing some ground rules for the session. The sessions then followed a series of activities; a 'word race', in which two teams competed to write down words they associated with the topics 'men' and 'women'; an 'advert game', which showed print advertisements with the brands removed (the students had to guess what was being

[6] To protect anonymity, pseudonyms have been used for all research participants throughout.

marketed); a video of two toddlers—one boy and one girl—whose behaviours were a point of discussion on gender norms; the 'opinion continuum', in which students stood closer to one end of the room or another depending on whether they agreed or disagreed with a statement that was read to them; and finally, a video dramatization of a sexual encounter at a party, on which the students had to discuss the question, 'was that rape?'. All of these activities used content and techniques that served as entry points into discussions on themes relevant gender.

Understanding humour as a discursive strategy whose social functions are not (usually) consciously devised, but are part of complex interpersonal and group dynamics, the following sections will explore the ways it was used in the workshops (by both the facilitators and students) and its effects—as informed by the theoretical and analytical tools and examples explored in the previous chapter.

"Everybody just say 'erection'!": Creating a 'safe space'

The approach IMAGINE takes is not one of dictating information to students, but encouraging discussion among them; as Luke explained to me[7], it is about creating space for boys to talk rather than telling them what to think. The facilitators aim to guide the discussion by asking questions rather than giving answers. The kinds of discussions the students have depends on the kinds of questions asked and creating the right kind of atmosphere. To the facilitators, this means aiming to create one they described to me as 'lively', 'upbeat', 'exciting', 'relaxed', 'comfortable' and 'open'. To this end, switching into the humorous mode of discourse can be instrumental. For instance, right from the start, Luke eschews the kinds of formal language usually associated with teachers and begins the session with a humorous and colloquial opener:

> How's everyone doing? Everyone feeling ok? No? Ok. This is super awkward I feel like it's us against you, can we make some kind of circle where we're not aggressively staring at each other.

[7] All quotes and opinions of research participants refer to the workshop and interview transcripts, collated in the Appendix.

Humour is diffused throughout this statement in much more subtle and nuanced ways than can be found in the kinds of pre-written jokes traditionally used in humour research. The irony of 'No? OK' and the hyperbole of 'super awkward' and 'aggressively staring at each other' make this statement much more than a simple greeting or an instruction to form a circle—although it is both of those things. It sets a tone of informality, softens the command to make a circle, while also aiming to dissipate the potentially uncomfortable atmosphere created by a stranger coming in for a discussion on topics that are usually foreign to formal classroom settings. As Luke explains in relation to 'awkwardness', "if you're able to, kind of, make a joke about that, then everybody can relax, you can acknowledge it". As an outsider, Luke's position may feel uncomfortable, which explains why he says this instance of humour may be more for his own benefit than the benefit of the students.

The example above demonstrates the ability of humour to set a certain tone right the start of a workshop. It also demonstrates the nuanced, multifaceted and versatile functions of humour. While I analyse these functions somewhat separately, drawing links between them when appropriate and relevant, it is important to remember that social functions of humour rarely act in isolation. For example, in addition to the functions already mentioned, Luke's opening words also serve to create an effect deemed important to each of the three facilitators I interviewed: building rapport.

Developing a connection with the students is one goal towards which humour is seen to contribute. Without humour, rapport is seen as difficult to achieve, negatively impacting the students' participation, or as Jake put it to me, "without any humour I don't think they'd engage as well, they wouldn't want to." This affinity-seeking aspect of humour is one noted in other research that explores how humour can be used by those in positions of authority to diminish the power gap separating them from others (Martin 2007). As a discursive strategy, humour can, as Owen put it, "break down that standard relationship between teacher and pupil". A notable and visible element of the approach the IMAGINE project takes is to foster discussions on topics that boys would ordinarily feel uncomfortable broaching with adults. Humour as a means of building rapport can therefore be used by the facilitators, who are the authority figures in the discussion, to deconstruct the kinds of social barriers that might block the productive contributions of the young participants.

Rapport, however, can only go so far. A teacher may be able to create a good rapport with their students, but the kinds of conversations IMAGINE aims for require a more radical departure from normative formalities and expectations that usually influence classroom behaviours. For instance, the workshops aim to discuss issues including gender, masculinities, sexual harassment and sexual violence, which will necessarily require discussion on sensitive topics. To help foster this discussion, the facilitators have a number of strategies to create a supportive and mutually collaborative atmosphere. As Owen explained to me, "I think so much of what we do as facilitators in the room is to make the kids feel comfortable to express their views about something." Humour is one, but by no means the only (or most important), way this can be done. As mentioned previously, the workshops began with the formation of a circle, with the participants taking turns to introduce themselves. This was followed by the group collaboratively discussing 'rules' such as respecting each other's opinions, not talking over each other and keeping any personal things shared by others confidential. The facilitators wrote down the rules and ensured they covered key themes by asking leading questions if necessary. In Jake and Owen's workshop, Jake explicitly discusses the idea of a 'safe space'. This part of the workshop was not particularly humorous, that is, it mainly used the serious mode of discourse. However, in spite of the rules agreed upon, the students did frequently talk over each other in both workshops, and in at least one instance the sharing of a personal story was met with laughter, rather than respect. In such ways, by ignoring the 'rules' established at the start (but adhering to the much stronger 'rules' of masculinity), dominant boys can exclude the voices of others (Swain 2005).

As well as the *explicit* agreed-upon rules of what is acceptable and unacceptable in the 'safe space', there were *implicit* rules. Rather than being discussed directly, implicit social norms pertaining to the context of the workshop were constructed in ways that were heavily influenced by the facilitators, and largely aimed to show that the usual expectations of students in a classroom did not apply. Humour was one strategy that could be used to influence these norms and create a space in which the boys felt comfortable sharing opinions, emotions and experiences on topics that are potentially embarrassing or sensitive to discuss. In particular, humour was used to break taboos around certain words not usually considered permissible in the context. To this end, the 'word race' activity was profuse with humour, much of which was based on sexual language. This activity involved making two competing teams, each

armed with a pen and a sheet of paper to write on. The goal was to write as many words as possible associated with a topic, with students each writing one word at a time in a relay fashion. The topic of the first round was ‘men’ and the next was ‘women’. This activity was possibly the high-point in terms of energy, shouting, laughter and general amusement among the students of both workshops. The boys seemed genuinely engaged in the activity and interested in winning the ‘race’ by producing the most words. To the facilitators, the main purpose of this activity is to bring out gender stereotypes, with the high-pressure nature of the activity forcing the boys to draw upon internalised assumptions or instinctive gendered beliefs. The words they produce are then read out by the facilitators and become an entry point to a discussion on gender stereotypes. However, the game also serves other functions and, Owen explained to me, acts as an

> early kind of shock, almost, of the boys knowing it's ok for us to say the word “pussy” and having them write down all these sexual terms [...] then having someone there ostensibly in the role of the educator just reading out body parts or classroom vulgarities is good in breaking down certain automatic barriers.

After the words have been written, a boy, audibly trying to control his own giggling, asks if Owen can read out the words under the pretence of “I can’t see what they say [...] I need my glasses” (Transcript:7). Owen explained to me that he always enjoys this activity when delivering workshops and, in this case, played along with the boy’s joke, responding with, “you can't see what they say, ok what was your name? Ok for the benefit of Alex let's go through them”. He then read the words written down for ‘men’ (including “face”, “penis”, “buff”, “muscles”, “genitals”, “football”, “sex”, “ping-pong”, “masturbation”, “dick”, “hair”, “sperm”) and the words for ‘women’ (including “annoying”, “vagina”, “hot”, “babies”, “nice”, “pussy”, “tits”, “lesbian”, “virgin”, “no wage gap”, “rude”, “confusing”, “fit”, “cleavage”, “booty”), sometimes having to pause for explosions of laughter to subside. In a similar manner in the other workshop, Luke turns sexual humour into an opportunity to break down the formalities of classroom norms:

> Let me interject. Now this session is gonna get a lot worse than ‘erection’ so you're gonna have to be prepared. If you're gonna cry every time you hear the word ‘erection’ we're not gonna get very far. Everybody just say erection!

This remark elicited a chorus of "erections" and laughter from the group and, once the boys had realised that usually off-limits language was permitted, led to further jokes based around the word 'erection', including this exchange:

Luke: Ok so the team over here, all in favour of changing your team's name.

Students: Yeah!

Luke: All in favour of the Semen Men?

Students: No, no!

Luke: All in favour of One Erection?

Students: YEAH!

Luke: All in favour of The Erection Squad?

[Brief pause.]

One Erection. Ok.

[Cheers from students.]

Sammy: That was me! One Erection!

[Cheers, chatting and laughing.]

While a sexualised pun on the name of the pop group, *One Direction,* is in itself humorous, the humour in the above examples is further buoyed by the incongruity between what is socially expected in the classroom context and the actual, uninhibited nature of the conversation. By encouraging humour in this way, the facilitators signal tacit permission for the students to use language that is usually taboo in the educational context, with the aim of creating a space in which participants can feel safe in discussing challenging topics with adults, but on their own terms.

As Allen (2014) suggests, humour finds fertile ground in the context of topics related to sex, and other research such as Measor's (1996) observation of a sex education class discussed in the previous chapter, demonstrates the challenge of discussing sexual topics with a group of adolescent boys. Contrary to Measor's (1996) observations in which sexual humour completely undermined the class and the instructor's authority, the IMAGINE facilitators are complicit in the jokes, and therefore complicit in undermining institutional norms. The facilitators' complicity in the joking makes them somewhat immune from the risk of sexual humour undermining their authority. In this sense, the facilitators strip some of the sexual language of its subversive power; its permissibility means it cannot be used in some of the antagonistic or disruptive ways seen in other classroom ethnographies described in the previous chapter.

The aim of the facilitators, up to a point, seems to be to place themselves inside the boys' peer culture. Indeed, this is the intended approach of the IMAGINE project, and humour can play a significant role in achieving the 'peer' relationship between facilitators and students. The facilitators occupy a position normally associated with authority, yet flout the norms of teachers to humorous effect and, in doing so, blur the lines that usually guide social behaviour in formal educational settings. The lively and sometimes loud atmosphere that this created led to teachers in the room intervening several times throughout each workshop when they considered the behaviour of the boys to be unacceptable. Owen explained this can be frustrating as it undermines the openness of the atmosphere he aims to create and puts the facilitators in a difficult position. On the other hand, Jake suggests teacher interventions can help manage bad behaviour of one or two students who are closing off the discussion for others. The instances I witnessed elucidated the delicate situation of the facilitators in delivering a workshop in which they, as outsiders to the formal institutional setting, have granted implicit permission for the boys to flout school rules. Luke explained that when teachers reprimand the students for bad behaviour, he feels like he is also getting in trouble for allowing them to say things that are not permitted. However, he described finding this funny in a way that a mischievous student might when subject to chastisement from an authority figure who does not command their respect. Using this in a productive way to seek affinity with the boys, he explained that in cases of disciplinary interventions of teachers, he usually gives one of the boys a 'look', "as though everybody's getting in loads of trouble". Not only does Luke use humour to

build rapport with the group, it seems to be part of his character that he uses to create solidarity with them, including through humorous symbolic gestures in opposition to the institution of the school.

"I'm joking": Getting a laugh (and status)

While humour seems to be a strategy of gaining 'entry' into the peer culture through solidarity and rapport, it can also be seen as a means by which facilitators establish status within the peer group. Yet, facilitators' power in the workshops is somewhat predefined by their age, life experience, and position of responsibility over the boys. The volunteers themselves embody and present conventional versions of heterosexual masculinity, allowing them to naturally assume positions of status in the group, particularly because, taking Luke's case as an example, he explained how his (hetero)sexual experience is often presumed by the boys. Indeed, the volunteers represent a resource for the boys to ask questions relating to sex and therefore possess power within heteronormative masculine frameworks. Nonetheless, status is by no means guaranteed. Jake described one instance in which a participant used abusive language towards him and threatened the teacher, demonstrating the fragility of social power structures and how they can be manipulated through discourse. Establishing and maintaining status in the workshops is therefore important if the facilitators are to have any influence over the discussion and meet the goals of the exercise.

As discussed in the first chapter, the use of humour has been linked to status and power. For instance, more frequent use of humour can be a marker of higher status, and certain kinds of humour have been shown to be associated with higher and lower status (Martin 2007; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2001). Simply using humour may therefore be a result of, and constitutive of, the higher position of status the facilitators occupy over the students, while Luke's use of humour early on can be seen as a social cue indicative of status over the students. However, while humour was in abundance by Luke, it was used sparingly by Owen and Jake. This difference did not appear to have a significant bearing on the respective authority of the facilitators in the two workshops; an absence of humour does not necessarily signal lower status; there are other status-making factors such as the symbolic position of teacher occupied by the volunteers. However, humour can be seen to be constitutive of 'peer' status negotiated within a framework of masculinities.

Status can be gained in schoolboy peer cultures by rebelling, often through jokes aimed at subverting teacher authority or disrupting the class (Swain 2005). Luke's use and encouragement of humour can therefore be seen as a way facilitators may not only gain *entry* to the peer group, but, by 'undermining' the authority of the school (and leading others to do the same), gain *status* within it. In this way, humour can be conceptualised as the enactment of a certain kind of masculinity that demonstrates conventional 'male' characteristics such as strength and bravado through the undermining of authority or social norms. In other words, status can be gained by facilitators directing humour at the school as an institution, which in this social context represents an symbol of power and control over the students (ibid).

Equally, humour was directed *among* the peer group to establish status. For example, this early exchange in which Luke explains the 'word race' activity (using the word 'animals' as an example) shows how facilitators can engage in what Dalley-Trim (2007) describes as 'verbal sparring':

> Luke: Well you could say "dog biscuits" but you'd have to argue it and I would argue against you and you would lose. So—
>
> Students: Oooh.
>
> [Laughs.]
>
> Luke: No, I'm joking. The word has to be related to the topic.

This was said in response to one of the students joking that 'biscuits' could be an acceptable word associated with 'animals'. By this early stage in the workshop the boys already seem comfortable in engaging in playful, antagonistic verbal 'spars' with Luke. Luke's authoritative "you would lose" comment elicits a chorus of hyperbolic "ooohs" from the students who recognise the exchange as being in the humorous mode of discourse, and therefore feel safe in challenging the ostensible authority figure. Luke further signals the non-seriousness of the conversation by saying that he is joking, and ends the exchange with his higher status cemented, but in non-threatening way because of the use of the humorous mode of discourse. Humour can be seen in this example as a non-hostile assertion of superiority, while simultaneously valorising competitive forms of humour. This could have the effect of legitimising the value of

asserting dominance within a hierarchical framework of masculinity and creating space for the perpetuation of forms of humour coded as 'masculine'. However, maintaining some authority is also a necessity on the part of the volunteers so the methods they use, whether humorous or not, largely come down to individual personalities and preferences.

In this regard Jake and Owen did not produce nearly as much humour as Luke, and humour in their workshop mainly centred around the sexual vocabulary of the word race activity or instances of humour produced by the students. Owen and Jake did seem to command authority and status in their positions as the ostensible 'teachers' in the workshop. They mainly used the serious mode to maintain their status, for example, by telling the boys to stop talking over each other and reduce the noise level, which escalated fairly regularly throughout the session. The contrast between the two workshops helps reveal these different *kinds* of status facilitators can achieve; status-as-'teacher' versus status-as-'peer'. A crude conceptualisation might suggest that the serious and humorous modes of discourse are used exclusively in these respective status-seeking strategies. In reality, humour is more complex and there are ways of establishing status as a teacher through humour and ways of establishing status as a peer through seriousness. For instance, Jake explains how, in conducting the word race game, he can "have a little joke [that] us old men don't know what the youths are saying these days", which uses humour but highlights the social distance and therefore status difference of the student-facilitator relationship. Alternatively, there were instances in which Luke used the serious mode to discuss sexual topics, which can be seen as establishing his (masculine) status within the peer group as a more (sexually) experienced male with whom the boys feel comfortable discussing such topics.

Humour can be a powerful means of establishing status as a 'peer', but it is by no means the only or most influential factor in the negotiation of power in the workshops, or, as Owen explained to me, "I don't think kids will respect you because you are funny". Nonetheless, humour can be seen as instrumental in the *kind* of status that is produced, which depends heavily on individual style and preference of delivery of facilitators.

“Actually, no, that's not funny”: Serious power

Given the level to which humour is seen to be constitutive of dominance and subordination of masculinities, as well as providing opportunities to break down implicit differences in power in the facilitator-student relationship, creating space for humour risks reinforcing rather than challenging harmful beliefs. In this sense, humour may serve to make a space less ‘safe’ for gendered performances that do not conform with hegemonic masculine ideals. In particular, humour produced by the students can be seen to be used as a tool in negotiating status, and intertwined with hegemonic masculinity.

In one instance, a student was laughed at by his classmates after sharing a personal story about going on a water slide at an amusement park and two other boys, who were strangers, saying to him afterwards, “did your pussy get wet?”. The story is an ideal example of the way hegemonic masculinity manifests in boys’ daily lives—in this case by two strangers disavowing the bodily masculinity of their ‘target’ and, through their use of denigrating humour referencing female genitals, marking him as feminine (and therefore subordinate). Sharing the story can therefore be seen as a vulnerable act that draws attention to the storyteller’s ‘subordination’ in the normative framework of hierarchical masculinities. Sharing it in the classroom is therefore both an act of speaking *about* masculinity, and a *performance* contesting normative expectations of masculinity by highlighting personal vulnerability. It is thus, presumably, exactly the kind of thing the facilitators want the students to share, and the fact that the student seemingly felt comfortable using the word ‘pussy’ without the usual hesitation that might be expected when breaking language taboos in a formal setting suggests some success of humour in breaking down those formalities. However, when recounted, the story was met with laughter. As “being laughed at can be painful and humiliating” (Martin 2007:44), by responding with laughter the student’s classmates have (re)made him the ‘target’ of denigrating humour within his own story, and compounded his subordination within the hierarchical framework of masculinities that threads from the original water park encounter through to the classroom.

The facilitators seem well aware of the negative impact humour can have, especially the hurtful potential of ‘laughing at’ someone. The example above took place in Jake and Owen’s workshop and in response to the laughter they were quick to switch

the discussion to the serious mode of discourse, with Jake saying sternly, “guys, please, we're talking about harassment here, it's not something that's funny”. Owen then expressed his disappointment at the students’ reaction and how he personally would be upset if it happened to him, creating the kind of solidarity and supportive (non-humorous) response that was decidedly absent in the classmates’ laughter.

Like in other observations of male adolescent peer culture, normative constructs of masculinity have a strong influence over individual boys’ actions and words (Swain 2005). In another example, the boys were divided into three teams for the ‘paper toss’ game in which each student had to throw a ball of paper into the bin. The game is designed so that one team is closer and therefore at an unfair advantage, while one team is furthest from the bin, and the game represents a metaphor for a discussion on the concept of unearned privilege. This activity elicited several small humorous taunts directed at one boy in particular who missed the bin and therefore failed to live up to masculine norms defined by athletic ability. During the discussion that followed the game, one of the boys noted that the team at the back was not only disadvantaged by being at a greater distance from the bin, but also because the two teams in front obstructed them from getting their paper ball into the bin. The discussion then went into the idea of those in front ‘helping’ by moving out of the way. However, one boy explained that doing so would risk his classmates laughing at him. Being ridiculed is seen as the social price for showing supportive, collaborative or caring behaviours towards one’s peers in the fraught arena of masculine identities.

The examples above demonstrate the way humour is a tool of subordination in relation to a hegemonic version of masculinity within male peer groups, which is unsurprising given the body of similar findings in other qualitative classroom research. In the water park example, it is through conflating someone with the physicality of the feminine that masculinity is denied; a denial that is reinforced through laughter. The second example expounds the perceived risk of enacting characteristics not considered acceptable within a dominant masculine framework. It is in the realms of bodily materiality and behavioural and discursive performances that masculinity is defined. It is through humour that such expressions of masculinity can be enacted and policed.

While the stylisation of oneself around typically masculine characteristics is a significant effect of hegemonic masculinity, homophobia is another way dominant masculinities are enacted, including through humour. Homophobic undertones are

noticeable at various points throughout both workshops, with the following humorous exchange between a student, Harry and the two facilitators providing the most illuminating example:

Harry:	For my thirteenth birthday my parents bought me a book.
Classmates:	Oooh!
Harry:	[Sarcastically] And it's so interesting, I read it every day.
Eric (facilitator):	What's the title?
Harry:	It's called *How To Be a Boy*. It was, like, “you need to ask the girl before”.
Eric (facilitator):	Or boy.
Harry:	Yeah it's 2017, you can marry a dog.
Classmates:	Oooh.
Luke:	Whoaw. Just to pick up on that point, no prejudice against you, I would prefer if we didn't compare marrying a man to marrying a dog—that’s super awkward—or being non-heteronormative to marrying a dog.
Harry:	No but—
Luke:	[Reassuringly] I know what you're saying, I know what you're saying.

The student in this example uses humour in various ways involved in the negotiation of status. Mentioning receiving a book from his parents is met with a mocking “oooh!” by the other students. As Swain (2005) and others note, an interest in reading, learning or books is not something usually marked as masculine in heteronormative cultures in which physical prowess is valued as a masculine trait over academic

success. The student manages this by using humour to save face and maintain his status, distancing himself from the idea of taking the book seriously by sarcastically saying how interesting it is, and that he reads it every day. This is an example of how humour can be used to implicitly disavow oneself from statements that might be considered unacceptable according to group norms; in this case, an interest in books, particularly one chosen by one's parents.

His next joke, however, which equates homosexuality with marrying a dog, dehumanises non-straight people and has the effect of subordinating an implicit homosexual 'other', thus asserting his own heterosexuality and, therefore, masculine dominance. Other instances in the workshops also saw boys implicitly or explicitly distancing themselves from homosexuality through humour, such as one boy repeatedly joking "no comment" to the question of "can men be sexy?". This demonstrates the subtle but inherently homophobic nature of the peer culture in which the IMAGINE program aims to intervene, and supports other observations of broader patterns in Western adolescent male peer culture. Luke reverts to the serious mode of discourse in the above exchange to address the homophobia. Having established himself from the beginning as someone who participates in and encourages joking and laughter, Luke explained the subversive power of being serious:

> The boys have to know there are things that not everybody finds funny, and so there's kind of this expectation of 'lad culture' and of 'banter' that even when something hurts you, and even when something offends you, you just laugh at it because everybody else laughs at it. So to have somebody who's already modelled that they can operate within that culture to then say "actually, no, that's not funny", is a really powerful moment for a lot of the boys.

This kind of insight is typical of Luke's account of his own use of humour, of which he seems mindful and self-critically aware. Discussing instances like the one above, he frames humour as something that can be 'called out' or condemned to powerful effect, and then, when deemed appropriate, brought "back into the discussion in a safe way". Such uses of humour support the framing of discourse as always being in either the humorous or serious mode. Luke's insight into his own use of humour suggests that switching between these two modes can be an effective strategy in challenging

heteronormative beliefs, but doing so requires some level of critical awareness of the impact of humour and on-the-fly, context-sensitive intuition.

These examples of status-seeking acts of humour that subordinate non-conforming masculinities show the extent to which humour is instrumental in the negotiation of status among a group of adolescent boys. They hint at the presence of the already well-established dynamics in a group of boys, into which the facilitators aim to intervene. As Owen explained to me, these status hierarchies are part of hidden dynamics of power and status of which facilitators cannot necessarily be aware.

Despite its constitutive role in relation to hegemonic masculinity in the peer group, humour was not used in direct resistance to the *content* of the workshop, as was the case in Barnes' (2012) observations of older boys in the *Exploring Masculinities* program in Ireland. While there are no easy comparisons to be made between the two programs and their approaches, underlying factors such as culture, class, age—of both participants and facilitators/teacher—as well as the individual differences of boys in the respective groups, all play a defining role.

"I've raped her but I have a six-pack, it's ok!": Teasing out harmful beliefs and attitudes

As I have discussed, humour can help create a space for boys to explore challenging issues in a way that feels comfortable for them. To that end, the facilitators do not see it as a bad thing if they create an atmosphere that encourages students to participate in a way that reveals harmful attitudes and beliefs. On the contrary, as Luke put it, "it's really important that they say things that are problematic and that they draw those things out in a way that feels safe for them" or in Owen's words, "if someone makes a joke that is sexist, then in a way that's not such a big issue because you're going to be confronting that anyway". Thus, rather than 'calling out' harmful jokes and giving an opposing view in the serious mode, as I discussed in the previous section, humour produced by boys was frequently used by the facilitators as an entry point into the kinds of discussions they aim to have in these sessions. For example, the word 'hairy' appeared in the word race activity under the category of 'men'. One aspect of this activity involves discussing if the words the boys produce can also relate to the alternate category. In this case, after Jake asked if women can be hairy, one of the students suggested that "fit" (attractive) girls are not hairy. While this does not seem

to be intended as humorous, it elicited some laughter from his peers, perhaps because of the perceived incongruity between femininity and hairiness. Using the serious mode of discourse, Jake responded with "that's your opinion" to emphasise that the student's purported statement of truth about body hair is an individual preference, which then led into a discussion about how personal opinion is shaped by wider social norms and how this can affect people in general.

In a similar instance in the advert game activity in Luke's workshop, the group discussed a marketing poster featuring a woman in her underwear preparing to put dinner in the oven. This was an entry point with which Luke began a discussion on sexual expectations of a hypothetical man in the scene, which led to this humorous exchange involving Luke and three students:

Luke: What if she's, like, what you would picture as an ideal woman and he was just like "I don't really want to have sex"?

Felix: He might just not be feeling up to it.

Luke: Ok cool.

Marcus: He might be tired from the night before.

[General laughter.]

He might be a bit tired um and he's like, the woman's like [in silly voice] "hump me!".

[General laughter.]

and he's kind of like "no not today cuz, you know".

Anthony: "Last night was a bit vigorous."

Marcus: Yeah, "last night was *plenty* for the week for me".

Luke: That's really interesting that there's still this kind of assumption that even if he says no today, yesterday he would have said yes.

Here, the humour plays into heteronormative expectations of men (to desire sex with women), and women (to offer sex to men), and the boys make a joke about reasons why a man may not want to have sex. Interestingly, the humour produced by the boys is collaborative, with the joke being developed by several individuals and encouraged by laughter from the group. It therefore appears collaborative and affinity-seeking on one hand, while also being status-seeking within a context that is founded on heteronormative assumptions and venerates heterosexual success on the other. This demonstrates the equivocal and paradoxical nature of humour as framed by superiority theory, and its role in constructing and reinforcing heterosexual expectations. This instance served as an entry point for Luke to ask questions related to heteronormative assumptions. While this was done in the serious mode, the exchange that helped frame the discussion was founded on humour in a way that seemed to be engaging for the group and permissible thanks to the jovial atmosphere created by the facilitators.

The examples above show how the group can have a joke that follows normative expectations about—in this case—the body hair of women and the heterosexuality of men. The serious mode of discourse generally seems to be the approach used by facilitators to challenge such instances of humour based on gendered assumptions. As the aim of the IMAGINE project is to challenge rather than perpetuate or encourage harmful normative beliefs, it may be expected that the facilitators should not join in or laugh at jokes related to harmful issues. However, that is not always the case. In fact, the humorous mode was adopted by Luke in some of the most challenging topics including objectification of women and sexual violence. In the example below, the group is discussing an image in the advert game activity that shows a man forcibly holding a woman down on the ground while she appears to resist. Three other men stand around and watch. The woman and the men are conventionally attractive (and fashionably attired) models in a setting suggestive of affluence and wealth; it is an advert for the luxury fashion brand, Dolce & Gabbana. The fabricated scene in the image implies the use of force and significant difference in power between the woman and the four men. Use of the image in the workshop is designed to prompt a conversation on sexual consent and rape, and in the exchange below, Luke is responding to several comments from the boys that suggest the scene is one of consensual sex:

Luke:	Do you think if somebody was in a relationship where they were having sex with their partner and they were holding them down and both of them were really enjoying it and me and my friends were just like—
	[Luke strikes pose as if standing and watching. There is laughter from the students.]
	Do you think that's cool or awkward?
Students:	Awkward.
Luke:	My man's just like this like, just looking over his shoulder.
	[Luke strikes a pose mimicking the man pinning the woman down in the image, but looking back over his shoulder at the onlookers. There is laughter and chatting from students.]
Luke:	Somebody said a word that begins with 'R'.
Students:	Rape.

Luke's use of humour draws attention to the bizarreness of the situation and helps elucidate the discussion along the issue of consent and rape. It also demonstrates the importance of both non-verbal signals and discursive references that make humour so context-sensitive and indebted to shared, situated understandings—in this case the humour makes symbolic references to elements in the image. The above example prompted quite a strong reaction of laughter from the group, which continued to use the humorous mode of discourse at various points in discussing the image and the issue of rape:

Christopher:	She doesn't look like she's being raped.
Nathan:	She doesn't look like she's happy.
Christopher:	There's a guy with a six-pack so she wouldn't be complaining.

Luke:	Ok so you are saying. That's so interesting so you are saying she doesn't look like she's complaining. [To Nathan] You said she doesn't look like she wants to be there. [To Christopher] You're saying he's got a six-pack so she wouldn't be complaining. [Luke and students laugh.] That is jokes. Do you think girls, the minimum requirement for girls to want to have sex with you is for you to have a six-pack? You think if you've got a six-pack then she's like [slaps hands together] definitely, I definitely want this.
Students:	No.

Repeating the student's assertion that the woman would not be complaining because of the man's 'six-pack' elicits laughter from the group and Luke himself, followed by Luke's comment, "that is jokes." So, what is the joke? The humour here derives from the incongruity between what was said and what, in reality, would be the case; that is, the trauma and seriousness of rape is not compensated or lessened by perpetrators having conventionally attractive masculine body types. There was quite a strong reaction among the group at this comment, with some excitable exclamations of disbelief, laughter, and one student shouting sarcastically, "I've raped her but I have a six-pack, it's ok!" Here, the joke is extended by a student in a way that amplifies what seems to be a shared belief in the absurdity of the Christopher's remark. In this way, rather than perpetuating normative gendered beliefs, a misogynistic statement has become the target of humour. Luke breaks down the statement further by asking rhetorically if having a six-pack is the only requirement for women to want to have sex with a man, which further points to the absurdity of what was said. While laughing at the comment can be seen as a rejection of misogynistic assumptions, the humour can also be interpreted as a way classmates subordinate someone who makes a suggestion that is seen as unacceptable in the context; ridiculing not only what was said, but the person who said it. This next exchange responds to that effect in a supportive way:

Luke: Yeah you're not saying it's good, you're just saying she could do worse, but don't you think, like—can you see that's a little bit problematic because—

Christopher: Yeah.

Returning to the serious mode of discourse, Luke's supportive remark has the effect of disavowing the ridicule and maintaining the integrity of the 'safe space' for the student who made the comment that was the subject of laughter. It also suggests a sensitivity to the fragile nature of hierarchical adolescent masculinities. This example shows how humour can challenge harmful beliefs or assumptions by drawing attention to absurdity inherent within them. However, such uses of humour may also remain embedded within hierarchies of masculinity, which is a social framework towards which the facilitators can show awareness and sensitivity in the ways they manage the discourse.

"When I'm greased, my six-pack looks absolutely stunning": Mocking masculinities

One aim of the IMAGINE program is to help 'transform masculinities'. While the examples in the previous section showed how humour can target misogyny, it can be used in a similar way whereby certain forms of masculinity are themselves the targets of humour. Luke describes an example of making light of the absurdity of some of the effects of gendered assumptions in society—in this case, men not crying—as a way of deconstructing those assumptions:

> If you follow the logical train of thought, "why do girls cry?" "Because of their emotions", and then you make the point "so men don't feel emotions" and everybody laughs, and they're like "no, obviously men feel emotions but it's something which you can't express", then in that way that leads you to a really beneficial point.

Similarly, humour can be used to share a joke at the absurdity of unrealistic expectations over sexual success or certain masculine characteristics. This is illustrated in an exchange during the discussion of the advert discussed in the previous section:

Graham: When you're greased and you have a six-pack—[sarcastically] I have experience of this obviously.

[Some laughs.]

Luke: What you mean to say is "when I'm greased, my six-pack looks absolutely stunning".

[Some more laughs]

Graham's use of sarcasm is a self-deprecating joke based on the incongruity between the type of muscular masculinity shown in the advert and his lack of that kind of masculine physicality. Luke's comment emphasises and exaggerates the student's sarcasm, showing solidarity with him and sharing in the joke that having a 'six-pack' is a desirable masculine trait that is not necessarily one embodied by the students. The sarcastic nature of the sentence can therefore be interpreted as a tacit jibe at unrealistic masculine expectations. In another example, the boys are discussing a different (sexually suggestive) image in the advert game activity and one of the boys guesses the product being marketed is condoms, before another guesses the brand Durex. Luke then makes a quick joke out of this:

Luke: Someone was like "condoms" and you waited and was like, "Durex!".

[Luke strikes a pose imitating the student nodding confidently and proudly.]

"I know the brand." Ok cool.

It is clear from being in Luke's workshop and through interviewing him that he is someone who enjoys making a joke. In this case, he seized upon the incongruity of the student's purported knowledge of condom adverts (and therefore sexual experience) and the assumed lack of such knowledge (and sexual experience) to make a joke. This light-hearted joke that ironically inflates the student's physical masculine embodiment can be seen as disarming masculinity of its regulatory power, while its playfulness on the theme of sexual success seems supportive rather than

subordinating. While these instances of sarcasm and irony seem productive in the deconstruction of normative masculinities, they could also be seen as playing into and therefore valorising certain hegemonic forms of masculinity. Humour is, after all, a subjective and personal phenomenon whose effects depend on the successful exchange of meanings based around shared assumptions (Martin 2007). It is this equivocal nature of humour that makes it a risky strategy in the arena of challenging harmful normative behaviours and beliefs.

An analytical aid that may be useful in navigating humour's equivocality is the distinction between 'laughing with' and 'laughing at' someone. The laughing at/with distinction can also be applied to conceptual objects, behaviours, assumptions or beliefs. That is, laughing 'with' heteronormative assumptions can be seen as being complicit with (and constitutive of) them, while laughing 'at' them can be seen as subversive. In the two workshops I observed, Luke seemed to be the only facilitator to use a 'laughing-at-masculinity' approach. However, he notes the importance of not 'laughing at' an individual because of their views, even if those views are openly harmful to people with marginalised identities. As he explained, "if you can make a joke out of what they said rather than who they are or their identity, then that can be really beneficial but I think it is very hard, it is quite hard". Moreover, given the subjective nature of the enjoyment of humour, not all groups are receptive to this approach and Luke described an instance in which he thought humour made a group of boys feel threatened and 'made fun of', rather than 'laughing with' each other.

As well as making certain forms of masculinity the target of humour, the facilitators aim to challenge normative masculine assumptions by presenting 'alternative' forms of masculinity through their own gendered expressions. While strategies include taking a 'softer' approach to classroom discipline, another way they suggest this is possible is through self-deprecating humour. In discourses of power, self-deprecating humour can itself be seen as an act of self-subordination, as it draws attention to one's own errors or 'insufficiencies'. Examples described in the interviews include making a joke about one's own body type as not conforming to hegemonic character types, or joking about a personal experience of being afraid of fighting, which Luke suggests is a "pretty universal shared experience that we've all had but in the trap of masculinity, no one wants to admit that they have been afraid to fight". Self-deprecatory humour can be a useful tool in 'safely' revealing feelings that do not conform with hegemonic expressions of masculinity. Moreover, as Luke explained,

sharing such feelings can make workshop participants open up about their own similar experiences or emotions. Self-deprecating humour then becomes a strategy of demonstrating emotional vulnerability, with the aim of leading a group into alternative ways of acceptable thinking, feeling and expression. Many humour theorists argue that self-deprecatory humour is incompatible with a superiority theory of humour. However, it has been suggested that people who use self-deprecatory humour are showing superiority over a past or alternative version of themselves, which can be a demonstration of superiority. Indeed, in the IMAGINE context, Owen explained to me that rather than being an act of vulnerability, this can then be seen as a strength and resilience against becoming a target of ridicule for characteristics considered unacceptable by dominant masculine discourse. Self-deprecating humour can therefore be a style performance of alternative masculinities that does not lead to subordination—and can perhaps represent higher status—within group hierarchies.

However, while such uses of humour seem subversive of hegemonic masculinity, they do little to dismantle the hierarchical structures themselves—rather, they simply allow for alternative forms of status. As Luke explained, "we still all exist within that framework of masculinity that our society put us in". This points to the conceptual (and political) dilemma of whether interventions like IMAGINE seek a radical destabilisation of masculinities as a hierarchical framework, or whether they simply aim to create space for more varied expressions of masculinity within that framework. Moreover, if IMAGINE (and this analysis of it) are founded on the discourse of masculinities, this begs some fundamental questions; for example, to what extent does it reinforce dominant hierarchical structures that are produced by and reproduce a binary construction of gender?; or how does the exclusion of girls in this intervention limit their agency (and the agency of boys who wish to challenge male norms) in undoing gendered power hierarchies? Similarly, if humour is understood only as a form of superiority (even when being used self-deprecatorily), it is difficult to see how it can have radical potential in challenging the hierarchical nature of masculinities. Radial transformation, however, is not necessarily the aim of IMAGINE volunteers who are well aware of the challenge they face as facilitators and limitations of a three-hour session[8]. Rather, Owen explained that a more realistic aim is 'planting

[8] Not all IMAGINE interventions are limited to one session per group, with some making contact several times with the same group of boys over an extended period of time, with potential for deeper discussions and stronger relationships between facilitators and young men.

seeds' of ideas, and giving the students tools to think about things in new ways. Such an intervention may not in itself seem radical, but possesses the potential to grow into transformative change over time.

Conclusion

The title of this thesis, "Mocking Masculinities" was intended to suggest this would be an exploration of the ways humour can challenge masculinities as a concept and as a social 'reality' within a male adolescent peer culture—that is, crudely, how masculinities might be mocked. However, this analysis elucidates the double meaning in the title; masculinities are also *doing* the mocking. Indeed, the generally jovial atmosphere of the workshops helped reveal the underlying discourses of hegemonic masculinity that have come to be expected in male peer groups such as this one, and showed how humour is a significant force in the maintenance and policing of acceptable masculinities. Rather than suppressing these harmful patterns, the facilitators aimed to bring them out in the workshops. Humour was conducive to this by creating a space for boys to freely discuss sensitive issues in ways that break conventional school norms. While this created rapport between the volunteers and the boys, it was also constitutive of the volunteers' status within the group, particularly through the humorous subversion of school authority—but also, in the case of one facilitator, through competitive displays of humour.

As this risks humour playing into and legitimising cultures based around hegemonic masculinities, being serious can be a 'safer' option. However, the effectiveness of being serious is strengthened by the capacity to joke and laugh with the group, and switching between humorous and serious modes of discourse was a common strategy used by all the facilitators to confront harmful beliefs. More subversive or transformative instances of humour, such as making harmful beliefs the 'targets' of jokes or presenting alternative forms of masculinity through self-deprecating humour are possible and represent small but radical sites for change, but were not the dominant sources of humour in these workshops.

The IMAGINE facilitators occupy a conflicted position in which they must work both with and against a framework of hierarchical masculinities. The equivocality of humour provides a useful strategy to help navigate this delicate balance. It can therefore be a valuable strategy to manage discussions in a way that feels acceptable

to the participants. Nonetheless, the use of humour is heavily dependent on the individual style and preferences of the person delivering the workshop, as well as other points of difference in both the facilitators and participants. A longer-term ethnographic study would enable a deeper understanding of the interpersonal dynamics of a particular group, which could, for instance, explore how group-specific power structures are reinforced and challenged through humour, rather than modelling them on general frameworks. Moreover, in-depth interviews with workshop participants would shed light on the boys' use of humour and their interpretations of the humorous attempts of facilitators, which would reveal factors that are not necessarily possible to discern from an observational analysis of one morning's activities. Such avenues of research would serve to unearth humour's transformative potential as a phenomenon capable of subverting and deconstructing harmful gendered beliefs and behaviours within and among men and boys, creating potentially transformative conceptual space for how masculinities that mock can become 'masculinities' mocked.

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