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NO LAUGHING MATTER:

BOUNDARIES OF GENDER-BASED HUMOUR IN THE CLASSROOM

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As personified in jokers, fools and clowns, humour is an integral part of human history [44]. Humour can lighten what might otherwise be dull, tense or tedious situations. Common definitions of humour emphasize "amusement" and "laughter," implying some form of benign diversion. But recent research suggests that jokes are not "events" that are funny-- or harmful--as such. Rather, joking entails a dynamic process where the characteristics of the joke teller and the audience interact with the embedded meaning of the joke. It is the interactions among these factors which determine whether efforts to be funny are acceptable or not [26,40,42]. The present study employs a power-based approach to examine how situational factors affect the degree of acceptability of gender-based humour in classroom settings.

Theories About the Role of Humor

Probably the best known proponent of the psychoanalytic views about humour is Freud [14]. In Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, Freud argues for the cathartic effect of joking, especially in areas of unconscious turmoil about human sexuality and aggression. Humour is seen as a safe outlet that prevents the teller from expressing his (sic) hostilities in more destructive ways. Such a release of unconscious steam is also expected to vicariously cleanse the audience [9,10,32]. In other words, humour is seen as a mechanism to distance oneself from the potential disorganizations of the social world and their incumbent anxieties.

More recently, Dundes [10] applied the psychoanalytic assertions to "sick joke cycles." He claims that sick jokes ranging from "dead babies," to "Auschwitz jokes," serve as coping mechanisms to deal with bothersome issues such as sexuality, racial tensions, violence and guilt. More relevant to the current study, Dundes [10] claims that "sheep and blond joke cycles" (which center on degradation of women), reflect men's struggle to deal with their anxiety about the changing role of women. Wilson [44] also recognizes the anxiety reduction aspect of jokes through displacement, projection and rationalization of taboo impulses. The common denominator in all these assertions is the psychological (and indirectly, social cleansing) function of humour.

The conventional sociological approach to humour builds on the concept of role distance [8]. In this perspective, humour is a transposition of frameworks, a brief switching from the serious to the unserious or playful realm [1,13,18]. Such switchings are meant to provide license, so that humour does not officially "count" [11]. As jocular departures from the official line of interactions, puns, witticisms, jokes, sarcasm and mimicry produce amusement in an audience while allowing speakers to address topics that are taboo. In this latter sense, the conventional sociological perspective overlaps with the psychoanalytic orientation in finding humour functional. Thus it can reduce stress (as in the morbid humour of police and surgeons) and lubricate social interaction through self-mockery and the development of "joking relationships" [41].

While the conventional sociological perspective recognizes that certain switchings in the name of humour can be inappropriate, power-based approaches reject unqualified functionality arguments [31,38,46]. Power imbalances under the auspices of humour are seen as reinforcing old belief systems, blocking social change, and preserving inequality. In the past decade or so, minorities and feminists have pointedly challenged the prevailing views about humour. Increasingly, gender-based humour is seen as a manifestation of power imbalances between men and women, which in turn helps to solidify and perpetuate that power disparity. Feminists argue that men define reality for both men and women in work and in leisure. Men also take measures to legitimize the reality they themselves have constructed and demand conformity from those who are disadvantaged by male standards [12,24,36]. Cloaked as "having a good time," humour is among the tools used to demean, degrade, and oppress women [17]. In Mackie's words "humour participates in the typification of males and females, the dissemination of stereotypes, the celebration of boys and men and the devaluation of girls and women" [23, p.13]. The power-differential approach also highlights the catch-twenty-two position of women. Often they are left to choose between the equally undesirable alternatives of laughing at jokes at their expense to appear to have a "sense of humour," or refusing to

laugh and being deemed humourless [43].

Power, of course, is a multidimensional concept that must be concretely operationalized in different contexts [26,40,42]. Situationally varying dimensions of power include the sex of the joke teller and the audience, the sex composition of groups, and the sex of the target at whose expense the joke unfolds [45, Chapter 6]. Status differences between the joke teller and his/her audience and attendant feelings of trust or threat are also expected to be critical factors. To test predictions that follow from this approach, the present study compares the responses of male and female faculty and students to gender-based jokes in the classroom.

Literature Review on Boundaries of Acceptability

Research indicates that joke telling is hierarchical, reflecting "codes of privilege" that allow some to use humour while inhibiting others from doing so [2,45, p.269-273]. Men tell more jokes, tell them more frequently, and prefer more gender-based jokes than women [10,47]. Men also engage in more crude types of humour [10,15], while women use safer and more indirect types such as self-deprecation [20,26,45]. In work settings, for example, high ranking men may produce exaggerated displays of humour with sexual connotations in the presence of token women [19], while women are hampered in their reactions [8,28].

Recent research on how people respond to gender-based humour provides support for the power differential approach. Fundamental to this approach is the claim that women who are status disadvantaged in male dominated societies, should be less tolerant of female-disparaging jokes. A number of studies report results consistent with this claim [4,7,22,35]. However, the findings are not unequivocal since some studies find no sex differences in the appreciation of sexist humour [6,16]. Instead, both Henkin and Fish [16] and Moore, Griffiths and Payne [27] claim that the profeminist attitudes of men and women determine the level of displeasure with sexist humour. In other words, these studies suggest that gender awareness and sensitivity rather than biological sex differentiates the responses.

Place of Humor in a Classroom Setting

Humour may serve as a functional tool for educators who want to give an "affable" impression of themselves, lighten up a topic or prolong the attention span of their students' interest and participation [5,45].

However, the power dimension cautions us against the unchecked use of humour because classrooms are unegalitarian situations [21]. Power

differentials between students and instructors can render the former vulnerable [30]. Gender typically accentuates these power differences [25,37]. For example, professors are much more likely to be men than women while the latter are also congregated in the lower rungs [29]. These power differentials regulate how male and female instructors use humour. Male instructors use humour (sometimes lewd humour) to entertain and enliven their classes. Female instructors generally avoid using humour, or use it reactively, to regain control of classroom disruptions [39,p. 56-57].

The large body of research on how status characteristics (ie., sex, race, occupation) structure group hierarchies clearly shows that consequences of power imbalances are more than abstractions [33,34]. Hence, perceptions of the joking environment arising from gender and status disadvantages must be articulated within other situated characteristics.

Given the layers of power differentiation in a mixed-sex classroom, the acceptability of gender-based humour fluctuates according to the initiator, his/her relational power within the institution as well as to the audience, and the target of the joke. Judgments about who benefits from the joke will also be coloured by the feminist versus patriarchal belief systems of the audience. Jokes that aggressively target women in a situation that renders multiple and consistent status distinctions relevant are most likely to create a sense of intimidation. The dismay may be highest among those who are aware of the subtle workings of male hegemony [16,27].

Sociopolitical timing may also be a critical determinant of reactions to gender humour. For example, televised coverage of the Anita Hill/ Clarence Thomas hearings of the early 1990s created a heightened awareness of sexual harassment. As a result, in the past few years, women's groups and organizations have successfully lobbied for university regulations to deal with sexual and gender harassment, including offensive humour. Since the boundaries of acceptable humour are in flux, there are few clear norms to guide individual behaviour. In case of erroneous judgments, instructors will have to defend their choice on what may have been "truisms" of a bygone era. While some students find gender-based humour unpalatable, others may continue condoning its use. Gender will permeate these judgments [3,21,37]. Thus, in the changing milieu of gender relations, we expect that more contemporary data will reflect greater awareness and sensitivity to sexist humour by a growing number of women and *some* men.

The present study examines how students and faculty rate the acceptability of 16 gender-based jokes. The jokes were selected to vary

in their target (ambiguous, males, females) in order to explore the differential impact of status and gender on reactions to humour. Given the preceding discussion, we predict that:

H[1]- Men will have a higher level of tolerance and a wider boundary of acceptability for gender-based jokes than women.

H[2]- The difference between men's and women's level of tolerance and boundaries of acceptability will be the greatest in jokes that target women.

The present study also investigates the effects of threat versus trust in joking situations. We contend that the level of trust, which will be highest among status equals, will mediate the cognitive processing and emotional response to the content of the jokes. Hence respondents were asked to rate the acceptability of the stimulus jokes in the classroom, at a student or faculty party, and at a family party. Due to status differences in the classroom, we predict that:

H[3]- There will be a narrower boundary of acceptability for gender-based jokes in the classroom than in social or family gatherings.

Methods

Design and Variables

In the present study, gender-based humour is conceptualized as 16 stimulus jokes.[1] In a 2x2 design, sex (male/female) and status of respondents (faculty/students) are the independent variables. The dependent variables are the level of tolerance and the boundaries of acceptability.[2] We operationally defined level of tolerance as the aggregate ratings of six semantic differential (SD) items. The items were funny, stereotypical, derogatory, offensive, pornographic, hostile and their antonyms or opposites. Boundaries of acceptability were operationally defined as the ratings on three items concerning acceptability of the joke in a classroom, in a social gathering (faculty or student party), and a family party. Each item was on a seven-point scale with clearly identified end points. In order to control for response bias, half of the items were randomly presented from negative to positive and the other half reversed. For in-depth analyses, we cluster our tolerance and acceptability variables according to the joke target (ambiguous, men or women).

Samples and Procedures

Respondents were 377 students and 83 faculty members from the University of Toronto. For reasons of cost, convenience and availability, different sampling strategies were used to obtain the two groups. Questionnaires were distributed to students attending four introductory classes (three in sociology and one in economics). The selection of these courses was due to convenience and the cooperation of their respective instructors. More importantly, these courses are the largest introductory courses at the College and thus serve a large proportion of incoming students who eventually branch out into various disciplines. Thus, introductory sociology and economics courses provide a better mix of the student population at the university than can be found at any other specialization area.

A brief covering letter explained that the study was investigating gender-based humour and that participation was voluntary and anonymous. Students were allowed 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The response rate was over 95%.

Faculty respondents were obtained through a systematic sampling of the 1993 University of Toronto Faculty Directory. Questionnaires with return labels were sent to 368 faculty members through campus mail. Four questionnaires were returned due to the retirement or death of the addressee. The overall response rate was 24%, an outcome which will be discussed later as one the indicators of "resistance" to the study.

Questionnaire

Respondents received a package consisting of 16 randomly ordered stimulus-jokes and 16 rating scales corresponding to each joke. The jokes were selected from several thousand reviewed from humour books as well as jokes circulating on several "Electronic Bulletin Boards." Several criteria were used in the selection. First, all dealt with gender. Second, jokes ranged in their target, either butting males (5), females (6), or with an ambiguous target (5). Third, the jokes ranged in their "crudeness." However, since those with graphic descriptions or profane language were excluded, the chosen jokes represent a very contained sample of what circulates in the "humour market."

Results

An item-by-item correlation analyses (Pearsons) of the six SD ratings of tolerance and the three measures of boundaries of acceptability revealed highly significant results (p's<.001). Correlational analyses of the aggregated tolerance and acceptability responses for all 16 jokes were also highly significant (p's<.001). Given this overwhelming consistency, the ensuing analysis employs scaled results for tolerance

and acceptability ratings. Moreover, we report separate analyses for jokes that are neutral, target men or women.

Age Variable: Finally, we must address the issues related to age. Our study attempts to decipher the effects of status conceptualized as faculty versus students. However, there is a natural overlap between our status variable and age, since most (but not all) students are younger than most (but not all) faculty. First, and foremost, then, we must demonstrate that status effects are indeed significant, and separate from those due to age. We will do this before we discuss our results in detail. Although we collected ordinal level data about age cohorts of our respondents (four categories), the very small frequency of female faculty respondents prevented us from analyzing the main and interactive effects of age (2x2x4 design) in addition to those that arise from the power model (2x2 gender and status). However, dissociating the effects of age from the status variable of concern is a must if we are to validly test our hypothesis.

For this reason, we first conducted a multiple regression analysis using sex (female=1), status (student=1), and age by collapsing the latter into two categories (under 35=1 versus 35 and over) as regressors. The dependent variables were tolerance (analyzed separately for neutral jokes, jokes that target males or females), and acceptability (again, analyzed separately for the three targets).

In terms of the tolerance ratings, the age variable's contribution to the explanation of the variation was nonsignificant, regardless of the joke target. In contrast, the variation explained by status was significant in jokes that targeted both males ($p<.009$) and females ($p<.001$). The variation explained by models that contained all three variables (gender/status/age, $r^2=.016$ for neutral, .038 for male-target, .111 for female target, probabilities $<.065$, $<.001$, $<.001$ respectively) were almost identical to the models that contained only the two variables of interest (gender/status, $r^2=.013$ for neutral, $r^2=.038$ for male-target, $r^2=.111$ for female target, probabilities $<.048$, $<.001$, $<.001$, respectively).

The findings for the acceptability ratings are even more clear. A multiple regression analysis of gender/status/age on the acceptability of neutral, male or female targeting jokes showed substantial predictive effects of status ($p<.001$ regardless of the target), but absolutely none due to the age variable. The variation explained by models that contained all three variables (gender/status/age, $r^2=.090$ for neutral, $r^2=.150$ for male target, $r^2=.190$ for female target, probabilities $<.001$ in all cases) were identical to the models that contained only the two variables of interest (gender/status, $r^2=.090$ for neutral, .149 for male-target, .190 for female target, probabilities $<.001$ in both).

Indeed, these findings inform us that although age and status may be highly correlated in real life situations, their role in humour settings are substantially different. For testing our power model, we can legitimately disregard age and turn to the analysis of the relevant effects of status and gender.

Table 1 reports the mean tolerance scores for each of the 16 jokes, with smaller means representing greater tolerance. The means range from X=3.02 (Joke 15, neutral) to X=4.51 (Joke 4, female target). Examination of the ANOVA results for each joke reveals significant gender effects on nine of the 16 jokes (p<.040 to p<.001). Consistent with H[1], all of the nine significant effects are the result of males being more tolerant of the jokes than women. In addition, seven jokes show significant effects of status (p<.032 to p<.001). In all these cases, student ratings are more tolerant than those of the faculty. Nonetheless, interpretation of the main effects must be moderated by the highly significant interactions of gender and status obtained on eight of the jokes (p<.046 to p<.001). All these interactions are due to the fact that while male students are the most tolerant of all groups, female faculty are the least tolerant. We will examine the nature of these interactions more closely in Table 2, which gives mean tolerance scores for gender and status for each target cluster (ambiguous/men/women).

Tables 1 and 2 about here

Once again, the results in Table 2 strongly support H[1], since significant main effects are found for gender regardless of the joke target (p<.014, p<.003, p<.001 respectively for ambiguous/men/women). But beyond the consistent gender effect, the pattern of results differ by who the joke targets. Ambiguous jokes yield no status effects or interactions.

Within each of the target categories of men or women, there are clear interaction effects (p<.007, p<.001 respectively). These interactions arise from the fact that male students are the most tolerant of all groups (X=3.44 and X=3.36 for targeting men and women), while female faculty are the least tolerant (X=4.41 and X=4.87 in that order). Male faculty and female students fall between the extremes, with means closely corresponding with one another. The main effect of status is found only in the joke cluster that targets women (p<.003) where students are more tolerant than faculty.

Although target of the jokes is not an independent variable in Table 2, it is interesting to note that the ambiguous joke cluster engenders more overall tolerance (X=3.34) than jokes targeting men (X=3.71) or women (X=3.91). Comparison of the two-way cell means across the three joke

targets further elucidate the subtle variations in reactions to jokes. For example, the means for male students are relatively stable across all three targets (maximum spread .22). But female students (spread .61) and male and female faculty (spreads of .90 and 1.42, respectively) appear to differentiate by the target. Stated differently, the last three groups show less tolerance for male-directed jokes than ambiguous ones, and the least tolerance for female-directed jokes. Taken together, these results provide partial support for H[2]. Jokes that specifically target women indeed produce gender-based differences, but the effect is substantially due to the interaction with status (extremes of tolerance by male students and intolerance by female faculty).

The means of overall acceptability (the aggregate of acceptability in classroom, social gatherings and family parties) are given in Table 3. These results diverge quite sharply from the tolerance scores given in Table 1. Gender effects are found for only two of the 16 jokes, where women rate the jokes as less acceptable than men. The sparse effects give very little support to the gender expectations in H[1]. In contrast to the scant gender effects, 15 of 16 jokes show highly significant effects of status. In all cases, students find the jokes more acceptable than faculty ($p<.005$ to $p<.001$). More importantly, there are 14 significant gender and status interactions on these ratings ($p<.045$ to $p<.001$). Interactions are once again due to the extreme and opposite ratings of female faculty and male students. Male faculty's and female student's acceptability ratings fall in the middle (in that order). The presence of these consistent and strong interactions attest to the fact that status alone cannot account for all the variation in the acceptability ratings.

Table 3 about here

The nature of the main effects and interactions are shown in more detail in Table 4, in which, acceptability in the classroom, social gatherings and family parties are analyzed separately. As in Table 2, mean acceptability scores are given for gender and status, based on joke target clusters.

Table 4 about here

The most striking result of Table 4 is the absence of main effects for gender. Moreover, there is an identical pattern of results obtained for acceptability in the classroom and at social gatherings. In these two settings, there are highly significant status effects ($p<.001$ in all) as well as significant interactions ($p<.012$ to $p<.001$) regardless of the target. Faculty find the jokes less acceptable than students. Once again, and consistent with the reported results for tolerance (Table 2), all interactions are due to the polar reactions of male students and female

faculty. However, unlike Table 2, Table 4 reveals an interesting difference in the means. Whereas the means for male faculty and female students "converged" in the case of tolerance (Table 2), male faculty consistently find these jokes less acceptable in the classroom and at social gatherings than do female students (mean comparisons for male faculty and female students for classroom are 5.14>3.54; 5.83>4.23; 5.97>4.22 and for social gatherings are 3.73>2.65; 4.26>2.76; 4.60>2.99, independent t-tests show p<.010 for all comparisons). In effect, male faculty seem to deem the jokes as tolerable as female students do, but certainly not as acceptable to tell.

Results obtained for family parties diverge from the pattern for classroom and social gatherings (Table 4). There are no significant effects for jokes that are ambiguous or target men. Status and interaction effects are only found for the joke cluster that targets women. Taken together, these results do not support the acceptability expectations of H^2. However, despite the lack of main effects for gender, gender and status combine to restrict the acceptability boundaries for jokes that butt women.

The third hypothesis predicts that the boundaries of acceptability will be narrower in the classroom than in the other two situations. As discussed above, however, the patterning of the main and interaction effects are identical for the classroom and social gatherings, and only differ for the family gatherings. On the surface, this observation is contrary to the expectations about the unique and nonegalitarian nature of the classroom. However, an analyses of the means among the three situations render a somewhat different picture. Indeed, subsidiary analyses reveal that, overall acceptance is greatest at social gatherings (all targets X=2.90) and significantly lower in the classroom (all targets X=4.13) and at family parties (all targets X=4.22). In other words, the acceptability is equally narrow for classroom and family parties, but substantially more relaxed in social gatherings. This pattern is in line with the premise of H^3 but not with its wording. It seems that age and parental status differences deem family parties as nonegalitarian as classrooms, especially for the students.[3]

Discussion and Conclusions

In face-to-face interactions, use and reception of humour depends on multiple situated complexities. No single study can adequately capture the rich permutations possible in such complex environments. Therefore, our study is a modest attempt to untangle power differentials in only two factors (gender and status), provide additional information on two others (age and disciplinary affiliation), leaving many relevant others for future exploration.

Before we discuss our findings in more detail, a caution about using students and faculty from a single university is also in order. The University of Toronto is the largest University in Canada, drawing tens of thousands of students from within the country, and some from abroad. Since it is heavily state sponsored, it is accessible to students from various backgrounds. These characteristics make it similar to most other Canadian Universities, but they may set it apart from some of its private U.S. counterparts with more homogeneous students. All these aspects, including the classes we sampled from needs to be carefully weighed in terms of the generalizability of our findings. Nevertheless, the power dimensions that constitute the focus of this paper, namely that of status and gender, are entrenched aspects of all higher education. Therefore, there are insights to be gained from the present findings.

Our findings underscore the situated complexities in people's judgments of humour. Tolerance ratings consistently support H[1] and indicate that regardless of the target, women are more wary of humour than men. However, acceptability ratings provide very marginal support for direct gender differences predicted in H[1]. While these divergent outcomes may seem somewhat puzzling, close examination of the interactions provide at least a partial explanation for them. For both dependent variables, the interactions consistently show that female faculty are the most sensitive to the demeaning possibilities of humour, while male students seem almost oblivious of these issues. Our findings, then, are variations of Smith, Morrison and Wolf's [37] assertions about "college as a gendered experience." Variations, are also found in the responses of male faculty and female students. In the case of tolerance, the two groups converge. But in the measures of acceptance in the classroom and at social gatherings, the responses of male faculty approach those of female faculty, while female students find the jokes relatively more acceptable to tell. In both the acceptability and tolerance ratings, male students show the most lax boundaries. These findings are in line with Smith, Morrison and Wolf's [37, p. 720] conclusion that although men's and women's development in socio-political issues are in the same direction, "men end where the women begin, whereas the women continue to move in the direction of socially conscious views."

Gender and status interactions also help explain the support, albeit weak, found for H[2]. We had expected that male-female differences would be greatest for jokes that target females. While the average difference between female faculty and male students was invariable in the anticipated direction, male faculty were somewhat more sensitive to female-targeted jokes and attenuated the overall gender differences that are clearly apparent in the responses of their younger male counterparts.

The findings for H3, which predicted that there would be a narrower boundary of acceptance for classroom humour than for jokes told at social or family gatherings, also reveal the importance of situational complexities. Within target categories, family affairs produced fewer (and weaker) differences than did the other two situations. Overall, it was more acceptable to tell jokes at social gatherings than in either the classroom or at family affairs.

In terms of the analyses of the means across the target categories, we indeed found the status equality in social gatherings produced the most relaxed acceptance ratings. The mean ratings of the classroom and family parties were similar, and both significantly differed from the social gatherings. In the family party case, we may have underestimated the importance of a different situational variable. While we expected family interactions to be less influenced by gender considerations, we failed to realize how much student joking might be constrained by the presence of their parents! It is also interesting to note that this is the only case where male student ratings are not systematically different from female students. (Table 4).

The present findings clearly challenge the conventional view of humour as brief and functional "switchings" to the playful realm. This is especially apparent in the responses of female faculty, the group that one would expect to be aware and most sensitive to gender issues [25]. At this point, an aspect of the study which escapes detection in quantitative analyses also needs to be addressed. In our combined research efforts which span three decades, we have never experienced as much covert and overt resistance to our work as we saw in this study. The nature of men's and women's resistance was different, but it came exclusively from the faculty respondents. Several male faculty used strong words to question the relevance of this study. Specifically, six "anonymous" respondents chose to call sociology, the study, and the researchers (not necessarily in that order) "stupid" (and an assortment of other names), erroneously inferring that our goal was to develop a list of gender jokes to be used in the classroom. At least three others criticized the study for using "American" humour (as opposed to universal?). What is noteworthy is that, except for the cover sheet, these male faculty returned incomplete questionnaires.

Three female faculty who were critical of this study did not respond either. However, they called, gave their names, and asked for additional information, including the background of the principle researcher and whether permission was secured from the ethics review committee. They also requested a copy of the final paper. Even the status of women officer of the university was alerted to the study, and she asked for information on its progress.[4] The unifying concern for these women was

that the results, regardless of what they showed, could be used to justify sexist humour under the guise of "free speech." What is equally telling is the fact that five female faculty believed that all stimulus jokes targeted women, despite the fact that only 6 of the 16 did so.

Although faculty respondents were systematically selected, the response rate was very low (24%). Moreover, our aforementioned experiences suggest the possibility of non-random response patterns for male and female faculty. One possibility is that female faculty who were the most concerned about sexist humour refused to respond. In contrast, male faculty who did respond may have been more representative of those who are sensitive to gender issues, as opposed to those who are unaware of the study's intent or implications. Given the extent and vehemence of the opposition we encountered, it is clear that gender-based humour is on trial in universities. A related implication is that this type of humour will be closely monitored by faculty (especially female faculty). The down side is that if gender-based humour is used (or even abused), students (especially male students) are not likely to react to it [37].

In a general sense, then, our results concur with earlier studies which found that pro-feminist attitudes rather than biological sex to be the determining factor in responses to gender-based humour [16,27]. If the sensitivity of female faculty is hardly surprising, the variable responses of male faculty leaves open some important questions. Since the latter take a middling position in tolerance but display low acceptance for the telling of jokes, one needs to be cautious about attributing their responses to pro-feminist attitudes. Our findings may simply mean that male faculty are now more aware of the possible consequences of telling jokes that are deemed inappropriate. Further research efforts aimed at differentiating between attitudinal effects and situated constraints (as in comparing joking and language use in all-male versus other situations) is critical for understanding the type and extent of inroads feminist beliefs are making.

Equally interesting questions arise for students. Since our respondents were all first year students who completed questionnaires soon after the start of term, they had little opportunity to be aware of--much less influenced by-- the power-based approach to humour that has been institutionalized in various university contexts. Additional research on the somewhat anomalous responses of female students and the more fixed and less sensitive ratings of male students, especially as they mature in their university experience, is also worthwhile.

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Notes

1 Jokes in the order presented to the respondents:

1. I never knew what happiness was until I got married. And by then it was too late.

2. Did you hear about the new Playboy Magazine for married men?

What about it?

The centrefold is the same every month.

3. Friend: My wife had her credit card stolen.

Dagwood: That's terrible!

Friend: Not really-the thief's been spending less than she did.

4. Why is a cold beer better than a woman?

A beer won't accuse you of lying when you say you read Penthouse "just for the articles."

5. Why is a cucumber better than a man?

A cucumber never asks whether you've been seeing other cucumbers.

6. A man takes his date to a jeweller and asks to see their most expensive necklace. When he sees how much she likes it, he decides to purchase it. He asks the jeweller if a check is OK, and is told that since it is Saturday he will have to get the necklace on Monday after his check is cleared. He says fine and they leave.

On Monday morning the man returns to the store and is confronted by the jeweller. "How dare you show your face here? There is not a cent in your bank account!"

"I know" says the man. "I just came back to thank you for the most wonderful weekend of my life."

7. She: I've heard plenty about your love making.

He: Oh, it's nothing.

She: That's what I heard.

8. A couple that has been married a few years decide to go out to eat every Thursday night. After a few weeks the husband notices that his wife always leaves her glasses at home Thursday night. He asks her, at one of their dinners, "Do you leave your glasses at home because you think you look better?"

"No," she replied, "because you look better."

9. XYZ tobacco has just introduced a smokeless cigarette. It's just the thing to have after safe sex.

10. I can't understand why more people aren't bisexual.

It would double your chances for a date on Saturday night.

11. President Taft and his wife go to visit a farm. The wife is taken to the barnyard where she happens to see the rooster in action. She then has a secret service agent bring a note to her husband, saying, "This morning, the rooster made love 9 times!"

The agent returned with her husband's reply: "Yes, but did the rooster do it 9 times with the same hen?"

12. A salesman returns from a long trip to his many accounts across the country. His wife confesses an infidelity.

"Who was it?" the salesman bellows. "It must have been my friend Tommy."

"No, it wasn't Tommy."

"Then was it my friend Alex?"

"No, not Alex."

"Then it must have been my friend Willie!"

"What's wrong with you?" the wife roars. "Don't you think I could have friends of my own!"

13. After a long and difficult argument, Lady Astor said, "Sir if you were my husband, I'd poison your coffee." Without missing a beat, Churchill replied, "If you were my wife, I'd drink it."

14. A wife was dying. She called her husband to her bed and said softly, "Gary, I must confess. I've been unfaithful."

Gary answered with even more softness, "I know. That's why I poisoned you."

15. The whole world dies and an endless line waits to get into heaven. Suddenly, there's a great roar from the front of the line. Someone in the back calls out.

"Why are they cheering?"

Somebody in the front yells back, "They're not counting adultery."

16. A married couple is making love. The husband asks his wife, "Did I hurt you, my dear?"

"Not at all," she answers. "Why do you ask?

He replied, "Because I thought you moved."

2 Upon the insightful recommendation of one of our anonymous reviewers, we also analyzed the effects of reported disciplinary affiliation (as social sciences versus non/social sciences) and status (faculty versus students). Of the six two-factor (2x2) ANOVA's carried out on our acceptability and tolerance measures of neutral, and male and female targeting joke clusters, only one showed a main effect of disciplinary affiliation. Respondents from social sciences (faculty and students) found male targeting jokes more acceptable than respondents from non social sciences (means: 3.68 versus 3.98, p=.02). There were no other discipline effects or interactions with status. Because of the small numbers of female professors, we were not able to simultaneously analyze gender. However, the sparsity of the discipline effects shows that the disciplinary affiliation was not an important issue in our investigation, and thus the following discussion is solely centered on status and gender.

3 A MANOVA was carried out to assess the effects of gender and status as well as their interactions on difference scores in the three levels of trust scenarios. MANOVA takes into account the intercorrelations among multiple dependent variables. We created difference scores between acceptability in 1. classroom versus social gathering, 2. classroom versus family party, and 3. social gathering versus family party ratings. MANOVA findings for both sex and status were significant (df=3,445, p<.030 and p<.001). ANOVA's on each of the difference scores indicated that sex as well as status determined the situationality of the more reserved ratings in family parties and in the classroom as opposed to the social gatherings.

4. An anonymous reviewer asked whether the ideological affiliation (ie. feminism) of the researchers was known, and whether such knowledge may explain the negative faculty responses we received. Indeed, the principal researcher of this study is known in her discipline (sociology) for her feminist research and teaching whereas the co-author is not at all associated with feminist endeavours. However, first year students are not likely to know these specialization details. Moreover, University of Toronto is the largest university in Canada, with more than a thousand faculty members dispersed across one main and two satellite campuses. It is unlikely that the systematically selected faculty members from across all disciplines in the three campuses will know the ideological positions of the researchers, although some undoubtedly would have this knowledge. Therefore, the knowledge about the researchers' ideological inclination is a possible confounding factor which needs to be more directly monitored in future studies.

Table 1 Mean Tolerance for Jokes by Gender, Status, and their Interactions				
Jokes and Targets	Mean Tolerance	Gender (G)	Status (S)	(G*S)
1 (A)	3.43	--	.002	--
2 (M)	3.91	.001	--	.004
3 (F)	3.63	--	.001	.001
4 (F)	4.51	.001	--	.006
5 (M)	4.19	--	--	--
6 (F)	3.65	.001	.001	.001
7 (M)	3.49	--	.032	.046

8 (M)	3.10	--	.001	--
9 (A)	3.25	.010	--	--
10 (A)	3.89	--	--	--
11 (F)	3.96	.001	--	.010
12 (M)	3.87	.001	--	--
13 (A)	3.03	.001	--	--
14 (F)	3.39	.040	.004	.007
15 (A)	3.02	--	--	--
16 (F)	4.29	.003	.001	.001

*Smaller means signify greater tolerance

*Targets A=Ambiguous, M=Male, F=Female

Table 2 Overall Tolerance and Acceptance of Joke Clusters that are Ambiguous or Target Men/Women by Gender, Status and their Interactions							
Target	Tolerance Means by Gender, Status				Probabilities		
	Overall		Faculty	Student	Gender	Status	G*S
Ambig.	3.34	Men	3.21	3.20	.014	--	--
		Women	3.45	3.43			
Men	3.71	Men	3.73	3.44	.003	--	.007
		Women	4.41	3.79			
Women	3.91	Men	4.11	3.36	.001	.003	.001
		Women	4.87	4.04			

*Smaller means signify greater tolerance

Table 3 Mean Acceptance of Jokes by Gender, Status and their Interactions				
	Mean	Gender (G)	Status (S)	(G*S)
1 (A)	3.04	--	.001	.044
2 (M)	4.24	.001	.001	.001
3 (F)	2.96	--	.001	.008
4 (F)	4.58	--	.001	.001
5 (M)	4.58	--	.001	.001
6 (F)	4.58	--	.001	.006
7 (M)	4.14	--	.001	.002
8 (M)	2.66	.002	.001	--
9 (A)	3.78	--	.001	.045
10 (A)	4.45	--	.005	--
11 (F)	4.35	--	.001	.001
12 (M)	3.84	--	.001	.044
13 (A)	2.49	--	--	.051
14 (F)	3.31	--	.001	.002
15 (A)	3.38	--	.001	.024
16 (F)	4.62	--	.001	.001

*Smaller means signify greater acceptability

*Targets A=Ambiguous, M=Male, F=Female

Table 4 Acceptance of Jokes with Various Targets in the Classroom, Social and Family Parties by Gender, Status and their Interactions							
Target	Means for Acceptance in Classroom				Probabilities		
	Overall		Faculty	Student	Gender	Status	G*S
Ambig.	3.69	Men	5.14	2.98	--	.001	.001
		Women	5.58	3.54			
Men	4.36	Men	5.83	3.52	--	.001	.001
		Women	6.51	4.23			
Women	4.34	Men	5.97	3.39	--	.001	.001
		Women	6.70	4.22			
Target	Means for Acceptance at Soc. Party				Probabilities		
	Overall		Faculty	Student	Gender	Status	G*S
Ambig.	2.72	Men	3.73	2.26	--	.001	.012
		Women	3.30	2.65			
Men	2.89	Men	4.26	2.24	--	.001	.003
		Women	4.36	2.76			
Women	3.09	Men	4.60	2.21	--	.001	.001
		Women	4.92	2.99			
Target	Means for Acceptance at Fam. Party				Probabilities		
	Overall		Faculty	Student	Gender	Status	G*S
Ambig.	3.88	Men	3.90	3.69	--	--	--
		Women	3.74	3.96			
Men	4.43	Men	4.67	4.27	--	--	--
		Women	4.77	4.47			
Women	4.35	Men	4.66	3.93	--	.015	.024
		Women	5.01	4.43			

*Smaller means signify greater acceptability

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Last modified: April 28, 2003