

The Butt of the Joke?

Laughter and Potency in the Becoming of Good Soldiers

Beate Sløk-Andersen

Copenhagen Business School

Denmark

Abstract

In the Danish military, laughter plays a key role in the process of becoming a good soldier. Along with the strictness of hierarchy and discipline, a perhaps surprisingly widespread use of humor is essential in the social interaction, as the author observed during a participatory fieldwork among conscripted soldiers in the army. Unfolding the wider context and affective flows in this use of humor, however, the article suggests that the humorous tune (Ahmed 2014a) that is established among the soldiers concurrently has severe consequences as it not only polices soldiers' sexuality and 'wrong' ways for men to be close, but also entangles in the 'making' of good, potent soldiers. Humor is therefore argued to be a very serious matter that can cast soldiers as either insiders or outsiders to the military profession.

Keywords: military, humor, attunement, affects, military service, potency, sexuality

During a four-month-long participatory fieldwork amongst soldiers serving in the Danish army, I experienced how laughter permeated everyday life and caused momentary breaks from the seriousness that came with being embedded in a quite hierarchal structure. Even the sergeants who were supposed to discipline the young soldiers were keen on lightening the atmosphere by telling jokes or encouraging others to do so. Humor appeared to make military service more fun: it lightened the mood and supported social bonds among soldiers which also made the tough times more bearable.

However, I also observed how humor took part in 'making' of military professionals; how seemingly innocent comments or actions that were "just a joke" took part in establishing otherwise unspoken limitations and norms for how to be a good soldier. In this article, I will unfold how the telling of jokes, laughter, and pranks seemed to "tinker towards" (Law and Mol 2002) what was expected of the soldiers for them to be recognizable as military subjects; and thereby move closer to becoming insiders to the military profession. Attempting to grasp this role of humor in soldiers' continuous process of *becoming* (Haraway 2008), I will combine insights from previous ethnological studies of humor and gender studies, unfolding how the concept of *affects* might further develop the understanding of how humor works in powerful ways in military settings.

This crucial role of humor will be examined by unfolding the question of *potency*, not only as enacted sexually but equally as enacted through leadership. Connecting these two ‘versions’ of potency, it is possible to demonstrate how humor not only takes part in a very serious policing of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways for soldiers to create social bonds, but equally to demonstrate how humor in subtle ways takes part in negotiating the recognition of ‘insiders’ to the military profession. Thus, humor is essential to military subjectivity.

To set the scene for the analysis, I want to present the reader with the scenario that spurred this article; it is a scenario which occurred during a two-and-a-half hour long march one warm afternoon:

It’s getting hot walking with about 25 kilos of gear on our backs, so during our first stop, Just, Fischer, and Persson pull down their pants to cool off their legs—which means that they are standing in the middle of the woods in their underwear, pants down by their ankles. On the other side of the trail, about 15-20 meters away and somewhat separate from the rest of the group, Juul and Karlsen are lying down against each other on the ground, enjoying a break in the sun. One of them has their arm around the other, and they are both smiling.

On the opposite side of the trail, one of the guys with his pants down around his ankles notices the two guys and proclaims loudly: ‘That’s kinda like *Brokeback Mountain*.’ After a few more guys comment on the apparently homoerotic character of this scenario, several of them sneak up on the two guys and throw themselves in a bundle on top of them. Juul and Karlsen are surprised and look like they are exhausted by the many kilos of human bodies that suddenly land on top of them, while the guys who have thrown themselves on top of them laugh. (based on field notes, week 11)¹

The two men lying together, Juul and Karlsen, seemed to grow fond of one another during the conscription period. But, as this excerpt indicates, their way of being close was considered inappropriate. It was compared to *Brokeback Mountain*, the 2005 blockbuster film about the forbidden love between two male cowboys. Although it was apparently perfectly fine to pull down your pants while surrounded by the rest of the platoon, it was deemed out of place to show another guy tenderness by holding him. I did not know the intimate details of Juul and Karlsen’s relationship—they might have been close friends without any sexual interaction, or they might have been lovers. But this is irrelevant, as they were considered to be ‘more’ than conscripts with a close bond; they were read as men who desired men. Seeing this display of assumed desire that did not fit the norm, some of the other male conscripts intervened with humor, which illustrates how humor can be an effective mechanism for policing sexuality and closeness.

But the scenario opens up an array of possible interpretations. Seeing it as a form of policing that safeguards the norms of heterosexuality is, of course, just one way to interpret this scenario. The scenario could also be seen in a broader perspective regarding how to perform as a soldier, and how this is regulated affectively—e.g.,

through laughter. This becomes apparent as the wider context of the scenario is unfolded. By doing so, I suggest that the tenderness between the two men was interfered with not just because of their display of intimacy, but also because their individual performances as soldiers fell outside of the recognizable patterns for being a good soldier.

Second, to understand why Juul and Karlsen did not oppose the group of peers throwing themselves on top of them, at the end of the article I will attend to the powerful forces working through jokes, mockery, and teasing. Here, I will draw on the work of affect scholar Sara Ahmed (2014a) who has argued that ‘being with’ means to be ‘similar with’ as recognition entangles in processes of *attunement*. In the form of a seemingly innocent use of humor, this social mechanism is suggested to take part in the disciplining of soldiers, keeping them within a humorous mood out of fear of ruining ‘the good mood’. But before turning to affects, I must set a minimal framework for this article, empirically as well as analytically.

Empirical setting and analytical approach

In a landmark article, feminist military scholar Carol Cohn notes how, during her fieldwork among defense analysts in the US, she realized “that talking about nuclear weapons is fun” (1987, 704). As part of a more extensive analysis of the use of language in this context, Cohn argues that language becomes a way of bypassing the realness of a subject that may otherwise invoke moral outrage or emotional reactions, thereby making it possible to work in close proximity to death. Cohn’s argument still appears relevant 30 years later, as I reflect on my own fieldwork in which the potentially very serious and deadly consequences of military work seemed absent. While Cohn did not focus on humor as such, I wonder how we might approach this still-very-present matter of “fun” in the training of Danish soldiers. For readers to understand the empirical setting for the analysis, the following section briefly introduces the Danish case and the empirical work leading to this article.

The overarching research project from which this article has unfolded, explores what it means to be a good soldier in the twenty-first century and how the road to becoming one might be challenged and obstructed.² In this work, the *good soldier* has been constructed as “a figure or character with agentic presence and force” (Ashcraft 2017, 53), which opens up to contradictions, negotiations, and compromises in the performative becoming of these soldiers. Here, I draw on Judith Butler’s definition of performativity as “that power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration” (Butler 1993, 20). This term is used to enable an analytical exploration of how the recognition as a good soldier is a continuous process that is never finalized; it is a continuous becoming. Empirically, the project attends to soldiers doing military service in Denmark where a 170-year-old conscription system is still in effect, albeit most of the 4,200 conscripted soldiers needed each year voluntarily sign a contract to serve.³ While only male citizens can be drafted, women are given the option to serve alongside them—unlike in the neighboring countries of Sweden and Norway where gender-neutral conscription has recently been introduced. However, all three



Figure 1. Conscripted soldiers marching at a Danish military camp, men and women marching side by side.

countries have somewhat similar conscription systems that historically have been tied to the development of the country's welfare system and claims for democratic rights (see e.g. Østergaard 1998; Sundevall 2011; Kronberg 2014). Summed up in the phrase "One man, one vote, one rifle" (Sundevall 2017, 63), military service could be seen as 'the price to pay' for recognition as a citizen of the state. Hence, the Danish male-only conscription system is reminiscent of a time when only men were considered citizens entitled to certain rights. However, since becoming one of the first countries to legalize pornography and abortions, many Danes have considered the country to be a frontrunner when it comes to matter of gender equality (Nellemann et al. 1988), something that is supported by a substantial representation of women on the labor market and men involved in child rearing and housework.⁴ A recent attention to gender issues in the military could perhaps also be seen as testimony to an egalitarian assumption that men and women should not just have equal rights but also a more

even representation, even in traditional male-dominated professions.⁵ Further, when interviewing male soldiers in Denmark, I found that they tend to distance themselves from militaries assumed to be hyper-masculine—often exemplified through the U.S. military—mentioning that Danish soldiers are far better at critical thinking, have a more informal tone, and respect women more. Among the conscripted soldiers that this analysis focuses on, 17 percent are now women (*Conscripted Soldiers*, 2018), making them less of a rare sight in the Danish military than they were just ten years ago.

The primary empirical foundation for this article is a participatory fieldwork carried out in the spring of 2016. Here, I participated in the everyday life of a platoon comprised of conscripted soldiers, joining them from the first day until they were discharged four months later.⁶ I performed the same routines and drills, wore the uniform, and shared a dorm room with a group of both male and female conscripts in an attempt to “perform the phenomenon” (Wacquant 2006). With this approach, I could observe the interactions between and practices of these conscripts; this allowed me to become part of their experience, and thereby gain insight into the forms of *tacit knowledge* that are attached to the daily routines that make up much of the everyday life in this setting (Ehn & Löfgren 2010; Löfgren 2014). And while my agreement with the platoon commander was that I was allowed to come and go as I so desired, most of the conscription period passed by so quickly that I almost forgot about my original intentions of alternating between participation and observations. The embodied experience of this fieldwork in a setting that somewhat resembled a *total institution* (Goffman 1968) simply overruled most intentions of detachment (Sløk-Andersen 2017).

It was not until the last month of the conscription period that I decreased my *degree of participation* (Spradley 1980). I did this by first doing a week of interviews, where I would pull conscripts and sergeants aside during the diverse activities planned for the week (e.g. while the platoon was learning to put out fires and evacuate buildings), whenever this would not interfere with the activities. I was still wearing the uniform, marching from one place to the other and taking part in cleaning and maintenance, but I was allowed to sidestep most of the core activities to do interviews. The week after, I took a step further away from the role as a conscript by observing the platoon from the sideline. For this part, I was wearing my own clothes, primarily to avoid causing too much confusion as I was now disrupting the integration that the uniform had enabled so far (Sløk-Andersen 2018). Concurrently, I kept doing interviews with conscripts during evenings and weekends throughout the remaining weeks, ending up with a total of thirty-eight qualitative interviews.⁷

To get a sense of the generalizability of insights from the four months of participatory fieldwork, I did an additional two days of contrasting fieldwork at a different military camp in the spring of 2017.⁸ Material from these two days is also included in this article, as this small fieldwork offered a case highly relevant for discussing women’s positions within a setting where a sexualized humor is predominant—something that I shall return to at the end of the article. Here, I will also I will reflect on the limitations and possibilities that came with being a woman doing fieldwork in a military setting often said to be defined qua concepts of masculinity (Higate 2003; Carreiras 2006; Baaz & Stern 2010; Kronsell & Svedberg 2012).

The seriousness of laughter

Quite some research effort has been put into the exploration of the social and cultural meaning and effect of humor (e.g. Radcliffe-Brown 1961; Douglas 1968; Lyman 1987; Billig 2005; Lockyer & Pickering 2005; Oring 2016). In an anthology by ethnologists Lars-Eric Jönsson and Fredrik Nilsson (2014), humor has for instance been argued to be a highly useful analytical approach as it negotiates and makes visible the “taboos, limits, norms, and rules” that the use of humor presupposes (ibid., 11, my translation). This analytical potential is in this article used not only to unfold how an active (primarily male) heterosexual practice is established and policed as the norm, but equally to argue that the performance of potency in the form of leadership and dominance is inherent to being a good soldier. Working my way towards these arguments, I will unfold how being positioned as ‘the butt of the joke’ indicates the limits of recognition. That is, how being the one being ridiculed, teased or made fun of, can be seen as a way to perform and police the boundaries between an inside and outside of the military profession.⁹

Rather than developing our understanding of humor in itself—as plenty of competent scholars have already led the way in this—my aim is to expand on how humor has been analyzed within a military setting. Here, ethnographers in previous studies have suggested humor to be a disciplining mechanism, a way to exclude that which disrupts efficiency and cohesion, a way to keep one’s honor intact within the hierarchal system, a way to build social bonds, and a way to express critique or complaints without disrupting cohesion (Ben-Ari & Sion 2005; Engman 2014; Godfrey 2016; Bjerke & Rones 2017). The following analysis will be contextualized to how humor has been analyzed in Scandinavian military settings as the structure and culture of these militaries—vis-a-vis the introduction to Denmark and Scandinavia in the previous section—are quite similar, making this a solid point of reference for the analysis.

In the above-mentioned anthology on humor, Jönsson and Nilsson (2014) suggest that the use of humor presents a risk of ridicule but it also builds social bonds because it challenges and makes visible elements that create order in society; thus, laughter is serious business. Specific to the military setting, this is illustrated in Jones Engman’s contribution to the anthology. Engman (2014), who has conducted fieldwork in the Swedish navy for years, argues that humor—in counterpoint to an otherwise formal and disciplined tone of the armed forces—helps to create intimate and informal bonds among the sailors, while its playful and carnivalesque character also provides them with an opportunity to challenge the social and cultural order of the navy.

In another recent Scandinavian study based on fieldwork among Norwegian conscripted soldiers, Thea A. Bjerke and Nina Rones (2017) explore the use of humor as a way to manage life in a strict and disciplined *total institution* (Goffman 1968). Pinpointing the usefulness of humor in such a setting, Bjerke and Rones note that this is a strategy for handling frustration and disagreements “without being someone who causes problems” (2017: 15). Drawing on the work of social anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, the authors argue that the soldiers in their study walked a fine line

between funny and offensive humor, which suggests that there is a risk that the joke's usefulness could turn counterproductive. As this fine line is difficult for not only the soldiers but perhaps also researchers to navigate, I refrain from using such a distinction here and explore instead the practices to which the use of humor is attached.¹⁰ And here, silences as well as bodily experiences might be just as useful to explore; however, they are difficult to grasp through theories about humor. This is one argument for going beyond the field of humor studies, complimenting this with arguments from affect theory—which I will be doing at the end of the article.

A second argument is that in much of the existing research on humor in military settings, the use of humor seems to presuppose established and recognized subject positions; the person making the joke, the person casted as the butt of the joke as well as the audience are all presented as entities. Their positions might be destabilized through the joke, but in the 'successful' use of humor, the social order is restored after the telling of the joke, hereby establishing the use of humor as a somewhat linear interaction process between subjects. But what if we do not presuppose coherent subjects? What if we approach humor as an inherent mechanism in the becoming, e.g. as in good soldiers, and thus as a continuous process where recognition is never ensured? With the help of *performativity* and *affect theory*, this is what I am curious to investigate. Thus, this article does not set out to define what humor is, but rather how it is done and what the implications of this could be in a military setting. In this attempt, *humor* will be joined by terms like *laughter* and *mood* as a way to open up to a broader approach in which the embodied experience and the non-verbal use of humor and its bodily felt implications can be included in the process of becoming.

A laughing band of brothers

There was a lot of laughter during the four months I spend at the military camp, not least because humor and jokes were considered a way of creating a positive atmosphere. Humor was so essential to the everyday life that we even had one week where the company commander, called "Boss," decided that the focus for the entire company should be on creating "a good mood and attitude" which resulted in daily competitions of who could tell the best joke—of which many revolved around male sexuality.

After having visited a fair share of military camps across Denmark and interviewed soldiers of various ranks over the last five years, I would claim that the widespread use of humor is something that many employees in the military take pride in. As suggested by Engman (2014) in his article on the Swedish Navy, this might be to counterbalance the strictness and seriousness that also defines being a soldier. For the conscripted soldiers that I joined, the occasional jokes appeared to be a nice break from everyday routines defined by discipline, hierarchy, and order. As mentioned above, Engman further suggests that humor takes part in creating intimate and informal bonds amongst soldiers (*ibid.*), whereby humor could be said to support the establishing of so-called *bands of brothers*.

Expressions such as *band of brothers* and *brothers-in-arms* are often used to describe the intimate bonds that can be made between soldiers during their service; within military research, this has been referred to as *cohesion* (King 2013), a concept that is considered essential for the efficiency of military troops (Creveld 2002; Maninger 2008). The establishment of such close bonds may have been challenged by the fact that the service period for most conscripts in Denmark has been reduced to four months, yet the issue of closeness still appears to be a priority—among soldiers as well as superiors. As expressed by our platoon commander, Lieutenant Petersen, with regards to his own relationship to others in the company: “You quickly become more than colleagues. [...] Soldiers find it quite easy to bond” (1st interview with Lt. Petersen). The focus on creating bonds and closeness—whether we call this cohesion or something else—not only seems to have a beneficial effect on the capabilities of a platoon; it also appears to simply make the job more enjoyable for the people who devote a lot of time and energy to the Danish military. Thus, becoming a soldier is also about becoming part of a collective in which humor is an integral element.

As the expressions *band of brothers* and *brothers-in-arms* indicate, the idea of closeness amongst soldiers has typically been contingent on a male-only platoon. Following, as suggested with the scenario that opened this article, intimate bonds between male soldiers may, however, also have limitations; there are unspoken restrictions regarding this closeness, which necessitates a certain policing of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways to be close. Underscoring such limitations of the closeness among male soldiers, historian Stephan Maninger has stated that:

When operational, the members of military units are in each other’s presence on a 24-hour basis, involving matters of life and death. Operational conditions are therefore by their very nature intimate, but among heterosexual men never sexual (Maninger 2008, 22).

As a scholar, Maninger represents one of the more extreme positions in the debate about the inclusion of women in combat units, yet his position illustrates a prevalent assumption that the bonds between male soldiers are not, or at least should not be, sexual. Making the same argument, albeit in the form of a humorous comment, our platoon commander was quoted numerous times for saying: “This is not a summer camp, we don’t sit in a circle and play the flute... Well, maybe we play flute, but we don’t touch each other’s instruments” (field notes, week 17). Here, embedded in the sound of laughter, it was made clear that sexual relations between (male) soldiers were unwanted. Through the use of humor, a heterosexual practice was thereby reiterated as recognizable.

As both quotes imply, the bond between brothers-in-arms *could* be but *should* not be anything more than a closeness that is brotherly and non-sexual.¹¹ So while the Danish military have for the last three years taken part in the Copenhagen Pride Parade under the slogan “Serve with pride,” doing military service still does not seem to be easily combined with the gender and sexual diversity celebrated with the parade.



Figure 2. The Danish Defence has taken part in the Copenhagen Pride Parade since 2016. (Photo by Tine Damsholt)

The expectation of sexual potency

Making it more complicated for soldiers to maneuver through this field, the policing of closeness was accompanied by an extensive focus on sexual activity and potency.¹² Because while relations between (male) soldiers were expected to be non-sexual, an active sexuality *was* expected of them. An example of this was how a three-day long drill in the woods was wrapped up by our platoon commander mentioning that by now, we were probably looking forward to going back to the barracks to take a shower, sleep indoors, and “beat the bishop a bit” (field notes, week 4), referring to an expected male masturbation practice impatiently on hold during the drill.

References to sexual activities were, perhaps not surprisingly, extremely present in the use of language in this setting. For instance, when we were given instructions or were standing in a waiting position, we were often told to (or rather, expected to know that we should) “take a knee”; i.e., kneeling down with one knee and one foot on

the ground. As we learned this process, those who incorrectly put both knees on the ground were corrected with the exclamation: “Not in the blowjob position!” Similarly, the expression “dick in the ass” was used to emphasize situations in which we needed to be very close to the person in front of us. And when we were praised for having done something well, there were analogies to erections or ejaculation. Especially among the male conscripts, discussions that caused laughter could be on topics such as, “Who in the platoon is short enough to give a blowjob standing up?” or questions like, “If you *had* to choose, would you rather have sex with a scrawny guy like Torsten or a big fat black dude?” (field notes, week 17).

This use of language might have required an initial getting used to for some of us, but I did not take note of anyone complaining or expressing annoyance over this.¹³ The only comment came from Olsen, a female conscript who—despite her overall tendency to be highly adaptable and laugh things off—reacted to one sergeant’s particular comment:

It’s a bit odd, because when they [sergeants] say that something is so good that ‘The Boss will get an erection’ and stuff like that, I just think, ‘Sure, whatever.’ Then this [Sergeant] KM comes along... and we’re standing there, listening, and then he asks us to all just step a pussy hair closer’, and I felt that it was super inappropriate and... ‘Couldn’t you just have asked us to take a step forward?’ [...] I was like, ‘Ugh, that was a gross statement’ (Interview with Olsen)

While Olsen had gotten used to images of sexual practices being an integral part of the language, something stood out for her in this case. And while Olsen did not say anything in the situation, what her reaction makes clear is how almost all of the sexualized references implied a sexually-active *male* body: men giving blowjobs, men masturbating, men penetrating or being penetrated, men getting erections and ejaculating. With Sergeant KM’s utterance—which was no doubt meant as an attempt to be humorous—the female genitalia suddenly appeared, which interrupted the expected pattern and made it visible (Star 1990; Bowker and Star 2000).

Within queer studies, criticism has been raised over the often “excluding assumption about the subject’s sexual existence” in queer theories (Johansson 2013: 45); a neglect of people who are not sexually active, e.g. asexual or celibate people. However, what I am trying to illustrate is that an active sexuality and potency was assumed among the male conscripts, regardless of their individual practices. An example of this presented itself during another drill, where we were cracking jokes and taking lighthearted punches at each other. One of the male conscripts, Hald, ended up as the butt of the jokes because someone had heard rumors that he had hooked up a female soldier:

During our breaks, there is talk about tree stumps, holes, moistness, and all sorts of other things [in the woods] that can be misinterpreted as being related to sex. Each time, it leads to laughter. And then there is a long interrogation of Hald; whether he had sex with Nielsen, or if he ‘couldn’t get a boner?’ as Buster asks with a cheeky smile. Hald tries several times to diplomatically shut down the conversation, but Fischer, Buster, Madsen, and Andersen keep the interrogation going. (based on field notes, week 16)

Among the conscripts, gossip about sexual encounters always prompted great curiosity and enthusiasm. In this case, even one of Nielsen's best friends was cheering and pushing for more intimate details. Although the rest of us found the interrogation amusing, Hald did not seem comfortable in the situation. When I talked to him later that day, he told me that he and Nielsen had not had sex but "just kissed" and slept next to each other. Either way, he did not want to 'spill the beans' out of consideration for Nielsen, who might feel betrayed. However, remaining silent about the details of their encounter also worked to Hald's advantage, keeping him within the boundaries of an active heterosexuality. His silence meant staying inside the norms of a male soldier who *wanted* to have sex with this (or any) woman; thus, he remained recognizable as a sexually potent soldier. The jokes and questions from the others suggest that he certainly *would* have had sex with her if he was potent enough to "get a boner." Thus, the use of humor not only policed the types of sexual practices or closeness that were considered to be a threat to the band of brothers; it also pointed to the importance of a heterosexual desire and potency.

In prior research, such significance of male soldiers' heterosexual desire and potency has been presented as a key focus for both national militaries and the nation-states they are meant to defend (Goldstein 2001; Kronsell 2012; Bourke 2016; Bulmer 2017). One argument for this preoccupation with sexuality could be that soldiers are supposed to be "the ideal, exemplary male" (Kilshaw 2011, 182) and, as such, this profession is highly entangled with issues of sexuality and reproduction. I want to add that humor plays a crucial role in the policing of this sexual practice and desire, hereby ensuring that the potent sexuality of male soldiers was turned towards women and not towards other men (see also Sundevall 2014). Through humor, an active heterosexual practice was hereby reiterated as the norm.

My empirical examples from drills may suggest that the connection between sexuality and humor was primarily present when we moved outside the military camp, but it was indeed present in most situations in which formality or exhaustion did not rule out the use of humor. But different settings made the expectation of an active sexuality play out in different ways: while heterosexual couples kissing and sleeping together were highly visible at the camp, as we were all living in very close proximity to each other, we were told that this behavior was not permitted when we were on duty. Here, activities that could take part in establishing someone as sexually potent, such as kissing or watching pornography, were not allowed. Thus, the numerous jokes and sexualized humor could be seen as a way of showing one's potency in situations where it was not allowed to be actively practiced. As I shall demonstrate next, sexual potency was however not the only form of potency that was expected of good soldiers.

A potency beyond sexual desire

Reading the Oxford Dictionary's definition of *potency*, a possible broadening of how potent soldiers are supposed to perform presented itself. Here, being potent is defined as having two different meanings:

1. “having great power, influence, or effect. *Synonyms*: powerful, strong, vigorous, mighty, formidable, influential, commanding, dominant, forceful, dynamic [...]”
2. (of a male) able to achieve an erection or to reach an orgasm.” (Oxford Dictionaries 2019)

While the second definition refers to the sexual potency that I have so forth argued to be an expected part of being a male soldier, the first one seems to correspond with my impression of how *the good soldier* should be practiced. This twofold definition of potency seems to encapsulate the expected performance of good soldiers; they are not only expected to be sexually potent, but also expected to be able to perform in a way that can be described as being powerful, strong, vigorous, etc.¹⁴ Here, I want to once again return to the scenario that opened up this issue in the beginning of the article.

Juul and Karlsen, the two young men who were enjoying each other’s company that day in the woods, had quite different approaches to conscription. While Juul knew that he did not want a career in the Danish military and had primarily signed up for conscription primarily to make new friends, Karlsen was focused on showing his potential as a good soldier with leadership potential. Juul recognized this potential in Karlsen but felt that few others saw it because of his somewhat hesitant approach:

Someone like Karlsen, well, if you ask me, I would say that he should be Soldier of the Month [an honor awarded to one conscript each month], but he’s just not the type. I mean, he’s really tough and bad-ass and a good soldier, I think, but he’s just not the type who publicly shows that he’s a leader. Yeah, he just holds back more and lets others take control, even if he is a really good soldier. (Interview with Juul)

As Juul expresses in this quote, it is difficult for someone like Karlsen to be rewarded and earn respect if he is unable to take control and enact authority. To be recognizable as a good soldier, it seems necessary that one is positioned as active and influential—as potent. In Juul’s opinion, Karlsen “let others take control,” even though his skills had earned him a spot in two drills that were for only the most talented conscripted soldiers. Despite these achievements, few soldiers in our platoon mentioned him when I asked them during interviews to give an example of “a really good soldier.”

During an interview, our platoon commander—who had selected Karlsen for the two drills—stressed the need for soldiers to be extroverted. Describing himself as highly introverted, Lieutenant Petersen knew that this did not work in the military, so he focused on performing as more extroverted; “you have to,” he told me (1st interview with Lt. Petersen). Regarding the evaluation of the potential of each conscript in the platoon, he noted that “[i]f you’re invisible, it’s very easy to score a low grade.”¹⁵ This statement was supported when another conscript in our platoon, Fischer, was named Soldier of the Month. In the motivation for this decision, which was read aloud in front of the entire company, Fischer was praised for “actively participating in all activities and being proactive when it comes to tasks and questions. He is committed and is [...]”

good at taking responsibility for the group” (field notes, week 17). To a large degree, this praise reflects the Oxford Dictionary’s first definition of being potent. Regarding the second definition, Fischer was not hesitant in referring to his own potency; he was very open about his own sexual prowess.

Even if one is not sexually potent, one can at least still be potent through means of leadership; but being neither seemed to be a bad fit with the military setting. Professionally as well as sexually—if these can even be separated—Karlsen did not enact potency. So, while Lieutenant Petersen and Juul recognized Karlsen’s potential as a good soldier, he failed to perform as such in various ways: in appearing considerate and sensitive, and in being read as non-heterosexual. A combination of potency and *homosexuality* might have been an even greater breach of the norm. As such, this combination was delimited or even tabooed by the humorous policing of sexuality to such a degree that I have not met any openly gay soldiers during my fieldwork—or any other representatives of the LGBTQIA ‘community’ for that matter.

The effect of humor

While the last section supported the suggestion that Danish soldiers need to perform potency in more than one way, I have yet to unfold how humor is then entangled in this process. Underscoring how extensively humor is embedded in the social interaction in the empirical setting that I observed, an advisor at the camp noted this during a presentation about the working environment and sexual harassment. Here, she remarked that “it is of course not prohibited to tell a naughty joke, but try to be considerate of each other [...] The tone can be rough every once in a while. We have a certain jargon here” (field notes, week 4). Thus, soldiers were encouraged to find a fitting level of humor among themselves; something that, as illustrated, made it difficult for some to express their uncomfortableness with comments and actions considered humorous by those who executed them. Because while humor makes the military an enjoyable workplace for many, the use of humor appeared so fundamental that it would be almost inappropriate to show offence or oppose over sexual jokes or comments because “it was just a joke.”

The work of feminist scholar Sara Ahmed (2014a; 2014b) might help us understand the powerful forces embedded in the seemingly innocent telling of jokes or pranking of peers. Along the claims of scholars like Engman, Ahmed recognizes that the establishing of a collective mood—e.g. a humorous mood—enables us to be “in relation to others” (2014a, 15). Yet she takes a more critical approach by arguing that this also makes it difficult to stand outside of this mood. Not being in the mood—or, being “affectively ‘out of tune’ with others” (ibid.: 17)—affects one’s possibilities to take part in the collective as “attunement is understood not only as being *with*, but being *with in a similar way*.” (ibid., 16, my italics) So while generating a humorous tune may be seen as an innocent and positive way to support social bonding, it also (re)produces a certain, required way of being with as these flows of affects “produce subjects and relations” (Frederiksen 2013, 26). Thus, as a consequence of being out of tune, recognition as a subject is threatened. From such a perspective, the use of humor

in a military platoon not only establish a certain affective mood to which everyone was expected to contribute, it also indicated what was expected of good soldiers, thereby enabling military subjectivity (see also Billig 2005). Hence, the use of humor that I observed feeds into not only one's possibilities to become part of the band-of-brothers but also to be recognized as a military subject.

So while the humorous tune in the conscription company was seen as just a certain jargon, it affected one's possibilities to become an insider to the military profession. This is clear in the following example, which addresses the tradition of using the conscripts who are unable to participate in drills and exercises as 'extras'; i.e., making them play the role of an enemy soldier, a person in need of first aid, or a civilian in order to make the scenario more realistic for the other conscripts. Being an extra thereby meant the opposite of being an able soldier; it was an indication of failing as a soldier.

While standing outside the auditorium, lined up *at ease*, waiting for a sergeant to come out and give us orders to go in, a male voice in the crowd—I can't hear who it is—repeats a joke that Sgt. Kleinmann told yesterday: 'What do you call Peter in the military? An extra!' The crowd laughs. (based on field notes, week 13)

19-year-old Peter had been an extra a number of times due to an old injury. The sergeant's joke was therefore inspired by a recognizable situation, albeit one that was exaggerated to be more humorous. This joke was repeated numerous times over the course of the following weeks and, while Peter also laughed at the joke, he revealed to me that he was annoyed that he could not participate in the drills. As he mentioned during the interview, he felt that he was missing out on "some of the most fun and cool things in the military" (interview with Peter). In this case, laughter made visible something that was not part of being a good soldier: disability. If nothing else, a good soldier should at least be *able-bodied* (McRuer 2006).¹⁶

Not just dishing out jokes but also being the butt of them every once in a while, seemed to be the price to pay to be part of this social context. Each one of us was the butt of the joke once in a while, but being caught in this role too often—as was the case with Peter—was not a good sign. Yet laughter seemed to *stick* to some more than others (Ahmed 2014c), especially those who were not performing as potent soldiers. Returning to Engman once again, he notes that "[w]ith gesticulations that seem light as a feather—gazes, gestures, smiles and posture—people point out where there is order, [where it] should be found or should not be found. Humor makes us act and reflect on the state of the world" (Engman 2014, 19, my translation). In this way, it can be argued that laughter contributes to shaping good soldiers through the seemingly innocent attempts to use humor to create a positive mood.

To counter this critical emphasis on the power working through effects of humor, it should be noted that humor can also be a setting for challenging the social and cultural order (Lockyer & Pickering 2005; Engman 2014). For example, during a drill in the woods, the platoon second-in-command, Sergeant Bolt, caused quite a bit of laughter as he—in front of the entire platoon of conscripts lined up for inspection—



Figure 3. Conscripted soldiers lined up for inspection.

started moving his hips and singing the chorus of a song that was apparently stuck in his head: Rihanna's "Work." As he interrupted his own singing, he cursed and said something about wanting to fuck her ("her" being Rihanna). Our amusement over his actions was no doubt a response to his normally very strict appearance; starting to dance and sing in front of us was a definite break with his typical strictness, and the performance of most sergeants in general. But humor offered a way to play with these expected and recognizable performances. For Sergeant Bolt, however, order was restored when he emphasized his active, dominating position as a heterosexual male who wanted to "fuck" Rihanna.

Not in the mood

Just like Peter Lyman (1987) in his well-known analysis of the use of humor in American fraternities illustrates that jokes do sometimes fail, so was the humorous

tune challenged on few occasions. But what happens when someone speaks up? According to Ahmed, someone who has “ruined the atmosphere by turning up or speaking up” is a *killjoy* (2013). This figure reflects the aforementioned idea of being out of tune or not being in the mood. A feminist killjoy is defined based on a number of possible criteria, such as: one who “will not laugh at jokes designed to cause offense” (Ahmed 2013), or will “refuse to laugh at the right points” (2014c, 2), indicating that the right point is probably when everyone else is laughing.

Returning to Juul and Karlsen’s silence after the group of conscripts threw themselves on top of them—as well as Olsen’s silent repulsion to the mentioning of “pussy hair”—their response could be interpreted in terms of the silencing effects that come with the threat of being a killjoy. If they had not accepted the other conscripts’ behavior as a joke, then they would have revealed themselves as being out of tune—as killjoys. This would also have been the case if Karlsen had filed a complaint after one of the other male conscripts punched him in the testicles, causing Karlsen to curl up in pain, almost unable to move. This was not the only time a male conscript was punched in the genitals; these incidents seemed to function as a way to test whether the receiver could ‘take it’ as the butt of a (physical) joke while simultaneously amusing the immediate bystanders. In accordance with the formal regulations, such an incident could be reported. But, because Karlsen neither opposed, screamed, nor reported this, I argue that this was a consequence of him not wanting to ruin “the good mood.” As Ahmed notes, “[s]ometimes we might keep laughing in fear that otherwise we would cause a breakage” (2014a, 17). Karlsen accepted being the butt of the joke in order to stay in the band of brothers; he performed potency through his ability to physically and affectively ‘take it.’

During the two days of observations I conducted at a different military camp, it once again became clear how humor can make it difficult to speak up. During the second day, I sat in on a meeting in which five female conscripted soldiers were asked to expand on accounts of sexual harassment that had been mentioned to one of their sergeants the day before. The soldiers themselves did not refer to the matter as sexual harassment; this was the term used by the company commander who wanted the soldiers to decide whether or not this should be raised as a legal matter. As the soldiers started to describe what they had experienced, they mentioned how they had gotten used to daily comments like, “This guy could fuck you, right?” However, certain incidents over the preceding few weeks had been “the last straw” (field notes, MC 2, day 2). While their male peers seemed to consider their actions as merely playful and humorous, being surrounded by male soldiers only wearing underwear, being pulled into someone’s dorm room, or being surprised in the shower had made some of the women “snap” (Ahmed 2017). But they were hesitant; they seemed unsure whether they were even allowed to complain, let alone whether they wanted to take the next step and file a formal complaint. The rumors of their reporting had already made some of the male soldiers approach them with spiteful comments. When the company commander suggested that the farewell party the following day might be cancelled as a consequence of these accounts, one of the conscripts protested, stating that, if that

were the case, she did not want to report anything. Having already interfered with the good mood in the company by speaking up, the women would most definitely become killjoys if they were seen as the reason that the farewell party got cancelled. In this case, the female soldiers turned something that was supposed to be humorous into something serious because they were not ‘in the mood’—and they were aware of the breach they had caused to the humorous attunement within the platoon.

An interesting aspect of this story was that the company commander assumed that it was the recent introduction of gender-mixed dorm rooms that caused these unpleasant situations; that it was the closeness between men and women in small dorm rooms that derailed their interaction. However, the soldiers corrected this assumption, stating that the men with whom they shared close quarters were actually the least of their worries (see also Ellingsen et al. 2016). Rather, it was men from other platoons that were causing them trouble.

This case illustrates another interesting point as the company commander stated that he would take the complaint just as seriously if it were men making it. But it seemed just as difficult for men like Karlsen to oppose this sexualized humor. Perhaps because men are considered to be active and potent, both sexually as well as humorously—thus, unlike the women, they are not seen as non-potent subjects that need to be protected against sexual harassment.¹⁷

Following up on these observations, I called the company commander a few days later to ask how the case had evolved. He told me that he had discovered that one male soldier in particular had initiated most of the incidents; perhaps a way for him to signal to me that sexual harassment was not a widespread phenomenon in his company. Regardless, pinpointing a single offender connects the incident to my argument that being a good soldier is entangled with being potent—particularly because the soldier in question was not only supposed to continue on to a military career, but was also a candidate for the honor of *Best Soldier*. Although the company commander said that he would have to wait and see if the Military Prosecution Service would press charges, he doubted that the soldier would be honored or become a sergeant now that this matter had come to light. Because, while he had impressed his superiors by performing as a potent soldier, he had perhaps been overly potent towards his female colleagues.

An embodied experience of attunement

While my presence among the conscripted soldiers was motivated by a scholarly purpose—which may have affected how soldiers acted around me—I was also involved in the reiteration of potency through the use of humor and laughter. For example, as I was about to sit down to have breakfast in the canteen one day, a male soldier with a smirk on his face next to me asked: “So, Sløk, did you pop any anal sphincters this weekend?” (field notes, week 13). This ignited a conversation about anal sex in which I felt no need to engage, especially not while eating oatmeal at 6:05 in the morning. However, this particular scenario stuck in my head; I was curious about the penetrative role in which such a question cast me. The comment somehow challenged both the gender and sexuality roles that I had otherwise observed female soldiers being assigned. I assume that, due to my additional role as ‘the researcher,’ my position in this setting was different from that of the other female soldiers in the platoon.



Figure 4. Breaks during drills were a recurrent scene for the telling of jokes.

During the five days of observations I did a few weeks later, the following scenario occurred and positioned me quite differently. I had been following the platoon around all day as they rehearsed various tactical moves in the terrain adjacent to the military camp. Now, the platoon had returned to the barracks and the soldiers were polishing their weapons; a group of them were sitting on rickety benches around a long wooden table in our maintenance room.

Andersen needs help disconnecting the shoulder strap from his weapon. Krebs gives it a go while Andersen proclaims to the rest of the group: 'You're not done before I'm done'—which is technically correct, since no one is ever dismissed before the entire platoon is done with a given task. Kirkegaard and I joke about this comment also being applicable at home. But, unlike what I was referring to, Kirkegaard was talking about sex and proceeds to discuss this subject with the guys sitting across the table from him.

As I move on to talk to Andersen and Torsten instead, Torsten locks eyes with me and starts gesticulating a hand-job, using the lock of his weapon—which he was in the middle of polishing—as a sham penis. After a couple of seconds, I tell him, 'You can do that all day without affecting me.' He stops gesturing and goes back to polishing the lock, turning his gaze to the weapon instead of me. At the other end of the table,

Jimmy finally gets Andersen's strap disconnected from the weapon after several other guys have given it a shot without any luck. Gloating, Jimmy asks, 'Who are all those faggots who couldn't get this off?' (Field notes, week 15)

This type of scenario often prompted more-or-less conscious decisions on my part to not be a killjoy. I never called out someone for overstepping my boundaries or asked them to refrain from "jokes designed to cause offense" (Ahmed 2013) because I figured that this was just the tone that came with being in the military. Since it was all just fun and games, did I really want to disrupt the good mood and the bonds I had built by saying "stop"? The months of participatory fieldwork had ensured that I was just as caught up in the naturalization of this humorous tune as everyone else—if not fully adjusting to the tune, then at least I was reluctant to become a killjoy.

Had I been in a different setting, I would most likely have expressed disgust or turned away if someone gesticulated a hand-job while locking eyes with me. But here in the maintenance room, expressing my ability to 'take it' seemed like the best possible reaction while neither actively adding to the sexualization of the scenario nor being a killjoy. However, I could not help but wonder what Torsten's agenda was. What was he trying to achieve? Did he want to see me disgusted? Was he trying to make me laugh—or make Andersen laugh? I could not help but feel the gender marks on my body suddenly become more visible and sexualized in a room with only men present. Noting how my body was indeed part of the humorous attunement, 'taking it' became an embodied experience of engaging pride and will, followed by an awkward awareness of my own gendered body. My body was a vessel for gathering empirical material, picking up affective experiences along the way.

The reading of my body as feminine could be argued to have both enabled and challenged my participatory fieldwork (Horn 1997; Pini & Pease 2013). Either way, it affected the empirical material that I gathered through bodily experience, interviews, and observations. For instance, Olsen sharing her disdain when a sergeant asked the group of conscripts to step "a pussy hair" closer seemed to rely on a certain complicity between us as members of the gender being called out in this specific situation. While appearing female and thus 'harmless' may have increased my access in the military—as suggested in psychologist Rebecca Horn's study of the police (1997)—my gender also prevented access to certain settings where humor played out—e.g., in the male-only dorm rooms in which half the platoon was living. Horn argues that "when conducting research in a male-dominated environment, such as a police force, gender assumes a greater significance than it might do in other environments" (*ibid.*: 306). However, I would rather argue that its visibility and the practices in which its performance is enrolled differ (Mol 2002); and in my case, it is closely tied to practices of humor.

Conclusion

The military might be best-known for a strict order and clear hierarchy. But in the midst of this seriousness and discipline, I discovered an abundance of laughter and jokes during a four-month-long ethnographic fieldwork in this setting. In the Danish military, it appears, soldiers of all ranks put honor in the profession's informal and

humorous tune; their abilities to joke with one another and pull pranks. And just as Cohn argued in 1987 that a certain use of language can make the very serious topic of nuclear weapons “fun” to talk about, the extensive use of humor did indeed push the potentially very serious backdrop of military work to the back. In addition, the widespread use of humor certainly ensured that the four months of military service that I took part in were more pleasant than they would have been without all the laughter. But perhaps it was more fun for some than others.

Taking a performative approach to my empirical material, I have followed in the footsteps of previous studies on humor by arguing that humor *does* something in the military setting. In addition to potentially bypassing the very serious consequences of being a soldier, humor creates a certain mood that seems to support the establishment of close bonds. However, drawing on the work of Ahmed, I have argued that this mood could be seen as *attunement* among the soldiers; an affective ‘synchronizing’ that not only makes soldiers part of the band of brothers, but also makes them similar according to current norms (2014a). Laughing at the jokes—because it was after all “just a joke”—is a way of showing that you are *in tune* and, as such, not only part of the collective but also recognizable as a military subject.

Entangled in the humorous tune, there was an implicit expectation of an active male heterosexuality—a male *potency* directed towards women. The reiteration of this expectation and the corrections of those who dared to sidestep it worked through the use of humor. Humor indicated norms and subtly corrected or punished those who deviated from them. And while there were also plenty of jokes and humorous comments in which sexual encounters between men was the punchline, they were not a threat to this male heterosexual potency as long as this stayed in the carnivalesque sphere of humor.

Beyond the matter of sexuality, the humorous tune also indicated other ways in which good soldiers should be potent; that is by “having great power, influence, or effect.” The two types of potency—which I would argue are deeply entangled—seemed to make up elements in the performance of good soldiers. And while good soldiers might appear as an abstract concept, they were easy to notice, honor, and potentially recruit for further training in the military. So while the extensive use of humor did indeed make the mood positive most of the time, it also had serious consequences as the humor in question made it difficult for conscripts in general to speak up out of concern that this would ruin the good mood. Speaking up when the platoon commander for instance stated that “we don’t touch each other’s instruments” would be an indication that one was out of tune—not only by not being able to take the joke, but also by challenging the implied heterosexuality.

This article has been focused on an assumed *male* sexual potency, as this is what seemed to define the humorous tune that takes part in ‘making’ good soldiers in the military. As an effect, women are placed in a difficult position within the military, as this attunement based on male potency leaves a difficult space for women to act within. Most of the time, the female soldiers that I spend my days alongside were in tune. But—as their limited role in this article illustrates—they were rarely actively involved

in setting the tune. Their presence was however instantly noticed if they caused a breakage by speaking up, as shown with the case of sexual harassment. Because while the fear of being a killjoy kept both men and women from ruining ‘the good mood’ by speaking up most of the time, soldiers sometimes “snap” when someone gets tired of being the butt of the joke.

The camaraderie and laughter that is part of doing military service is undoubtedly a motivation for many of the Danish citizens who sign up voluntarily each year. But through the flows of affects that the use of humor brings with it, those who keep ending up as the butt of the joke are positioned as being outside the limits of what can be recognized as a good soldier. Thus, the use of humor enables conscripted soldiers (and their superiors) to discover whether or not they are in tune—and thereby determine if they have ‘what it takes’ to pursue a military career.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Tine Damsholt, Karen Ashcraft and Alma Persson for their valuable comments in my process of writing this article—as well as the rest of the dissertation that this article is part of. Further, I would also like to thank Anne Katrine Kleberg Hansen for helping me make the connection that spurred the analytical argument of this article. And finally, I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their detailed and very useful comments.

Notes

1. The names of soldiers as well as the specific regiments, companies and platoons referred to in this article are concealed due to considerations of anonymity. Thus, all informants have been given different names as they are presented in this analysis.
2. The definition of *good* that I rely on in this analysis is inspired by the work of philosopher Annemarie Mol (2002; 2008; Heuts & Mol 2013). Based on ethnographic research within the health care sector, Mol argues for an understanding of ‘good’ as something that is done through the practices of which the object is part of rather than inherent characteristics. Following this reasoning, good is “established along the way” as a collective doing (Mol 2008, 75). Thus, the mention of *good soldiers* in this article does not refer to soldiers acting in a way that can be said to be morally good. This is a different—but no less relevant—debate.
3. My focus on this system of compulsory military service is motivated by its function as basic training as well as the primary recruitment platform for the rest of the military. However, as an effect of cut-backs and a transformation towards a military force primarily made up by so-called “professional soldiers”, most conscripted soldiers now only serve a total of four months. During this period, they are neither deployed nor involved in ‘real’ combat.
4. However, gender pay gaps and a highly gender-segregated labor market indicates that while the welfare system ensures a basic safety net and redistribution, men are still dominating power and economic wealth in Denmark.
5. Women have had access to entry-level positions in the Danish military since 1971. The remaining restrictions to women’s participation in military work were gradually annulled up until 1992, when there were no more formal restrictions for women in the Danish military

(Sløk-Andersen 2014). However, no woman has so far been promoted to the highest ranks or been accepted to the special operation forces.

6. The four months of fieldwork were carried out at one of the eight military camps where conscripts can serve in the Danish army. While conscripts can also serve in the Navy, the Air Force, and the Danish Emergency Management Agency, I decided to focus on the army as this is where 94 percent of all Danish conscripted soldiers serve (*Conscripted Soldiers*, 2018).
7. The thirty-eight interviews carried out during this period—of which twenty-six were with conscripted soldiers, and twelve were with superiors at different levels—were all semi-structured (Kvale 1997). Questions were based on a combination of insights from the previous three months of participation as well as my analytical framework. The length of each interview as well as the circumstances leading to a specific interview taking place varied a lot, but all of them took place within the boundaries of a military camp or terrain.
8. Besides the ethnographic work mentioned here, additional observations and interviews, as well as a wide variety of written materials have also been included in the overarching research project that this article is part of.
9. Here, I draw on the work of military scholar Kenneth T. MacLeish (2013; 2015), who has argued that boundaries between a military and civilian sphere rather than being an organizational or educational given, are the result of a “constant policing, performing, and imagining of the boundaries between in and out” (2015, 17).
10. The edited volume *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour* by Sharon Lockyer and Michael Pickering (2005) ambitiously engages with this attempt to locate the limits of ‘fun’.
11. Historians have described how male soldiers have supported their financial situation during their military service by selling sexual services to other men—without this making them self-identify as homosexual (Edelberg 2011; Belkin 2012). Thus, military service has been closely linked to matters of men’s sexual relations.
12. Mary Douglas, in “The Social Control of Cognition” (1968), has suggested that it is exactly in cases of cultural contradictions that joking fills a purpose. Here, the subversive effect of jokes can be utilized “on the dominant structure of ideas” (ibid., 364).
13. A similar reluctance to oppose a humor often based on gender-discriminatory punchlines has also been documented in a recent interview study among female combat soldiers in Denmark (Knudsen & Teisen 2018).
14. In analyzing the interconnection between the two different types of potency, I have been inspired by not just Judith Butler’s heterosexual matrix (1990), but also Dorte Marie Søndergaard’s (2006) reworking of this.
15. The grades given during the conscription period, which evaluate the accomplishments as well as the potential of each conscript, define their possibilities for a career in the Danish military.
16. Working in the intersection of compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality, McRuer argues that the two are intertwined in a way that “works to (re)produce the able body and heterosexuality” (2006: 31).
17. This was also indicated by an internal investigation regarding the extent of sexual harassment in the Danish Defence in which only women were asked to participate (Øhrstrøm et al. 2003).

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. 2013. "Hello Feminist Killjoys!" *Feminist Killjoys*, Uploaded August 26 2013. Retrieved last December 6, 2018, from <https://feministkilljoys.com/2013/08/26/hello-feminist-killjoys/>
- . 2014a. "Not in the mood." *New Formations* 82: 13-28.
- . 2014b. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. (2nd ed.) Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- . 2014c. *Willful Subjects*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- . 2017 "Snap!" *Feminist Killjoys*, Uploaded May 21 2017. Retrieved last December 6, 2018 from <https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/05/21/snap/>
- Ashcraft, Karen. L. 2017. "'Submission' to the Rule of Excellence: Ordinary Affect and Precarious Resistance in the Labor of Organization and Management Studies." *Organization* 24(1): 36-58.
- Baaz, Maria E., Maria Stern. 2010. *The Complexity of Violence: A critical analysis of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo*. Working paper published by the Nordic Africa Institute. Retrieved last February 6, 2019 from <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:319527/FULLTEXT02>
- Belkin, Aaron. 2012 *Bring Me Men. Military Masculinity and the Benign Facade of American Empire 1898-2001*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ben-Ari, Eyal, and Liora Sion. 2005. "'Hungry, Weary and Horny': Joking and Jesting among Israel's Combat Reserves." *Israel Affairs* 11 (4): 655-671.
- Billig, Michael. 2005. *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Bjerke, Thea A., and Nina Ronnes. 2017. "The Fine Line between Funny and Offensive Humour in a Total Institution. An Ethnographic Study of Joking Relationships among Army Soldiers." *Res Militaris* 7(2): 1-23.
- Bourke, Joanna. 2016. "Love and Limblessness: Male Heterosexuality, Disability, and the Great War." *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 9(1): 3-19.
- Bowker, Geoffrey. C., Susan L. Star. 2000. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Bulmer, Sarah. 2017. "Sexuality in State Militaries." In *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*. Edited by Rachel Woodward & Claire Duncanson, 163-176. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York & London: Routledge.
- . 1993. *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Carreiras, Helena. 2006. *Gender and the Military. Women in the Armed Forces of Western Democracies*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Cohn, Carol. 1987. "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals." *Signs* 12 (4): 687-718.
- Conscripted soldiers/ Værnepligtige i Forsvaret og Beredskabsstyrelsen*. Danish Defence Personnel Organisation. Retrieved last February 7, 2019 from <http://forpers.dk/hr/Pages/Vaernepligtige.aspx>.

- Crevelde, Martin van. 2002. *Men, Women & War: Do Women Belong in the Front Line?* London: Cassell.
- Douglas, Mary. 1968. "The Social Control of Cognition: Some Factors in Joke Perception." *Man* 3 (3): 361-376.
- Edelberg, Peter. 2011. *Storbyen trækker, homoseksualitet, prostitution og pornografi i Danmark 1945-1976*. PhD dissertation. Copenhagen: Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen.
- Ehn, Billy, and Orvar Löfgren. 2010. *The Secret World of Doing Nothing*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ellingsen, Dag, Ulla-Britt Lilleaas, and Michael Kimmel. 2016. "Something is Working – but Why? Mixed Rooms in the Norwegian Army." *NORA* 24(3): 151-164.
- Engman, Jonas. 2014. "Den skrattande löjtnanten: Parad, karneval och humor." In *Skratt som fastnar. Kulturelle perspektiv på skratt och humor*. Edited by Lars-Eric Jönsson & Fredrik Nilsson, 19-37. Lund: Lund University.
- Frederiksen, Maja/Mons B. 2013. "Krumme tæer. Skam i krydsfeltet mellem queer, feministiske og postkoloniale teorier." *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* 21(1): 25-36.
- Godfrey, Richard. 2016. "Soldiering On: Exploring the Role of Humour as a Disciplinary Technology in the Military." *Organization*, 23(2), 164-183.
- Goffman, Erving. 1968. *Asylums. Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Goldstein, Joshua S. 2001. *War and Gender. How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haraway, Donna J. 2008. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Heuts, Frank., and Annemarie Mol. 2013. "What is a Good Tomato? A Case of Valuing in Practice." *Valuation Studies* 1(2): 125–146.
- Higate, Paul R. (Ed). 2003. *Military Masculinities. Identity and the State*. Westport: Praeger.
- Horn, Rebecca. 1997. "Not 'one of the boys': Women researching the police." *Journal of Gender Studies* 6(3): 297-308.
- Johansson, Joakim. 2013. "Sexualnormativitet och medborgarskap. En diskursanalys av "trådar" på internetportalen Passagen." *Lambda nordica* 2: 44-75.
- Jönsson, Lars-Eric, and Fredrik Nilsson, eds. 2014. *Skratt som fastnar. Kulturelle perspektiv på skratt och humor*. Lund: Lund University.
- Kilshaw, Susie. 2011. *Impotent Warriors: Gulf War Syndrome, Vulnerability and Masculinity*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- King, Anthony. 2013. *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Knudsen, Stine E., and Marie Sihm Teisen. 2018. "Negotiating Gender: Female Combat Soldiers in Denmark." *Women, Gender & Research* 2-3: 49-61.
- Kronberg, Klas. 2014. "Den Svenska värnpliktens historia." In *Lumpen. Från mönstring till muck. Armémuseum årsbok*. Eds., Anna Maria Forsberg and Klas Kronberg, 23-51. Stockholm: Atlantis.

- Kronsell, Annica. 2012. *Gender, Sex, and the Postnational Defense. Militarism and Peacekeeping*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kronsell, Annica, and Erik Svedberg. 2012. *Making Gender, Making War: Violence, Peacekeeping and Military Practices*. New York: Routledge.
- Kvale, Steinar. 1997. *InterView. En introduktion til det kvalitative forskningsinterview*. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Law, John and Annemarie Mol. 2002. "Complexities: An Introduction." In *Complexities. Social Studies of Knowledge Practices*. Eds., John Law and Annemarie Mol, 1-22. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Lockyer, Sharon, and Michael Pickering, eds. 2005. *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Löfgren, Orvar. 2014. "The Black Box of Everyday Life. Entanglements of Stuff, Affects, and Activities." *Cultural Analysis* 13: 77-98.
- Lyman, Peter. 1987. "The Fraternal Bond as a Joking Relationship: A Case Study of the Role of Sexist Jokes in Male Group Bonding." In *Changing Men. New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*. Edited by Michael S. Kimmel, 148-163. Newbury Park: SAGE.
- MacLeish, Kenneth. T. 2013. *Making War at Fort Hood. Life and Uncertainty in a Military Community*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- . 2015. "The Ethnography of Good Machines." *Critical Military Studies* 1(1): 11-22.
- Maninger, Stephan. 2008. "Women in Combat: Reconsidering the Case against the Deployment of Women in Combat-Support and Combat Units." In *Women in the Military and in Armed Conflict*. Edited by Helena Carreiras and Gerhard Kümmel, 9-27. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- McRuer, Robert. 2006. *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York: New York University Press.
- Mol, Annemarie. 2002. *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2008. *The Logic of Care. Health and the Problem of Patient Choice*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Nellemann, George, Iørn Piø, and Birgit Vorre. 1988. *Dagligliv i Danmark i vor tid. Bind 1: Samfund og familie*. Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck.
- Oring, Elliott. 2016. *Joking Asides: The Theory, Analysis, and Aesthetics of Humor*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado.
- Oxford Dictionaries*. 2017. "Potent". Retrieved last February 7, 2019 from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/potent>
- Pini, Barbara and Bob Pease. 2013. "Gendering Methodology in the Study of Men and Masculinity." In *Men, Masculinities and Methodologies*. Edited by Barbara Pini & Bob Pease, 1-25. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred. 1961. *Structure and Function in Primitive Society. Essays and Addresses* (4th ed). London: Cohen & West.
- Sløk-Andersen, Beate. 2014. *Kvindernes trinvis adgang til det danske forsvar*. Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Defence College.

- . 2017. "Researching the Body – The Body in Research. Reflections on a Participatory Fieldwork in the Danish Army." *Kuckuck. Notizen zur Alltagskultur* 2017 (2): 28-32.
- . 2018. "Beyond the Uniform: Exploring Military Uniformity through Everyday Routines." *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 48: 7-25.
- Spradley, James P. 1980. *Participant Observation*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Star, Susan L. 1990. "Power, Technology and the Phenomenology of Conventions: On Being Allergic to Onions." *The Sociological Review* 38: 26-56.
- Sundevall, Fia. 2011. *Det sista manliga yrkesmonopolet: Genus och militärt arbete i Sverige 1865-1989*. Stockholm: Makadam Förlag.
- . 2014. "Porr i vapensåpet och bögekompani på Gotland." In *Lumpen. Från mönstring till muck. Armémuseum årsbok* Edited by Anna Maria Forsberg and Klas Kronberg, 150-170. Stockholm: Atlantis.
- . 2017. "Military Education for Non-military Purposes: Economic and Social Governing Projects Targeting Conscripts in Early Twentieth-century Sweden." *History of Education Review* 46 (1): 58-71.
- Søndergaard, Dorte M. 2006. *Tegnet på kroppen. Køn: Koder og konstruktioner blandt unge voksne i akademia* (3rd ed.). Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag.
- Wacquant, Loïc. 2006. *Body & Soul – Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Østergaard, Uffe. 1998. "Værnepligt og Nationalstat." *Fokus* 5. Copenhagen: DUPI.

Responses

Some Remarks from a Folklorist and American Perspective.

Lisa Gilman

George Mason University

Danish male soldiers claim that they have more respect for women than do their American counterparts. Yet, misogynist and homophobic humor pervade both military cultures (see Gilman 2016). These prejudicial attitudes are not restricted to fun-making, but extend to harassment and violent behavior. Humor is a powerful hegemonic mechanism for socialization and gender policing because the joke frame trivializes the message, however repugnant or controversial. As Beate Sløk-Andersen notes, humor makes military service more fun, lightens the mood, and supports social bonds; however, it also contributes to the socialization of soldiers, helping make them “recognizable as military subjects; as insiders to the military profession.” Joking reinforces that real soldiers inhabit sexually dominant male bodies, regardless of a military’s actual demographics or policies.

The humor in both militaries clarifies that to succeed and ultimately belong, one has to live up to a narrow definition of masculinity. The Danish male soldiers in this study were drafted conscripts. The women, by contrast, served voluntarily. Because women joined out of their own volition, many women may have felt a greater motivation than did their male counterparts to participate appropriately in order to belong, even if it meant accepting the rampant sexist joking. In the U.S. context, military service is voluntary. Since troops select to join, many feel that they do not have grounds

to criticize or reject something for which they volunteered. This adds to the pressure on troops who may not fit well because of gender or sexual identity, skill, or ideological positioning. Furthermore, the Danish conscripts served for four months. Though the training during this period was physically taxing, the social dimension was similar to a camp setting: people who don’t know each other develop social bonds by spending intensive time together for a short duration. Humor contributed to fostering connection and making the four months fun. By contrast, those serving in the U.S. military serve multi-year terms, and in the last two decades, the majority deployed to war zones. Whether social bonds are formed and whether one is deemed warrior-worthy therefore has much higher costs in the U.S. setting.

The butt of the jokes described by Sløk-Andersen’s are situated symbolically in various sexual positions; however, the power is clearly associated with the joker rather than the jokee. As Alan Dundes and Carl Pagter explain, the goal of much sexual humor between heterosexual men is to “humiliate one’s opponent by depriving him of his masculinity, that is, to feminize him.” Phallic aggression or symbolic anal penetration in humor expresses the ultimate feminization (Dundes and Pagter 1991: 320). Humor contributes to the reification of the always fragile social hierarchies tied to masculinity that require continual reinforcement. Proof of how well one belongs in the masculine environment of the military, regardless of one’s gender, can be performed through demonstrations of being skillful, tough, emotionally stoic, or jocularly dominant. Despite these ongoing tests, the same joking that contributes to power contests also forges social bonds that are supposed to be equitable, emblemized in the solidarity and mutual support expected

of a 'band of brothers.'

As with the Danish example, men in the U.S. military share a great deal of physical, social, and emotional intimacy. Yet, they are not supposed to "touch each other's instruments." But where is the line? In my interviews, men described jokes that involved men placing their naked genitals on other men. Relatedly, John Paul Willis and Jay Mechling (2015) analyze a playful test of sexuality common in U.S. military settings, a game called gay chicken. Two men move toward one another with the goal of kissing. The one who does not pull away, even if it means kissing, affirms his manliness because he demonstrates being so confident about his heterosexuality that nothing could put it into question. In situations where acts of physical intimacy occur, who participates, the context in which it occurs, and how everyone responds determines the assessment of whether or not a line was crossed. A man whose occupational and social potency has already been proven is likely to receive little more than laughter. For a man whose manliness is already at stake, the fact of touching, even in a joking frame, could contribute to his ongoing devaluation and ultimately to harassment. Yet, these examples are paradoxical because they also give men the opportunity to engage in physical intimacy, albeit under critical surveillance that they exhibit no sign of desire.

Juul and Karlsen drew attention because their potency was already suspect and they exhibited intimacy outside a play frame. The policing ironically augmented the male-on-male touching by producing an intimate tangle of bodies. Presumably, the two men at the bottom continued to enjoy the bodily proximity for which they were chastised.

Not knowing more, I was left wondering whether this teasing also suggested tacit approval? There is often much greater acceptance of homosexuality in the U.S. military than what is suggested by the constant homophobic ribbing. When I was doing research, the policy of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" allowed homosexual men and women to serve as long as they kept it top secret. Nevertheless, many of the straight people I interviewed knew of gays or lesbians in their units (see Weems 2012). Sløk-Andersen's discussion of tension between potency associated with leadership versus sexuality provides a useful framework. I ascertained that U.S. troops were often much more concerned with an individual's ability as a soldier than their sexual orientation. Somebody who was deemed a good soldier who was also gay could be granted greater acceptance than a heterosexual man who was considered inadequate. The straight bad soldier would be judged not only for his occupational inadequacy, but his heterosexuality would also be put into question, thus further weakening his status.

This emphasis on potency tied to masculinity in the military is paradoxical. Those at the lower echelons, who are most likely to engage in sexual joking, have little real power. In addition to rules restricting dress, living arrangements, and mobility, they have to follow their command regardless of whether they agree with a strategy or deem it ethical. Furthermore, troops have to exhibit the roughest forms of masculinity at the same time that they are in situations that inevitably evoke feelings that aren't typically considered to be very "masculine." War experiences necessarily evoke fear, anxiety, sadness, regret, loneliness, vulnerability, hurt, weakness, and neediness. Though they are expected to display rough masculinity,

they also often rely on one another emotionally. Marine veteran Pete whom I interviewed in December 2012 explained:

We all go through hell, so we know what it's like and there is a time and place for everything. Just because you're a wreck about the wife and kids back home doesn't mean you can't handle business overseas. We all worked through the problems (and ribbed each other over it as usual), but it was never looked down on as feminine, besides the jokes of course.

It is mostly only with others within their 'band of brothers' that many U.S. male troops feel comfortable sharing their pain, at the same time that they mitigate their vulnerability through humor.

Gary Alan Fine (2005) has written extensively about what happens when women enter male-identified occupations and are expected to either operate on the margins or integrate into the masculine culture. The U.S. and Danish militaries are integrating women into more and more spaces; however, little has been done to transform the military *cultures* to make it more gender inclusive (Burke 2004). Women and those who do not fit the gender binary in the U.S. are expected to listen to and sometimes participate in highly misogynist humor. Being a "killjoy" can jeopardize their acceptance within the "band of brothers" where unity can be equally important to the skill-based training. However, more and more military operations are happening off the battle ground, requiring less physicality or the bravado needed to face an enemy. Contemporary military intelligence and operations require high levels of intelligence, education, focus, precision, and speed more than physical

proWess. Yet, the culture of the military continues to be about hypermasculinity, suggesting that this lack of attention to fostering inclusivity around gender and sexuality could be detrimental in the long run.

Works Cited

- Burke, Carol. 2004. *Camp All-American, Hanoi Jane, and the High-And-Tight: Gender, Folklore, and Changing Military Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Dundes, Alan and Carl Pagter. 1991. "The Mobile Scud Missile Launcher and Other Persian Gulf Warlore: An American Folk Image of Saddam Hussein's Iraq." *Western Folklore* 50: 303-322.
- Fine, Gary Alan. 2005. "In the Company of Men: Female Accommodation and the Folk Culture of Male Groups." In *Manly Traditions: The Folk Roots of American Masculinities*, ed. Simon Bronner, pp. 61-76. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Gilman, Lisa. 2016. *My Music, My War: The Listening Habits of U.S. Troops in Iraq and Afghanistan*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Wallis, John Paul and Jay Mechling. 2015. "Devil Dogs and Dog Piles." *Western Folklore* 74 (3/4): 275-308.
- Weems, Mickey. 2012. "Taser to the 'Nads: Brutal Embrace of Queerness in Military Practice." In *Warrior Ways: Exploration in Modern Military Folklore*, ed. Eric A. Eliason and Tad Tuleja, 139-60. Logan: Utah State University Press.

Barbara Plester
University of Auckland

I found this to be a really interesting article based on unique, rich, ethnographic data. I was impressed at the author's dedication to data gathering by assimilating with a military unit and following them and joining their exercises and activities. This offers a richly authentic, embodied account that can stimulate a variety of different papers and publications. The humour data are both interesting and engaging and I like that the author has not censored the highly sexualised jokes and interactions that form the basis for her analysis of humour and affective flow in the army. The military setting gives a distinct point of difference from established research work about humor in the workplace.

The author has drawn on a wide-ranging assortment of literature and concepts, even though there are under-theorised parts in regard to humour theories and research. The key concept presented is humour and this aspect could be theorized in greater depth to increase the scope and discussion of the paper. The research occurs in the organizational (workplace) context - the Danish Army. The argumentation could be developed by looking at the excellent paper by Nick Butler (2015) which examines how humour/laughter is used as a 'corrective' to modify behaviour. This would help to theorize the concept of humour as Sløk-Andersen's notion of 'policing' is theoretically similar to Butlers 'corrective' function of laughter.

There are distinct gendered aspects in the article, but I sensed some confusion in the gendered arguments. While the author mentions one specific female

soldier and her reaction to a sexualised, sexist joke much of the rest of the paper appears to rest on the gendered assumption that 'soldiering' is masculine. There are frequent references to male solidarity, 'band of brothers' and even the abstract outlines that humour offers 'ways for men to be close'. A further debate about what hegemonic masculinity might mean for female soldiers could be developed. My own research (Plester 2015a) depicted life inside a technology company where heterosexual masculinity was highly prized to the extent that women employees also displayed and performed masculinity in order to fit the culture. They did not want to be considered a spoilsport towards the highly sexualised joking and pranks. Homosexuality was openly derided, as was feminism, and there are some strong parallels with the military culture portrayed in the Sløk-Andersen's article. It might be interesting for further research and debate to frame the gendered aspects more elaborately in such a way that the term soldiers is recognized as inclusive of both male and female soldiers and to look at the gender implications of the use of humour.

The article analyses humour to show its contribution to male bonding, and the desirable outcomes of creating a 'band of brothers' or 'brothers in arms' as argued by the author. Additionally, it is argued that humour in the Danish army offers a break from routines, hierarchy and order. The author argues that sexual potency is an expected part of being a male soldier and is displayed through sexual jokes and banter. Beate Sløk-Andersen states that the soldiers found a "fitting level of humor among themselves." Citing Lyman (1987) she concedes that jokes sometimes

fail but she does not fully acknowledge the 'dark side' of humour nor does she discuss the disturbing elements of sexualised, sexist humour used by the soldiers (see Plester 2015b and Billig 2005). Humour is highly complex and can be highly disturbing, offensive and even dangerous. The sexual, sexist humour used by the Danish soldiers could be analysed as an extreme form of hegemonic masculinity, or as sexual harassment and as a form of domination, power and control (see Plester, 2015a and b; Collinson, 1996). As argued by Butler (1997b) sexual humour may even be considered a form of pornography. Butler (1997b) argues that sexual speech can be considered "tantamount to a sexual act" (76) and she claims that institutional power maintains subordination, and this may be enacted through injurious language (such as sexualised jokes). This could be an interesting angle to pursue. The embodied and aggressively gendered aspects in Sløk-Andersen's article could be further developed.

In her conclusion, the author notes: "I... feel the gender marks on my body..." and such an embodied aspect and what she has endured during this research could stimulate really interesting discussions about feminist research, embodied and subjective research experiences and becoming subjected by sexualised, sexist jokes (see Judith Butler's work on subjection and subjectivities 1997a as well as Harding, Ford & Fotaki, 2013).

My final reflection on Sløk-Andersen's work is that it gives us food for thought about why sexual jokes are openly shared and are considered 'currency' in the male bonding described in the article. Freud (1905) wrote an entire book on 'joke work' that theorises the release

and relief functions of humour. According to Freud much joking concerns sex, sexuality and /or aggression and because we cannot openly release these thoughts and impulses in social (or work) settings we frame sexual or aggressive outbursts as 'just a joke' or banter (see Plester & Sayers, 2007). Joking is seen as a safe, acceptable way of releasing such impulses. Of course, society is changing and sexualised joking is becoming much less acceptable and tolerated in our #metoo climates. The joking presented in the paper could be considered through Freuds 'release' lens. Other avenues might be to include more modern conceptions of sexual harassment and workplace protocols. There are a variety of workplace, shop-floor ethnographic studies that explore male joking, profanity, sexuality, sexism and humor boundaries and these could contribute to a robust theorisation of this unique military joking and its meaning (see for example, Roy, 1959; Collinson, 1988, 2000; Collinson & Collinson, 1996; Linstead, 1985; Kehily and Nayack, 1997; Plester, 2009, 2015a and b).

I wish the author well in the development of her highly interesting, original research and look forward to many forthcoming papers.

Works Cited

- Butler, Judith. 1997a. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford University Press.
- . 1997b (2013). *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Butler, Nick. 2015. "Joking Aside: Theorizing Laughter in Organizations."

- Culture and Organization* 21(1): 42-58.
- . 1988. "'Engineering Humour': Masculinity, Joking and Conflict in Shop-floor Relations." *Organization Studies* 9 (2): 181-199.
- Collinson, David L. 2002. "Managing Humour." *Journal of Management Studies*. 39 (3): 269-288.
- Collinson, Margaret, and David Collinson. 1996. "It's Only Dick': The Sexual Harassment of Women Managers in Insurance Sales." *Work, Employment and Society* 10 (1): 29-56.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1905. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. New York: WW Norton & Company.
- Harding, Nancy, Jackie Ford and Marianna Fotaki. 2013. "Is the 'F'-word still dirty? A past, present and future of/for feminist and gender studies in *Organization*." *Organization* 20 (1): 51-65.
- Kehily, Mary Jane, and Anoop Nayak. 1997. "'Lads and Laughter': Humour and the Production of Heterosexual Hierarchies." *Gender and Education* 9 (1): 69-88.
- Linstead, Steve. 1985. "Jokers Wild: The Importance of Humour in the Maintenance of Organizational Culture." *The Sociological Review* 33 (4): 741-767.
- Plester, Barbara. 2015a. "'Take it Like a Man!': Performing Hegemonic Masculinity through Organizational Humour." *Ephemera* 15 (3): 537.
- . 2015b. *The Complexity of Workplace Humor*. New York: Springer.
- . 2009. "Crossing the line: Boundaries of workplace humour and fun." *Employee Relations* 31(6): 584-599.
- Plester, Barbara A., and Janet Sayers. 2007. "'Taking the Piss': Functions of Banter in the IT Industry." *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 20 (2): 157-187.
- Roy, Donald F. 1959. "'Banana Time': Job Satisfaction and Informal Interaction." *Human Organization* 18 (4): 158.