

## **The Butt of the Joke? Laughter and Potency in the Becoming of Good Soldiers: A Response.**

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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 Freud's '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.

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