

Humour and Gender Hegemony: The Panoptical Role of Ridicule vis-à-vis Gender

by

Mostafa Abedinifard

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Department of Comparative Literature
University of Alberta

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I read gender humour through the lens of masculinities studies and critical humour studies to contribute to gender studies and humour studies. I engage two crucial problems and propose solutions and possibilities. The first problem concerns the state of the concept of ridicule—as a form/aspect of humour—within gender-related debates and specifically ridicule’s place in challenging and enforcing gender hegemony. In such discussions, ridicule and humour are frequently mentioned as insidious social control strategies through which certain forms of masculinity and femininity are *abjected*. Despite their recognizing such role of ridicule, however, the above debates never grant the role any theoretical significance. Critically reviewing the related literature, I draw on Michael Billig’s theory of ridicule as a universal reinforcer of the social order to argue that ridicule, as occurring in mainstream gender humour, plays a panoptical role in enforcing inequitable gender relations. As a pervasive disciplinary tool, gendered ridicule causes self-regulation in social agents who then wish to consent to the cultural ascendancy of certain modes of gender performance and the subordination of certain other forms of performing gender. By connecting this fearful consent to debates in gender studies about the role of abjection in the creation of gendered subjectivities, I also hypothesize that ridicule occupies a necessary role in the creation of gendered beings in the first place.

I raise my main argument in Chapter One. In Chapters Two to Four, I illustrate the argument by analyzing various types of mainstream gender humour—with a particular emphasis on the genres of *canned joke* and *sitcom*—from Iranian and Anglo-American (mainly the U.S. and the U.K.) societies and cultures. The main humour types and/or categories include those targeting women, homosexuals, effeminates as well as bodily non-normative and ethnic/racial femininities and masculinities. For the Anglo-American sections (Chapter Two and parts of

Chapter Four), besides related joke cycles, episodes from the sitcoms *Two and a Half Men* (2003-2015) and *Ellen* (1994–1998) as well as spots from the *Get a Mac Ad* campaign (2006-2009) are analyzed. For the Iranian part (Chapter Three and parts of Chapter Four), the main focus is put on the contemporary Qazvini and Rashti joke cycles, the sexual humour of the classical Persian satirist Ubeyd Zakani (d. ca. 1370), and his modern counterparts.

My main argument, given humour's well-known potential for subversion, may arouse the objection that ridicule always exists as a counterhegemonic tool to resist hegemonic gender norms. I tackle this possibility in the last Chapter Five, where I discuss the possibilities and restraints of feminist and in-group lesbian humour as representative categories of fringe or non-mainstream gender humour. I argue that this resistant humour, due to its minimal normalizing power—compared to the heft of mainstream gender humour—apparently cannot offset the latter's disciplinary power and thus be effectively subversive of patriarchy.

The second problem I focus on is the way gender theories inform prevalent textual analyses of gender humour. Examining the pertinent literature, I argue that the critical blind spots need redress and enrichment. While analyzing gender humour, I argue, many humour scholars either resist gender theories or employ theories incapable of explaining intricacies related to gender. To address this insufficiency, I suggest that we use—as I have done throughout—comprehensive theories that not only embrace multiple masculinities and femininities but also heed the intersection of gender and other identity elements. I use Raewyn Connell's gender hierarchy model as a case in point.

In contrast to much work in gender studies that recognizes, yet understates, ridicule's political force in favour of gender hierarchy, this research contends that the above force is universal and central, and therefore must be foregrounded in gender studies. Within humour

studies, too, the research contrasts with exculpatory accounts of humour that downgrade or deny humour's effect on the social order. My findings indicate that mainstream gender humour, while reflecting the gender order, is most likely to affect that order, too. Finally, unlike much research in feminist humour studies that puts too much hope in seditious functions of fringe or marginal gender humour, I find that such humour cannot find recognition among mainstream audiences unless its underlying assumptions find cultural ascendancy.

Preface

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to Soroush and Ava

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Introduction

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS AND THE OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT

In this dissertation, I will draw on theories and debates in critical humour studies and masculinities studies to contribute to gender and humour studies. As an emergent field within the broader interdisciplinary area of humour studies, critical humour studies primarily involve problematic ethical and socio-political aspects of humour and laughter. Masculinities studies, which overlap feminist studies, adopt a critical attitude towards masculinity and mainly aim to disclose non-democratic and detrimental forms of masculinity. I engage two crucial problems and propose solutions and possibilities. To support my claims, I cite and analyze various instances of gendered folk and popular culture humour from (contemporary) Iranian and Anglo-American (mainly the U.S. and the U.K.) societies and cultures.

The first problem I examine is the state of the concept of *ridicule*—as a form or aspect of humour—within gender-related debates. More specifically, I focus on ridicule's place in both challenging and enforcing gender hegemony. In many theoretical discussions related to gender, ridicule and disparaging humour are frequently mentioned as insidious social control strategies through which certain forms of masculinity and femininity become subject to abjection. While recognizing such a function for ridicule, the above debates never grant ridicule any theoretical significance. Reviewing the related literature and connecting it with some masculinities theorists' debates on what helps sustain gender hegemony, I draw on Michael Billig's discussion of ridicule as a universal reinforcer of the social order to argue that ridicule, in the form of gender humour, apparently plays a central panoptical role in enforcing inequitable gender relations. As a pervasive disciplinary tool, ridicule can induce self-regulation in social agents' gender

performances so that they want to consent to the cultural ascendancy of certain modes of gender display, and to the subordination of certain other forms of doing gender. By connecting this fearful consent to debates in gender studies about the role of *abjection* in the creation of gendered subjectivities, I also hypothesize that ridicule occupies a necessary role in the creation of gendered beings in the first place. The above theories will be put forward in detail in Chapter One and later elaborated on in Chapters Two to Four.

As we know, however, “[b]ecause it is complex, multiple, [and] contradictory, hegemony always carries within it the seeds of resistance and rebellion” (Brantlinger 97). This subversive potential, as far as gender hegemony and its relation to ridicule are concerned, may lead to some readers’ objection that ridicule always exists as a counterhegemonic tool to resist or rebel against hegemonic gender norms. I will tackle this possibility in the last Chapter Five, where I discuss the possibilities and restraints of feminist and in-group lesbian humour as two major political categories of fringe gender humour. I argue that this resistant humour, due to its minimal normalizing power—compared to the heft of mainstream gender humour—apparently cannot offset the latter’s disciplinary power and thus serve as an effectively subversive discourse against patriarchy.

The second problem I focus on examines the way gender theories inform prevalent textual analyses of gender humour within humour studies. Examining the pertinent literature, I argue that the critical blind spots need redress and enrichment. While analyzing gender humour, I show, many humour scholars either resist gender theories or employ theories incapable of explaining intricacies related to gender. To address this insufficiency, I suggest instead that we use—as I have done throughout—comprehensive theories that not only embrace multiple

masculinities and femininities but also pay attention to the intersection of gender and other identity elements. I use Raewyn Connell's gender hierarchy model as a case in point.

MAIN FIELDS OF STUDY INVOLVED: CONCISE INTRODUCTIONS

Partly because they have emerged more or less recently, masculinities studies and critical humour studies are not widely recognized. Masculinities studies have grown steadily during the past few decades. Critical humour studies, however, comprise even a much newer, largely neglected area. The lesser recognized status of these fields has other reasons, too. Masculinities studies (sometimes deliberately called critical studies of men and masculinities in order to differentiate it from less critical approaches to studying men and masculinity, such as *men's studies*) might sometimes be mistaken as a masculinist or pro-gender hierarchy area of research. Also, critical humour studies could appear to contain a too serious or pessimistic tone about humour and thus be ill-conceived. Brief introductions to both fields are therefore in order here.

Masculinities Studies

After the late 1960s, in response to second-wave feminism, some men's movements arose in some Western countries. Some, such as the Men's Rights Movement and the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, were less sympathetic to or antagonistic towards feminism, normally attempting to resuscitate what they claimed to be men's lost rights due to the spread of women's liberation movements in the West. Perhaps the most common denominator of such men's movements was their claim about the *crisis in masculinity*, a controversial concept which has ever since continued to inform many discussions of masculinity.¹

¹ For an overview of some important discussions in masculinities studies about the concept of *crisis in masculinity*, see Chapters One and Seven in Buchbinder. As inferred from his overview, supposed crises in masculinity may best

According to leading masculinities studies scholars Michael Kimmel and Michael Kaufman, although many factors helped cause this sense of crisis in many men—including the gradual disintegration of the image of men as bread-winners due to increasing industrialization and bureaucracy, which threatened or eliminated the economic freedom of many men—the crisis was mostly felt due to the emergence of women’s and gay/lesbian activism (17). While in the late 1960s, the civil rights movement had challenged white supremacy, women’s and gay/lesbian movements questioned more rooted, more internal (both domestic and psychological) conceptions about the gender relations between and among men and women (17). In direct response to these changes, in the 1990s the American author and poet Robert Bly initiated the increasingly growing Mythopoetic Men’s Movement in the United States. Relying on a symbolic system of meanings, which he had devised from popular Western mythology and folklore, Bly sought the revival of the traditional or supposedly *genuine* masculinity in the West, a masculinity he claimed had been annihilated by the modern lifestyle. The thoughts and writings of the proponents of such regressive movements, including Robert Bly’s book *Iron John: A Book about Men* have, according to Catano and Novak (2), formed the first wave of masculinity studies in the West, a wave whose advocates, more than being willing to advance a dialogue with feminists, conceived men as the victims of feminist doctrines and activities, and therefore sought an alleged original or natural masculinity (2).

Almost concurrent with these men’s reactions to feminism, pro-feminism also developed among some men. Being more sympathetic with feminists’ teachings, pro-feminists even aspired to changes in dominant forms of masculinity in their societies. The intellectual activities of pro-

be understood as anticipated consequences of the developmental process of societies’ gender orders, particularly at times when impending changes in these orders are perceived by the hegemonic groups to be actually or potentially detrimental to their privileged status.

feminists led to the development of Men's Studies. The field, by avoiding gender-essentialism and by adopting a more analytical approach to the topic of men and masculinity, remarkably distanced itself from the aforementioned regressive movements, and heralded the second wave of masculinity studies (Catano and Novak 2; Brod and Kaufman 4). However, the early research in Men's Studies faced mixed feelings by some women's studies scholars (e.g., see O'Brien 2011), mainly because despite its disagreement with the first wave regressive men's movements, the second wave still maintained somewhat retaliatory sentiments towards feminism (Catano and Novak 2).

Since the past three decades or so, a third wave of masculinity studies has thrived. Within the frameworks of feminism and gender democracy, this last wave regards masculinity as an analytical category, thus seeking to examine and understand men and masculinities to induce healthier and more gender-democratic lives for men and consequently also women. While evolving from second wave Men's Studies, this last wave has different names including "studies of men and masculinities," "critical men's studies" (Connell, Hearn, and Kimmel, "Introduction" 2), and "masculinities studies" (see Buchbinder). The topics undertaken in masculinities studies include "boyhood, fathers and fathering, sports, the military, male sexualities, male violence, male intimacy, homophobia, men in the workplace, men of color, men's health, and theories and history of masculinity" (Capraro 533). The particular attention masculinities studies pay to feminist theories likely helped their increasing acceptance among Women's Studies programs, particularly in North America and Europe.

Although originating in the West, masculinities studies, particularly during the past decade or so, have attracted the attention of a growing number of scholars interested in studying non-Western men and masculinities. The main aim in masculinities studies has been "to make

visible” men *qua* men because, as Kimmel remarks, men’s gender has mostly remained invisible throughout history, even—perhaps particularly and ironically—after the appearance of feminism. While feminism made gender visible, Kimmel argues, gender gradually became synonymous with woman; therefore men increasingly remained outside the reach of gender studies (Kimmel, “Invisible Masculinity” 29; see also Connell, Hearn, and Kimmel, “Introduction” 1).

Masculinities studies scholars insist that we need to know how particular sociocultural mechanisms, in patriarchal societies, work to deter people from attempting, or even feeling the need, to question or study masculinity. What, we need to ask, might cause us to take masculinity for granted? In their attempt to turn men into subjects of gender studies, masculinities studies scholars, many of whom are also activists, seek to raise the consciousness of the public—particularly men themselves—about men’s and boys’ inextricable places within issues of gender and their role in bringing about gender equality (e.g., see Connell, “Change among the Gatekeepers”; Magnuson).

Critical Humour Studies

Critical attitudes towards humour are not unprecedented. As far as gender is concerned, for instance, much research, particularly since the second wave of feminism, has critically studied gender humour. (For my detailed discussion of the concept, see pp. 66-72 below). Such scholarship has been greatly helpful in advancing my own project. The research, however, stands in contrast with a much larger body of scholarship which during the past few decades has constituted the mainstream field currently known as humour studies. Humour studies normally approach humour as inherently good and positive (see chapter two in Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*). Such an assumption, however, may create serious impediments for critical interests in humour. First, according to the assumption, the insensitive, irresponsible, cruel, or morally and

politically problematic instances of humour are only unfortunate negative appendages to the essentially good entity of humour. Accordingly, raising serious questions of humour's political force may at best appear as unnecessary if not irrelevant. Second, the assumption can encourage an "exculpatory" approach to humour, therefore depoliticizing and exonerating it from social critique (see Weaver 8-9).

More recently, however, a small but growing number of critics have begun to develop a notoriously critical outlook on humour. In their 2008 essay "You Must Be Joking: The Sociological Critique of Humour and Comic Media," Lockyer and Pickering deem this "emergent field of study" as "critical humour studies" (818). The field begins with questioning the alleged benignity of humour, connecting humour with the complex web of power relations within human societies. As Lockyer and Pickering put it,

Challenging the notion of humour as an absolute good means that humour cannot be taken as a form of discourse or performance that is isolated from other discourses or from wider configurations of sociality and social relations. Humour may at times provide distraction or diversion from the serious sides of life or from entrenched social problems, but it is not separate or separable from the broad spectrum of communicative forms and processes or from the manifold issues surrounding social encounter and interaction in a multicultural society. Sexism, racism, homophobia, and other kinds of prejudice and bigotry are not exonerated by their appearance in comic discourse; indeed, they may be more effectively communicated, disseminated, and reinforced by being articulated under the wraps of humour and comedy. (817-818)

These authors' edited volume *Beyond a Joke: The Limits on Humour* (2009) and Simon Weaver's 2011 book *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour* are prominent examples of the growing scholarship in this new field. In his book, Weaver examines a wide range of racist humour, particularly from the U.S. and the U.K., in order "to explain what racist humour does for serious racism and to provide a critique of racist humour on that basis" (1).² However, what Lockyer and Pickering refer to as "challenging the notion of humour as an absolute good" has nowhere been undertaken as thoroughly as in Michael Billig's book *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. This study, on whose main argument my research in part relies, defamiliarizes humour by controversially suggesting that humour's universality is due not to any of its benign features but to the social functionality of the very aspect of humour which humour scholars often deem as unfortunately negative, i.e., *ridicule*. Ridicule, Billig maintains, occupies a universal role in maintaining the social order. As I discuss later, while Billig's claim is open to discussion, it incites interesting and promising questions about the relationship between the humorous and the serious.

CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

Billig's hypothesis concerns the relationship between humour and social order in general. I examine his theory concerning *gender order* as a particular type of social order. Gender order is defined as "a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity and masculinity" (Connell, *Gender and Power* 98-99). To advance my argument, I thematically analyze select primary texts from the folk and popular culture domains in contemporary (and old) Iranian and Anglo-American societies and cultures. My texts range

² For an overview of Weaver's book, see Abedinifard, "Rev. of *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour*."

across various humour genres, including canned jokes, contextualized verbal humour (e.g., as occurring in memoirs), comedy films, humorous advertisements, stand-up comedy, and comic strips. However, my principal corpus comprises instances of the *canned joke* and the *sitcom*.³ My sitcom cases are the first ten seasons of the TV series *Two and a Half Men* (2003-2015) and three episodes from *Ellen* (1994–1998).

Important questions regarding my methodology and corpus naturally arise: How are the genres of canned joke and sitcom and the two particular TV series selected? Since jokes are specific types of text, mainly in terms of authorship, what is the principle of selection for the jokes? Why is the humour of more than one region studied? More specifically, what is the rationale behind juxtaposing Anglo-American and Iranian societies and cultures in the study? What is meant by *contemporary*, and why has non-contemporary humour also been included in the research? Finally, what are the possible limitations to my method of textual analysis and cultural speculation?

I have chosen the canned joke and the sitcom because of their suitability to my topic of ridicule and social structure. Firstly, jokes often contain a butt and are directed towards eliciting ridiculing laughter. This also often holds true of much humour found in typical situation comedies. Moreover, these genres, since they circulate widely and are received on societal, regional, and sometimes even international levels, are suitable for analyzing social themes, including those of gender politics, on a broad scale. This broad-level circulation and reception of these humour texts is vital to my study for two reasons. First, such circulation and reception are

³ The term *joke* refers both to “a type of text” and “an instance of humor” (Attardo, “Jokes” 417). As a type of text, joke can be either “canned” or “spontaneous”/“conversational.” While conversational jokes are improvised, canned jokes, which are typically short narratives, are made based on previously existing models. Yet, “canned jokes, in some cases, may originate from conversational jokes that have been decontextualized” (417).

demanding by my focus on gender order as an arrangement of gender that specifically deals with society- and culture-wide conceptions of gender. Secondly, the widespread circulation and reception of the selected texts are also beneficial to my study, which, rather than empirical data, relies on thematic textual analysis and therefore remains speculative. Because of the speculative nature of my research, although I emphasize jokes (normally considered as folklore), my research is not a case in *fieldwork folkloristics*, as I do not involve such methods as interviews, questionnaires, data mining, and statistical analysis (see George and Jones 15; Shoemaker 1). This dissertation is an exercise in cultural studies, and places particular emphasis on critical masculinities and feminist theories on the one hand and close thematic analyses of texts on the other.

In choosing the genre of situation comedy, I have considered the high popularity and relevance of the genre in the lives of many contemporary Anglo-American people. The sitcom, since its first appearance on American radio in the 1920s and its later migration to TV, “has lost little of its appeal [and] continu[es] to dominate the contemporary television schedules” (Feasey 20) in the West. I have selected my particular sitcoms for their public influence and/or appropriateness to my arguments. *Two and a Half Men*, since its premiere in 2003, has been broadcast and syndicated not only in the U.S. but also in many other countries around the world. The sitcom, as James Messerschmidt observes, “has both extensive regional and global influence” (“Engendering Gendered Knowledge” 61). Due to its main plot, and quite compatible with the purposes of my study, the sitcom foregrounds multiple masculinities and (as the show’s producers once put it) speaks to the idea of “what it is to be a man” (qtd. in Hatfield 530). Therefore, this sitcom proves appropriate for studying hegemonic and non-hegemonic gender relations among men, a topic crucial to masculinities theory. Similarly, *Ellen*’s relevance to my

research is determined by the nature of my argument in Chapter Five, where I critique the purported subversiveness of gender humour. Helene Shugart's analysis of *Ellen* is highly relevant to the aims of my chapter. To refute Shugart's argument for the effectiveness of gender parody as a subversive strategy, I offer a re-reading of her selected episodes of *Ellen*.

My joke texts come from published English and Farsi joke collections, Internet humour websites and, to a lesser extent, social network pages on the Net. Despite my non-folkloristic method, I value folkloristics' consideration of all social individuals as potential informants of culture. Therefore, despite some reservations mentioned below, I regard all contemporary print and online humour associated with Anglo-American and Iranian societies to be *potential* sources for my study. After all, jokes have a unique textual status. As Christie Davies remarks, "[j]okes [. . .] have no authors, they exist in large numbers, and they circulate independently of such formal institutions as publishers, editors, censors, etc." ("Lesbian Jokes" 311).⁴ This very condition makes it too difficult to prefer a joke collection over another. Unlike literary texts, which are unique, jokes often appear in numerous versions, therefore requiring us to consult multiple sources. In the case of Iranian humour, because of particular censorship issues, only one reliable source—published outside Iran—is available in print, that is, the self-exiled Iranian writer and humorist Ebrahim Nabavi's recently published collection of contemporary Iranian joke cycles titled *Kashkul-e Nabavi: Ahd-e Jadid (Nabavi Anthology: New Testament)*. I consider this and two comprehensive humour websites as my main sources of Iranian humour.⁵ However, my

⁴ For typical studies of jokes by humour scholars in which the authors rely on print and online humour, their own collections of jokes, and/or humour collected from other individuals, see Bemiller and Schneider; Billig, "Humour and Hatred", "Comic Racism"; Bing; Bing and Heller; Bowd; Case and Lippard; Davies' oeuvre; Draitser; Dundes, *Cracking Jokes*; Oring (numerous works); Weaver.

⁵ See <http://fckshahabi.blogfa.com/post-96.aspx>; <http://www.jokekhoone.com/> The first address, which is no longer available, used to contain numerous examples from all contemporary Iranian ethnic joke categories.

jokes are narrowed down through the criteria of *gender-relatedness* and *frequency of appearance*.⁶

Jokes often lack specific contexts. This may cause concerns about their serving as primary texts in a study (e.g., see Kotthoff 6-7). Admittedly, jokes contain much less context than, for instance, conversational humour. However, this can arguably be advantageous in my research. Unlike studies that concern the micro-dynamics of humour in inter-personal communication, my research, while recognizing many related empirical studies, deliberately distances from particulars and ventures towards a general theory about ridicule and gender. Given such an aim, too much context would only cause a hindrance. As Billig puts it amidst a comparable discussion, “[t]he accumulation of [. . .] evidence about humour’s various conversational and interactional functions is unlikely to produce an overall social theory of humour. The construction of social theory depends upon selection and exaggeration, rather than the accumulation of detail” (126). This methodological observation, I think, also holds true for the relationship between ridicule and gender. While there exist many sporadic and passing references to, or studies on, the disciplinary use of ridicule toward gender, no one has attempted to deduce from these a general theory of how ridicule as political force relates to gender norms.

That said, I embrace any promising context in my primary texts. First, I primarily deal with *joke cycles* rather than with individual joke instances. A joke cycle is an aggregate of thematically related jokes (Attardo, *Humorous Texts* 69) circulating among masses of people in a certain society during a particular period. While conversational jokes do not give rise to cycles,

⁶ For my discussion of gender humour, see pp. 69-72 below. I take two or more occurrences of a joke (in different sources, even if with slight differences) as a sign of the assumed potential circulation of that joke. However, the *appearance* condition need not be limited to the whole joke text as a unit, but may also be satisfied by the appearance of a *motif* in various joke texts. As I explain later, circulation need not be actual, but may also be potential (see footnote 37 below.)

canned jokes, which are “clearly meant for a vast and generalized audience,” do (70). Therefore, unlike single joke instances, joke cycles are more reliable sources for studying society-wide beliefs and notions. As Christie Davies remarks,

[i]t is difficult and dangerous to deduce much from the analysis of a single joke, but one is on far, far surer ground when considerable numbers of jokes exist with a common theme. Such a cycle or large aggregate of jokes constitutes what the sociologist Emile Durkheim termed a “social fact,” a facet of a particular social world that has to be explained in social terms. (*Jokes and Targets* 4)

The context in joke cycles mainly comprises extratextual references “at the macro-social level of class, gender and ethnic power relations” rather than “at the micro social level of conversations” (Paton, Powel, and Wagg 2). As Billig also reminds us, “[c]ontext does not necessarily refer to the immediate person-to-person context in which a joke is told. It can also refer to a more general ideological or political context that can affect the understanding and meaning of a joke” (“Comic Racism” 32). More often than not, much of the meaning of a joke resides in the unwritten, yet shared, *script(s)* experienced by social conversers. A script is “an organized chunk of information about something (in the broadest sense). It is a cognitive structure internalized by the speaker which provides the speaker with information on how things are done, organized, etc.” (Salvatore Attardo, qtd. in Bing 24). Joke scripts not only provide a lexical and cognitive context for *understanding* jokes but also bear traces of an “ideological and political context” for the jokes in which they appear, thereby helping us with *analyzing* the jokes, too.⁷ Nevertheless,

⁷ As a case in point, Victor Raskin infers and reconstructs the lexical script for the term *doctor*, as a familiar script for all English-speaking people acquainted with typical jokes containing doctors as main or significant characters (“The symbol “+” means that an attribute is present, the symbol “>” stands for “in the past” and “=” for “in the present” [Bing 25]):

DOCTOR

where necessary, I map out further socio-cultural and/or historical context for the humour I discuss.

When mentioning jokes as examples, I normally limit their number in a way that the jokes are illustrative of the points argued. In a number of instances, however, additional jokes are provided, especially in footnotes, for confirmatory and archival purposes. In such cases, I have had in mind one or a combination of the following reasons. In some cases (e.g., see pp. 97-99 and 121-26), I raise extensive claims. Various elements in such claims ask for multiple pieces of joke as evidence. In these discussions, the numerous jokes, since they prove the existence of a *joke cycle*, also help create some sort of a socio-historical context. Also, in Chapter Three, I

Subject: [+Human] [+Adult]

Activity: >Study medicine

= Receive patients: patient comes or doctor visits

doctor listens to complaints

doctor examines patient

= Cure disease: doctor diagnoses disease

doctor prescribes treatment

= (Take patient's money)

Place: > Medical school

= Hospital or doctor's office

Time: > Many years

= Every day

=Immediately

Condition: Physical contact. (qtd. in Bing 25)

Similar scripts for other typical characters, such as the Dumb Blonde (see Perkins 47), and even events and things such as “restaurants” and “war” (Attardo, *Linguistic Theories* 200) could be inferred from the jokes in which they frequently appear. The same process is applicable to such typical characters as the Rashti, the Kurd, the Turk, the Isfahani, the Lorr, or the Qazvini person (in contemporary Iranian jokes), or the Newfie, the redneck, the Polack, the Jewish American Princess, etc. in American and Canadian jokelore. In the case of Iranian ethnic humour, in some jokes, the role of dialect and accent as significant contextual elements for “getting the joke” will also be explained. For the *semantic script theory* and its application to jokes, as well as more examples of joke scripts, see Attardo, *Humorous Texts* 3, 85; Bing 25; Raskin 81, 85.

register many jokes in their original Persian and English translation in my often bulky footnotes. Here, while intending to strengthen the arguments through further evidence, I also have in mind the archival value of the jokes. This is all important as Iranian joke cycles, despite their significance for academic studies, have previously not been rendered into English and archived in aggregate. While not aiming to provide a comprehensive collection of such jokes, I hope the further evidence and cultural background I provide in Chapter Three footnotes will be helpful to interested readers as well as to future scholars. Finally, some words on the societies and the cultures involved in my study are in order. Billig's hypothesis, due to its claim about ridicule's universal role in maintaining the social order, not only justifies but also requires the study of more than one culture. This requirement simultaneously validates choosing any and as many cultures as possible as case studies. In selecting the Iranian and Anglo-American cultures for this study, I have—rather compatible with typical comparative or juxtapositional literary and cultural studies, and in line with my own academic background in English and Comparative Literature—been inclined to choose cultures and societies in which I have further cultural and linguistic competence. While I show these particular case studies to support my application of Billig's hypothesis to gender relations, other scholars may like to build on the current research to study the gender humour of more societies and cultures.

In addition to the above mentioned, in considering issues related to gender democracy as the main motivation behind this research, the reader will note that certain contemporary geopolitical presumptions, conditions, and events also significantly add to the importance of the textual juxtapositions in the study. Particularly in the post-9/11 world not only the Arab and/or Islamicate societies but the Middle East in general have arguably become *the Other* for the West. Iran in particular has been the focus of certain pervasive and insidious othering discourses. Most

notably, shortly after 9/11, in support of his rallying cry for a “war on terror,” then U.S. President George Bush deemed three countries including Iran to be the *axes of evil*. This attitude has, for instance, led to such ideas as those promoted in Mark Palmer’s book *Breaking the Real Axis of Evil: How to Oust the World’s Last Dictators by 2025* (2003). In this book, Palmer extends Bush’s statement to a wide range of other countries, and argues that the U.S. must consider as its priority the promotion of democracy by ousting the states in many countries. While such tendencies might be criticized on account of their provocative belligerence, I would argue that, first and foremost, they presume a problematic dichotomy of the West and the East. More specifically, Iranian and Anglo-American societies may at first sight suggest starkly opposite statuses concerning social modernization and particularly prevalent attitudes toward gender democracy. Through studying gender humour as a telling yet understudied discourse—in terms of its potential for revealing subtle socio-cultural assumptions in any culture—my juxtapositional study complicates the above insidious, oversimplified polarity. The study shows how, despite their differences, the gender orders associated with my representative societies (as the orders are represented in these societies’ mainstream gender humour) also reveal surprising overlaps. These overlaps indicate striking similarities in both societies’ mainstream socio-cultural attitudes toward gender democracy.

Nevertheless, comparative and juxtapositional literary and cultural studies also require that the researcher clarifies her/his rationale for choosing, juxtaposing, and/or comparing certain texts and not others. Taking issues related to gender democracy as the main motivation behind this research, the reader cannot but note that certain contemporary geopolitical presumptions, conditions, and events significantly add to the importance of my textual juxtapositions. Particularly in the post-9/11 world not only the Arab and/or Islamicate societies but the Middle

East in general have arguably become *the* Other for the West. Iran in particular has been the focus of certain pervasive and insidious othering discourses. Most notably, shortly after 9/11, in support of his rallying cry for a “war on terror,” then U.S. President George Bush deemed three countries including Iran to be the *axes of evil*. This attitude has, for instance, led to such ideas as those promoted in Mark Palmer’s book *Breaking the Real Axis of Evil: How to Oust the World’s Last Dictators by 2025*. In this book, Palmer extends Bush’s statement to a wide range of other countries, and argues that the U.S. must consider as its priority the promotion of democracy by ousting the states in many countries. While such tendencies might be criticized on account of their provocative belligerence, I would argue that, first and foremost, they presume a problematic dichotomy of the West and the East. My juxtapositional study complicates this oversimplified polarity by showing in particular how, despite their differences, the gender orders associated with my representative societies (as represented through these societies’ gender humour) also reveal surprising imbrications that in turn indicate striking similarities in their respective mainstream socio-cultural attitudes toward gender democracy in these societies. In other words, while Iranian and Anglo-American societies can at first sight suggest starkly opposite statuses related to social modernization and in particular prevalent social attitudes toward gender democracy, the study tends to refute such a superficial view by studying gender humour as a telling yet understudied discourse in terms of its potential for revealing subtle socio-cultural assumptions in any culture.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Like much research in critical discourse analysis, my study concerns the relationship between language and social structure, and is therefore motivated by socio-political issues as

informed by and reflected in language. Critical discourse analysis, as Norman Fairclough puts it, analyzes texts and interactions; yet, “it does not *start* from texts and interactions. It starts rather from social issues and problems, problems which face people in their social lives, issues which are taken up within sociology, political science and/or cultural studies” (qtd. in Mayr 9, original emphasis). More than anything else, critical analysis of discourse investigates “how the microstructures of language are linked with and help to shape the macrostructures of society” (9). Since this work is performed by revealing hidden ideologies in language, ideologies which allow the domination of some people over other people, such research inevitably serves political aims, too.

Accepting the central role of ridicule as a form of humour in maintaining gender hegemony, and perhaps also in constructing gendered beings has important consequences for theory and practice in humour and gender studies. My study also provides further evidence for the ongoing critiques, in critical humour studies, of the “exculpatory” attitudes toward humour. In gender studies, my first and foremost aim is to draw scholars’ attention to the under-theorized status of ridicule, despite its frequently admitted significance in regulating, perhaps partly constituting gender. Such a role can in practice also further validate policy conclusions of related empirical studies (e.g., see Pascoe 167-174). Yet, if we accept my argument about the role of humour in buttressing the gender order, then perhaps more than anything else my study contends that we seriously strive for more gender-democratic societies in which mainstream gender humour will necessarily serve more, not less, democratic functions. As Christine Horne concludes in her book *The Rewards of Punishment: A Relational theory of Norm Enforcement*, “[w]hen social relations and metanorms [reactions to sanctions and expectations to reactions]

vary, norm reinforcement varies as well” (128). This cultural dynamic renders valuable and all the more pressing our efforts to expose and redress ridicule’s possible influence on gender.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

In this last section, I present outlines of the five chapters and explain their ordering and connectedness. As the theoretical backbone of the dissertation, Chapter One, “Gender Hegemony and Ridicule: The Norm-Reinforcing and Disciplinary Functions of Mainstream Gender Humour,” considers critical reviews of the related literature in gender and humour studies, and introduces the study’s central argument about mainstream gender humour. I argue that this humour, through direct or indirect use of ridicule as a social control strategy, reinforces hegemonic gender norms and is likely to regulate social individuals’ gender performances. My claim shapes the next two chapters, which respectively deal with Anglo-American and Iranian mainstream gender humour.

Chapter Two, “Mainstream Gender Humour as Patriarchal Panopticism: The Case of Contemporary Anglo-American Folk and Pop Culture Humour,” examines various instances of contemporary Anglo-American gender jokes and other types of gender humour alongside episodes from *Two and a Half Men*. Categorizing and examining the humour instances in light of Connell’s aforementioned model, I show that hegemonic gender meanings in current Anglo-American societies—as the meanings intersect with sexuality, age, race/ethnicity, asexuality, and bodily normativity—are reflected (on), subscribed to, and patrolled in the humour analyzed.

Chapter Three focuses on the only two contemporary Iranian joke cycles concerning sexuality and gender, i.e., jokes about the man from the city of Qazvin and those about the man and the woman from the northern Iranian city of Rasht. Trying to put the cycles in their social

and cultural milieu, I read both cycles in light of the historical transformations, during the nineteenth century and afterward, in the gender order of the Iranian society. I propose that both cycles apparently originated as disciplinary and norm-reinforcing tools in relation to the nascent heteronormative gender order in Iran and resiliently appear to continue to serve similar functions today.

Chapter Four expands the previous arguments about mainstream gender humour by suggesting that such humour is often deployed as a rhetorical tool in such varied forms of cultural communication as *political satire* and *commercial advertisement*. To show this rhetorical development, the chapter analyzes various instances of (contemporary) Iranian satire, as well as spots from the Apple Incorporation's "Get a Mac" ad campaign (2006-2009). That such rhetorical utilization of gender humour prefers mainstream gender humour over fringe gender humour confirms the former's further normalizing power, which originates from its recourse to hegemonic gender norms. This argument becomes a premise for the contention about fringe gender humour in the last chapter.

Chapter Five, by focusing on non-mainstream or *fringe* gender humour (which I define as any humour that contests the hegemonic gender norms in a society) articulates a rebuttal to a hypothetical counterargument to my argument in previous chapters. This hypothetical counterargument perhaps would propose that given ridicule's disciplinary power, we may re-deploy it as a counterhegemonic tool to resist or rebel against hegemonic gender norms. Through examining instances of contemporary Anglo-American feminist and lesbian jokes and select episodes from the sitcom *Ellen* (1994-1998), I discuss the subversive possibilities and unsolicited disciplinary functions of fringe gender humour and conclude that, while effective for certain in-group purposes, fringe gender humour does not seem capable of undermining the disciplinary

effects of mainstream gender humour, particularly because the latter's rhetorical and normalizing power by far surpasses that of the former.

Chapter One

Gender Hegemony and Ridicule: The Norm-Reinforcing and Disciplinary Functions of Mainstream Gender Humour

INTRODUCTION

As the theoretical backbone of the study, this chapter identifies the research problems and offers solutions to them. In the first section, titled “Ridicule as a Maintainer of Hegemonic Gender Relations: A Review of Related Literature in Gender Studies,” I demonstrate that in much gender studies research, the relation between ridicule and gender order—although frequently referred to—has remained under-theorized. Many theoretical sources on gender, while containing numerous sporadic references to the norm-reinforcing and disciplinary roles of humour—especially in the form of ridicule—tend to downgrade such roles by not granting them any theoretical significance. On the other hand, the related empirical studies, while positing the above roles of humour, focus on particularities and avoid generalizing their results.

The second section, titled “A Historical Overview of Ridicule and Its Disciplinary Function since Antiquity,” overviews past references to ridicule’s disciplinary and norm-reinforcing functions, ending with Michael Billig’s recent theory of ridicule as a punitive tool regarding the social. The theory shows how the connection between humour and gender order may be theorized, and with a particular attention to ridicule. Humour is universal, Billig maintains, because through its ridiculing aspect and via a rhetorical mechanism based on (fear of) embarrassment, humour occupies a universal role in maintaining the social order.

In the third section, “Patriarchal Gender Order: Masculinity Theorist Raewyn Connell’s Model of Gender Hegemony,” I introduce the sociologist Raewyn Connell’s model of *gender*

order as a particular type of *social order*. The model depicts how, in a heteronormative patriarchal society, multiple masculinities and femininities are inter- and intra-related at the level of a whole society. Although proposed with attention to post-industrial Western societies, the model provides a useful starting point for discussing non-Western gender orders, too.

Section four, titled “What Maintains the Gender Hegemony?: Ridicule as an Agent of Abjection vis-à-vis Gender,” attends to an important question arising from Connell’s model of gender hierarchy, that is, What sustains a hierarchichal gender order? Reminding us of the gaps in the literature reviewed at the chapter’s outset, some gender theorists do hint at ridicule as a central element in sustaining gender hierarchy, without pursuing the point. Connecting these discussions to the concept of abjection, we might hypothesize that ridicule plays an essential role in the *creation* of gendered beings in the first place. While this remains an unsubstantiated claim, more verifiable statements could be made about how ridicule may reinforce gender norms as well as police and regulate social subjects’ gender behaviour.

The penultimate section five, “Ridicule and Gender Hegemony: The Norm-Reinforcing and Disciplinary Functions of Mainstream Gender Humour,” puts forward the main argument. Conceived as a form of rhetoric, mainstream gender humour draws on hegemonic gender norms in a society and seeks to convince its audience of its gender ideology through direct or indirect use of ridicule. When deploying ridicule directly, mainstream gender humour tends to elicit a punitive laughter at the expense of imaginary or real norm-violating subjects. However, even when not deploying direct ridicule, mainstream gender humour, like humour in general, may draw on the social pressure to laugh to secure a laughter of approval for its gender ideology. In any of these ways, mainstream gender humour may serve a panoptical role against gender.

The final section, titled “Reading the Gendered in Humour: Reconsidering Gender Humour in Light of Connell’s Model,” seeks to extend typical definitions of gender humour in the related literature. A critical review of some representative textual analyses of gender humour shows that they either assume gender or define it as too exclusive. Connell’s model—which not only considers the multiplicity of masculinities and femininities but also heeds the intersection of gender and other identity elements—helps us expand the definition of gender humour, while enhancing our readings of the gendered in such humour.

RIDICULE AS A MAINTAINER OF HEGEMONIC GENDER RELATIONS: A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE IN GENDER STUDIES

A survey of some typical gender studies literature, including feminist and masculinity studies, reveals scholars’ references to humour, ridicule and teasing as elements that, often as punitive tools, affect social agents’ gender-acquisition processes and help preserve the hegemonic gender meanings in a society. In his *An Introduction to Masculinities*, Jack Kahn remarks how men who commit gender-bending acts “suffer humiliation and harassment” (4) and “name-calling,” which serve as negative feedback to social individuals’ failed gender expectations (32). Referring to the same phenomenon, Connell, in her book *Gender in World Perspective*, mentions how Australian boys “come under peer pressure to show bravery and toughness, and learn to fear being classified as ‘sissies’ or ‘poofers’ (a local term meaning effeminate or homosexual)” (4, 99; see also Connell “Theorising Gender” 263). Elsewhere, Connell, while addressing the topic of subjugated masculinities, lists various items from “a rich vocabulary of abuse” (mostly comprising derisive offensive names, some with a dash of humour), which target certain gender-motivated social exclusion, and specifically aim at expelling non-hegemonic masculine performances “from the

circle of legitimacy” (*Masculinities* 79). The vocabulary includes such labels as “wimp, milksop, nerd, turkey, sissy, lily liver, jellyfish, yellowbelly, candy ass, ladyfinger, pushover, cookie pusher, cream puff, motherfucker, pantywaist, mother’s boy, four-eyes, ear-’ole , dweeb, geek, Milquetoast, Cedric, and so on” (79).

Some theoretical sources on gender even briefly theorize about such an assumed relationship between ridicule as a certain linguistic practice and gender. For instance, in *Language and Gender*, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, after discussing the vital importance the sociologist Erving Goffman grants “face” and “facework” in social interactions, comment on the the disciplinary aspect of gendered ridicule:

One powerful force behind the maintenance of the gender order is the desire to avoid face-threatening situations or acts. A boy who likes purses may learn not to carry one into public situations rather than to risk public ridicule,⁸ an unpopular boy may learn not to try to interact with popular girls to avoid public rejection [. . .]. A heterosexual man may speak in monotone for fear someone will think he is gay. (60)⁹

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet’s last two examples evoke the debates, in gender studies, on the intersection of gender and bodily non-normativity. Since such discussions emphasize (deviance from) gender norms, one might expect that they grant a special importance to the role of ridicule in sustaining prevalent gender norms by helping to preserve bodily hierarchies. Due to such a hierarchy in a society, “[p]eople with less-normative bodies are engaged in an asymmetrical

⁸ This example is reminiscent of an advertisement, by Miller Lite Company, in its “Man Up” ad series, titled “Purse or Carry-All?.” The video may be accessed for free on the Internet.

⁹ While not all of Eckert and McConnell-Ginet’s examples might evoke ridiculing *laughter* in actual situations, some of them may.

power relationship with their more-normative-bodied counterparts, who have the power to validate their bodies and their gender” (Gerschick 373). However, the above discussions either disregard such a function of humour or de-emphasize its importance (see, e.g., Bell and McNaughton; Cheng; Gerschick; Gerschick and Miller; O’Grady; Shakespeare [numerous works]; Valentine).

However, remarkably enough, Marlene Mackie, in her essay “The Role of Humour in the Social Construction of Gender,” clearly asserts that “humour plays a significant part in the social construction of gender” (13). She argues that despite the “dual role” of humour, i.e., its conservative and subversive roles, the emphasis needs to be put on “humour’s conservative function as a vehicle of male hegemony. That is, humour is a form, among many, of cultural symbolism that reinforces traditional views about the sexes” (23). However, despite her arguably defensible claim about humour serving as some “ideological device” for naturalizing gender differences (13), the premise via which Mackie reaches her main argument about humour’s role regarding gender remains inexplicable. According to her, “*since humour generally affirms societal standards*, its key function is ideological buttress of the patriarchal status quo” (13, my emphasis). In other words, Mackie does not clarify through which mechanism(s), if any, humour manages to buttress patriarchy. This is partially done by the leading masculinity studies theorist Michael Kimmel who, in his classic essay “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity,” connects the construction of heterosexual masculinities with shame. He argues that the fear of shame and humiliation causes men to become silent in the face of aggressive patriarchal acts—including the creation and circulation of sexist/racist/gay-bashing jokes—hence perpetuating the gender-hierarchical system. “Shame,” Kimmel remarks,

leads to silence—the silences that keep other people believing that we actually approve of the things that are done to women, to minorities, to gays and lesbians in our culture. The frightened silence as we scurry past a woman being hassled by men on the street. The furtive silence when men make sexist or racist jokes in a bar. The clammy-handed silence when guys in the office make gay-bashing jokes. Our fears are the sources of our silences, and men’s silence is what keeps the system running. (35)

Kimmel does mention gendered ridicule in men (36). He also refers to a study in which “[w]omen responded that they were most afraid of being raped and murdered. Men responded that they were most afraid of being laughed at” (37). However, he does not maintain an explicit connection between humour or ridicule and gender. In other words, he apparently neglects the possibility that the shame and silence he holds responsible for promoting patriarchy by and among men might themselves be partly created through fear of ridicule. Moreover, Kimmel’s reference to the study about men’s and women’s fear might imply that women are invulnerable to gendered ridicule.

Other than theoretical research, much empirical research also observes the disciplinary and norm-reinforcing roles of ridicule concerning gender.¹⁰ Nardi and Bolton, for example, note that men and women’s performances of subordinated forms of masculinity and femininity can cause them a range of reproaches including “insults” and “vicious jokes” (412). Also, Leznoff and Westley, while discussing the ways in which homosexuals have to evade social controls, speak of “secret” homosexuals (as opposed to “overt” ones) who, in fear of a status threat, choose to conceal their homosexual identity. Their study of secret homosexuals results in three reasons for

¹⁰ Disciplines are not necessarily bad (see O’Grady 6), but if they cause or sustain marginalization and oppression of certain individuals or groups, they need to be rethought.

such persons' concealment. The top-ranking reason is the "desire to avoid social ridicule" (8). Likewise, Centola, Willer, and Macy briefly refer to the research on gender which demonstrates "how homophobic humor is used to ridicule group members who lack the requisite toughness and to affirm the status and loyalty of those who might otherwise become suspect themselves" (1011). Finally, Kehily and Nayak, in their essay titled "Lads and Laughter: Humour and the Production of Heterosexual Hierarchies," emphasize the part humour plays in constructing masculine identities among communities of male teenage students. While investigating select communities of teenage pupils in the U.K., the authors observe humour as "*an organising principle*" and "a regulatory technique, structuring the performance of masculine identities [. . .] in the lives of young men within school arenas" (84, original emphasis). The authors observe that the "[y]oung men who did not [subscribe]¹¹ to the hyper-heterosexual practice of masculinity were ridiculed through humorous rituals" (84). This, Kehily and Nayak conclude, reveals "the *disciplining* effects of humour on sex/gender identities" (84, original emphasis).

The above mentioned literature is but a scant sample of the literature touching upon the norm-reinforcing and disciplinary roles of ridicule—as a form or aspect of humour—vis-à-vis gender.¹² However, such references at best remain passing in the theoretical research while the empirical studies tend to avoid hypothesizing from their results. This indicates a tension toward humour in these studies. This tension—which is a reminder of many sociologists' long-standing mixed feelings about humour as a serious topic (see Davis 327-330; Kuipers, "The Sociology of Humor" 361)—would translate: humour apparently does have something to do with a society's

¹¹ Here, the original essay erroneously mentions "circumscribe." In e-mail correspondence, Dr. Kehily confirmed that this had been "a typo that slipped through the proofs." (Date of correspondence: 29 Sept. 2012.)

¹² For further occasional references to the role ridicule occupies in upholding gender relations, see Francis and Skelton 117; Goodwin 76; Greenberg 17, 435; Oransky and Marecek 227-228; Parker, Andrew 148-149; Seidman 23-24; Thompson and Armato 55.

gender order, yet going beyond the extant emphasis on humour's role concerning gender would be to grant humour too much significance.

Michael Kimmel's essay undoubtedly provides valuable insights on how shame helps maintain gender hierarchies; he also aptly marks the destructive role of sexist and gay-bashing humour concerning gender. However, Kimmel does not recognize the probable role such humour itself might have in the creation and maintenance of the shame he rightly foregrounds. Mackie's study, notwithstanding its proper claim, rests on obscure premises, while studies such as that by Kehily and Nayak restrict their authors' insights to specific small-scale communities. Such studies, despite their relatively high precision, tend to not venture generalized theories.¹³ However, the emergent research in humour studies on ridicule, as probably the most problematic aspect of humour, convinces us that we do need such a general theory, and that it must pay particular attention to ridicule. As we will see, at the heart of this emergent research is a theory about the norm-reinforcing and disciplinary functions of ridicule. Therefore, a historical overview of ridicule from this particular perspective is in order.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF RIDICULE AND ITS DISCIPLINARY FUNCTION SINCE ANTIQUITY

To ridicule means “to mock, to show the absurdity of, to make fun of, belittle, taunt or tease” (K. Smith 77). More specifically, it signifies “the act of making fun of some aspect of another [which] involves a combination of humor and degradation and encompasses a range of activities like teasing, sarcasm, and ritualized insults” (Wooten 188-189). While not always

¹³ For other similar research, which relies on situational gender humour among members of select communities, see Crawford, “Gender and Humour”; Kotthoff; Schnurr and Holmes.

involving humour, ridicule is frequently regarded as “derisive joking” (Wilson 189), as “one type of disparagement humor” (Janes and Olson 474), and in general as a “form” or “aspect” of humour (Billig, *LR* 29, 196, 200). Much research studies the socio-psychological aspects of humour (see Roeckelein 284-288; 518-529). Such research identifies many interpersonal and group functions of humour (see Kuipers, “The Sociology of Humor” 364-368; Martin 128-152). Of these functions, as mentioned above, “enforcing social norms and exerting social control” (Martin 150) are of specific significance to our topic.

References to ridiculing laughter and its presumable social functions date back to Greek philosophy. In at least two of his books, Plato refers to two contradictory functions of laughter. In *Republic*, while enumerating the rules to be taught to the young guardians of his ideal state, Plato strongly curtails laughter since “whenever anyone gives in to violent laughter, a violent reaction pretty much always follows” (69). While Plato is apparently concerned here about the order-violating function of laughter, in *Philebus*, he deems the ignorance of the powerless as “ridiculous,” hence not only hinting at the disciplinary—and hence order-maintaining—function of ridicule but also suggesting a relation between ridicule and power (49). In his book *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle hints at the persuasive potential of ridicule, when quoting Gorgias who “rightly said that one should spoil the opponents’ seriousness with laughter and their laughter with seriousness” (248). In doing so, however, Aristotle prefers “mockery” over “buffoonery” (248). Cicero later attends to the topic in further detail in his book *De Oratore (On the Orator)*. For Cicero, laughter and ridicule do have rhetorical uses, although they must be used judiciously (375).

Yet, systemic thoughts on ridicule first emerge in the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and *The Treatise on Human Nature*. As a philosopher whose ideas on humour

demarcate the classical and modern theories of humour (Roeckelein 95), Hobbes “puts ridicule at the psychological core of humour” (Billig, *LR* 50). He famously defines laughter as “nothing lese but *sudden Glory* arising from a sudden conception of some Eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the Infirmary of others, or with our own formerly” (Hobbes, *Treatise* 65-66; see also *Leviathan* 38). Hobbes’ debates about laughter and humour develop what is now recognized as the *superiority theory* of humour, according to which “when something evokes laughter, it is by revealing someone’s inferiority to the person laughing” (Morreall, *Comic Relief* 7).

Concern with ridicule continues with such thinkers as Sydney Smith and Earl of Shaftesbury (Billig, *LR* 44), but gradually tends to decline by the emergence (in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) of humour theories that shy away from ridicule. According to John Morreall, in response to the then prevalent “anti-social” superiority theory, “philosophers developed two alternative theories in which laughter was not anti-social: the Incongruity Theory and the Relief Theory” (*Comic Relief* 9). The waning interest in ridicule in Western humour studies might have had to do with the construction of the sense of humour as a desirable “personality characteristic” in the nineteenth century (Billig, *LR* 12). A person’s having a sense of humour would have granted him/her social value; however, an individual’s being associated with Hobbes and other superiority theorists—who were known as *misogelasts*, i.e., “so-called haters of laughter” (37)—could have most probably caused social depreciation to that person.

The French philosopher Henri Bergson, in his book *Laughter*, revives the previous prominence of ridicule. Bergson deems *the* useful social function of laughter to be its social corrective function (Billig, *LR* 128; Eastman 35). He embeds this function in his more complex argument about “the comic [as] ‘something mechanical encrusted on the living’” (qtd. in Billig, *LR* 127):

The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism, of movement without life. Consequently it expresses an individual or collective imperfection which calls for an immediate corrective. This corrective is laughter, a social gesture that singles out and represses a special kind of absentmindedness in men and in events. (Bergson 39)

Preoccupation with the corrective function of ridicule sporadically continues in the twentieth century. Wilson Wallis, in his 1920 essay, “Why Do We Laugh?,” which is based on various anthropological observations, “proposes a theory of laughter that combines Hobbes’ view with the ‘corrective’ interpretation of laughter [. . .] [H]e concludes that laughter universally serves as a social corrective mechanism” (Roeckelein 183). He also observes ridicule’s self-policing aspect (see Wallis 345). In 1927, the American cultural anthropologist Paul Radin argues for the role of fear of ridicule in preserving the social life of the “primitive” man (50-52). Later, Christopher Wilson, in a chapter of his book *Jokes: Form, Content, Use, and Function*, advances the debate by arguing that in general “[t]he threat of becoming the target of ridicule, and suffering the consequent feelings of isolation, will tend to enforce conformity within a group” (213, 230).¹⁴

Throughout the twentieth century, as Michael Billig argues in his book *Laughter and Ridicule*, a prevalent positivist attitude about humour shifts most scholars’ attention away from ridicule, which is mostly marked and disregarded as the “negative” or “dark” aspect of humour (5, 10-11). Significantly, in 2001, Janes and Olson, while conducting their empirical research on the effects of ridicule, notice that “[d]espite its prevalence in daily life, little research has

¹⁴ Roeckelein lists many sources (mostly written during the first half of the twentieth century) “[whose authors mainly] view humor/laughter as a *social corrective*” (183). However, he does not mention Radin or Wilson.

examined the effects of ridicule” (474). This academic uninterest in ridicule, in favour of more benign aspects of humour, has been so intense that even Bergson’s “put[ting] the disciplinary functions of ridicule at the heart of humour” has oftentimes been either disregarded or underemphasized by most contemporary humour scholars who have instead chosen to foreground gentler aspects of Bergson’s theory and in particular his aforementioned definition of the comic as “something mechanical encrusted on the living” (Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule* 111).¹⁵

More than a century after Bergson, ridicule’s corrective function becomes the subject of a book-length research in Michael Billig’s *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (2005). As a prominent work in the “emergent field” of *critical humour studies* (Lockyer and Pickering, “You Must be Joking” 818), Billig’s book furthers previous claims about the punitive aspects of ridicule regarding social norms. Billig contends that through a mechanism which involves embarrassment, humour, in the form of ridicule, occupies a universal role in maintaining the social order. “Without the possibility of laughter,” he asserts, “serious social life could not be sustained” (*LR* 5, 200). While both Bergson and Billig regard laughter to be a social corrective, they provide different reasons. Bergson frames his discussion around the idea of the rigidity of human acts and the social life; Billig connects the social corrective aspect of humour to social norms and the maintenance of social order in general. Therefore, Billig’s view of ridicule is a further developed version of Radin’s and Wallis’, and particularly Wilson’s, outlooks on ridicule as a social control and norm-reinforcing tool.

¹⁵ In its later occurrences in citational parentheses, *Laughter and Ridicule* will appear as *LR*.

An Apology for Ridicule and Its Embarrassing Power: Michael Billig's Theory of Ridicule as a Universal Maintainer of Social Order

In *Laughter and Ridicule*, Billig stages an argument for what he regards as the largely overlooked, yet central, role of ridicule—as a “form” or “aspect” of humour (22, 196, 200)—in social life. This vital role, he contends, has been “textually repressed” in prevalent popular and academic psychological studies of humour. Such studies, Billig shows, manifest what he deems and thoroughly critiques as “ideological positivism,” i.e., an ideologically motivated system of demarcating humour into desired positives and ignored negatives throughout social sciences (10-11). Billig contextualizes and critically re-reads the three most famous humour theories of superiority, incongruity and relief (or release) alongside Bergson and Freud, highlighting these writers’ treatment of ridicule. Billig’s major concern is the relation between humour and serious life, and “why humour is to be found universally in all cultures” (5). Emphasizing research that reveals the unnaturalness and rhetoricalness of laughter and humour, and especially building upon the humour and sociological theories of Bergson, Freud, and Goffman, Billig proposes that humour, in the form of ridicule, plays a universal function in maintaining the social order. He explains the disciplinarity function of ridicule as follows: The (fear/prospect of the) ridicule typically resulting from embarrassing social situations—by making (or threatening to make) us the object of others’ laughter—acts as a control strategy that causes our conformity to societal norms (*LR* 2, 5, 201-202).

Billig’s argument largely relies on Erving Goffman’s point—in his essay “Embarrassment and Social Organization”—about the vital role fearing the loss of face plays in preventing the breakdown of social order. For Goffman, social organizations are kept together by fear of embarrassment (Billig 217). Goffman’s sociology, which underlines the microcosm of

interpersonal relations, views embarrassment as “the central generative principle of human experience” so much so that “Goffmanian men and women are driven by the need to avoid embarrassment” (Schudson 634-34).

Although Goffman limits his view of embarrassment to “Anglo-American society,” this caution is deemed “unnecessary” by Billig who argues for the universality of embarrassment in maintaining the social order (*LR* 219). Billig’s argument clarifies the connection he claims exists between ridiculing laughter and Goffman’s view of the centrality of embarrassment to social life:

Everyday codes of behaviour are protected by the practice of embarrassment. If one infringes expected codes of interaction, particularly if one does so unwittingly, one might expect to be embarrassed. What is embarrassing is typically comic to onlookers. Social actors fear this laughter. Accordingly, the prospect of ridicule and embarrassment protects the codes of daily behaviour, ensuring much routine conformity with social order. This is likely to occur within all cultures. Therefore, ridicule has a universal role in the maintenance of order. (*LR* 201-202)

The disciplinary function of humour, as shown above, is not an original topic.¹⁶ The relation between humour and embarrassment had also been made before.¹⁷ However, none of these topics had been subject to a book-length investigation before Billig. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Billig frames his argument against the mainstream humour studies, and encourages a shift in them. Finally, his argument offers potentials for filling gaps in sociology

¹⁶ See, e.g., Berger, *Anatomy* 134, *Blind Men* 12-13; Bricker 220; Coser; Fine 174; Koller 26-28; Lewis 36-37; Norrick 78; Powell and Paton xviii; Stephenson 570.

¹⁷ See M. Wolf 333-35. Unlike Billig, however, Wolf puts forward a theory of humour in general. Unfortunately, Wolf’s research is not mentioned in Billig’s book.

and psychoanalysis. Billig's particular emphasis on the punitive aspect of ridicule in social relations can contribute to previous sociological attempts to explain social agents' motives for observing social codes,¹⁸ while also helping to secure the significance of humour as a serious sociological topic by arguing how "an understanding of humour is necessary for understanding serious social life" (Billig, *LR* 4-5). Also, by emphasizing "the place of [parental] ridicule in the social development of children" (201), Billig tends to add to the social dimension of Freud's repression theory.

Billig's theory, due to its particular emphasis on ridicule, has been generally ill-received by other humour scholars.¹⁹ Empirical evidence, however, supports Billig's viewpoint. In 2000, two social psychologists, Leslie Janes and James Olson, conducted a study at a Canadian university, where they studied the effects of ridicule on its observers rather than on its direct targets. They described this process as "jeer pressure." Studying some student communities, they discovered that

exposure to someone being ridiculed can have inhibiting effects on college students, even when the ridicule is presented on videotape. Other-ridicule appears to make observers aware of their own vulnerability to ridicule and rejection. This enhanced awareness can limit and constrain subsequent behaviour. (484)

Janes and Olson's coinage, "jeer pressure," has been well-received by many social psychologists, and their study has gained attention in discussions of social influence (see Cottam et al. 74).

Janes and Olson's research also demonstrates and foregrounds the self-policing effects of

¹⁸ As Billig is aware (*LR* 8), the concept of social order, as a central and yet complex sociological phenomenon, has for long occupied the minds of some sociologists. In their attempts to answer questions about social order and how it is maintained, some scholars have made connections between social order, norms, and values on the one hand and social control strategies on the other (e.g., see Innes).

¹⁹ For a critical review of some scholars' criticism of Billig, see Abedinifard, "Rev. of *Laughter and Ridicule*."

ridicule (Stewart 206), as previously noted by Wallis (see p. 32 above). Such research apparently resonates in a recent study by Cohn and Sims on behalf of the U.S. Navy. The research, titled “Ridicule as a Tool for IO/PSYOPS in Afghanistan,” was published in the journal of *The Culture & Conflict Review*.²⁰ The journal is affiliated with the Program for Culture & Conflict Studies at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School.²¹ Using a variety of native and foreign research sources, Cohn and Sims examine the interconnections of such concepts as humour, funniness, ridicule, shame, embarrassment, and humiliation in the Afghan culture in order to render

humor and ridicule as a tool of IO/PSYOPS in Afghanistan [which] could increase the coalition and GIROA’s [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan] ability to undercut Taliban leadership in the eyes of their followers and supporters, provoke them into rash and hurried decisions, mock or trick combatants into laying down their arms, create divisions and doubts in multiple

²⁰ IO stands for “information operations,” which the *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* defines as the “integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own” (“Information Operations”). PSYOPS and PSYOP, now considered as “misused terminology” by the above dictionary (Appendix B, No. 6, n.p.), stand for *psychological operations*. Instead, the dictionary introduces the term MISO, i.e., *military information support operations*, which it defines as “[p]lanned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to the originator’s objectives” (“Military Information Support Operations”).

²¹ The Program, on the homepage of its website, is introduced as follows: “The Program for Culture and Conflict Studies (CCS) is premised on the belief that the United States must understand the cultures and societies of the world to effectively interact with local people. It is dedicated to the study of anthropological, ethnographic, social, political, and economic data to inform U.S. policies at both the strategic and operational levels. CCS is the result of a collaborative effort to provide current open source information to Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT), mission commanders, academics, and the general public. Covering tribes, politics, trends, and people, this website [is] a 21st century gazetteer [that] provides data, analysis, and maps not available anywhere else” (See <http://www.nps.edu/Programs/CCS/index.html>; Date of access: 31 May 2013).

forms in the enemy camps, lessen their power to intimidate and weaken their omnipotence in the eyes of the rest of the population. (n.p.)

“In order to do this,” state the authors, “there needs to be some culturally specific guidelines as to what is funny and what constitutes ridicule in the Afghan context” (n.p.). Interestingly, what the authors presume is also Billig’s contention, i.e., that ridicule universally functions as a social control and norm-reinforcing tool *despite* the particularity of the humorous in different cultures. As we will see, a similar contention can be made regarding ridicule and its relation to gender norms. Before pursuing this topic, however, a caveat concerning Billig’s argument is in order.

A concern raised about Billig’s theory is his claim that ridicule’s disciplinary function towards the social order is a *necessary* function. Billig constructs a distinction between “necessary and surplus functions” by partly drawing on Herbert Spencer’s concept of “social function” (LR 125-126). Spencer considers a three-part typology of social functions, that is, universal, general, and specific functions. For his own purpose, Billig reduces these to the two necessary and surplus functions:

[T]here are functions that are universal to all societies and there are functions that are specific to certain types of society. One might argue that universal functions are necessary for social life in general: the very continuity of social life would be threatened should these functions be unfulfilled. Then, there are practices that might be functional for certain types of social interaction, but these types of social interaction are not themselves necessary for the overall existence of social life. One might call the former types of function *necessary* and the latter *surplus*. (LR 125)

According to Billig, therefore, the universality of a social function leads to its being a necessary—rather than a surplus—function. However, Billig’s implying as surplus other

functions of humour than its punitive function, i.e., the one fulfilled through ridicule (126, 200), is problematic. Why, one could ask, cannot more than one function of humour be regarded as necessary? Why, for instance, alongside humour's disciplinary aspect, cannot another aspect of humour—e.g., its role in easing inter-personal interactions—also be deemed as a necessary function? If the world of human relationships becomes too rigid to sustain without humour, then the role humour plays in lubricating human relations is perhaps a necessary, not surplus, function. Therefore, should we insist on defending Billig's bipartite functions in relation to humour, we would have to explain "what makes the necessary function different from one that might not be necessary although it might be common," a question which is beyond the aims of this study.²² Furthermore, although Billig vaguely implies that multiple elements maintain social order (*LR* 202), his argument—obviously without his intention—sometimes suggests that fear of ridicule is the one and only element that keeps social life together (see, e.g., *LR* 8, 214). Ridicule is clearly one of many social control tools. It is sometimes deemed as an "informal social control" strategy (Burfeind and Bartusch 170-71; see also Chriss 2; Horwitz 2) as opposed to such formal strategies as law enforcement and police organization.²³

Later on, I will be contending about the *necessary* role ridicule apparently plays in creating gendered beings. Given the above critique of Billig, I intend my reference to the term *necessary*

²² The question in quotes belongs to Billig himself in his E-mail correspondence with the author. Billig gracefully took the author's criticisms, while proposing the above question and accepting that "[t]hese are questions which I did not discuss in sufficient detail [in my book *Laughter and Ridicule*]." (Date of correspondence: Feb. 7, 2012.) However, somewhere in his book, Billig does hint at a point that offers theoretical assistance with the above issue. While taking issue with Freud's considering humour as essentially rebellious, Billig contends, "But if ridicule is necessary for maintaining social order, then humour will not be intrinsically or essentially rebellious, as Freud supposed. It may even help maintain the order that it appears to mock" (*LR* 200). I debate this further in Chapter Five below when I consider the unsolicited disciplinary functions of rebellious gender humour.

²³ For a diagram illustrating ridicule on a hierarchy of various socially regulating tools in contemporary U.S. society, see Ferraro and Andreatta 328.

to be understood within the well-known philosophical *necessary-vs-sufficient-conditions* construct. With this caveat in mind, I will now attend to the discussion of gender hegemony and how it might be related to the disciplinary role of ridicule as argued by Billig. He articulates his hypothesis in relation to social order in general, which could comprise all social life. I tend to examine his theory only in relation to one example of such an order, i.e., gender order.

PATRIARCHAL GENDER ORDER: MASCULINITY THEORIST RAEWYN CONNELL'S MODEL OF GENDER HEGEMONY

Masculinities studies have become an ever-growing interdisciplinary field that imbricates, and contributes to, feminist theory (e.g., see Dowd; Gardiner; Murphy). One conspicuous contribution has been the theory of multiple masculinities. This theory, which the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell has proposed based on her concept of hegemonic masculinity, suggests that as a category, *men* does not constitute a single and essentialist identity constantly associated with dominance and power. There are also “ways in which the dominant gender system subordinates and differentiates among men” (Dowd 4). This idea has been applied to discussions of femininity, too. For instance, Mimi Schippers has attempted to complement Connell’s understanding of gender hegemony by hypothesizing multiple femininities (see Schippers).

Relying on the concept of hegemonic masculinity, Connell has proposed a model for gender hierarchy, with regard to post-industrial Western societies. In other words, she has outlined the *gender order* of such societies. The concept of gender order, initially introduced by Jill Mathews in her account of the construction of femininity in twentieth-century Australia, refers to the pattern of gender relations between and among women and men at the level of a

whole society (Connell, *GP* 98-9).²⁴ A society's gender order is constituted of various gender regimes, that is, gender arrangements at the level of institutions in that society. Such institutions could be "clearly boundaried formal institutions such as schools or workplaces, [or] large sprawling ones such as the state, and informal milieux such as the street" (Flood, "Gender Order" 236). Gender regimes could be comprehended through the careful analysis of several inter-conditioning structures in a society. Such structures, as proposed by Connell, could include those of power, production, cathexis, and symbolism. Therefore, rather than dealing with micro-relations, "gender order refers to the current state of a macro-politics of gender" (235). In this sense, gender order can best be understood as representing the hegemonic gender meanings and relations within various gender regimes in a given society. In this section, the inter- and intra-relations in Connell's model of gender hierarchy will be introduced. Since in analyzing non-Anglo American humour I will also be relying on concepts from Connell, I also comment briefly on the applicability of these concepts beyond the Western world.

Connell's Gender Hierarchy Model

"Connell," as Anthony Giddens suggests, "sets forth one of the most complete theoretical accounts of gender, which has become something of a 'modern classic.' [. . .] Her approach has

²⁴ In recent discussions of gender, *gender order* is normally preferred over such concepts as "sex-gender system" and "patriarchy" for describing the system of gender relations in a society. Unlike patriarchy, which may easily be understood as a simple ahistorical power imbalance between men as oppressors and women as the oppressed (Buchbinder 66), gender order recognizes the temporality and historicalness of gender relations. Furthermore, gender order does not predetermine the content of gender relations, and can include or anticipate egalitarian relations. In other words, not all gender orders are patriarchal, and those which are may stop being so. Finally, when understood as a process, gender order bears some resemblance to the sex-gender system, as famously conceptualized by Gayle Rubin, in that both do turn individuals into gendered subjects. However, unlike Rubin's rather deterministic system that acts as an "apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products" (qtd. in Demetriou 345), gender order recognizes the agency of social individuals by conceiving gender relations as "produced and reproduced in gender practice" (345).

been particularly influential in sociology because she integrates the concepts of patriarchy and masculinity into an overarching theory of gender relations” (609). Giddens is referring to Connell’s understanding of gender as a social structure as well as to her gender hegemony model, which gathers together various forms of masculinity and femininity and seeks to clarify their inter- and intra-relations. Raewyn Connell, formerly known as R. W. Connell,²⁵ is a leading figure in the developing field of masculinities studies. Her gender theory is the result of around three decades of theoretical and empirical research, by her and in collaboration with others, initially on class and afterward on gender. She originally outlined her theory in the paper “Theorising Gender” (1985), which was followed by a more detailed account in her book *Gender and Power* (1987). Later, while expanding on the gender hierarchy model initially proposed in this book, Connell developed further theories on masculinity in her subsequent books *Masculinities* (1995, 2005) and *The Men and the Boys* (2000). As such, Connell’s theory is complex and elaborate, rendering reductive any attempt at summarization. Her theory developed from her extended critiques, from 1980’s onward, of the two dominant attitudes to gender in Western sociological gender studies: sex role theory and *categoricalism*—i.e., feminist approaches that assume men and women as pre-formed categories before discussing gender (“Theorising Gender” 268).

Adopting a constructivist view of gender, Connell takes gender as one of many social structures in human life. Social structure signifies “[e]nduring or widespread patterns among social relations” (*GIWP* 10). “Gender,” according to Connell, “is the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes” (11). An implication of seeing gender as a set of social

²⁵ Connell is a male-to-female transsexual. “Previously Robert W. Connell but now legally Raewyn Connell, she prefers to be referred to, even in the past tense, as a woman” (Wedgwood 338).

relations is that “[g]ender, like all other social structures, is multi-dimensional; it is not just about identity, or just about work, or just about power, or just about sexuality, but all of these things at once” (11). This is because gender relations are “internally complex” and involve multiple social structures (75). Thus, the structures that form and are formed by gender relations are also necessarily multiple. “This approach,” as Maharaj says, “sees women’s [and men’s] specific experiences as generated by intersecting [i.e., mutually conditioning (76)] structures which may derive from any social realm, be it the realm of culture, economics, politics, religion or ideology” (57). Connell identifies four “major structures[s]” (*GP* 97), which she recommends we consider while analyzing gender relations in any context. These are the structures of power, labour, cathexis, and symbolism (*GIWP* 75-87).²⁶

Through the mutual conditioning of these four structures in a society at a particular era, the categories of men and women and the definitions of masculinity and femininity are (re-)created. When the resulting configurations of gender practice are observed at the level of specific institutions—e.g., home, school, workplace, church, the street, etc.—Connell calls such configurations the *gender regimes* of those institutions, i.e., “regular set[s] of arrangements about gender” in those institutions (*GIWP* 72). Such institutions include “from schools to workplaces to the state and even the street (Flood, “Gender Order” 236). Gender regimes are part of the broader configuration of gender practice Connell calls the *gender order* of a society (73). A patriarchal gender order entails a certain structure of social relations between and among men and women. More specifically, it is “a social structure that advantages men, as a class, over women, as a class; and that privileges men who possess or demonstrate certain characteristics over those who do not” (Buchbinder 69). Thus, a patriarchal order involves an economy of

²⁶ Before Connell, other feminists had offered multiple-structure models for analyzing gender relations. Connell builds her model on her critique of these other models (see *GP* 96-97; *GIWP* 75-76).

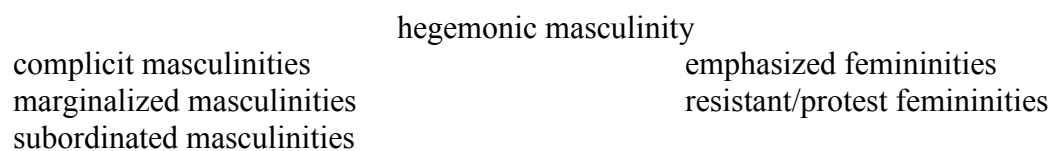
power which is based on differential and unequal distribution of power between and among men and women in their relations (71).

Connell's outline for the current Western gender order seeks to explain how gendered identities, which the model depicts as multiple masculinities and femininities, are inter- and intra-related at the level of a whole society (Connell, *GP* 182). The model recognizes the connections between gender and sexuality, while also predicting the intersection of gender with such other identity elements as race, ethnicity, class, bodily normativity, and age. These elements, due to the necessary entwinement of gender with other social structures, are vital for a more complete comprehension of gender relations (Connell, *GIWP* 86). However, the concept of hegemonic masculinity, on which Connell's model relies, has been criticized by some as inapplicable to non-Western societies.

Victor Seidler, for example, is concerned that "a globalised theory of hegemonic masculinities [. . .] allows the West to legislate what is good for others without ever having to learn to listen to young men and young women in different cultural settings who might question the terms in which they are being theorised" (9). However, Seidler's concern diminishes if we observe that hegemonic masculinity has proved an insightful concept in empirical "[i]nternational research" on how "gender orders construct multiple masculinities" (Connell and Messerschmidt 833-35). Evidently, Connell's model presupposes some Western rationalist and liberal democratic values and, despite its resilience, its very form prescribes some gender content for the ideal gender orders it negatively desires. However, as far as non-Western societies are concerned, the concern would only be valid if we were to apply the model to a non-Western gender order remained untouched by the Western (neo-)colonialism and the current globalization. Ever since the colonial era, the gender orders in the periphery have been mostly

manipulated by Western powers (*GIWP* 92-93; *GP* 157-158; *TMTB* 39-43). To theorize the somewhat homogenized gender orders of many contemporary societies, Connell has spoken of “the globalization of gender” and even hypothesized the “world gender order” (“Masculinities and Globalization” 7-9; *TMTB* 40-42). Therefore, I agree with David Morgan who, in reference to Seidler’s above mentioned concern, asserts, “I was not wholly convinced by [Seidler’s] critique of the idea of hegemonic masculinity(ies). I feel that the idea can serve as *an important point of departure* in an analysis that is sensitive to cultural differences and to transnational trends” (315, my emphasis). Hegemonic masculinity, as the key concept in Connell’s model, has been applied to research in such diverse areas as “education studies,” “criminology,” “media representations,” and “organization studies” (Connell and Messerschmidt 833-35). That Connell’s concept has “withstood more than twenty years of [international and mostly empirical] research experience” (Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinities* 35) confers upon it a certain amount of reliability.

Despite Connell’s descriptions of her gender hierarchy model (*GP* 183-188; *Masculinities* 76-81; *TMTB* 10-11), she has not yet graphed it. Anthony Giddens (611) has proposed a diagram, a modified version of which is appropriate for our discussion:²⁷



At the top of the hierarchy rests hegemonic masculinity, defined as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the

²⁷ Connell differentiates between *marginalized* and *subordinated* masculinities in her model. However, Giddens merges both categories under “subordinated masculinities.” I have modified Giddens’ graph accordingly.

subordination of women” (Connell, *Masculinities* 77). Drawing on Antonio Gramsci, Connell regards gender hegemony as an “ascendancy achieved [primarily] through culture, institutions, and persuasion” (Connell and Messerschmidt 832; Connell *GP* 184; *Masculinities* 77). Although in a society the masculine can encompass a wide range of ways of being a man, the patriarchal order in a society authorizes only a limited number of these ways which come together in the idealized hegemonic version of being a man in that society (Buchbinder 90).

The attributes of the Western and Anglo-American hegemonic masculinities have been enumerated by many scholars. The lists, each arising from a different context, foreground various aspects of these forms of masculinity. On a broad level, Anglo-American hegemonic masculinity has been associated with “[valorizing] traits such as rationality, martial prowess, muscular strength, competition, individualism and male camaraderie, as well as a zero-sum approach to confrontation” (Basu and Banerjee 477). It has also been characterized as “always constructed as heterosexual, White and, drawing on the history of imperialism, naturally superior” (Hooper 64).²⁸ To describe the contemporary (Anglo-)American hegemonic masculinity, Michael Kimmel quotes Erving Goffman’s enumeration of what he deemed, in 1963, as the attributes of the only “one complete, unblushing male” in America:

a young, married, white, urban, northern heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports. Every American male tends to look out upon the world from this

²⁸ Although it is argued to be influenced by the European colonialism, Anglo-American hegemonic masculinity has also been claimed to inherit its various representations from a “much longer cultural history” as far back as such constructions as the “Greek citizen/warrior, which combined militarism with rationalism [. . .], the Judaeo/Christian patriarch, a more domesticated masculinity emphasizing responsibility, ownership of property, and paternal authority [. . .], an honor/patronage model based on aristocratic ideals of male bonding, military heroism, and risk-taking [. . .], and a bourgeois rational masculinity, idealizing competitive individualism, calculative rationality, self-denial and emotional self-control” (Hooper 64).

perspective ... Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself ... as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior.²⁹ (*Gender of Desire* 30)

Hegemonic masculinities, in different cultures or within the same culture at different eras, “[come] into existence in specific circumstances and [are] open to historical change. More precisely, there [can] be a struggle for hegemony, and older forms of masculinity may be displaced by new ones” (Connell and Messerschmidt 833).³⁰ Thus, for instance, “in recent decades, it has become customary to expect the ‘typical’ man also to register emotion, feelings, and sensitivity” which is in contrast to the stoicism often expected from his counterpart of the later nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century (Buchbinder 89-90).³¹ Hegemonic masculinity is “always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women” (Connell, *GP* 183). The particular form of femininity complicit with the hegemonic masculinity in its sustenance of patriarchy, is termed *emphasized femininity*. This exaggerated and idealized form of femininity, with which women struggle and which is essential to gender inequality is “defined around compliance with [the overall subordination of women to

²⁹ A more recent, yet overlapping, list of features for the current Western hegemonic masculinity can be found in Buchbinder 89.

³⁰ Hence Connell’s warning that “[h]egemonic masculinity’ is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable” (*Masculinities* 76).

³¹ As I will discuss further below, while analyzing instances of humour in *Two and a Half Men*, the fact that Charlie Sheen has been replaced by Ashton Kutcher—i.e., an actor who satisfies the show’s need for its hegemonic masculine character, yet with significantly different features from those of Charlie Sheen—may not be irrelevant to the producers’ need to render a more updated version of hegemonic masculinity. The revised form, despite sharing many features with the dismissed version, manifests many features of *metrosexual masculinity*, and distances itself from the pseudo-machismo previously evinced by Sheen’s character. For further discussion of metrosexual masculinity, see pp. 103-104 below).

men] and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of [heterosexual] men” (183, 187). Emphasized femininity, according to Connell, is associated with

the display of sociability rather than technical competence, fragility in mating scenes, compliance with men’s desire for titillation and ego-stroking in office relationships, acceptance of marriage and childcare as a response to labour-market discrimination against women. At the mass level, these are organized around themes of sexual receptivity in relation to younger women and motherhood in relation to older women. (*GP* 187)

This form of femininity is deemed as *emphasized* since it is highlighted by the patriarchal order at the expense of other unconventional femininities. Numerous yet very similar versions of modern emphasized femininity in the West are circulated in the mass media and marketing on a daily basis (Connell, *GP* 188).

Hegemonic masculinity, although being “an idealized version of masculinity” (Levy 254), is not the statistically dominant version of masculinity (Connell, *GP* 184-85). However, it is the most aspired version. In 1987, Connell exemplified hegemonic masculinity by such “fantasy figures” as Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne and Sylvester Stallone, and such “real [yet unattainable] ideals” as the former Australian Rules football player and coach Ron Barassi and the boxer Muhammad Ali (184-85). These might be replaced by more contemporary models. In their attempts to seek such idealized yet unreachable forms of masculinity in a patriarchal society, most men consciously or unconsciously perform *complicit* masculinities. The complicity may arise from tendencies for “[f]antasy gratification” and “[d]isplaced aggression” (185). However, it is mainly motivated by what Connell calls *patriarchal dividend*, i.e., “the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” (*Masculinities* 79). This dividend

is enjoyed by those men and women who seek to benefit from patriarchy. Based on a metaphor from the stock market, patriarchal dividend is best understood in light of the aforementioned concepts of patriarchal order and its specific economy of power (see pp. 43-44 above). The more a social subject invests in the patriarchal economy, the less they would want the patriarchal order associated with that economy to change, and thus the more they would remain subservient to that unequal order (Buchbinder 71-74).

An example from the fitness industry helps clarify the interconnection of complicit masculinity and the patriarchal dividend. The popular demand, among many young men, for going from *scrawny to brawny* or from *bones to buff*³² is telling in this regard. That a young teenage boy with a flimsy body, despite the probable ridiculing gaze of others, enthusiastically and regularly yields his naked body to the rigorous disciplines of a body-building program in a gym, reveals how the promise of the patriarchal dividend (e.g., the boy's hoping to win the attention of certain girls at school, or his competing with other male bodies in certain interpersonal relations) can persuade social subjects to invest in, and submit to the dynamics of, the patriarchal hierarchy.³³

³² I take the first italicized phrase from the title of a famous book, and its corresponding website (see <http://www.scrawnytobrawny.com/>), and the second phrase from the title of a "muscle-building [program] specifically for people who have a hard time gaining muscle and weight" (see <http://www.joeyvaillancourtfitness.com/>).

³³ Other examples could also be mentioned. A relevant instance of complicity is the actor Charlie Sheen's recent confession (even if untrue, as some have suspected) in a recent interview that "testosterone cream" caused his infamous 2011 meltdown (<http://www.torontosun.com/2013/02/05/charlie-sheen-blames-meltdown-on-testosterone-cream>). The sociologist Alan Johnson's reference to how laughing at, or silencing before, sexist jokes can help sustain the patriarchal system provides another example of complicity with the hegemonic masculinity (*The Forest and Trees* 18). Also, an interesting instance of women's complicity with the dominant masculine ideals, in order to benefit from the patriarchal dividend, is found in Jeannie Thomas' essay, "Dumb Blondes, Dan Quayle, and Hillary Clinton: Gender, Sexuality, and Stupidity in Jokes," when the author quotes a female redhead student's honest

For hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity to sustain their cultural ascendancy, and more important, for this ascendancy to look natural, other forms of gender behaviour must be “defined as deviant or inferior and attract derision, hostility, and sometimes violence” (Kessler et al. 44). As Michael Messner observes, “[a]lthough it may be true that men, as a group, enjoy institutional privileges at the expense of women, as a group men share very unequally in the fruits of these privileges” (qtd. in Cheng 300). The non-hegemonic masculine performances are described as marginalized and subordinated masculinities in Connell’s model. She uses subordination to describe a relation “internal to the gender order” and in reference to effeminate heterosexualities but particularly homosexual masculinities. Homosexuals rank the lowest on Connell’s hierarchy, as “[g]ayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity [. . .] [F]rom the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity” (*Masculinities* 78). Marginalization, on the other hand, is intended by Connell to designate the “interplay of gender with other [external] structures such as class and race” (80). The intersection of gender with bodily normativity and age could also be subsumed by marginalization.

At the lowest rank in the femininity side of the hierarchy rest what Mimi Schippers—in her critical addition to Connell’s model—deems as pariah femininities, since they “contaminate” the idealized relationship between hegemonic masculinity and femininity “by refusing to complement hegemonic masculinity in a relation of subordination” (Schippers 95). Of the place of such femininities in the gender hierarchy, Schippers explains:

If hegemonic gender relations depend on the symbolic construction of desire for the feminine object, physical strength, and authority as the characteristics that

reaction to a blonde joke: “I thought this joke was funny because I’m a redhead, and I resent blondes because they get more attention from men” (284).

differentiate men from women and define and legitimate their superiority and social dominance over women, then these characteristics must remain unavailable to women. To guarantee men's exclusive access to these characteristics, other configurations of feminine characteristics must be defined as deviant and stigmatized. This is needed to define the ideals for femininity, but also to ensure swift and severe social sanction for women who take on or enact hegemonic masculinity. (94-95)

Unlike emphasized femininity, pariah femininities are repelled by hegemonic masculinity, and have historically been represented in the West by such figures as “spinsters, lesbians, unionists, prostitutes, madwomen, rebels and maiden aunts, manual workers, midwives and witches” (Connell, *GP* 188). Schippers' examples of practices and traits which cause stigmatization and sanction if manifested by women, include “having sexual desire for other women, being promiscuous, ‘frigid’, or sexually inaccessible, and being aggressive” (95).³⁴ The social depreciation of non-hegemonic femininities and masculinities apparently provides ample motivation for most social subjects to become complicit with the hegemonic gender norms by succumbing to the interpellations of the patriarchal order to benefit from its specific economy.³⁵

³⁴ As discussed in Chapter Two below, Connell's and Schippers' respective references to “spinsters” and “frigidity” provide a unique opportunity to discuss the emerging social category of the *asexual* in its relation to gender hierarchy and gendered humour.

³⁵ For female subjects' repudiation of non-hegemonic femininities, an example from the realm of sport is noteworthy. It has been observed that despite “a greater social acceptance of lesbians in many Western societies, the use of the lesbian label to preserve traditional gender boundaries, control sportswomen and stigmatise lesbians is still a dominant practice” (Symons 144). In fact, it has been suggested “that within sport femininity acts as a code word for heterosexuality” (145). Thus, “sportswomen emphasise their femininity to avoid being labelled butch or, even worse, a lesbian. Examples of emphasised femininity and heterosexual normalcy are numerous and include the makeup, feminine dress and deportment classes that have been a regular feature of a number of national women's

One important question arising from the above articulation of gender order would be: What holds together the various elements in a gender order? Given the hierarchical relationship central to non-democratic gender orders, the question could in fact be rearticulated as follows: What maintains a hierarchical gender order? Some masculinities studies scholars and theorists, in their discussions of gender hegemony, evoke the above question. As shown in the next section, these references may be brought together and enhanced through the insertion of the topic of ridicule as a social disciplinary tool.

WHAT MAINTAINS THE GENDER HEGEMONY?: RIDICULE AS AN AGENT OF ABJECTION VIS-À-VIS GENDER

The occasional references in gender studies to the role of ridicule in maintaining gender hegemony, as illustrated in the beginning of this chapter, reveal the presence of an elephant in the room of gender studies. The question of what sustains the gender hierarchy, which evokes sociologists' question about social order in general, is summoned by Connell, Messerschmidt, Kimmel, and Schippers in their discussions of *hegemonic masculinity*. Connell (see p. 25 above) mentions a long list of offensive terms to clarify how effeminate heterosexual men are chastised—by being associated with homosexual masculinity as the most subordinated masculine identity—for their non-hegemonic gender performances. In their first articulations of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and her colleagues had passingy noted a connection between ridicule and the maintenance of gender hegemony. Hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, they declare, are regarded “as the pattern of masculinity or femininity in general and

sporting teams; the heterosexy calendars featuring individual and teams of sportswomen; and the emphasis in media coverage on the heterosexual relationships of sportswomen” (145).

are often assumed to be the natural characteristics of each sex. Other kinds of behavior and character are defined as deviant or inferior and attract *derision*, hostility, and sometimes violence” (Kessler et al. 44, my emphasis). This echoes Messerschmidt who, while criticizing some functionalist accounts of gender for their tendency to explain gender hierarchies as self-reproducing systems, asserts, “To sustain a given pattern of hegemony requires the *policing of men* as well as the *subordinating of women*” (31). The strategies employed towards these goals range from such *hard* options as “security threat,” “war” and “homophobic assaults and murders” to *softer* options such as “the teasing of boys in school for ‘sissiness’” (31).

Kimmel and Mahler also touch on how shame and ridicule interlink with desiring to prove one’s masculinity, and how fearing ridicule and shame might cause men with non-hegemonic masculinities to use violence upon failing to achieve hegemonic masculine ideals. The authors’ quote from James Gillian, on how masculinity and violence are related to shame and ridicule, is telling: “[V]iolence has its origins in ‘the fear of shame and ridicule, and the overbearing need to prevent others from laughing at oneself by making them weep instead’” (1452).

Also, while discussing Connell’s gender hegemony model, Schippers stresses the importance of “stigma” and “social sanctions” in constructing the *quality content* of non-hegemonic masculinities and femininities. By “quality content” of the categories “man” and “woman” Schippers simply means such quality characteristics as “men [being] physically strong and authoritative/women [being] physically vulnerable and compliant” (90). So for instance, “bitch,” “slut,” and “cock-teaser,” Schippers contends, are among social stigmas intended to punish women who embody pariah femininities. Symbolic sanctions, Schippers notes, are central to the construction of pariah femininities and the gender hegemony, and are necessarily related to

the actual sanctions—e.g., various forms of social exclusion or violence—which women with such gender performances may undergo (96). The same is true of men who exhibit dominant feminine characteristics. The verbal sanctions such men receive, e.g., “‘fag,’ the ‘pussy’, and the ‘wimp’,” are also central to the construction of hegemonic masculinities (96). In line with Schippers’ observation, C. J. Pascoe, in her book *Dude, You’re a Fag’: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*, demonstrates how American male high school students achieve a masculine identity through “the repeated repudiation of the specter of failed masculinity” (5).

These and the aforementioned references to the role of ridicule in maintaining gender hegemony (reviewed at the beginning of this chapter) obviously indicate the vital role of ridicule in maintaining the gender order. More important, however, they also allow us to speculate about how ridicule might occupy a similar role in creating gendered identities in the first place. Marginalized and subordinated forms of masculinity can be explained through what Judith Butler calls *the abject* position, a concept central to Pascoe’s analysis of the “fag discourse.” The abject, as understood by Julia Kristeva and later by Butler, has been taken up by some scholars, including Iris Marion Young, to describe the social status of marginalized “groups, such as people of colour and homosexuals” (Kutzbach and Mueller 9). While Kristeva’s focus is psychological, Butler translates the concept into the socio-political realm by emphasizing the issues of inclusion and exclusion and their role in the “production of the subject by means of constituting its borders” (Hochberg 102). Informed by studies of defilement, and particularly in accord with Kristeva’s understanding of “abjection as a process through which the proper subject is created through exclusion, Butler suggests that we understand abjection as a process that consolidates culturally hegemonic subject positions through radically ‘othering’ others and rendering them non-subjects or less-than-subject” (102).

In its non-hegemonic and contaminating aspect, the abject strongly evokes Connell's subordinated masculinities as well as her and Schippers' resistant and pariah femininities, as these subjugated gender entities violate the clear-cut heteronormative dichotomies of the male/female and the masculine/feminine, and hence need to be continually repudiated for any heteronormative hegemony to be maintained. As previously quoted by Connell, in (Western) patriarchal ideology, gayness—as the emblem of subordinated masculinities—“is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity” (*Masculinities* 78). “Indeed,” as Buchbinder mentions, “the masculine is constituted by the simultaneous abjection of the feminine and the male-homosexual” (101). Building on Kristeva, Butler centralizes abjection in the process of the construction of the gendered beings (Pascoe 332). Butler's argument, as Lisa Adkins states, “is not simply that subjectivity acts as a norm from which there are certain exclusions, but rather that subjectivity and the subject can only come into being (can only be achieved) through the very processes of repudiation and abjection” (Adkins 613). For Butler, gendered beings are created through processes of *repeated invocation and repudiation*. People constantly reference or invoke a gendered norm, thus making the norm seem like a timeless truth. Similarly, people continually repudiate a “constitutive outside” in which is contained all that is cast out of a socially recognizable gender category. The “constitutive outside” is inhabited by what she calls “abject identities,” unrecognizably and unacceptably gendered selves. [. . .] The abject identity must be constantly named to remind individuals of its power. Similarly, it must be constantly repudiated by individuals or groups so that they can continually affirm their identities as normal and as culturally intelligible. (Pascoe 14, my italics)

This process is, as we will see below, what occurs in direct uses of ridicule in gender humour. As Pascoe notes in her own study of high school students, ridiculing abject gendered identities occupies an essential role in these students' constructing their own gendered identity. "After imitating a fag," Pascoe observes, "boys assure others that they are not a fag by instantly becoming masculine again after the performance. They mock their own performed femininity and/or same-sex desire, assuring themselves and others that such an identity deserves derisive laughter" (339). Therefore we may claim that as an exclusionary and *othering* repudiatory discourse, ridicule plays a necessary role in the formation of gendered identities.³⁶ While to demonstrate this claim is beyond the scope of this study, we may still hypothesize in a more particular manner the relation between ridicule, as it occurs in mainstream gender humour, and the gender order in a society.

RIDICULE AND GENDER HEGEMONY: THE NORM-REINFORCING AND DISCIPLINARY FUNCTIONS OF MAINSTREAM GENDER HUMOUR

I use the term *mainstream* gender humour as opposed to *fringe* gender humour. (For the latter type, see Chapter Five below.) By the mainstream category, I mean the type of gender humour which enjoys circulation—even if potentially³⁷—by and among the hegemonic gender

³⁶ As Giselind Kuipers observes, "being an object of laughter often causes an acute sense of exclusion and humiliation, almost akin to social paralysis" (Kuipers, "The Politics of Humor" 73). This presumes that ridiculing laughter is interwoven with social exclusion, because "[l]aughing at something or someone defines it as outside the social order" (71).

³⁷ For instance, publishers in heteronormative societies might not be willing to publish, solely or extensively, collections of in-group humour produced and enjoyed by people who self-identify as homosexual. This reveals that such peculiar humour is not considered potentially circulating in those societies.

“norm circles” in a society (Elder-Vass, *The Causal Power of Social Structures* 122-124).³⁸ Such prevalent reception indicates an imbalance in the production size of the mainstream and fringe gender humour. Moreover, it also suggests that mainstream gender humour more likely elicits approbatory laughter—rather than an irksome “unlaughter”—from the typical members of hegemonic gender norm circles in a society.³⁹ This presumes humour to be a certain form of rhetorical argument (see Conley; Meyer; Stephen Smith; Weaver), more specifically a message directed towards obtaining laughter of approval from its audience. Necessary to the induction of such laudatory laughter is the shared recognition of certain knowledge by the transmitter and the recipient of humour-as-communication. This commonality, as the philosopher Ted Cohen has observed, is “a background of awareness that teller and listener are already in possession of and bring to the joke” (269). Such a background, in canned jokes, may be explained in terms of what is called “script” in the semantic script theory of humour (see p. 13 above). Conley relates this stipulated common ground to Kenneth Burke’s concept of *identification* as a pivotal element in persuasive discourse:

What I think Cohen is talking about here is very close to what Kenneth Burke calls “identification” [. . .] [and to] how “persuasive” discourse has at its core not division—as in speaker vs. audience—but *communeication*, so to speak. “You

³⁸ “Norm circle” is conceptualized by Dave Elder-Vass in his complex theory of the connection between agency and social structure. First proposed in his book *The Causal Power of Social Structures* and later developed in his book *The Reality of Social Construction*, “norm circles” represent any social circle or group which is “concerned with specifically normative questions” and whose members share a “a *collective intention* to support” its norms “by advocating the practice[s], by praising or rewarding those who enact [them], by criticising or punishing those who fail to enact [them], or even just by ostentatiously enacting [the practices] themselves” (*The Causal Power of Social Structures* 122, 123, 124).

³⁹ Coined by Billig, *unlaughter* is different from merely not laughing, and signifies “a display of not laughing when laughter might otherwise be expected, hoped for or demanded” (*LR* 192).

persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his”. (qtd. in Conley 269)

This should explain why, for instance, in dominantly heteronormative societies, humour that is specifically enjoyed in circles whose members self-identify as, for instance, “lesbian” is—if understood at all—unlikely to have adequate rhetorical power to induce laughter from persons who self-identify as heterosexual.⁴⁰

If, following Billig, we assume the universal role of ridicule—as a form or aspect of humour—in maintaining social order, we can expect that in a society certain ridicule-based mainstream gender humour is directed toward sustaining its gender order as a significant example of a social order loaded with norms and values.⁴¹ In other words, we can expect certain order-maintaining mainstream gender humour to be formed around gender meanings in that society.⁴² The mechanism of such ridiculing gender humour in relation to gender norms—following Billig’s main argument (see p. 35 above)—may be outlined as follows. Femininity and masculinity are inherently relational, in that they find meaning in contrast to each other. Also, as

⁴⁰ For an example of how a well-known in-group lesbian joke fell flat in “a group of self-identified heterosexual academics,” see Bing and Heller 166, or p. 251 below.

⁴¹ This, however, does not entail that all gender humour, or even all disciplinary gender humour, necessarily be based on ridicule. It only involves that from among all types of (gender) humour, some types must be directed towards maintaining the gender order. However, some scholars have erroneously taken Billig to mean that humour is interchangeable with ridicule (see Davies, “Rev. of *Laughter and Ridicule*” 206; Kuipers 383, 386). This might have been caused by Billig’s unprecedented book-length focus on ridicule or by his argument for the necessary function of ridicule in sustaining social life. It is noteworthy, however, that some full-fledged adherents of the superiority theory do take humour as identical with ridicule (see Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously* 7-8).

⁴² This also means that the gender order of any society must be significantly reflected in that society’s gender humour, with the implication that analyzing any society’s gender humour must provide an outline of that society’s gender order. This will be demonstrated in Chapters 2-4.

West and Zimmerman famously remind us, social agents, while “doing gender,” are held “accountable” for their performances (135-37). “[T]o ‘do’ gender,” they assert, “is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior *at the risk of gender assessment*” (136). Therefore, ridicule is conceivably used to warn or punish social agents’ imagined or actual violations of their societies’ gender definitions by failing to produce normative gender behaviour competently.

David Wooten’s diagram of “Ridicule as a Socialization Mechanism,” which involves the three principal elements of “target,” “teaser,” and “observers,” comes close to depicting the above mechanism for disciplinary gender humour, namely, the *gender-inappropriateness-gets-disciplined-through-ridicule* mechanism (Wooten 190). For instance, in the cases of verbal joke and sitcom as humorous narratives typically containing butts, the above disciplinary effect may be attempted by deriding certain gender-transgressing victims within such narratives. (Humour butts are mostly either “groups” or “individuals based on their group membership” [Janes and Olson 474].)⁴³ While certain prevalent gender norms are presumed or implied, violations are stated or strongly implied as derisive. In mainstream gender humour, this should happen through jeering a target who is violating the hegemonic ontology of gender.⁴⁴ Consider the following two jokes:

⁴³ Rather than funny, *humorous* is here taken to mean as descriptive of any text created with the aim of, or directed towards, producing laughter, whether this purpose is fulfilled or not. (For laughter as “the language of humour,” see Zijderfeld 42.) As Billig concludes from analyzing a humour case relating to the 2003 Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi (Billig, *LR* 177-79), “humour cannot be defined purely as that which elicits the response of laughter. Humour might involve the attempt to produce laughter in its recipients but it must be recognizable as humour even if it fails in its end” (179). An important implication of this definition is that what is intended as humorous, regardless of producing laughter, can be included as an object of (critical) humour studies.

⁴⁴ This ontology is sometimes only latent and, as Judith Butler implies, may become manifest via the occurrence of nonconventional gender performances: “When one performance of gender is considered real and another false, or

What's a man's ultimate embarrassment?

–Walking into a wall with an erection and hurting his nose. (Arnott and Haskins 463)

Why did God invent alcohol? So fat chicks can get laid too. (182)⁴⁵

Both jokes target certain groups through their generic representatives, i.e., men having *undersized* erect penises and women with *too overweight* bodies, while presuming both embodiments as socially devalued. Yet, butts need not always appear in canned jokes. The above themes, for instance, also occur in the ninth season premiere of the comedy series *Two and a Half Men*, which is titled “Nice to Meet You, Walden Schmidt.” After the controversial dismissal of the former lead Charlie Sheen (as Charlie Harper) by the producers of the series, the ninth season premiere introduces the new lead Ashton Kutcher as Walden Schmidt. Walden, a heart-broken billionaire, after a failed suicide in the ocean near Alan’s residence, appears on the latter’s deck. While Walden is undressing to dry himself, his penis is seen by Alan, who, while going back to the kitchen, complains to the camera, “Wait, billion dollars and he’s hung like an elephant!” (14:07–14:13). Alan is obviously referring to the hierarchical relationship between Walden’s socially honoured bodily normativity and (we imagine) his own inferior embodiment. The penis size theme appears again the same night at a bar, when, while drinking, Alan suddenly turns to Walden, saying: “So, don’t take this the wrong way, but I can’t get the image of your penis out of my mind” (15:26–15:31). In both instances, Alan’s utterances are followed by laugh

when one presentation of gender is considered authentic, and another fake, then we can conclude that a certain ontology of gender [i.e., an account of what gender *is*] is conditioning these judgments [. . .]” (*Undoing Gender* 214).

⁴⁵ Of this joke, depending on the butt’s bodily non-normativity, there are various versions including the following one: “Why was alcohol invented? — So ugly women could get laid too” (Pease 35). In Season 4/Episode 14 of *Two and a Half Men*, Charlie Harper refers to this latter version when he says that “[alcohol makes] ugly people doable” (03:10).

tracks, encouraging the actual watchers to laugh at Alan and/or his implied small penis. Next morning, Berta, the house's typically fat and unbeautiful yet amusing maid is impressed upon accidentally viewing Walden's endowment in the kitchen, where the latter is wandering around naked after having spent a successful night with two sexy chicks. Berta's presumably unquestionable lack of access to Walden's (or any similar) body is intended to make a butt out of the amusingly fat and unbeautiful Berta, too. Finally, shortly after, the middle-aged Judith, Alan's divorced wife—who has come to pick up their son, Jake, from Walden's house (where Alan and Jake live)—is similarly impressed by Walden's penis size upon encountering him. “I like him [Walden]” is what Judith utters to Alan, upon Walden's leaving, thus creating another joke for the audience at the expense of Alan.

Such gender humour not only sustains gender norms but also tends to internalize such norms in social agents. Similar to the subjects in Janes and Olson's research (see p. 36 above), who would police and restrain their behaviours upon watching others being ridiculed on video, the audience of the above mentioned gender humour is exposed to some “jeer pressure,” and is hence likely to monitor and restrain their gender behaviour in fear of similar castigation. However, an important question can arise out of the above discussion: Given that mainstream gender humour feeds on hegemonic gender norms, how—if at all—would the humour devoid of explicitly ridiculed butts occupy punitive and regulatory functions toward gender? This is pivotal since numerous instances of gender humour, despite their arguably reinforcing gender norms, either do not have explicit butts or do have them but those butts do not trespass any gender codes per se. Examples abound. One is a frequently cited joke about President Calvin Coolidge and his wife, as related by Leon Rappoport in his book *Punchlines*: “While visiting a farm they saw a bull mount four cows one right after the other. Mrs. Coolidge said to her husband, ‘Look, what

masculine strength.’ He replied, ‘But look, how many partners!’” (107).⁴⁶ In this joke, even if we take Mrs. Coolidge as the butt, we cannot show she is being laughed at for her *violating* any gender norms. Another appropriate example is a frequently cited witticism Sigmund Freud quotes in his book, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*: “A wife is like an umbrella. Sooner or later one takes a cab” (qtd. in Billig, *LR* 162). Just as an umbrella cannot protect one from a rainstorm, the joke indicates, a married man’s promiscuity might eventually compel him to visit a prostitute (Billig 162). In this case, too, we cannot show that the audience’s possible laughter occurs at the expense of any gender-transgressing character.

Examining this latter type of gender humour in light of the disciplinary role of ridicule proves enlightening. While our first mechanism involved direct ridicule aimed at reinforcing norms and regulating gender behaviour, the second mechanism achieves disciplinarity through securing laughter in support of the humour’s stated or implied gender ideology. Here, the rhetorical side of humour becomes particularly foregrounded. The laughing audience’s response approves the gendered stance embedded in the humour-as-rhetoric, and simultaneously fulfills its norm-reinforcing aspect.⁴⁷ To understand this aspect in such humour, we must note how, as

⁴⁶ For a different version of the joke, and how the incident was used to coin the term “Coolidge effect,” see Ben-Ze’ev 430.

⁴⁷ Understanding the disciplinary impact of gender humour—i.e., the audience’s acceptance of the hegemonic gender norms embedded in the humorous piece—can barely be separated from what causes funniness. The aforementioned umbrella and Calvin Coolidge jokes are explainable by the *benign violation theory* of humour, as both jokes—when considered from the perspective of a patriarchal ideology—depict “benign” violations of marital mores. Neither joke, however, could rouse laughter were the violations to be reversed, i.e., if they were aimed at the *husbands* instead of the wives. Thus, if the punchline in Rappoport’s joke had belonged to the President’s wife, or had Freud said, “A husband is like an umbrella. Sooner or later one takes a cab,” these would have barely incited mirth in the listeners. This is because such reversals—due to the conditions and the possibilities of the gender orders in Freud’s and Rappoport’s societies—would have necessarily eliminated the benignity element from the texts, leaving them with too morally violent utterances to provoke amusement. This double-standard attitude in such gender humour may originate from broader gender ideologies in Western societies. This possibility is strongly

Merrie Bergmann remarks regarding sexist humour, “[w]hat goes into ‘making sense’ of the episode is at once confirmed by the episode” (72).

Remarkably, however, this latter type of gender humour, in its claim to approving laughter, apparently appeals to *fear of ridicule* by exerting the social pressure to laugh. As previously mentioned, mainstream gender humour taps into hegemonic gender norms, and consequently enjoys the potential or actual support of prevalent gender norm circles. This could also mean the probable rhetorical success of such humour in eliciting laughter (of approval) from the majority of its audience. Any *unlaughter* (see footnote 39 above) may in principle cause the *unlaughers* to feel embarrassed, if not to become the butt of subsequent ridicule. Billig’s emphasis on our fearing “the *prospect* of ridicule and embarrassment” (*LR* 202, my emphasis) is pertinent here. It is no surprise if, particularly in the presence of others, we may laugh or smile at humour we find unfunny or supportive of ideas incompatible with our worldviews.⁴⁸ As Billig comments on the research about the rhetoric of laughter in conversations,

evidence demonstrates that laughter does not just occur at the end of jokes. It can be subtly placed in serious remarks. And when it occurs at the end of jokes, it

upheld by Shifman and Lemish’s observation, as they comment on the theme of “disloyalty” in marriage-related humour in Western culture: “In most of the jokes that depict adulterous men, the man is depicted as a ‘winner’ in the punch line. Thus, cheating men in jokes manage to get away without any negative ramifications or punishment. In contrast, jokes about cheating wives tend to end in unpleasant or even tragic results—especially for the men involved, such as the death of an innocent man or the wife giving birth to the milkman’s children. Jokes about infidelity, so it seems, continue to reinforce the well-entrenched double social standard in which men’s disloyal sexual adventures are positively rewarded, while the same type of behaviors by women result in punishment” (“‘Mars and Venus’ in Virtual Space” 260).

⁴⁸ On the *Urbandictionary.com* website, under the terms “lielaugh” and “fake laugh,” there are other related defined/undefined terms, which are noteworthy: “false laugh,” “pretend laugh,” “peer pressure giggle,” “conned laughter.” A user defines “lielaugh” as “To laugh at a joke one doesn’t get, with the intention of appearing smarter.”

does not occur in a simple, ‘natural’ way. [. . .] [L]aughter does much more than signify a sense of inner joy. In fact, often it does not even do this. (LR 189)⁴⁹

As McCann, Plummer, and Minichiello note, while commenting on the policing capacity of humour in male-male relationships, “[t]o be part of the peer group, to get the joke, to be accepted, are all powerful motivators. Like the panopticon, humour has an ongoing self-policing aspect: men continue to partake in its controlling mechanism to remain in humour’s embrace” (515). One’s laughing at gender humour despite their uninterest can therefore ensure that no one questions their silence (510). However, the laughter, whether they like it or not, simultaneously reveals one’s—even if reluctant or enforced—conformance to the gender norms stated or implied in the humour.

This approving laughter by the audience could be motivated (at least) in one or a combination of three ways related to fear of ridicule. We may fear that others might think that we lack a sense of humour, an accusation which could mean that we “lack a vital human quality” (Billig 11). On the other hand, not laughing at a joke could suggest that the receiver is simply not getting the joke in the first place. Therefore, a person’s laughing at mainstream gender humour despite their liking it could imply that they intend to show (off) their success in passing what we can call a public or inter-personal test in gender basics. Finally, expressing *unlaughter* upon hearing a joke could signal the beginning of an argument. Doing so, as Allan Johnson would put it, is to choose *the path of greater resistance* in social relations, a path most people seek to avoid in social relations (*The Gender Knot* 32-3, 225, 238-43; see also p. . . . below). Upon expressing unlaughter, the receiver may be taken as doubting the assumptions implied in the joke and presumably shared by the enthusiastic joke-teller and other possible audience members. Yet,

⁴⁹ For a rather comprehensive source on the various functions laughter can serve in human interaction and on why it would be simplistic to merely associate laughter with funniness and humour, see Ph. Glenn.

unlaughter is normally avoided since it may cause the above unpleasant results at once. As Billig puts it, “if one gets too serious about humour, then one can easily end up as a figure of ridicule” (LR 15). Also, as Giseline Kuipers remarks about “the downside of protesting against jokes [. . .] [r]efusal to accept the comic frame is unpleasant and abrasive: people objecting to humour ‘spoil the fun’, show they ‘can’t take a joke’ and thus ‘have no sense of humour’” (“The Politics of Humour” 73). Therefore, what Titze, in his essay “Gelotophobia: The Fear of Being Laughed at,” remarks about the punitive aspect of laughter regarding norms in general also sounds applicable to *unlaughter* itself as a type of norm violation. “Those behaving contrary to prevailing group norms,” Titze observes, “will experience a ‘punishing laughter,’ which forces them back to the group’s normative expectations” (34). Few people would want to be marked as negatively off-beat or fringe within their peer group.⁵⁰

These suggest the panoptical capacity of humour and laughter, a possibility which is itself compatible with the similar conditions under which hegemonic gender meanings are reinforced and secured within peer groups. As Kimmel notes in his book *Guyland*, “Our peers are a kind of ‘gender police,’ always waiting for us to screw up so they can give us a ticket for crossing the well-drawn boundaries of manhood” (47). As I will show in the next two chapters, ample mainstream gender humour that features any or both of the above two mechanisms (direct ridicule of gender-violating butts or resort to social pressure to laugh) can be understood as a social patrol for hegemonic gender meanings. Therefore, such humour also reveals basic elements from the gender order of the society in which the humour is prevalent. Since my

⁵⁰ In their essay, “Being the Butt of the Joke: Homophobic Humour, Male Identity, and Its Connection to Emotional and Physical Violence for Men,” McCann, Plummer and Minichiello, while commenting on a case of homophobic humour among a community of men and the punitive effects of such humour, remark, “[T]here is no need to use ‘poofster-bashing’ to police peers’ behaviour: the threat of being laughed at or aligned with the poofsters was sufficient to keep other men at a distance from the gay soldiers” (515).

analyses of the humour texts in the following chapters are primarily based on insights provided by Connell's gender hierarchy model (see pp. 41-52 above), before ending this chapter, I intend to clarify how using this model can also help fill a gap in extant textual analyses of gender humour.

READING THE GENDERED IN HUMOUR: RECONSIDERING GENDER HUMOUR IN LIGHT OF CONNELL'S MODEL

Much textual analysis of gender humour reveals one of two theory-related problems.⁵¹ First, some humour scholars, while discussing gender humour, show little interest in gender studies theories. An instance is some well-known scholars' treatment of the *dumb blonde* stereotype. For example, Elliot Oring, despite his defensible claim that "[t]he dumb blonde is [. . .] not a sociological category" ("Blond Ambitions" 63), disregards the possible gendered implications of the blonde joke, as brought up by some others (e.g., see Lacey 139-140). Christie Davies, too, adopts a similar approach to the blonde joke category (see *Jokes and Targets* 69-112).⁵²

Second, there are studies that, though demonstrating their authors' interest in gender issues, are incomprehensive or insufficiently informed of gender theory. Such research either uses arbitrary theories or fails to apply a holistic theory that can explain the complexities of gender relations as reflected in gender humour. In such research, at best certain themes are identified,

⁵¹ Here, I am not dealing with sociological studies of humour mostly focusing on the differences between males and females and how such differences affect each category's production and reception of humour. For many examples of such research, see Carrell 310.

⁵² See also Abedinifard, Rev. of *Jokes and Targets*. In this review, I give more examples of how Davies' attention to gender theories could have enhanced his analyses.

yet are not brought together under an overarching picture of gender capable of explaining such various elements as multiple masculinities and femininities and different sexual orientations as well as (dis)ability, race, class, age, and ethnicity, as far as these latter elements intersect with gender.⁵³ Gershon Legman's classic volumes, *Rationale of the Dirty Joke: An Analysis of Sexual Humor* and *No Laughing Matter: An Analysis of Sexual Humor (Second Series)* are notable.⁵⁴ The narratives are thematically categorized by Legman, albeit according to his orthodox Freudian interests. He studies themes such as rape, penis length, vaginal size, virginity, cuckoldry, and pedophilia, some of which I will also address. However, while Legman engages in psychological discussions of these topics, rendering mainly feminist-unfriendly interpretations of the humour he cites, the gendered aspects of such humour will be focused on here.

In *Cracking Jokes* (1987), the late American folklorist Alan Dundes seeks to shed feminist light on two joke cycles circulating in the 1980s, which caused many similar cycles in the West: "97 Reasons Why Cucumbers Are Better than Men" and "The Reasons Why Sheep Are Better than Women" (82-95). Dundes' brief discussion, however, would have immensely benefitted from some feminist insights. Yet, by praising the "anti-male" side of the "97 Reasons" list and taking that feature for "feminist ideology" (83), Dundes reduces feminism to male-bashing

⁵³ For instances of this second type of research on gender humour, see Bemiller and Schneider; Bing; Bing and Heller; Bowd; Brandes; Davies, "Fooltowns" and "Sex between Men"; Draitser; Dundes, "97 Reasons"; Koller 111-125; Oring, "Blond Ambitions"; Rappoport; Shifman; Shifman and Lemish; Thomas. (Early in her aforementioned essay, Marlene Mackie makes a momentary reference to the above mentioned complexity in gender issues [13], but she never returns to the theme afterward.)

⁵⁴ Legman's research, although it is relatively dated, has found a certain degree of authenticity among some Western scholars of sexual (and gender) humour. For example, Charles Gruner, in the fifth chapter of his book *The Game of Humor*, titled "Sex, Sexist, and Scatalogical Humor," largely draws upon Legman's categorization of sex jokes. Also, Alan Bowd's corpus of jokes in his empirical research on "Stereotypes of Elderly Persons in Narrative Jokes" is almost entirely based Legman's work.

discourse and praxis. Also, while comparing both lists, Dundes posits an essentialist view of gender as the outer display of inherent differences in male and female bodies, that is, a “body-as-machine” view towards gender (Connell, *GIWP* 53). In the last chapter here, I re-read Dundes’ lists, aiming to complement his reading. Christie Davies’ chapter on men’s same-sex humour in *Jokes and Targets* (154-83) is another case in point. The chapter, despite its insights, pays no attention to gender theories. Drawing on some masculinity theories would have helped Davies ask more gendered questions, e.g., about why only certain categories of professional men become the targets of homosexual jokes in Western societies. Nardi and Stoller’s joint essay on homosexual jokes, titled “‘Fruits,’ ‘Fags,’ and ‘Dykes’: The Portrayal of Gay/Lesbian Identity in ‘Nance’ Jokes of the ’50s and ’60s” is also almost inattentive to feminist or queer theories.

As a last example of gender humour analysis inadequately informed of gender theories, a chapter in Leon Rappoport’s *Punchlines* is noteworthy. The chapter is titled “Males versus Females, Gays versus Straights, and the Varieties of Gender Humour” (101-117). Rappoport’s discussion of gender in the chapter is arbitrary, therefore causing him to leave undefined such key terms in his writing as “sexist humour”/“sexist joke”(s) (103, 105, 108, 111, 112), “gender jokes” and “feminist humour” (e.g., 20, 104-107, 109, 111-113). This theoretical drawback makes Rappoport neglect or compromise obviously gendered aspects in the humour he analyzes. For instance, in support of his claim that certain gender humour is not quite gendered, Rappoport cites the aforementioned joke about President Calvin Coolidge and his wife (see pp.61-62 above). He then explains that “some types of gender humor are not particularly aimed at disparaging either men or women, but instead suggest the amusing nature of differences between their outlooks on life” (107). In his reference to the above joke, Rappoport reduces a complex network of power relations to a presumably benign “outlook” difference between men and

women.⁵⁵ Viewed through the feminist standpoint theory, Rappoport's ostensibly non-gendered and amusing example reveals a more complex rhetoric. As revealed by the punchline, the anecdote presumes a male-centered viewpoint which assumes "male privilege" and "entitlement" (Johnson 4-5, 31-32; Kahn 25-29), seeking to elicit the audience's approbatory laughter for those perspectives. Therefore, the anecdote, in its very form (i.e., in the symbolic victory of the male character who utters the finalizing punchline), cunningly celebrates and reproduces male domination.

More theory-informed and insightful analyses of gender humour do exist. Many of such analyses, however, could be further enhanced theoretically. Based on typical gender studies definitions of gender, at the most obvious level, any humour advancing implied or stated comparisons between men and women *qua* men and women is gender humour. Such humour is clearly represented by the somewhat globalized genre Shifman and Lemish aptly conceptualize as "Mars and Venus" humour in their essay "'Mars and Venus' in Virtual Space" (261-265).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ To Rappoport's dismay, the joke can be argued to have a butt, which would most probably be Ms. Coolidge. She is the one who, from the viewpoint of the joke-teller and those who share in the enjoyment, is *defeated* in the punchline. (For a discussion of how argument is metaphorically regarded as a war, see Lakoff.) (For a disputable discussion of how each and every instance of humour has a butt, and how to recognize butts in all jokes, see Gruner 9, 115-124.)

⁵⁶ Here is an example: Here is an example of such jokes:

"How to Impress a Woman
Compliment her
Cuddle her
Kiss her
Tease her
Comfort her
Hug her
Send her flowers
Wine and dine her
Listen to her

Understandably, such gender relations may be projected onto the world of things, animals, supernatural beings or non-human fairy tale characters.⁵⁷ Accordingly, how a joke is typically categorized—e.g., as clean, dirty, adult, sick, kid-friendly, religious, politically correct/incorrect, ethnic, etc.—also becomes irrelevant to its gendered aspect. Therefore, the famous demarcation between the politically correct and the politically incorrect should not deter us from noticing that, as far as gender is concerned, humour from either category may follow similar patterns of thought by assuming such concepts as male privilege and entitlement, misogyny, gender essentialism, and heteronormativity.⁵⁸

Connell’s gender hierarchy model helps us go beyond the obvious and distinguish subtleties in gender humour. The model importantly demonstrates how “not all gender relations are direct interactions between women on one side and men on the other. [. . .] Relationships among men, or among women, may still be gender relations—such as hierarchies of masculinity

Care for her

Hold her

Support her

How to Impress a Man

Show up naked ... with beer.” (Shubnell 9)

⁵⁷ This is one example: “A woman walked into the kitchen to find her husband stalking around with a fly swatter. ‘What are you doing?’ she asked. ‘Hunting flies,’ He responded. ‘Oh. Killing any?’ She asked. ‘Yep, three males, two females,’ he replied. Intrigued, she asked, ‘How can you tell?’ ‘Three were on a beer can, two were on the phone.’ (Men ... *The Insufferable Sex* 57)

⁵⁸ Here is a “clean” joke from a 2011 *Reader’s Digest* collection of jokes, titled *Laughter Really Is the Best Medicine*: “A woman rubbed a lamp and popped out a genie. ‘Do I get three wishes?’ she asked. ‘Nope, I’m a one-wish genie. What will it be?’ ‘See this map? I want these countries to stop fighting so we can have world peace.’ ‘They’ve been at war thousands of years. I’m not that good,’ he said. ‘What else do you have?’ ‘Well, I’d love a good man. One who’s considerate, loves kids, likes to cook, and doesn’t watch sports all day.’ ‘Okay,’ the genie said with a sigh. ‘Let me see that map again.’ (*Laughter Really Is the Best Medicine* 62). The joke, both in its characterization of the woman as well as its punchline implication for all men’s unalterable nature, mainly assumes and promotes gender essentialism.

among men” (*GIWP* 73). For instance, in their essay “Between Feminism and Fun(ny)mism: Analysing Gender in Popular Internet Humour,” Shifman and Lemish, while addressing “humour about gender” (870), apparently reduce gender inequality to *sexism* by merely theorizing sexist humour (872-73), and hence emphasizing a man-woman relation/difference framework. Connell’s model would have helped the authors to construe gender as a more extensive and complex category, e.g., also inclusive of the humour on homosociality and homosexuality.

Connell’s model also emphasizes the intersection of gender with identity elements other than sexuality. Therefore, it becomes easier to notice how gender interplays with race in, for example, the following Q&A joke: “Which is better, being born black or gay? –Black, because you don’t have to tell your parents” (Thripshaw 161). The joke, drawing on *coming-out* as an issue, seeks to elicit an amusing response. Due to her or his skin colour, a black person, the joke apparently implies, cannot hide in the closet in the first place. One could easily miss the gendered aspect of such a joke. However, whether we take it as referring to two men, two women, or a man and a woman, the joke, when seen in light of Connell’s model, could open up an interesting opportunity to discuss the intersectionality of gender, race, and sexuality. In its very form, for instance, the joke implies a hierarchy of bodies. Juxtaposing gays and blacks evokes their more powerful other, i.e., white heterosexuals. As we discussed earlier, Connell’s gender hierarchy model regards gay and black masculinities to be respectively representative of “subordinated” and “marginalized” masculinities.

Similarly, in reading the joke “What’s the best form of birth control after fifty? – Nudity” (Thripshaw 351), only a framework of gender that recognizes the intersection of gender and bodily normativity can help us fully discern the joke’s main topic, i.e., the socially constructed aesthetics and the hierarchichal value of female bodies. Attending to such subtleties could, for

instance, have helped Shifman, in her essay “Humor in the Age of Digital Reproduction,” to avoid unnecessarily separating the category of “sex” (which Shifman regards as subsuming “homosexuality” and “heterosexuality”) from that of “gender” (which she understands as subsuming such topics as “blondes,” “gender differences,” and “marriage”) in her typology (200).

SUMMARY

This chapter put forward the main argument of the research about the disciplinary and norm-reinforcing role of gender humour in connection with the gender order. While much theoretical gender research admits the punitive role of humour and ridicule toward gender norms, such research avoids granting any theoretical significance to such a role. Also, whereas many empirical studies approve of the above role of humour and ridicule, they are too careful to generalize their results. Drawing on Michael Billig’s theory of ridicule, as a form or aspect of humour and as a reinforcer of social order, and integrating that theory with Raewyn Connell’s gender hierarchy model—devised to depict gender order a particular type of social order—I proposed that ridicule may be conceived as a universal sustainer of gender orders. Even gender scholars’ specific references to how a hierarchichal gender order is maintained contain references to teasing and ridicule. Such references, however, like those in the aforementioned theoretical research on gender, remain non-theorized. We could even go beyond a mere application of Billig’s theory to gender order and claim that ridicule might function as an abjecting tool and serve as a central element in the creation of gendered beings in the first place. While this can be substantiated only through ample related empirical research, we may more easily theorize about how mainstream gender humour, by deploying ridicule, may serve a punitive and norm-

enforcing role. As a rhetorical discourse, such humour may directly use ridicule to punish real or imaginary targets who violate hegemonic gender norms. On the other hand, much mainstream gender humour secures a disciplinary function through the social pressure to laugh, i.e., an indirect use of ridicule.

The chapter also proposed a redefinition of gender humour based on conceiving gender as a more inclusive category of analysis. As inferred from Conell's model, gender is interconnected with sexual orientation, while intersecting with such other identity elements as age, race, ethnicity, class, and bodily normativity. Considering such complexities in our examinations of gender humour will make them more comprehensive and inclusive. This extended definition of gender humour will be shown in practice in my readings of gender humour throughout the next three chapters, which demonstrate the current chapter's main argument about the disciplinary and norm-reinforcing role of mainstream gender humour.

Chapter Two

Mainstream Gender Humour as Patriarchal Panopticism: The Case of Contemporary Anglo-American Folk and Pop Culture Humour

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I analyze instances of contemporary Anglo-American mainstream gender humour in its relation to the current Anglo-American gender order. I argue that such humour reflects the hegemonic gender norms in Anglo-American societies, while patrolling such norms through the promise of a punishing ridicule. The discussed humour instances comprise verbal jokes from published joke collections and Internet websites in English as well as many episodes from the ongoing sitcom *Two and a Half Men*. I also mention cases from comedy films and stand-up comedies that specifically target Anglo-American audiences. Such examples complement the canned joke instances, while showing how the themes identified in the jokes prevail in other popular forms of humour.

Drawing upon Raewyn Connell's gender hierarchy model, and particularly her concept of hegemonic masculinity, I study the gender humour instances to a) show how gender hegemony, in terms of the inter- and intra-relations of masculinities and femininities, is reflected in the corpus of contemporary Anglo-American mainstream gender humour; b) demonstrate how through its abjecting power, the ridicule within gender humour helps reproduce the above gender hegemony; and c) contend how this ridicule can in turn serve to police the above hegemony by symbolically punishing fictive gender non-conformances while also threatening to punish non-subservient social subjects in real.

Before going on, however, more information on the special suitability of *Two and a Half Men*—as the extended example in this chapter—along with a synopsis of its core plotline are

helpful. *Two and a Half Men* (hereafter referred to as *Men*), while being produced in the U.S., and apparently with an initial English-speaking audience in mind, is known around the world. In fact, as James Messerschmidt observes, “[*Two and a Half Men*] has both extensive regional and global influence” (“Engendering Gendered Knowledge” 61). Since its first season in 2003, *Men* has been continuously broadcast in many countries, and on five continents. In 2011, in a *New York Times* essay, Bill Carter maintained that *Men* had “been the biggest hit comedy of the last decade.”⁵⁹ Also, in the same year, in a *Brandweek Magazine* essay Steve McClellan asserted that “*Two and a Half Men* is currently the most-watched sitcom on network television, averaging more than 14 million viewers this year.”⁶⁰ The Facebook page for the show is currently liked by over thirty million users,⁶¹ and despite the dismissal of the show’s relatively popular former lead Charlie Sheen (as Charlie Harper) by the series’ producers, the ratings for the ninth and tenth seasons that star Ashton Kutcher (as Walden Schmidt) reveal no significant wane.⁶² Also, during the Sheen period and afterward, the sitcom has boasted the highest paid actors on U.S. TV, which demonstrates the high popularity of this sitcom.⁶³ In addition, and significantly enough, *Men* has been renewed for an eleventh season.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ <http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/02/24/sheen-assails-creator-of-two-and-half-men/?hp>

⁶⁰ <http://www.adweek.com/news/television/sheens-1-billion-bender-125279>

⁶¹ <https://www.facebook.com/TwoandaHalfMen>

⁶² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_and_a_Half_Men#Ratings; See also <http://www.deadline.com/2013/04/ashton-kutcher-jon-cryer-returning-two-and-a-half-men/#more-484664>

⁶³ Sheen initially received \$800,000 per 22-minute episode:

<http://entertainment.msn.co.nz/blog.aspx?blogentryid=646812&showcomments=true>

Later, the amount was raised to two million dollars:

<http://entertainment.msn.co.nz/blog.aspx?blogentryid=648444&showcomments=true>

Kutcher now receives \$700,000 per episode, which makes him the current highest paid actor on TV:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2219732/Ashton-Kutcher-knocks-Charlie-Sheen-Forbes-highest-paid-TV-actor-list-bags-spot-24m-earnings.html>. With a slightly lower income than Kutcher, Jon Cryer is currently

Despite its continued popularity, *Men* has barely been the subject of academic research. Thus far, Elizabeth Hatfield's paper "'What It Means to be a Man': Examining Hegemonic Masculinity in *Two and a Half Men*" is the only scholarly paper written in English on *Men*. While Hatfield renders a close reading of episodes of *Men* to examine its treatment of gender issues, I consider the show as providing further support for the main hypothesis I put forward about the relation between humour and gender order. As Hatfield suggests about the significance of *Men*, the show, due to its juxtaposing of multiple masculinities, renders unique opportunities for comprehending certain intricacies in gender relations (527). The show creators Chuck Lorre and Lee Aronsohn, in explaining their motivations for producing the show, asserted that they "were looking to do something that was a little more male-centric, that reflected a little bit more about our experiences as men . . . Men wrestling with what it is to be a man" (qtd. in Hatfield 530). However, the show does more in its depiction of gender relations. "To be sure," remarks Messerschmidt, "a salient aspect of this sitcom is how it primarily represents and legitimates an unequal masculine/feminine relationship in and through two male bodies" ("Engendering Gendered Knowledge" 61). Although Hatfield only examines the first five seasons (available at the time she conducted her research), the following five seasons are well worth discussing both in terms of the similarities and the differences. Along with the insertion of a new leading character (i.e., Walden Schmidt), the writers do modify the masculine identity of their previous main character (i.e., Charlie Harper). However, the show's treatment of gender issues and of the gender order in the fictional world of the show barely changes.

the second highest paid actor on TV: <http://www.deadline.com/2013/04/ashton-kutcher-jon-cryer-returning-two-and-a-half-men/#more-484664>

⁶⁴ <http://www.deadline.com/2013/04/ashton-kutcher-jon-cryer-returning-two-and-a-half-men/#more-484664>

Two and a Half Men starts as the story of two adult men and a child—hence the title. The successful and wealthy children’s song writer Charlie Harper, a bachelor, is leading a hedonistic life in his big beach house in Malibu, Los Angeles, when his brother and ten-year-old nephew, Alan (Jon Cryer) and Jake (Angus T. Jones), come to stay temporarily with him. Alan has had a fight with his wife, Judith (Marin Hinkle), who has thrown him out. When Alan gets divorced, he and Jake move in with Charlie. Much humour in *Men* is intended to rise from juxtaposing Charlie’s and Alan’s highly contrasting characters. While Charlie manages to lead an affluent life by writing “jingles,” Alan, a mediocre chiropractor (whose profession is a constant butt of jokes throughout the show) can only make ends meet, and remains dependent on Charlie for residence. Also, despite being carefree and irresponsible in his relationship with everyone and particularly with women, Charlie, in his successful life and casual relationships, is frequently envied by the conscientious, sensitive and responsible Alan who later fails in yet another marriage—with Kandi (April Bowlby).

The eighth season ends with the sudden death of Charlie Harper, who is replaced in the following season by Walden Schmidt, a heart-broken Internet billionaire who after a failed attempt at suicide in the ocean, shows up on the deck of the Malibu beach house, where he meets Alan. Walden, who has broken up with his wife, buys Charlie’s old house and asks Alan to stay with him for a while, which becomes permanent. While Walden’s rather naïve character and fairly sensitive temperament separate him from his former counterpart Charlie, Walden’s wealth, his handsomeness and his having become a lonely bachelor at the Malibu beach house make his situation very similar to that of Charlie. Thus, the contrast between him and Alan—particularly in terms of their physical features, intimate relationships, and professional situations—charges much of the humour in the show.

MAINSTREAM GENDER HUMOUR AS PATRIARCHAL PANOPTICISM: RIDICULE AND THE RELATIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED SUBJECTIVITIES

Drawing on Michel Foucault's *panopticon* concept, David Buchbinder connects the patriarchal order with Foucault's understanding of discourse as a policing and regulating entity that leads to the production of self-disciplining subjects (79-82). "Because, within the patriarchal order, an individual man must take his place (indeed, must carve out a place for himself)," says Buchbinder, "it follows that his attempt to do so is both monitored and evaluated by other men, which in turn affords them considerable power over him" (79). This puts the male subject in a position where his masculine identity is largely conditioned by the confirmation of other males with whom the patriarchal order has put him in a constant, often unconscious, competition for the phallic power (71). Hence, males, in their performances of masculinity, become constant objects of other males' observation, while simultaneously watching and judging others' renditions of masculinity. This is because masculinity is above all a homosocial enactment constantly negotiated in homosocial circles and in need of other peers' approval (Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia" 33-34; see also Kimmel, *Guyland* 47-48). When a man's inappropriate performance of masculinity is *found out*, it can result in "some form of disciplinary action [on the part of other men], ranging from comparatively harmless censure, teasing or ridiculing, through to more serious forms of response, such as ostracism, physical punishment, even the infliction of death" (Buchbinder 81). The panoptic surveillance inspired by the patriarchal order acts towards creating self-policing women, too (81). Such self-regulation is so powerful that "even in private, men [and women] tend to behave according to the norms of masculinity [and femininity] as if they were under actual and continuous observation" (81).

As contended in the past chapter, (the prospect of) ridicule, as manifested in mainstream gender humour, may serve as a tool for patriarchal panopticism. Such humour may be construed as a societal watchman that regulates and restrains the gender behaviour of his imaginary or real targets and/or audience. This, as suggested by Jane and Olson's study (see p. 36 above), may in turn create self-policing social subjects. This chapter aims to demonstrate this proposition. Taking the case of the contemporary Anglo-American folk and pop culture humour, I will a) show how gender hegemony, in terms of the inter- and intra-relations of masculinities and femininities—as illustrated through Connell's aforementioned model—is reflected in Anglo-American mainstream gender humour; b) demonstrate how through its *abjecting* power, the ridicule in gender humour plays a role in discursively constructing the above gender hegemony; and c) suggest how this ridicule may in turn serve to police the above hegemony by symbolically punishing fictive gender non-conformances while also threatening to punish non-subservient social subjects in real.

In doing so, I also show how the claimed connection between gender humour and gender hegemony can also be observed through a corresponding relationship between the major elements within Connell's model and some main humour categories in Anglo-American societies. As an important preliminary step towards such a task, it is crucial to explain briefly how even the fundamental assumptions underlying the contemporary Anglo-American gender order—i.e., sexual dimorphism and sexuality (as opposed to asexuality)—are themselves dealt with and monitored through some mainstream gender humour.

Humour and the Fundamental Assumptions of Gender Hierarchy

A Woman with Two Testicles: Gender Humour and the Two-Sex System

Anne Fausto-Sterling opens her well-known essay “Why Male and Female Are Not Enough” with reference to Levi Suydam, a nineteenth-century hermaphrodite whose genital ambiguity suspended a Connecticut local election at a time when women had no right to vote. In part of the essay, Fausto-Sterling famously complains that “Western culture is deeply committed to the idea that there are only two sexes” (20). This two-and-only-two sex system is so much patrolled by the states and the legal systems (20) that genital ambiguities are normally treated through medical sex reassignments (see Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes Revisited”). Especially due to its heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity strongly subscribes to this two-party sexual system in which the “opposite sexes” presumably give rise to correspondingly distinct masculine and feminine behaviours.

Intriguingly enough, certain contemporary Anglo-American gender humour does aim to preserve the above entrenched binary by deeming as risible any unintelligible or blurred gender identities that might threaten the clarity of the dichotomy. No specific joke cycles, so to speak (e.g., intersex jokes, etc.), exist for this purpose. However, examining the Anglo-American mainstream gender humour reveals that the topic is a potential site for humour-inducing incongruities.⁶⁵ A case in point is the South African world champion runner Caster Semenya, whose victory at the 2009 women’s World Championships was suspended and made conditional to the result of a subsequent gender testing (Hall 2). The following joke was apparently fuelled by the incident: “Hollywood producers are in discussions to make a film about the life of South African runner Caster Semenya. Will Smith has agreed to play the lead role” (Thripshaw 758). The joke’s humour purportedly lies in the audience’s noticing the alleged similarity between the two named figures, i.e., an expected female and a known male, while assuming the incongruity

⁶⁵ For an account of what type of incongruities may induce humour, see Weaver’s discussion of “Humour and the Habitus” (24-26).

of a person having so obscure sex features that her or his sex category could not be easily decided. The same mechanism partly fuels the following self-referential anecdote, in which the U.S. stand-up comedian Tig Notaro—by deeming herself as inadequately chested for a woman—self-deprecatingly taps into the man/woman sexual difference, in order to induce comic amusement.⁶⁶

I was walking through my neighbourhood, down the sidewalk, I was passing this guy Right when we were passing each other, he said to me ... *Right* when we were passing each other, he said, “Aaaaaaa ... them’a little titties [Long laughter by audience] ... I thought she was a man! [Audience’s laughter]” [. . .].⁶⁷

Likewise, a category in the various types of the famous maternal insults known as *yo mama jokes*, i.e., the “Yo mama is so hairy ...” cycle of one-liners, apart from its apparently main function, i.e., humorous offensiveness, hinges upon and in turn serves to sustain the above mentioned two-sex dichotomy.⁶⁸ Some one-liners in this specific category open with “Yo mama is so hirsute ...,” which is reminiscent of the aforementioned medical discourse and its role in

⁶⁶ I thank Kara Stone for introducing me to Notaro’s work.

⁶⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiWZJrQ7w4M>

⁶⁸ For some instances, see <http://www.funnyandjokes.com/yo-mama-so-hairy.html> <http://www.yomamajokesgalore.com/hairy.html> “Contemporary North American mass media,” as Sydney Matrix notes, “have normalized the model of the depilated female body and in the process constructed women’s body hair and hairy women’s bodies as abject, taboo, unsightly, and unhygienic” (294). As Louise Tondeur observes, “[b]ody hair modification has fluctuated over time and is certainly not universal across cultures” (81). For instance, although the American practices of marketing safety razors to women have influenced European women, “the influence has been slow and uneven” (81). Also, as I will discuss in the next chapter while explaining some recent instances of Iranian jokes revolving around women’s facial hair, this was not a gender marker per se in Qajar Iran when “facial and other bodily marks of human beauty were shared by young men and women” (Najmabadi 260).

constructing the abnormal. In *Online Oxford Dictionary*, the word “hirsutism” is labelled with the word “Medicine,” and defined as “abnormal growth of hair on a woman’s face and body.”

The theme of gender confusion is also often deployed to lubricate the comedic in pop culture humour. This could range from the laughter at such a familiar phrase as a “woman (trapped) in a man’s body” (*Two and a Half Men* 2005, Sea. 3/Ep. 14, 3:00; *Two and a Half Men* 2006, Sea. 4/Ep. 15, 12:20) to laughing at particularly created characters.⁶⁹ In the comedy film *40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005), for instance, the eponymous main character Andy’s co-workers intend to set him up with a prostitute. To Andy’s amusing consternation, she turns out to be a “tranny,” thus repelling Andy who then confronts his friends in the following scene. Towards the end of their argument, the exchange below occurs between Andy and one of his friends, Jay (Romany Malco):

Jay: So, you say she was definitely a man.

Andy: Yesss!

Jay: Okay, how did *you* know she was a man?

Andy: [Vexed] Because her hands were as big as André the Giant’s. And she had an Adam’s apple as big as her balls.

Jay: So you have no proof.

(*The Forty-Year-Old Virgin*, 1:04:25-38)

Main or significant characters with gender-confusing characteristics are also sometimes created merely to (help) cause humour. An instance occurs in the comedy film *50 First Dates* (2004), in which a character named Alexa (played by Lusia Strus) is intended as an ambiguously gendered person only to induce facetiousness. What is supposed to maximize the humour is the

⁶⁹ In all subsequent references to *Men*, for further ease and accuracy in citation, I overlook the title and the year of production, and instead mention the number of the season and the episode to which I refer.

ironical fact that the unmarried Alexa—who is repeatedly mistaken for a man by strangers—is the assistant of the protagonist veterinarian Henry (Peter Segel), who is a womanizer. Yet, Alexa never becomes an object of Henry's desire or cathexis (see Connell, *GP* 111-16). A final example of the simultaneous presumption and construction of the two-sex system in humour occurs in Sea.9/Ep.22 of *Men*. For the first time after Charlie's death, his ghost appears as an apparently hermaphroditic woman (played by Kathy Bates, who won the Primetime Emmy Award for the role) in one of Charlie's infamous bowling shirts. The ghost reveals to the shocked Alan that (s)he has been condemned to living forever in Hell as a woman with a pair of testicles: "This body has a pair—they are under my hooaha!" Given the controversies around the dismissed former lead of the show, part of the humour in this scene is seemingly intended to rise from emasculating Charlie Harper/Sheen by having the audience imagine him as a ludicrous *freak*, a weird creature with a pair of absurd testicles beneath a vagina.

The above humour instances, while reflecting Fausto-Sterling's observation about the two-and-only-two sex system in the current Western culture, also show how ridicule is ready to punish possible threats to this supposedly clear-cut sexual boundary.⁷⁰ Other more familiar joke cycles, although not directly attending to the theme in this section, significantly serve to strengthen the binary sexual system discussed above. One is the highly popular joke cycle which Shifman and Lemish deem as Mars and Venus humour and discuss in detail in their essay "Mars and Venus' in Virtual Space" (261-265). Such humour presumes a clear-cut sexual dichotomy, i.e., a dimorphic sexual difference between males and females from which seems to result a definite and distinct character dichotomy between men and women (see Connell, *GIWP* 50-53,

⁷⁰ For an intriguing account of how this system (re)acts when it comes to persons with hardly intelligible gender displays, see Betsy Lucal's thought-provoking personal account in "What It Means to Be Gendered Me: Life on the Boundaries of a Dichotomous Gender System."

60-61). Another important instance of gender humour that can serve to police the corresponding male/female and man/woman dichotomies is, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the jokes that deride certain behaviours of gays and lesbians as, respectively, effeminate and manly (see Nardi and Stoller).

Along with the above rigid binary system, there is another fundamental assumption regarding the current Western (and almost all other non-Western) gender order(s) in general, which has rarely been discussed in its relation to (gender) humour. Like most other systems, the Western gender order, as obvious as it may sound, is a *sexual* system, assuming that every single individual is necessarily sexually attracted to other human beings of the same or a different sex. This assumption is facing vigorous criticism from a growing number of studies on asexuality, not “as dysfunctional or repressed sexuality” (Cerankowski and Milks 651) but as a separate sexual orientation or identity dimension. Given the significance of the issue, and since the relation between humour and asexuality is highly understudied, I discuss the topic in the next section.

“An Ice Cube with a Hole in It”: Asexuality⁷¹ and Gender Humour

Asexuality, according to Anthony Bogaert, “can be defined as the *absence* of a traditional sexual orientation, in which an individual would exhibit little or no sexual attraction to males or females” (“Asexuality” 279). In this sense, asexuality is capable of restructuring our common understandings of gender and sexuality, and of the power relations within the gender structures in our societies.

Whereas the heterosexual matrix, as conceptualized by Judith Butler, can be said to naturalize heterosexuality and hence lead to the imposition of what Adrienne Rich deems as compulsory heterosexuality, “the *sexual imperative* which assigns sex and sexuality a space of

⁷¹ I thank Elaheh Dehnavi for introducing me to the topic of asexuality.

prominence in our culture” (Pryzbylo, “Asexuality” 6) would equally naturalize sexuality itself, either as a desire for coitus or as the capacity or will to procreate. This in turn would culminate in what we might comparably deem as *compulsory sexuality*, i.e., that everyone is naturally and unquestionably sexual, based on which we could conceptualize the notion of the *naturalization of sexuality*, too. This latter concept could be defined as the assumption, typically made without thinking, that everyone is sexual⁷² unless labelled otherwise—that sexuality is the norm and asexuality is a special case.⁷³ The following joke helps clarify how asexual persons, as Kristin Scherrer remarks, “are in a unique position to inform the social construction of sexuality” (621):

A woman goes to her doctor, complaining that her husband is 300 percent impotent. The doctor says, “I’m not sure I understand what you mean.” She says, “Well, not only can he not get it up, but he’s also burnt his finger and his tongue.” (Hobbes, *Jokes Men Won’t Laugh At* 49)

The joke might or might not be funny to (some) asexuals.⁷⁴ However, and more important, when viewed through an asexual lens, the joke’s presumption of *sexual imperative* is revealed. If asexuality were an equally recognized option, the joke might have been structured differently, if not ceased to exist, in the first place. So is the case with the Q&A joke “How do you spot a blind man on a nudist beach? It’s not hard” (Dowd and McCracken 69), in which being sexual has been presumed for all the imaginary characters.

⁷² I use the word for lack of a word meaning “not asexual,” without necessarily connoting over/hypersexuality. As Mark Carrigan remarks, “there is not really a good word to refer to people who aren’t asexual” (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-16552173>).

⁷³ I model my definition of the naturalization of sexuality on a definition of the naturalization of heterosexuality (see Parker, Dale 180).

⁷⁴ Anthony Bogaert, in Chapter Twelve of his book *Understanding Asexuality*, argues that asexual persons may find sexual jokes funny.

Furthermore, findings about asexuality “have implications not only for asexual identities, but also for the connections of asexuality with other marginalized sexualities” (Scherrer 622). Given this, in discussions of gender hierarchy, we can benefit from the inclusion of asexuality as another non-hegemonic gendered position. Compared to homosexuals, asexual people seem to entail less threat to the hegemonic masculinity. Thus, it might appear plausible to conclude that asexuals may not attract as much abuse and violence as homosexuals do.⁷⁵ However, the words *acephobia* and *asexophobia* (i.e., fear of asexuals), although mostly recognized within asexual communities, do hint at the existence of certain prejudice, if not violence, towards asexuals. They may be ridiculed for being asexual, or even mistaken as homosexuals and castigated accordingly.⁷⁶ Also, due to their mostly unknown and hence enigmatic sexual identity, asexual people might be charged with monstrosity.

The invisibility of asexuals at first sight seems to have been reflected in popular culture, too. For instance, the extant ten seasons of *Men* do not hint at the topic, while also almost all joke collections rarely if ever contain any category on asexuality. However, while the popular culture tends to naturalize sexuality mostly by ignoring asexuality as an option, it is noteworthy that the theme of “frigidity/asexuality,” which Giseline Kuipers includes in her categorization of

⁷⁵ According to an asexual person, “[our case is] more about marginalisation [rather than blatant oppression] because people genuinely don’t understand asexuality” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-16552173>

⁷⁶ As one of Rle Eng’s asexual interviewees recalls, “I am guilty of trying to fit in with others I thought could understand me, mainly gay men and a few lesbians. I was mistaken for being gay, and once they realized that I was really a[n] asexual woman *they ridiculed me* and suggested I get psychological help. Imagine being told by a gay person that you need psychological help for not wanting sexual contact, the very group that had to hear that same po-po [sic] years ago suggesting that to you” (n.p., my emphasis). Ridicule and fear of it also feature in other interviews in Eng. For instance, although Lisa (“a 20-year-old college student at the University of Texas in Austin”) manages to turn ridicule into a motivation for further success, Edith (“a 53-year-old librarian that lives in fear of further ridicule from family and co-workers”) says that she “lack[s] the courage to endure ridicule from [her] profession” (Eng, n.p.).

gender- and sexuality-related jokes (*Good Humor, Bad Taste* 122), does appear as a butt in various jokes. Frigidity jokes basically target and stigmatize people's (mostly temporary) uninterest in sex. This cannot be irrelevant to the social pressure towards sex "in a world that presumes sexual desire and that attaches great power to sexuality" (Cerankowski and Milks 661).

As a case in point, in a humorous list titled "What Women's Personal Ads Really Mean," of which various versions can be found, "romantic" is defined as "frigid" (Thripshaw 37-38). Such a claim to laughter obviously presumes a binary opposition between such disadvantaged social constructs as the *frigid*, *icy*, *sexless*, and *asexual* on the one hand and other (normally) privileged constructions like the *hot*, *aroused*, *sexy*, *sensual*, *lustful*, etc. on the other. Following a similar mechanism, the jokes below also target sexual unresponsiveness:

Two men were sitting at a bar and staring into their drinks. One guy got a curious look on his face and asked his friend, "Have you ever seen an ice cube with a hole in it before?" The friend said, "Yep. I've been married to one for 15 years."⁷⁷

A husband walks into the bedroom holding two aspirin and a glass of water. His wife asks, "What's that for?"

"It's for your headache."

"I don't have a headache."

He replies, "Gotcha!"⁷⁸

The cultural significance of such jokes in the West becomes evident when a recently released advertisement for a well-known acetaminophen brand strongly implies a mockery of *frigidity* to increase sales. The ad, released on the 2013 Valentine Day, depicts two Tylenol

⁷⁷ <http://www.ebaumsworld.com/jokes/read/145081/>

⁷⁸ <http://headaches.about.com/od/livingwithheadaches/a/headachehumor.htm>

tablets forming a heart-shaped figure on a dark red velvety background, obviously symbolizing love and passion. The caption reads: “In case your valentine has a ‘real’ headache tonight.”⁷⁹ The facetious ad, similar to the aforementioned jokes, reveals the pressure regarding interest in sex (and being sexual) to which the Anglo-American culture subjects its individuals. Such a pressure could, to a different extent, also be studied in the dominant negative attitude towards prolonged celibacy and especially virginity. The aforementioned comedy film *The Forty-Year-Old Virgin* (2005) humorously portrays this prevalent attitude in the American society. However, the fact that in the end the eponymous character finally consummates in a happy marriage makes the film, as is the trend in typical popular cultural products, quite complicit with the hegemonic cultural paradigms (which in this case is the very *sexual imperative* portrayed throughout the film).

Hegemonic Masculinity and Its Others: Humour and the Relational Construction of Dominant Masculinity

Having discussed briefly the central assumptions of the gender hierarchy, i.e., its dimorphism and sexuality, and their treatment in mainstream gender humour, it is appropriate to examine the role such humour plays in the construction of hegemonic masculinity as the principal component in patriarchal gender orders. According to Michael Kimmel, “[t]he constituent elements of ‘hegemonic’ masculinity, the stuff of the construction, are sexism, racism, and homophobia” (“Invisible Masculinity” 30).⁸⁰ Although not intended as definitive, Kimmel’s list includes perhaps the three most important features in relation to which the current

⁷⁹ <http://www.buzzfeed.com/copyranter/tylenol-ad-mocked-women-yesterday>

⁸⁰ Also, elsewhere Kimmel notes, “American masculinity is a relentless test. The chief test is contained in the first rule. Whatever the variations by race, class, age, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, being a man means ‘not being like women.’ This notion of antifemininity lies at the heart of contemporary and historical conceptions of manhood, so that masculinity is defined more by what one is not rather than who one is” (*Gender of Desire* 31).

Western—including the Anglo-American—hegemonic masculinity is constructed (see Connell, *Masculinities* 76-81). This relational construction involves the repudiation of various gendered identity positions. Examining the contemporary Anglo-American gender humour reveals that it occupies an important function in this abjecting process.

Of the abjected elements, femininity and homosexuality are intrinsic to the sex/gender system, and are the most noted features in definitions of hegemonic masculinity (see e.g., Buchbinder 98, 101). Thus, I will be discussing them first, and in further detail. As revealed by Kimmel's aforementioned quote from Goffman (see pp. 46-47 above), the identity dimensions subject to abjection by the hegemonic masculinity are numerous. To discuss or even identify all elements is beyond the aims and the scope of this research. However, to gain a more complete picture of gender humour and its interplay with gender hierarchy, as understood from Connell's proposed model, I also discuss aspects of the intersection of gender with bodily normativity and ethnicity/race. Bodily normativity itself comprises a large spectrum of physical identity markers, from which I discuss disability and age as two important examples. Such discussions are hoped to provide a model for future researchers of gender humour who could then pursue the intersection with gender of such other social identity elements as class, religion, etc.

Of Traducing Women, Effeminate, and Gays: Sexist and Homophobic Humour

In Western culture, misogyny and homophobia have been shown to be interconnected within a process of constructing compulsory heterosexual masculinity through expelling femininity and homosexuality (Mac an Ghail 198; see also Connell, *Masculinities* 76-81). In fact, the relation between hegemonic masculinity and the repulsion of femininity and homosexuality is so strong that it is maintained that "*the masculine is constituted by the simultaneous abjection of the feminine and the male-homosexual*" (Buchbinder 101, original

emphasis).⁸¹ Given the importance of hegemonic masculinity in maintaining the gender hierarchy, discussing the role of sexist and homophobic humour vis-à-vis hegemonic masculinity is therefore of paramount significance.

Sexist and homophobic humour not only depicts gender and sexuality-related inequalities, but is also deployed in interpersonal and social interactions towards constructing heterosexual masculinities. Scholars have argued that sexist humour presumes and reflects sexist beliefs (e.g., see Merrie Bergman), and in doing so such humour also tends to support the patriarchal ideology of the society in which it is being circulated (Bemiller and Schneider; Shifman and Lemish, “Between Feminism and Fun(ny)mism” 872-873; Shifman and Lemish, “‘Mars and Venus’ in Virtual Space”). Also, much sexual humour has been shown to be sexist and have disciplinary effects regarding gender (Crawford, “Only Joking: Humor and Sexuality”; Mulkay 134-151). Sexist humour—which Shifman and Lemish divide into the two categories of “general” sexist humour (that which belittles women as a collectivity) and “specified” sexist humour (such as the “dumb blonde” and the “mother-in-law” jokes) (see “Blondejokes.com: The New Generation”)—almost always presumes a hegemonic masculinist viewpoint on the part of its teller or enjoyer, while representing and promoting male privilege and dominance.⁸²

Positing the incongruity theory of humour, Merrie Bergman defines sexist humour as “humor in which sexist beliefs, attitudes, and/or norms either must be held in order to perceive an incongruity or are used to add to the fun effect of the incongruity” (70). If we assume this as a

⁸¹ For a detailed account of masculinity as “the flight from the feminine” and “as homophobia” see Kimmel, “Masculinity as Homophobia.”

⁸² The tellers or enjoyers of sexist humour could of course include women, too. (See footnote 33 above.) This is because women may also internalize or subscribe to hegemonic masculine ideals, and thus become complicit with hegemonic masculinity. This contention is compatible with the fact that “gender awareness and sensitivity rather than biological sex differentiates [men’s and women’s] responses [to sexist humour]” (Aysan and Ungar 89; see also Moore, Griffiths, and Payne).

working definition of sexist humour, the following examples, mentioned in a recent *Daily Telegraph* essay (2011) titled “‘Sexist Jokes Make Women Worse Drivers’,” help clarify the point:

- My wife drives the car like lightning.
- You mean she goes very fast?
- No, she hits trees.

My wife says she is a careful driver—she always slows down when going through a red light.

We bumped into some old friends yesterday... my wife was driving.⁸³

In these jokes, the gender-essentialist implication that women qua women are inept drivers is, according to Bergmann’s definition, essential to perceiving the incongruity and hence the intended humour. However, since one could perceive each joke without necessarily enjoying or appreciating it, we might modify Bergman’s definition by adding “and enjoy or appreciate” after the word “perceive.” (The definition could also be adapted for other types of gender humour, such as homophobic humour or humour dealing with bodily non-normativity.) Ironically, the author of the *Telegraph* essay amusingly quotes these and other related jokes shortly after reporting about a 2011 study conducted in some U.S. universities regarding the demonstrated negative effects of such jokes on some female drivers’ performance.

Much if not most sexist humour revolves around sex. In his analysis of men’s sexual humour, Michael Mulkay mentions four principles for such humour as deduced by Marshal

⁸³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/motoring/news/8938379/Sexist-jokes-make-women-worse-drivers.html>

Legman. They are: a) “the primacy of coitus,” b) “the general availability of women,” c) “woman as object,” and d) “the subordination of woman’s discourse” (Mulkay 134-137). The umbrella joke by Freud, and the President Coolidge joke cited by Rappoport, which were discussed in Chapter One (see pp. 61-62 above), share almost all of the above principles. In patriarchal societies, because of the “male privilege” and “entitlement” men in such societies are born into (Johnson, *Gender Knot* 5), sexism becomes many if not most men’s second nature. An interesting example of this entrenched mindset is inferred from an anecdote mentioned by the authors of the essay “Disabilities and Women” in the *Encyclopaedia of Women and Gender*:

At a conference on Women with Disabilities, a woman with spina bifida described a preadolescent encounter with her gynecologist this way: “Will I be able to have satisfying sexual relations with a man?” “Don’t worry, honey, your vagina will be tight enough to satisfy any man.” Her own satisfaction probably didn’t cross the gynecologist’s mind. (Asch et. al. 350)

The gynecologist’s witty remark, like Freud’s and Rappoport’s examples mentioned in Chapter One, assumes a male (hetero)sexual audience. Elements from these examples also resonate in a joke told by Berta, in the early moments of Sea.10/E.14 of *Men*. Alan is joining Walden for breakfast in the kitchen, where Berta is as usual tidying up. Through a short exchange, both Alan and Walden reveal annoyances over their recent relationship problems, upon which Berta intervenes, addressing Alan (and apparently Walden, too):

Berta: You know who knew relationships? [Turning to Alan.] Your brother [Charlie].

Alan: Oh, please! His lasted an hour at a time—an hour and a half if he was drunk. [Laugh track]

Berta: Exactly. He treated women like rental cars. You pay for'em when you need'em, and it's someone else's job to empty out the trunk and hose'em down.

[Laugh track]

Walden: Well, I'm not paying for sex. And he [pointing to Alan] can't afford to.

[Laugh track]

Alan: I don't need a hooker—I have Lyndsey! [Alan's girlfriend] [Laugh track]

(2:44-3:11)

Berta's joke embraces Legman's criteria all at once. Also, although uttered by a woman, the joke's sexist belief does presume and endorse a hegemonic masculinist attitude on her (and the enjoying audience's) part (see footnotes 33 and 82 above).⁸⁴ Walden's retort is significant, too. While initially he differentiates his hegemonic masculine performance or lifestyle from that of his past counterpart, Charlie Harper ("Well, I'm not paying for sex"), Walden is quick to remind Alan that unlike himself, Alan's gender performance is limited due to his class position ("And he can't afford to").⁸⁵ Thus, Alan, in what appears to be an attempt to reclaim part of his lost

⁸⁴ Despite this example, sexist humour has been shown to be enjoyed often in male homosocial circles (see Lyman). An instance of this, in *Men*, occurs amidst a conversation between Herb (Judith's second husband) and Charlie, after Herb has been kicked out of house: Herb: "No, she kicked my ass out. But the thing is, talking to you and seeing how you live, I'm convinced I'm better off single." Charlie: "Is that so?" Herb: "Oh, yeah, I mean, uh, why chew on one chicken wing when you can eat from the whole bucket?" [Laugh track] Charlie: "Uh, just so there's no confusion, chicken wings are ..." Herb: "Women, Charlie. I was opting for a metaphor." [Laugh track] Charlie: "And you went with wings rather than breasts and thighs." [Laugh track] Herb: "That *is* better!" [Laugh track.] Legman's four criteria could also be identified in Herb's and Charlie's jokes.

⁸⁵ As Michael Kimmel reminds us, "[m]asculinity is," among other things, "measured by the size of your paycheck, and marked by wealth, power, and status" ("A Black Woman Took My Job" 103). Just as Alan's deceased brother Charlie's wealth provided the latter with a lavish masculine lifestyle, Walden's wealth, as a sign of his further valued masculinity than that of Alan, is a motif in the new series of *Men*. One interesting instance occurs towards the end of the very episode above, amidst a conversation among Walden, Alan, and Billy (Walden's best old friend, and current business partner in Walden's \$1-billion-dollar company). Billy (played by Patton Oswalt) is a

masculinity in the presence of Walden, resorts to another sexist joke (at his girlfriend's cost, yet by extension at the expense of all female partners in heterosexual relations): "I don't need a hooker—I have Lyndsey!"⁸⁶ Alan's use of gender humour is particularly reminiscent of our initial discussion in this section about how sexism and masculinity construction are interconnected.⁸⁷

Conversational and interactional sexist humour (as well as homophobic and racist humour) has been shown to be deployed as a way of constructing or maintaining hegemonic masculinities

very short, somewhat fat person, with typically unattractive facial and bodily features. He has been recently dumped by his girlfriend, Bridget (Walden's ex-wife) as she thought Billy was "inconsiderate, condescending, and that [he] looked like a lesbian art teacher" (4:40). The conversation occurs when all three men share concerns about relationships with women: Alan: "Well, the good news is neither one of you guys are gonna be single for long. [Pointing to Walden] You got looks and money." Walden: "Thank you." Alan: [Pointing to Billy] You got [long pause] money!" [Laugh track.] Billy: "That's true." Walden: [Pointing to Alan] "What about you? You got ... [laugh track] ..." [Laugh track] Billy: "Yeah, yeah, look ... I mean ... you've got er ... you've got" Alan: "To go apologize to my girlfriend." (Simultaneously) Billy: "Yep." Walden: "Exactly." (As of Sea. 9/Ep. 13, Alan apparently enjoys a director's honorarium of \$50,000 a year from Walden's company. However, this is seldom brought up later, as the producers seem to not want to make significant changes in the previous order between the two main characters.)

⁸⁶ For how sexism in sexist jokes with specific targets may be extended to women in general, see Bergman.

⁸⁷ In linking the contemporary examples of sexist humour to older instances of such humour (such as that previously quoted from Freud and Rappaport) I intend to suggest how patriarchal social structures in different historical eras seem to legitimate similar patterns of sexism in humour. Interestingly, in Thos. W. Jackson's joke collection published in Chicago in 1903, and titled as *On a Slow Train Through Arkansaw* (sic) (the book, according to its modern editor W. K. McNeil, became "the best-selling jokebook in American history" [Salzman 278]. In fact, "[b]y 1950, *On a Slow Train Through Arkansaw* had sold seven million copies" [Lovell]) we find the following joke which, while revealing specific signs of its historicity, strikingly bears resemblance to contemporary examples of sexist humour as discussed above: "Me and your brother and another fellow were choosing the other day what kind of wife we would like to have in case we got married. Your brother said when he got married he wanted a wife that was like a Bible. - Why did he want a wife like a Bible? - Because she would be seldom looked at. The other fellow said he wanted a wife that was like a piano. - Why did he want a wife like a piano? - Because she would be upright and grand. I said when I got married I wanted a wife that was like an almanac. - Why did you want a wife like an almanac? - Because I could get a new one every year" (Jackson 35). For a helpful introduction to Jackson's book, see Lovell's online encyclopaedia entry. (I thank Marco Katz Montiel for informing me of Jackson's book.)

through abjecting women and gays (Crawford, “Gender and Humor in Social Context” 1423). Peter Lyman, in his essay “The Fraternal Bond as a Joking Relationship: A Case Study of the Role of Sexist Jokes in Male Group Bonding,” argues that “[t]he humor of male bonding relationships generally is sexual and aggressive, and frequently consists of sexist or racist jokes” (170). Likewise, in their essay “‘Lads and Laughter’: Humour and the Production of Heterosexual Hierarchies,” Kehily and Nayak demonstrate how humour is deployed to construct masculinity through repudiating femininity and homosexuality. While noticing “interconnections between homophobia and misogyny” in schoolboys’ use of humour, the writers observe that sexist interchanges and homophobic humour, used as policing and punitive discursive acts, are constitutive of masculine identities: “[Y]oung women were targets for male humorous insults while young men who did not conform to dominant heterosexual codes of masculinity were also subject to its adverse consequences” (70).

If *real* masculinity equals displaying unfeminine and non-gay gendered acts, then it is expected that male behaviours which border on effeminacy, womanliness, or gayness be marked as ridiculous. For hegemonic masculinity, gayness and femininity are so much interconnected that perhaps the ultimate embarrassment for a male body is considered as to *be penetrated*—like a woman. Not surprisingly, in discussions of homophobic humour, it has been shown that “[t]he underlying social tensions are about male penetration” (McCann, Plummer, and Minichiello 515; see also Davies “Sex between Men”).

To illustrate the mechanism of the contemporary Anglo-American gender humour dealing with effeminacy, womanliness, and gayness, and to show the significance of such humour in its relation to the current Anglo-American gender order, I read a set of recent effeminacy jokes about the Canadian singer, Justin Bieber, as cited on some Internet humour websites, as well as

examine aspects of the character of Alan Harper as depicted in *Men*. Alan is a paramount element in *Men*'s humour, since in terms of gender and embodiment, he maintains a hierarchical relationship with Charlie—and later with Walden, who is at one point covetously described by Alan as someone with “chiselled good looks, beautiful stamina, and freakishly large penis” (Sea. 9/E. 4). Additionally, the contemporary cultural icon Justin Bieber's distinctive appearance and gender display have triggered important responses among many people, which is quite telling about the existing structures of gender relations that validate such a response. Importantly, both cases also show how sexism, misogyny and homophobia meet to police non-hegemonic masculine performances, and thus aid in sustaining the hegemonic masculinity.

In its current use, effeminacy, as Holly Crumpton remarks, is ascribed to any person or thing that is expected to be masculine, but is instead feminine (247). This attribution, which is often misogynistic, first and foremost presumes and seeks to preserve the previously discussed binary sex/gender system, i.e., the man/woman dichotomy. As Crumpton puts it “the label of effeminacy has had less to do with censuring any one particular sexual act than with ensuring the continuation of power structures based on the maintenance of clearly demarcated male and female social roles” (247). Such a policing strategy, due to its strong socio-cultural support, is powerful and often succeeds in making its targets follow the hegemonic course. For instance, Crumpton mentions the case of the Backstreet Boys, who, in response to charges of effeminacy, “attempted to bolster the image of their masculinity by producing a video that showed them deliberately ignoring sexy women as they pursued a futuristic military campaign” (248). During the past few years, a similar case has occurred concerning Justin Bieber. Observing the “overt sexism and homophobia” in the extant disparaging remarks about Bieber, the author of an online essay remarks:

A quick perusal of the internet affirms that some of Twitter's hottest trending topics on Justin Bieber are devoted entirely to questioning—and trashing—his masculinity and sexual orientation. Justin Bieber looks like a GIRL. Justin Bieber sounds like a GIRL. Justin Bieber is probably GAY and a GIRL. (Hall, par. 4)⁸⁸

Such labels, another author clarifies, are caused by Bieber's "flexible masculinity" which includes "his love for the color purple, scarves, and fashionable clothing; his combination of very youthful appearance with swagger; his willingness to experiment with different dance moves; and his high-pitched voice (although it is changing)."⁸⁹ The systematic nature of this labelling can reveal much about the current gender order, not only in North America but also elsewhere.⁹⁰ Among other things, the idiosyncratic masculine performance of Bieber, who enjoys extraordinarily high popularity and visibility on the mass media, might have been taken as *troubling* the more defined and stable versions of masculinity.⁹¹ In fact, as Crumpton puts it, "[b]y drawing attention to the way gender is performed, effeminacy reveals the unavoidable

⁸⁸ <http://www.depauliaonline.com/opinions/is-bieber-bashing-about-masculinity-or-music-1.2155249#.UV0N2Dd4-jt> On a previous version of this chapter, and in reference to the above quote, my colleague Marco Katz Montiel mentions, "Many singers embrace this ambiguous androgyny. Mick Jagger has plugged into it for almost half a century." While not contradicting my focus on the social functions of the Bieber-related gender humour, Katz's observation does evoke a sociologically valuable question: Despite certain similarities in Jagger's and Bieber's gender displays, what socio-cultural factors could have worked towards inducing the systematic derision of such displays in one and not in the other singer by their societies?

⁸⁹ <http://www.articlerich.com/Article/Justin-Bieber--Masculinity-and-Sexuality/770834>

⁹⁰ Besides the traditional narrative format jokes about Bieber, other forms of humour including cartoon and video jokes have also been circulating via social network websites such as Twitter and Facebook. There are, for instance, many *anti-Justin Bieber* and *Justin Bieber Gay* pages on Facebook, either with the same or slightly different names, in English and other languages.

⁹¹ For a biblical critique of Bieber's masculine performance, see:
<http://inkslingerblog.wordpress.com/2012/01/04/justin-bieber-and-the-redefinition-of-manhood/>

The essay is reminiscent of the Christian organization Promise Keepers and its adherents' treatment of what they believe to be a current "crisis in [the Western] masculinity" (see Buchbinder 12-16).

instability at the heart of all performances of masculinity” (247). In light of this, the jokes targeting Bieber’s masculine identity can, as discerned from the following examples, indicate the disconcerted voice of a hegemonic masculinity whose unstable performativity has been disclosed:

Hey dude Justin Bieber sounds like a dying cat with his high pitch faggot voice.⁹²
(sic)

I heard Justin Bieber has an 8 inch dick, But it’s in his ass and belongs to Usher.
(sic)

Q: What does Justin Bieber and a Christmas tree have in common?

A: Their balls are just for decoration. (sic)

Q: What is the biggest lie of 2011?

A: “Justin Bieber is the father of my Baby” - Mariah Yeater.⁹³

Better to watching (sic) gay porn and be thought of as gay than to listen to Justin Bieber and remove all doubt.⁹⁴

Q: How do you know your (sic) a homosexual?

A: When you make Justin Bieber look straight.

⁹² <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Justin%20Bieber&defid=6006609>

⁹³ <http://www.jokes4us.com/celebrityjokes/justinbieberjokes.html>

⁹⁴ <http://www.jokes4us.com/dirtyjokes/gayjokes.html>

Q: What will happen if you call Justin Bieber gay?

A: He will slap you with his man purse.⁹⁵

The jokes obviously punish the dominant masculinity's *others*, which leads to the maintenance of the ascendancy of hegemonic masculinity over femininity and subordinate masculinities. In such jokes, Bieber is constructed as an effeminate and a homosexual, whose marked and stigmatized masculine performance reveals much about the version of masculinity implicitly endorsed by the jokes' tellers and enjoyers.⁹⁶ Through a rhetorical mechanism embedded in most of the examples, an initially promised bestowal of certain culturally defined markers for *real* men is, in the punchline, denied to Bieber. Such signs, compatible with many of the elements cited from Hall above, include a certain age, a low-pitched voice, certain male organs, the ability to impregnate, aggressiveness, and a *straight look*. Numerous jocular "Justin Bieber" entries, many of which echo the above themes, also appear on the highly popular online *Urban Dictionary* of slang words and phrases. Many such entries identify Bieber as a child (i.e., a non-man or a lesser man), a girl, or a homosexual.⁹⁷

Whether or not such ridiculing humour, as in the case of Backstreet Boys, will affect Bieber's masculine behaviour, it is plausible to claim that, as shown by Janes and Olson's research on the indirect effects of ridicule (see p. 36 above), the pervasiveness of the Bieber-centered sexist-homophobic humour on the Internet can serve as a surveillance tool for many

⁹⁵ <http://www.jokes4us.com/celebrityjokes/justinbieberjokes.html>

⁹⁶ A survey of Bieber's YouTube videos, under many of which one may find a myriad of hostile/witty remarks, shows that most attackers or joke-tellers are identified as male. Yet, women with a patriarchal gender mindset could also enjoy effeminacy and homophobic humour, including that about Bieber.

⁹⁷ As of yet, there are four hundred and thirty-two "Justin Bieber" entries on *Urban Dictionary*. This single topic, I would argue, requires a separate online ethnographic research.

other boys who might come under pressure to police their own gender behaviour to avoid similar traducement by others, especially their peers.⁹⁸ The Bieber-ridiculing jokes, more than an individual, deal with wider patterns of gender and sexuality in Anglo-American society, which in the first place legitimize and make meaningful such humour. This is approved by the somewhat similar humour revolving around the character of Alan in *Men*.

As mentioned earlier, much of the humour in the show revolves around the discrepant characters of Alan and his brother Charlie whose social embodiment and lecherous life are often envied by Alan.⁹⁹ The contrast between Alan's effeminate behaviour and Charlie's virile masculinity is established right in the show's pilot, when the brothers' neighbour Rose (Melanie Lynskey; Charlie's previous one-night lover and current stalker) unexpectedly enters the house

⁹⁸ Through analyzing a sexist Best Buy Co. video commercial in which Justin Bieber stars in two roles (one as himself and the other as a moustached, bearded, and rough-voiced Bieber who tags his fresh-faced version as girly), Katherine Hall shows how "the musician himself capitalizes on perpetuating [the gender] stereotype" Bieber is exposed to in the above mentioned (humorous) attacks (<http://www.depauliaonline.com/opinions/is-bieber-bashing-about-masculinity-or-music-1.2155249#.UZPcrkoSr6m>). As revealed in a recent interview, despite Bieber's unorthodox gender displays, Bieber tends to endorse a traditional view of masculinity in his interpersonal relations. In response to a question about boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, Bieber remarks, "I think it's up to the guy to be romantic. I think it's the guy's responsibility to take her out. It can't be the other way around. That would take away my masculinity; I feel if that would happen [. . .]. I think that the most romantic things to do for someone are the things that you spend time on. Like having a picnic where you bring all the stuff they [girls] like. You make it something that she's going to remember so she can tell all of her friends. Stuff she can say, 'He did this for me!' That's great" (http://www.contactmusic.com/news/justin-bieber-being-romantic-is-masculine_3642310).

⁹⁹ This is wittingly represented in one episode of *Men*. In Sea.5/Ep.15, Charlie's womanizing habits end up being costly for him, when he receives a broken nose, aching testicles, and two black eyes from some of his lovers' partners. While both brothers are sitting at their local bar late in the evening, Alan starts to advise Charlie: "Don't you think you need to slow down a bit?" "Why would I wanna do that?" "Oh, come on! Is this lifestyle actually making you happy?" "Let me answer that question with another question. Who would you rather be, you or me?" "[With a facetious tone] You're kidding, right? You have two black eyes, and you're perched on a scrotum cozy... [Pause; Abrupt change of speech tone to serious] You [Laugh track.]." (7:23-7:46).

through the deck, and meets Alan for the first time. Rose introduces herself as Charlie's maid, after which we have:

Rose: [Abruptly] Well, yeah I can smell him [Laugh track]

Alan: Smell who?

Rose: Your brother ... he has a very *musky* scent. [Laugh track]

Alan: [With an open mouth] Aha [Laugh track] Well, I'll just ... let you get to work. [Alan turns and starts to go]

Rose: Well, wait [Alan stops and turns around. Rose approaches Alan, and starts sniffing] Ah, no, it's okay. [Laugh track]

The gender essentialism charging this humorous scene, i.e., that masculinity (and by extension, gender) emits from one's body, provokes almost all of the subsequent gender humour in the show. Such gender essentialism, based on a character dichotomy (Connell, *GIWP* 60-61), denies masculinity to women and full masculinity to some men. In Sea.1/Ep.11, Charlie decides to change Alan's attire so that he becomes more attractive to women. After showing up in their local bar the same day, Alan notices some difference in the female bartender's behaviour towards him. Shortly after, Alan's gender performance is beaten by a hunk who sits at the bar right beside him. Having noticed the bartender's abrupt change of behaviour, Alan complains to Charlie, "Did you see that?," to which Charlie responds, "What do you expect? You bought a sports jacket, not a magic lamp!" [Laugh track]. Charlie's witticism could be read as indicative of the limitations of gendered acts, when they are mapped on to bodies that lack certain normative features in the first place.

A key characteristic of Alan's that brings him the label of woman is his being (excessively) responsible towards his ex-wife, Judith. While divorced by her, Alan continues to pay Judith's

alimony, which makes Alan a constant object of laughter. His *womanly* role in his marital life, for instance, is frequently derided by Charlie. During one incident (Sea.5/Ep.5; 00:30), Charlie, upon seeing Alan “paying their [Alan’s and Judith’s] household bills,” complains: “You’re a good wife Alan [Laugh track]. I can’t believe some lucky guy hasn’t snapped you up [Laugh track]. Probably the penis [Laugh track].” (For more instances, see Sea. 1/Ep. 22; Sea. 2/Ep. 18; Sea. 4/Ep. 15; Sea. 5/Ep. 16; Sea. 6/Eps. 22 & 23; Sea. 7/Eps. 6 & 7.)

That effeminacy is strongly associated with gayness is best depicted by this Q&A joke: “Q: Why is it so hard for women to find kind, sweet, sensitive men in this world? A: Because they already have boyfriends!”¹⁰⁰ Assuming an obviously gender-essentialist ideology by dichotomizing men and women based on certain attributed characteristics—what Connell calls a *body as a machine* view towards gender (*GIWP* 53)—the joke implies that the enumerated qualities, i.e., *kindness*, *sweetness*, *sensitivity*—allegedly sought by *all* women—are not only inherently womanly traits but that they can naturally and only attract men and not women. Thus, the adjectives, the joke suggests, either befit women or womanly men. The men who think otherwise, it is implied, should be cautioned about a ridiculing laughter that may similarly condemn them as gay. Finally, the joke cunningly implies that aggression should be expected naturally from heterosexual men. In this sense, the joke also approves of Cheng’s remark that “[o]ne way to ‘prove’ hegemonic masculinity is to act aggressively or even violently toward what is regarded as ‘feminine,’ for example, women, homosexuals, and nerds” (298).

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.jokes2go.com/jokes/19107.html?25>. On this website, the above joke was found under the “Gays and Lesbians” category. The joke, with minor changes, also appears as mainly targeting men. The following version was found in a published collection of jokes, titled *Jokes Men Won’t Laugh At*: “Q: Why is it so hard to find a man who is sensitive, caring and emotionally mature? A: Because they all have boyfriends” (Hobbes 2). In my analysis above, I take into consideration both interpretations.

In *Men*, too, Alan's refined character, in contrast with Charlie's racy disposition, clearly motivates much humorous incongruity, due to which Alan ('s behaviour) is often associated with *gayness*—an attribute which supplies various types of humour in the show, from the trite “It's so/super gay” reactions by numerous characters, to Alan's being taken as gay by some strangers, and to his and Charlie's being taken as a homosexual couple in some public places. The show, however, takes the topic to its farthest extreme when in Sea.4/Ep.21, Alan and Charlie, upon encountering Greg—a gay friend Alan has made in a support group for single parents—become concerned about their sexual orientations. While the more homophobic Charlie visits his shrink to deal with his concern, Alan literally experiments with his sexual orientation. The story comes to its climax when Alan ventures into kissing Greg on his lips, only to face Greg's dismay. After assuring Alan that he cannot be gay, Greg (ironically) says: “Alan, it's okay to be straight!” [Laugh track]. This statement could be argued to receive much of its humorousness from its complete incongruity, if not absurdity, in a heterosexist society where gays, due to their peripheral sexual orientation, are expected to be the consoled ones—not the consolers.

Other than gayness and effeminacy, the borderline identity position deemed as *metrosexuality* upon its emergence in the 1990s is also mentioned in relation to Alan, and derided in the show. In Sea.8/Ep.12, in response to Charlie, who keeps teasing Alan by describing him as gay, Alan responds, “I'm not gay; I'm metrosexual” [Laugh track], upon which Charlie retorts, “That's just a gay man who can't get laid” [Laugh track]. Due to his grooming habits (from applying “product” to his face, hair and body, to visiting salons for various treatments and to removing unwanted hair from his well-maintained body), the metrosexual man, although self-proclaimed as heterosexual, “embodies for many in the culture, especially men, an uneasiness around issues of gender, and particularly of masculinity”

(Buchbinder 7). The metrosexual lifestyle, however, is becoming more and more standard so much so that many people do not label it any longer as effeminate or gay.¹⁰¹

Given this finding, it seems plausible that after Charlie Sheen's dismissal, the producers did not opt for an exact replacement of Charlie Harper's character, but obviously chose to modify their lead's masculine performance, too. Walden's masculinity, which cannot be separated from Ashton Kutcher's embodiment, and even to some extent from his lifestyle as a celebrity (as was the case with Charlie Harper played by Charlie Sheen), is more of a metrosexual than a rough and tough masculinity type. Not surprisingly, since Walden was introduced, the "effeminacy" jokes at Alan's cost (which made more sense when Jon Cryer co-starred with Charlie Sheen) have significantly diminished in favour of direct references to Alan's alleged *gayness* due to his *inferior embodiment*—particularly his purportedly much smaller penis—in contrast to that of Walden.¹⁰² In the following section, I expand the vital issue of inferior embodiment and its relation to gender, with specific attention to the intersection of gender with bodily non-normativity and race/ethnicity.

Marginalized Masculinities and Femininities: The Cases of the Bodily Non-Normative and Ethnic/Racial Gendered Identities

Other than its relational construction against femininity, effeminate heterosexuality, and male homosexuality, hegemonic masculinity entails the abjection of other identity elements relating to, for instance, ethnicity/race and bodily non-normativity. I perceive bodily non-

¹⁰¹ For a report on a recent study about the decline in associating metrosexuality with effeminacy and gayness, see: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2232921/Death-metrosexual-As-men-embrace-fashion-grooming-longer-considered-effeminate-look-turned-out.html#ixzz2PXqh8zve>

¹⁰² In Sea.9/Ep. 18, Walden's penis is referred to as a "python" by his business partner, Billy, who is now sleeping with Walden's ex-wife, Bridget. By contrast, in the previous episode, Alan's girlfriend, Lindsey, in the presence of Walden and Alan, had described the latter as "a grower, not a shower".

normativity as an overarching concept embracing all bodily violations of cultural norms regarding social embodiment. Such violations are caused by the limitations brought upon bodies due to various conditions including *agedness, fatness, ugliness, mental or physical impairment*, etc. Even racial and ethnic social subjects can be, and frequently are, marginalized due to their non-normative bodily features.

With this in mind, in this section, I render concise accounts of the intersection of gender with bodily non-normativity and ethnicity/race as represented in contemporary Anglo-American humour. Since much of such humour deals with both men and women, along with marginalized masculinities I also discuss marginalized or “pariah” femininities as they are constructed and maintained in relation with emphasized femininities. The key point, when studying the construction of pariah femininities in humorous narratives, is the hegemonic masculinist gaze or voice assumed in such humour, which provides further evidence to the importance of the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

Hierarchy of Bodies: Gender and Bodily Normativity in Humour

If gender is a set of practices or performances (Connell, *GIWP* 11; West and Zimmerman), and if one’s success or failure in doing or performing gender is exposed to evaluation within interpersonal and social interactions (Gerschick and Miller 126; West and Zimmerman 135-137), then the role of the body in displaying gendered acts, and in the degree one may succeed or fail in performing such acts, cannot be overemphasized. Hence, interconnected and in alignment with Connell’s gender hierarchy is also a *hierarchy of bodies* within Western and most other cultures. This latter hierarchy explains much of most social agents’ complicity, in a patriarchal order, with the hegemonic gender meanings. According to Thomas Gerschick, in his essay “Masculinity and Degrees of Bodily Normativity in Western

Culture,” in societies numerous norms are associated with different types and features of bodies, which are then valued—or devalued—based on the extent to which they approximate the culturally sanctioned ideals. Such evaluations are based, among other characteristics, on “race, ethnicity, class, age, physique, weight, height, ability, disability, appearance, and skin color” (371). There are many ways one could pass or fail this social appreciation test.

At a given time, each culture, based on its own criteria for normativeness, stigmatizes those bodies which it deems as deviant. “People,” for instance, “can be less normative by being too light, too dark, too fat or too skinny, too poor, too young or too old, too tall, too short, too awkward, or too uncoordinated” (Gerschick 371).¹⁰³ Thus comes into existence a hierarchy of various types of body, each of which can claim a different place on the gender performance ladder. Hence, each body is granted—or not—a certain value within the patriarchal economy. The body becomes “a type of social currency that signifies one’s worth” (372), meaning that one’s body can directly affect what s/he is capable of obtaining within her/his social interactions as symbolic transactions.

Given the interconnection of the concept of hierarchy of bodies with those of patriarchal economy and patriarchal dividend (see pp. 43-44 and 48-49 above), it is conceivable how within a patriarchal order, “[p]eople with less-normative bodies are engaged in an asymmetrical power relationship with their more-normative-bodied counterparts, who have the power to validate their bodies and their gender” (373). Thus, the former “are vulnerable to being denied social recognition and validation” (372). In fact, the body image disturbances resulting from perceived or real social depreciation due to bodily non-normativity may lead to problems from minor

¹⁰³ Of these attributes, *poorness* may not clearly evoke bodily features. However, I understand Gerschick as referring to features in one’s body or appearance that are associable with poorness, e.g., ragged clothes or obvious nutrient deficiency.

annoyances to severe obsessions needing psychotherapeutic treatments (e.g., see Rothschild 599). The U.S. stand-up comedian Chelsea Handler touches on this notion when she jokes, “Guys, if you’re writing poems, you’re making up for some other stuff, like a big, hairy back or one ball.”¹⁰⁴ As discussed in this section, by acting as a surveillance tool, much mainstream humour—including Handler’s witticism, as it reveals no critical attitude towards its subject—helps reproduce and sustain the hierarchy of bodies and therefore gender hierarchy.

Perhaps the most remarkable condition which can cause bodily non-normativity regarding gender norms is disability in general. Whether congenital or resulting from an illness or injury, disability, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, is “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life” (Bredenkamp, “Disability” 143). Examples are (certain types/degrees of) such acquired, developmental, and/or physical impairments as spinal cord injury, Alzheimer’s disease, Down’s syndrome, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and cystic fibrosis.

Such conditions, other than inducing trouble for the disabled persons in handling their daily lives, can significantly limit these people’s ability in performing gendered acts. Thus, as partners, parents, lovers, friends, team members, etc., some disabled persons can be—and often are—held accountable for failed gender displays in interpersonal and social interactions. For this reason, as Bredenkamp mentions, “[m]en with disabilities have often been represented as not really men/masculine” (“Disability” 143). The same holds true for women. A woman whose face is (partly) scorched, or who is limping, or whose cancerous breasts have been removed via mastectomy, will, within the current Western gender order (as well as many others around the world), undoubtedly lose some bodily currency or credit for performing gender as *beautifully* or

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.comedycentral.com/jokes/n55tv0/stand-up-chelsea-handler--chelsea-handler--guys-who-write-poems>

elegantly as many other women. Such a woman could also be associated with monstrosity, which—being the opposite point of the features desired in the emphasized femininity—may then cause her gender display to be discarded into the realm of the *pariah* (see pp. 50-51 above). The anecdote mentioned earlier about a disabled woman who was concerned about her ability to have sexual satisfaction serves as another example (see pp. 92 above).

The disabled body, due to its stark incongruity with non-disabled bodies—if not due to the highlighted mechanicality of some disabled bodies, as Henri Bergson might put it—has been prone to much ridiculing humour in most cultures. In much of such humour, the disabled are symbolically excluded from meaningful social interactions due to their impairment. For instance, in the punchline of the meta-disability one-liner “Two gimps walk into a bar... oh wait,”¹⁰⁵ the initial physical ability granted to the two pejoratively labelled characters is, in the punchline, cancelled out as ludicrously incongruous. Similarly, in the joke “One-armed waiters. They can take it, but they can’t dish it out” (Thripshaw 138), the ridicule is expected to arise from imagining the incongruous situation of a one-armed waiter whose job obviously entails using both hands. Other jokes dehumanize the disabled people by associating or identifying them with vegetables and animals, objectify disabled persons, or simply deem them as insignificant.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ <http://crippledcomedy.wordpress.com/2008/08/15/crippled-jokes-the-best-of/>

¹⁰⁶ Here are some examples entertaining the above themes: (Most of the jokes come from a website apparently run by a disabled person. Some of the jokes are taken from within the comments put on the website by its users, most of whom also seem to self-identify as disabled: <http://crippledcomedy.wordpress.com/2008/08/15/crippled-jokes-the-best-of/> “Why did the disabled man get washed in the kitchen sink? Because thats were (sic) you are meant to wash vegetables”; “Q: what’s the hardest part about eating vegetables? A: getting them out of the wheelchair” (sic); “two cripples crawl into the bar..the bartender says, ‘ NO PETS ALLOWED!’” (sic); “A log, a boulder, and a guy in a wheelchair are thrown off a cliff, who hits the ground first? Who cares?”; “where do you find a cripple without their wheel chair? where ever the hell you left them! Haha” (sic). Another animalized version of the last joke is as follows: “Where do you find a turtle with no arms and no legs? Wherever you put it, dumbass” (<http://www.jokes.com/funny-animal-jokes/aiozgh/help--i-lost-my-crippled-turtle->); “What’s the hardest thing about

Much of such humour, which depicts the disabled persons as—to borrow Tom Shakespeare’s words—“dustbin[s] for disavowal,” can undoubtedly affect our views of how such people may do gender, because successful performances of masculinity and femininity depend on barely unquestionable bodily normativity.

Still, certain humour directly holds liable the disabled people as failed gendered subjects. In Sea.1/Ep.12 of *Men*, for instance, Berta’s exceptionally beautiful sixteen-year-old granddaughter, Prudence (Megan Fox), is helping out her grandmother to clean up Charlie’s house. While Charlie and Alan cannot approach her, the 11-year-old Jake falls for her, only to discover that she has, to her mother’s dismay, developed a crush on Freddie, a teenaged boy apparently with Down’s syndrome condition. Upon seeing Freddie, Jake utters: “Who’s *he*? [. . .] You’re marrying *him*?!” [Laugh track]. Jake’s joke takes for granted a hierarchy of male bodies in which Freddie’s body is certainly ranked low.

Direct sexual matters are also often entertained in mainstream humour about the disabled. Consider this joke, for instance:

cooking vegetables in a microwave? Getting the wheelchair through the door!”
(<http://morticom.com/jokesdisabled.htm>). (For further jokes with similar themes, see Manuel 117.) In their virtual community, many of the users of this website appear to be using the jokes for alleviative purposes, which would approve of Gary Albrecht’s observation that disability humour, aside from its dark side, may also be liberating (67). However, some of the users reveal a significant *unlaughter* (Billig, *LR* 192). One of the users, for instance, reacts as follows to some other users’ enjoying the jokes: “your fucken jokes suck like a fucken 2 dollar hooker you should be ashamed of yourself s i hope you all die and spend all eternity in hell while the devil fucks you in your ass with fired up dick” (sic). This triggers further, mostly soothing, reactions by other users. Another user, shortly after relating a joke (“A log, a boulder, and a guy in a wheelchair are thrown off a cliff, who hits the ground first? -Who cares?”) adds a comment, saying, “BTW I’m in a wheelchair,” to which another user responds, “that’s no excuse you self-pitying twat,” which in turn incites another user to reply, “He just has a sense of humor about things you fuckin’ idiot” (sic). Such comments, while showing the polysemous nature of humour, interestingly also reveal what is at the heart of Billig’s debate about humour, i.e., the issue of ridicule and its inescapable resurgence in exculpatory or *ideologically positivist* accounts of humour.

How do crippled's make love?

They rub their crutches together. (sic)¹⁰⁷

Regardless of its pejorative tone and the fact that it homogenizes all disabled people, the joke presumes a *sexual* (as opposed to asexual) stance, forcibly maps the disabled persons' societal identity into their intimate lives, while also presuming penetrative sex as *the only* normal sexual activity, in order to conclude that the sexual practices of the disabled people must be a sight. In his essay, "The Sexual Politics of Disabled Masculinity," Tom Shakespeare notes that a "narrow notion of normal sexuality—which is focused primarily on the male erection—is detrimental to the sexual and psychological health of both men and women [while] it is particularly oppressive and undermining of disabled men" (58).¹⁰⁸ With Shakespeare's insight in mind, we can see how the following joke, which is in various forms cited in many printed and online joke collections, depicts a disabled heterosexual man, the stigma of whose socially devalued body within romantic interactions can only be cancelled out by his presumably having a long and hard erect penis, i.e., by his capitalizing on the patriarchal dividend:

A woman got married, but her husband was abusive. She got remarried and that husband ran out on her. She got married again and that husband failed in bed. Finally, she put an ad in the paper: "Looking for a man who won't abuse me, won't leave me, and won't fail me in bed." The next day, the doorbell rings.

¹⁰⁷ <http://crippledcomedy.wordpress.com/2008/08/15/crippled-jokes-the-best-of/>

¹⁰⁸ As Louis Rothschild remarks, "[f]eminist critics have demonstrated how models of sexual dysfunction privilege biological and reproductive aspects of sex, articulating both a coital imperative, which positions penile–vaginal sex as the most natural and therefore fundamental sexual practice, and an orgasmic imperative, which sees the goal of sexual practice as orgasm. The penis is also fundamental to cultural understandings of heterosexual sex, such that 'having sex' is commonly taken to mean penile–vaginal intercourse. In men's and women's accounts, sex without intercourse is often positioned as unimaginable" (Mooney-Somers 374; See also Przybylo "Crisis and Safety" 448-449).

There is a man with no arms and no legs. “Hello, I saw your ad in the paper,” he says. “Tell me a little about you.” “Well, I have no arms, so I can’t hit you. I have no legs, so I can’t run out on you,” he replies. “How do I know you’re good in bed?” she asks. He says, “I rang the doorbell, didn’t I?”¹⁰⁹

Were it not for his fictively exaggerated penis, through which he can apparently reclaim much of his socially depreciated embodiment, the disabled character would not dare to respond to the ad, as he would have simply been regarded as a piece of *vegetable* compared to his non-disabled peers. The female equivalent of the above character, appearing in yet another frequently circulated joke, appears to not enjoy a similar fate, as she—despite her being at the legal threshold of her adulthood—cannot easily reclaim any of her lost bodily value by partaking from the patriarchal phallic power:

A man was walking along the beach one day when he passed by a young woman who did not have any arms or legs. He couldn’t help noticing that she was gently sobbing to herself. “Why the tears?” he asked. She said: “I’m eighteen years old and I’ve never been kissed.” The man paused for a moment, then smiled and gave her a soft kiss on the forehead. She brightened up a little and smiled, so he gave her a big kiss on the lips. They pause (sic) for an unsure moment, and then she said, “You know, I’m eighteen years old and . . . I’ve never been fucked.” The man stood up, started smiling and grabbed the young woman by the hair and tossed her into the sea. As she started screaming and bobbing up and down, the man shouted, “Consider yourself fucked, love!” (Thripshaw 209)¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.jokes.com/funny-dirty-jokes/u3eyxb/searching-for-the-perfect-man>

¹¹⁰ See also <http://crippledcomedy.wordpress.com/page/2/>. For a slightly different version of the joke, see <http://www.jokes.com/funny-dirty-jokes/67b99d/no-arms--no-chance> A remarkable version of the joke, with a

Aside from the necessary fictional structure of the narrative as a joke, it does reveal traces of the prevailing attitude towards the disabled people in many societies. This attitude, as Shakespeare states, is a necessary response on the part of the non-disabled to the *anomaly* of the disabled peoples' differences, which may well include such opposed reactions as "violence or veneration, expulsion or sanctification" ("Joking a Part" 49). The viewpoint promoted in much humour about the disabled people, as also noticed in the calamitous ending of the above joke, considers disability as a personal tragedy or disaster. Such a view, instead of taking culture or society accountable for the social discriminations the disabled people undergo, regards disability as an accident *misfortunately* occurred to a person.¹¹¹ As Swain and French note, "the ultimate version of the tragedy model is that physical death is better than the social death of disability" (157). This observation is confirmed in the following joke—as overly constructed as it is—related by the U.S. actor and stand-up comedian, Gilbert Gottfried:

A woman gets into a really bad car accident. The man rushes from work over to the hospital. The doctor comes out, he goes, "Sorry, it's really bad news. Your

disabled *man* as the main character, is also mentioned on the same website (<http://www.jokes.com/funny-blonde-jokes/jcr3go/legless-on-the-beach>). The following version is also remarkable in terms of analyzing the gender and power relations: "A man with no legs is lying on the beach, when three attractive blondes approach him. The first blonde says to him 'I bet you've never been hugged before.' The legless man shakes his head. Then the second blonde says, 'I bet you've never been kissed before.' The legless man shakes his head again. Then the third blonde says, 'I bet you've never been fucked before.' The legless man says, 'No.' The third blonde replies, 'Well you are now because the tide is coming in!'" In this version, the disabled character is even rejected by the blondes who represent the most naïve and promiscuous characters in contemporary Western jokelore (e.g., "What is a blonde's chronic speech impediment? —She just can't say NO!" <http://morticom.com/jokesdisabled.htm>; "What's the difference between a blonde and the Titanic? —Only 500 men went down on the Titanic"; "Why did God create orgasms? —So blondes would know when to stop screwing"; "Why did the blonde rush to the department store? —She heard that men's pants were half-off"; "Then there was the blonde who's had more fingerprints than the FBI"; "Why is a blonde like a doorknob? —Everybody gets a turn" [Buffington 13, 15, 17, 20, 21]).

¹¹¹ For further details on the the opposition between the individual/personal/medical model and the social model of disability, see Oliver.

wife was in a horrible car accident. Her face and body are totally mangled; she'll be crippled and paralyzed from the neck down. She's going to need 24-hour care, of (sic) which your insurance is not going to pay for. You're going to have to wash her and feed her and keep turning her over in case she gets bed sores and rubbing ointment on her. You'll have to change her pretty constantly 'cause she'll have no control over her bladder or bowels." And the man breaks down crying. And the doctor goes, "I'm just f**king with you. She's dead."¹¹²

Another important identity element related to bodily norms, which often intersects with gender in humour, is *age*. Age significantly determines our attitudes towards other people, as from a person's perceived age "we [can] infer social and cognitive competencies, political and religious beliefs, and physical abilities" (Cuddy and Fiske 3). Increasingly, research in Anglo-American societies on age as a previously neglected identity element has conceptualized *aging* versus *ageism*, with the latter signifying the social meanings attached to age. While physical decline is unavoidable in the aging process, stigmatization and marginalization of aging bodies have been understood by some to be socio-cultural constructions, and thus taken as avertable phenomena (Jackson 13; Victor 133-135). "[M]ost Americans," as Tod Nelson observes, "tend to have little tolerance for older persons and very few reservations about harboring negative attitudes toward older people" (ix). While referring to the dominant "'over the hill' theme" in the greeting card industry, Nelson observes that "the essential message" under the façade of the humour promoted through such cards "is that it is undesirable to get older" (ix). Likewise, older adults are "more likely than any other age group to appear in television and film as conduits for

¹¹² <http://www.comedycentral.com/jokes/fas2f7/stand-up-gilbert-gottfried--gilbert-gottfried--bad-car-accident>

comic relief, exploiting stereotypes of physical, cognitive, and sexual ineffectiveness” (Cuddy and Fiske 3).

Although it is observed that old men and women experience ageism differently (e.g., most old women may simultaneously be subject to sexism) (Victor 135), both old women and men’s age-based marginalization is revealed to be associated with patriarchy. While feminist studies link stereotypical views of old women to the beauty myth (Ortego 9; N. Wolf), masculinity scholars have also associated ageist attitudes toward old men with hegemonic masculinity (Hearn, “Imaging the Aging of Men” 112).¹¹³ As my analyses below show, ageist gender humour also reflects, and (indirectly) subscribes to, the bodily ideals associated with hegemonic masculinity and the emphasized femininity.

As shown by Alan Bowd, many sexual jokes about old men portray them as either “vain” or “virile.” However, “[t]he humor stemming from jokes using [the virile] stereotype derives from an implicit suggestion that most elderly men are not sexually virile” (28). For instance, much ageist humour revolves around the Alzheimer’s disease and how it may affect old people’s interactional performance. Here is one about old men: “Definition of old age in men: chasing after women, then forgetting why when they’re caught” (Arnott and Haskins 9). Humour directed towards deriding aged men frequently comes up in *Men*. Much of the humour in Sea 4./E. 16 revolves around Charlie’s ageing and his fear of his incipient decline in sexual potency. Also, in Sea.7/Ep.11, during Christmas time, Charlie’s mother Evelyn, who is invited to

¹¹³ That *age* is an indicator of the hegemonic masculinity is interestingly revealed in Sea.4/Ep.23 of *Men*, when Charlie hires a young Latin American handyman, named Fernando (Enrique Iglesias) to repair Charlie’s damaged deck. The boy, who Charlie admits is younger and better-looking than he himself, wins the heart of every woman who meets him at Charlie’s, including Charlie’s current lover-girlfriend. In the end, only with the help of his money (another indicator of hegemonic masculinity, as it was mentioned earlier [see footnote 85 above]) can Charlie get his girlfriend back. (The episode obviously plugs into the Latin lover stereotype, too.)

Charlie's to be with her sons and grandson, has had to bring along a very old and partly deaf, yet extremely rich, man on wheelchair (played by Carl Reiner), as she might gain a good commission from selling his house. (Evelyn is a real estate owner.) The dialogue between Evelyn and his sons, upon her and the old man's entering Charlie's house is revealing:

Alan: Mom ... are ... are you and he ... uh ...?

Evelyn: Oh, good Lord, no! The man is a thousand years old. [Laugh track]

It's a wonder his scrotum doesn't get tangled up in the wheels [Laugh track].

(10:30-10:41)¹¹⁴

Due to this very stereotype about old men's impotency, their use of Viagra as a humorous subject is also a recurrent theme in *Men*. While such humour in *Men* mostly deems as incongruous and funny the combination of Viagra and oldness, many canned jokes draw on the theme to take the abjection of old bodies to its extreme, indicating that old men's sexuality is far too non-functional.¹¹⁵

Along with old men, in Anglo-American culture, old women are also the butts of jokes usually centering on "the sexually frustrated old maid" (Shifman and Lemish, "'Mars and Venus'

¹¹⁴ The whole Sea.10/Ep.22 of *Men*, titled "My Bodacious Vidalia," revolves around the old-men-as-impotent stereotype.

¹¹⁵ Here is a frequently cited one: "An old man went to the drug store and asked the pharmacist for Viagra. 'How many?' asked the pharmacist. 'Just a few,' said the old man, 'but can you cut each one into quarters?' 'That's too small a dose—tiny quarters of Viagra won't get you through sex.' 'That's OK,' said the old man. 'I don't think about sex any more. I just want it to stick out far enough so that I don't pee on my shoes'" (Tibballs, *The Mammoth Book of Dirty, Sick, X-rated and Politically Incorrect Jokes* 463). Another similar joke initially constructs its old male character as seemingly capable of using the Viagra, only to suggest otherwise eventually: "An old man stood up slowly and put on his coat. 'Where are you going?' asked his equally aged wife. 'I'm going to the doctor's.' 'Are you sick?' 'No, I'm going to get some of those Viagra pills.' At this, the wife climbed from her rocker and put on her coat. 'Where are you going?' he asked. 'I'm going to the doctor's, too. If you're going to start using that rusty old thing, I'm going to get a tetanus shot!'" (Tibballs 464).

in Virtual Space” 260) or on the “insatiable [old] female” (Bowd 28-29). Such jokes often represent old women as desperate sex-seekers who, due to their socially devalued bodies, have to pay for sex with others. In Sea.3/Ep.9 of *Men*, for instance, we get to know that Charlie got his famous piano—as Alan got a Rolex watch—through having sex with Norma, an old neighbour of Charlie’s who, due to her long-ungratified horniness, becomes the butt of several gendered jokes in the same episode.

In line with this blatant sexism, in many other jokes, aged and hence depreciated female bodies are oftentimes synecdochically reduced to a limb, generally the breast or the vagina, while their contrast with the idealized female body is overemphasized. The following examples, for instance, while presuming the surveillance of the aesthetics of the female body in general, draw upon the *breast size/shape* theme to abject the aged female body:

- What does a 75-year-old have between her breasts that a 25-year-old does not have?
- Her navel. (Arnott and Haskins 54)¹¹⁶

At the age of 93 Mildred was distraught to be left a widow. She decided to end it all and join her husband in death. To make sure she did the job properly she rang her doctor and asked exactly where the human heart is located. She was told that the heart is just below the left breast. Hearing this she took her husband’s

¹¹⁶ Other versions of the same joke can also be found: “What do older women have between their breasts that younger women don’t? A bellybutton” (<http://www.jokes.com/funny-men-women/d9r982/geriatric-breasts>). The joke has also taken the form of a “Yo’ Mama” humorous insult: “Yo’ Mama is so old, her belly button is between her *breasts*” (<http://www.jokes.com/funny-insults/afyoc2/yo--mama-is-so-old---belly-button>).

revolver, placed it in the right spot, and fired. Half an hour later she was admitted to hospital with a gunshot wound—to her left knee. (9)

I was with a lady once, much older than me. She still had a great body, great breasts—not large, but long. They were like ferrets, actually. They were long with little whiskers on the end. She took off her shirt—I didn't know whether to do foreplay or make balloon animals.

The last instance is a performed joke by the American comedian Pat Dixon. Dixon's reference to the “whiskers” on the end of the old woman's breasts, which simultaneously abjects and helps police hairy female bodies, is a reminder of a “Yo' Mama” insult with the same disciplinary function: “Yo' mama is so hairy her breasts look like coconuts.”¹¹⁷

The breast size/shape theme also appears in a wide range of other related jokes, where female bodies are exposed to a hegemonic masculinist gaze that has in the first place ordained a hierarchy of such bodies. Such jokes have a significant role in reproducing the masculinist ideals of the emphasized femininity, which in turn sets the criteria based on which certain female embodiments are abjected. Here are two examples (The second one explicitly touches upon the above mentioned bodily hierarchy):

A flat-chested woman goes out shopping for a new bra. She goes into shop after shop asking if they have a size 28A but she can't find one anywhere. Eventually she tries her luck in a small lingerie shop run by an old deaf lady. ‘Have you got anything in size 28A?’ asks the woman. ‘What was that, dear?’ says the old lady.

The woman lifts up her T-shirt exposing her breasts and says, ‘Have you got

¹¹⁷ <http://www.jokes.com/funny-insults/h7poql/yo--mama-is-so-hairy----coconuts> (See also <http://www.jokes4us.com/yomamajokes/yomamasohairyjokes.html>).

anything for these?’ The old lady peers at the woman’s boobs and says, ‘No, dear. Have you tried Clearasil?’ (Arnott and Haskins 53)¹¹⁸

Have you ever wondered why A, B, C, D, DD, E and F are the letters used to define bra sizes? If you have wondered why, but couldn’t figure out what the letters stood for... It is about time you became informed:

A ... Almost Boobs

B ... Barely there.

C ... Can’t Complain!

D ... Damn!

DD... Double damn!

E ... Enormous!

F ... Fake ¹¹⁹

The gender assumptions intended to create humour in the two canned jokes above also provoke the humour in the following instances by well-known stand-up comedians:

I know most women only think guys like big breasts cause guys are always like “I like em big! Let’s go pee on stuff!” but I like small breasts, they’re sexy, they

¹¹⁸ As fictional and exaggerated as the narrative is, the old lady’s masculinist view towards gender and embodiment is a reminder of the unfortunate complicity of many women with the patriarchal gender order and economy in their societies. See also footnotes 33 and 82 above.

¹¹⁹ <http://jokes4all.net/breasts:2.html> The U.S. comedian Tom Papa puts something similar to the above idea in a joke about his own wife: “We have a newborn at home. God bless you ladies for getting pregnant more than once. You’re insane. My wife’s breasts quadrupled in size. They’re F’s—D’s are fun; F’s are scary.”

<http://www.comedycentral.com/jokes/gmlj1r/stand-up-tom-papa--tom-papa--quadrupled-breasts>

Here there is a humorous pictorial list of different types of breast, found on Jokes.com:

<http://www.jokes.com/funny-dirty-jokes/jignds/breast-icons>

have more personality. Small breasts are like “Hi! Can I help you with something?” and you’re like “No... I’m just lookin”¹²⁰ (sic)

If you’re a woman and you get breast reduction, you need to donate those boobs. There are flat women out there, right now, who actually have to think of clever things to say in conversation.¹²¹

The second joke, by Andrew Norelli, is specifically reminiscent of Thomas Gerschick’s statement about the asymmetrical power relationship between gendered bodies. Norelli’s joke reveals the difficulty some bodies encounter when, in a patriarchal economy, they (consciously or unconsciously) enter into a competition with other bodies. Within such an economy, as evidenced in an episode of *Men*, it is completely understandable if Charlie and Alan’s aged yet still sexually active mother, Evelyn, complains of her similarly aged boyfriend Tommy for having left her for “some fresh-faced 45-year-old bimbo” (Sea.6/Ep. 6; 13:14). The same holds true when in another episode, in response to Alan’s ex-wife Judith, who, having “blown up” a second marriage, confides in him, “Alan, I’m 40 years old. How am I gonna start over again? [...] Do you have any idea what it’s like trying to date when all the men your age are only interested in 25-year-old hard bodies?” Alan retorts, “Well, I can’t blame us” [Laugh track]. (Sea.6/Ep.3; 16:47-17:06). To Judith’s problem, Alan’s joke renders a response which, similar to much of the show’s humour, is replete with gender essentialism and biological determinism.

Ethnocentric Humour and the Construction of Racial Gendered Identities

Ethnocentrism is associated with ethnic superiority, and can “range from nationalism to hostility against foreigners, or from racism to xenophobia” (Tappe 257). Ethnocentrists believe

¹²⁰ <http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/mitch%20fatel>

¹²¹ <http://www.comedycentral.com/jokes/l22591/stand-up-andrew-norelli--andrew-norelli--breast-donation>

in hierarchies of race, culture, and/or religion, where they entitle themselves to be at the top (257). Ethnocentric humour, which I thus take as inclusive of racist humour, reflects ethnocentrism. Prevalent humour studies have sometimes ignored, denied, or downgraded ethnocentrism in ethnic or racial humour. Christie Davies' oeuvre is a strong case in point.¹²² As opposed to the "positivist" or "exculpatory" attitudes towards humour, the emergent critical humour studies have clearly problematized ethnocentrist humour (e.g., see Lockyer and Pickering; Weaver). For instance, Simon Weaver, in his book *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour* (2011)—which, to date, is the most comprehensive study of racist humour—argues that different forms of racist humour "rhetorically act upon the ambivalences and truth claims of racist discourse" and can actually reinforce racism (39).

Like other types of humour, ethnocentric humour touches upon a vast array of topics. A significant topic in Anglo-American ethnic/racial humour, which can also make an appropriate addition to the previous discussion about the intersection of gender and bodily normativity, is *penis size* as a sign of virility and masculinity. As Judi Addelston argues, women and the men at the margins of masculinity (e.g., those marginalized by their dominant culture due to their race, class, sexual orientation, or age) often have recourse to the phallus (either as a symbol, e.g., women's *power dressing*, or literally as the penis as "the absolute insignia of the male sex") to validate their gender performance within a gender-hierarchical society (338). When the literal penis is resorted to—especially within a male-male circle—the size simply matters (Rothschild 597). In fact, "[p]enis size is central to an understanding of masculinity" since "power, a key feature of manhood, is perceived to run together with large size" (Rothschild 597, 598).¹²³ While

¹²² For critiques of Davies' exculpatory accounts of ethnocentrism in ethnic humour, see Billig, "Comic Racism"; Weaver 8-9.

¹²³ For a psychoanalytically motivated analysis of "masculinities and penis size jokes," see Mechling.

explaining the patriarchal economy and how “it pits the individual man against most, if not, indeed, all other men,” David Buchbinder notes how in such an economy, even close friends become competitors, and how along with “sexual matters” (e.g., who first engages in sexual intercourse), “[p]enis size also becomes something over which men compete, from childhood and adolescence onward, whether by explicit comparison or by more or less covert ‘sneak peeks’ in communal showers, changing rooms, and public toilets” (72, 73).¹²⁴

In the context of racial differences in America, the male penis size is particularly invoked in the cultural mythology about the black man’s “super-penis” and the Asian man’s “micro-penis” (Buchbinder 76). Asian-American men are “often stereotyped as nerds” and considered as unmasculine due to their relatively smaller physical size (than even the typical Euro-American woman’s) as well as their scant body and facial hair (Cheng 305). In fact, “stereotypes of Asian American men as unmasculine often involve stereotypes that they have ‘small dicks’” (Kumashiro 104). Likewise, certain American jokes target Jewish men’s alleged lack of interest in sports and their supposed insufficient muscularity.¹²⁵ As Harry Brod states, “Jewish men remain relatively disempowered vis-à-vis non-Jewish men of the hegemonic culture” (“Jewish

¹²⁴ The case of the U.S. radio and TV personality Howard Stern, who is famous for outspokenly boasting of his reputedly small penis, seems to go against the above trend. However, while Stern’s “Small Penis Contest” is humorously framed (<http://www.wcqi.com/howard-stern-small-penis-contest-full-video/>), his self-deprecating references to his small penis in his autobiography, *Private Parts*, is strategically nullified by her first wife Alison’s frequently quoted reference to Stern’s penis in the same book, that Howard’s penis was “fine” (see Hickman 31-32). Recently, Stern revealed to the media that “[w]hen I’m aroused, I’m what they call average. I’m six inches” (<http://www.examiner.com/article/howard-stern-reveals-true-length-of-his-penis>).

¹²⁵ For samples of these jokes, see Davies, “Jewish Women and Jewish Men” 134-137. As Eric Anderson remarks about the relationship between athleticism and masculinity, due to the inevitable relationship between masculinity and the body, “jocks often define what hegemonic masculinity entails. [. . .] Being a jock provides social privileges not only over women and gay men, but over other heterosexual men as well” (Anderson 443-444).

Men” 442). Interestingly, along with Asian(-American) men, Jewish men are also depicted as having small penises:

Q: What happened to the chinese (sic) man who walked into a wall with a boner?

A: He smashed his nose.

Scientist say (sic) the average size of the male penis has gone down to 5 inches.

This just shows how big the Chinese population is getting.¹²⁶

— What happens when a Jew with an erection walks into a wall?

— He breaks his nose. (qtd. in Fuchs 113; see also Appel 102; Manuel 91)¹²⁷

Given these examples, and considering the fact that a bigger penis signifies further claim to phallus as a symbol of patriarchal power, the black man’s super-size penis stereotype apparently contradicts his marginalized masculine status within Western culture. One way to deal with this situation is to contend that the black man’s penis is constructed as *abnormally* large, similar to the way the Asian man’s is deemed non-normatively small:

Being too large can be too intimidating and dangerous. Being too small is weak and un-masculine. Black men are constructed as too physical, too threatening, and their penises too large. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Asian men are constructed as too small, too passive, with small penises if they have one at all.

(Chou 68)

Chou’s explanation is reminiscent of Gerschick’s discussion about bodily normativity, and of how the normative is defined through repudiating certain under- and over-degrees (see pp. 105-

¹²⁶ <http://www.jokes4us.com/dirtyjokes/penisjokes.html>

¹²⁷ The joke simultaneously draws on the Jewish man’s penis size and nose shape stereotypes (Fuchs 113).

106 above). As plausible as this explanation might seem, it is not supported by the repertoire of the U.S. racist jokes. In other words, while such jokes do construct the Asian and the Jewish man's penis as abnormally small, they do not exactly abnormalize the black man's penis size per se. Rather than directly abnormalizing the black penis, as we will see, the humorous discourse tends to delegitimize the phallic power of the black penis by frequently and meaningfully mapping it on to an already socio-culturally emasculated black man. To discern this gendered aspect of the black penis as reflected in jokes, they must be read within the larger context of other stereotypes about the black man, particularly the black man's "savage sexuality" stereotype which dates back to the colonial era (see Weaver 89-90). As Weaver notes,

On U.S. websites penis jokes form a part of a dichotomy in embodied racism that connects with a number of other stereotypes of savage sexuality. These connections include the idea that black men are misogynistic and have a propensity to commit rape, [and] that black people are sexually promiscuous and irresponsible [. . .]. (91)

Some of the connections Weaver indicates are reflected in the following examples:

- Why do niggers always have sex on their minds?
- Because of the pubic hair on their heads.
- What do black men do after sex?
- 15 years to life.

A black man takes a girl home from a nightclub.

She says, "Show me it's true what they say about black men."

So he stabs her and takes her purse.¹²⁸

— How can you tell a nigger's just had sex?

— His eyes are all red from the mace. (qtd. in Weaver 91)

— What's a nigger's idea of foreplay?

— "Don't scream or I'll cut you, bitch." (qtd. in Weaver 92)

As far as the gendered aspect of the black penis is concerned, the pattern of the associations made between the black man's sexuality and his allegedly inevitable propensity towards crime is significant. In other words, the black man's being frequently depicted as a dehumanized "dickhead" or as a criminal in his sexual relationships has dire ramifications for his gendered identity as it is constructed within the whole genre of the black man joke cycle, including in the jokes about his penis. Such jokes deploy rhetorical moves to neutralize the power and perils of the black penis, already bestowed upon black men since European colonialism (see Cobb 156). The technique often involves the creation of a preliminary narrative in which we anticipate the black man—and his stereotypically large organ—to be put on a pedestal, only to have this promised phallic power nullified by the subsequent criminalization or dehumanization of the black character.¹²⁹ Therefore, the fact that many if not most penis jokes normally resort to other familiar black stereotypes in their punchlines (e.g., the black people as dumb, lazy, unemployed, and poor) can be taken as an attempt to demote the black man's

¹²⁸ <http://www.racist-jokes.info/>

¹²⁹ Although being strongly linked to the black man's character, the crime stereotype in U.S. jokes is also associated with other racial and ethnic groups, as demonstrated by the following joke: "A Mexican and a nigger are riding in car. Who's driving? —A cop" (<http://www.racist-jokes.info/>).

masculinity, too. Here are some examples, the last one of which summarizes our discussion thus far in this section:

— Why did God give niggers big dicks?

— As a way to say sorry for putting pubes on their head! (qtd. in Weaver 90)

This little niglet boy asked his dad, ‘Dad, I have the biggest dick in the third grade—is it because I’m black?’

The dad replied ‘No you dumb nigger, it’s because you’re 17!’ (qtd. in Weaver 91)¹³⁰

— What is long, black, and smelly?

— The unemployment line.¹³¹

Q: Why are black men penises bigger than white men? (sic)

A: Because as kids white men had toys to play with!¹³²

A Jewish man with an erection walks into a wall and breaks his nose.

¹³⁰ In another longer version of this joke, in response to a black boy’s complaints about his being discriminated against at school, his mother twice says, “Well, that’s because you are black,” after which the boy grins and asks, “Well, whenever I’m in the shower with the white boys I notice that my penis is much bigger than their penises,” to which this time the mother replies, “Well, that’s because you are 37.” See <http://www.racist-jokes.info/>

¹³¹ http://jokes.contentavailable.com/i/Ethnic/What_is_long%2C_black%2C_and_smelly/6844/

¹³² <http://www.jokes4us.com/dirtyjokes/penisjokes.html>

An Asian man with an erection walks into a wall and breaks his glasses.

A black man with an erection walks into a wall and is arrested for rape.¹³³

This section would not be complete without a reference, even though brief, to the relational construction of racial femininities (as a typically marginalized femininity) in Anglo-American humour. An example from *Men* will serve. In her book *African American Women and Sexuality in the Cinema*, Norma Manatu, while commenting on why “white women seem to appeal to so many black males,” refers to the fact that “in the film medium, especially, black women’s physical beauty and social conduct are not shown as desirable nor valuable as that of white women” (92). Also, in her book *Black Women in Interracial Relationships*, Kellina Craig-Henderson mentions three enduring stereotypes of black women in Western media: *mammy*, who is typically rendered as an “unattractive, asexual being”; *Jezebel*, who is represented as “hypersexual, lewd, and lascivious”; and *sapphire*, depicted as “the black woman who is difficult [. . . and] tough” (109, 110, 113).

At a point in Sea.9/Ep.15 of *Men* (15:20), a black female character is momentarily brought in to produce humour through the striking contrast between her bodily, and behavioural, features and those of Zoey Hyde (Sophie Winkleman), Walden Schmidt’s white beautiful girlfriend, who is a lawyer. When learning of Walden and Zoey’s diminished sexual life, Berta, the housemaid, offers them some of her “special brownies” which, we get to know, have been flavoured with cannabis. Zoey, who had disappeared and apparently got lost due to her being drugged, is now back to the beach house where he finds Alan in the kitchen. After a short

¹³³ <http://www.sickipedia.org/search?page=21&q=erection&sortcolumn=length&direction=desc&deleted>

In the following joke, several black man stereotypes, including the black-man-as-rapist have been jammed: “What do you call a nigger with a regular job, who doesn’t drive a lowrider, sleeps in the same bed every night, doesn’t collect welfare, and doesn’t rape White women? An inmate” (sic) <http://www.racist-jokes.info/>

encounter with Alan, Zoey leaves for Walden's bedroom while we see Walden, who had been searching for Zoey, entering the kitchen from the deck to join Alan. Moments later, off camera we hear Jake (Alan's son) and Eldridge (the son of Lindsey, Alan's girlfriend)—both of whom had also tasted Berta's brownies, and left home to find Zoey—approaching the kitchen and shouting: "Good news! We found Zoey!," after which the director cuts to a shot of a black female character—arguably intended to be a mishmash of the three aforementioned stereotypes, given her appearance and imprudent conduct—standing in between Jake and Eldridge, who have apparently found her on the street. The shot is immediately followed by a laugh track. The woman, staring at the flabbergasted Walden and Alan, utters, in a black British accent, "Which one'a you is the billionaire lookin for me?," in response to which the still astounded Alan and Walden simultaneously point to each other. The next shot captures Jake's and Eldridge's victorious smiles.

SUMMARY

Based on my main argument, put forward in the previous chapter, the current chapter aimed to show that mainstream gender humour reflects and polices the gender order of the society where the humour circulates or is deemed as potentially circulating. (The latter case is illustrated by hopeful publication of various humour collections containing gender humour as well as by the re-creation of similar gender humour in many episodes from the same sitcom, comedy films, or in different stand-up comedy performances.) Various types of contemporary Anglo-American folk and popular culture gender humour were categorized and analyzed according to the main elements in Connell's gender hierarchy model, that is, multiple masculinities and femininities. For each main element within the model, relevant humour types

or joke cycles were found which reflected and maintained the gender norms suggested by the model. The findings were also supported by discussions of relevant humour in *Two and a Half Men*. As demonstrated, the relationships between and among the multiple masculinities and femininities were reflected, reproduced, and guarded through numerous themes reiterated in *sexist*, *homophobic*, *bodily normativity-directed*, and *ethnocentric* types of gender humour. Moreover, the very assumptions on which current Anglo-American gender order is based, i.e., its *sexuality* (as opposed to asexuality) and *sexual dimorphism*, were also shown to have corresponding gender humour which mirrors and protects both normative assumptions.

Chapter Three

Shame, Ridicule, and Gender Order: Iranian Modernity and the Contemporary Iranian Gender Jokelore

[I]n order to explain Iranian society, it is not enough (as it has been practiced thus far) to focus only on elite and the elite culture; it is necessary to look at popular culture.
(Talattof 4)

INTRODUCTION

Building on preceding chapters, this chapter examines two contemporary Persian joke cycles to pursue the relationship between them and the modern Iranian gender order. While in Chapter Two, I adopted a mainly textual approach to the humour discussed, in this chapter, I adopt a more contextual and history-based approach to the topic. Therefore, instead of including as many types of gender humour as possible in modern Iran, I focus on the only two contemporary Iranian joke cycles that center on sexuality and gender, i.e., the jokes about the Qazvini (man) and those about the Rashti (man and woman). Despite their relatively long-standing popularity, both joke series unfortunately remain highly understudied in the research on contemporary Iranian culture. Through highlighting some historiographical accounts of gender and sexuality in modern Iran and by focusing on the interplay of Iranian modernity and Iranian gender order during the past century, I suggest that both cycles are apparently connected with significant events and transformations related to the modern Iranian gender order during the past century or so. Both joke series, I argue, appear to have originated as disciplinary discursive tools and seem to continue to serve norm-reinforcing and disciplinary functions regarding the modern Iranian society's gender order. The body of this chapter comprises two sections. First comes an overview and literature review of the contemporary Iranian ethnic humour, which constitutes a

significant portion of the mainstream humour currently circulating within the Iranian community. These are followed by case studies of the Qazvini and Rashti joke cycles in light of the history of gender and sexuality in Iran during the past century.

CONTEMPORARY IRANIAN ETHNIC JOKES: OVERVIEW AND LITERATURE REVIEW

“There was once a Turk /a [Lor]/a Rashti/a Qazvini, etc.” is a familiar phrase to almost all Iranians, as it opens myriads of jokes that target certain ethnicities in contemporary Iran. Ethnic jokes, although not constituting all verbal humour in Iranian society, comprise a significant part of that humour. Due to their sensitive and sometimes sexual content, however, Iranian ethnic jokes are seldom discussed openly in the media or officially studied in academia inside Iran. Therefore, the most helpful testimonies to the types and the popularity of such jokes among many Iranians often come from sources published outside Iran. The authors of a guide book written for tourists interested in visiting Iran, introduce their readers to Iranian ethnic humour in the following manner:

‘If you drop your wallet in Qazvin, don’t bend down to pick it up!’ Political correctness has yet to touch the Iranian sense of humour, and [the] poor Qazvin, ‘where birds fly on one wing’, suffers constantly from jibes about predatory homosexuality. Other regions are equally unfairly stereotyped for jocular effect. Men from Rasht are portrayed as sexually liberal and constantly cuckold[ed], Shirazis as lazy and fun-loving [. . .], Turkmen as vengeful, Kurds as hot blooded [sic] and the [Lurs] of Lorestan as congenitally untrustworthy.¹³⁴ In common

¹³⁴ It is not clear to me why the author ascribes *untrustworthiness* to the Lur character. This jocular character is, to my knowledge, an emphasized counterpart for the Turk character, who is stereotyped as the emblem of idiocy.

jokes Azaris [Azeris, i.e., the residents of the East and West Azerbaijan provinces in Iran] are supposedly slow-witted [. . .]. Within their loose-fitting dishdasha robes, Iranian Arab men are whispered to be endowed with an especially impressive set of wedding tackle. But it's Esfahanis, who are reputed to be cunning and tight with money, that you're most likely to hear about. One Yazdi man gleefully told us that Esfahanis are 'like the Scots; they'll do anything to save a few tomans'. (Burke and Elliott 49)

Yet, the Esfahani people have also been long reputed for their clever repartees that make them the typical winning interlocutors in inter-personal exchanges, often with people of other ethnicities.¹³⁵ Perhaps as predicted by the above quote, the jokes about Esfahani people (due to the essentially non-sexual and relatively less-offensive themes in such jokes) are more likely to reach non-Iranians. However, as attested in many memoirs of foreign visitors to Iran, most of the above ethnic jokes are as likely to be told to strangers.¹³⁶ Yet, as Christie Davies notes, there is always the possibility that even upon prompting, some jokes are not told to strangers. This "may simply mean that one's informants are reticent or fearful or one's interpreter is unwilling to reveal this aspect of his or her own people's pattern of jokes" ("Undertaking the Comparative Study of Humor" 160).

Yet, patterns of (self-)censorship are not limited to jokes invested with risqué narratives. Davies' remark ironically holds true for humour scholarship within Iran. Any scholar intending to rely on the humour research conducted *within* Iran would soon notice that the above ethnic

For collections of jokes about the Turk and the Luri characters in Iranian jokelore, see, respectively, Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 9-120, 227-249.

¹³⁵ For a rich source on Esfahanis as good-at-repartee people, see Nourbakhsh.

¹³⁶ Some examples will be mentioned in the body of this chapter.

humour, despite its striking prevalence among Iranian folks, is rarely mentioned or accredited in academic writing. Therefore, if writing about jokes is difficult due to certain methodological issues—e.g., jokes are authorless narratives with numerous versions and hardly known origins (Davies, *Jokes and Targets* 3-6)—the scholar focusing on contemporary Iranian jokelore will soon face especially frustrating obstacles. There exists little academic research, in Farsi or English, on contemporary Iranian, including ethnic, humour.¹³⁷ One reason—which is a reminder of many sociologists’ dubious attitude towards humour as a topic worthy of serious debate (see p. 28 above)—is that studying humour in general and canned jokes in particular has not flourished in Iran (Salahi 12; see also Bromberger, “Usual Topics” 200-201).

Moreover, extant research, particularly that which has been conducted inside Iran, has to be approached with certain cautions in mind. In such research, for example, due to the issue of censorship, the authors frequently have to compromise the precision of their debates by veiling their meanings or by choosing to not mention actual examples of the ethnic and/or sexual humour they discuss.¹³⁸ Self-censorship also becomes problematic in much research performed on Iranian humour. The cultural dynamics of *sharm* (i.e., shame) and *hojb-o-haya* (i.e., internal

¹³⁷ To my knowledge, no scholarly or peer-reviewed papers in Farsi or English focus on contemporary Iranian jokes. I could only find an M.A. thesis that discusses Iranian ethnic jokes (see Seifikar). There are also two book chapters, on the same topic and by the same author, that partly address the Rashti jokes (see Bromberger, “Eating Habits and Cultural Boundaries in Northern Iran” and “Usual Topics”). Three of the most comprehensive surveys into Persian humour and satire take an obviously elite approach to their topic, and never even make a reference to contemporary Iranian jokes (see Behzadi Anduhjerdi; Halabi; Javadi, *Satire in Persian Literature*).

¹³⁸ For instance, in his otherwise insightful sociological research on Farsi jokes, Shervin Vakili disguises the ethnic jokes currently prevalent in Iran either by using ellipsis or by replacing the ethnic characters with generic names, such as by a man, a person, etc. (see Vakili). Also, in his essay titled “The Innocent Victims of the Folk’s Jokes,” Gholam-Ali Latifi, while enumerating stereotypes in Iranian ethnic humour, has to disregard some unmentionable ones. Furthermore, since he cannot mention any instances of the jokes he refers to, his discussion remains wholly abstract. The same problem is noticed in Mahmoud Farjami’s note “I Do Not Get Offended by Jokes.”

veil) arouse many Iranians' self-censorship, thus preventing them from openly discussing, for example, the topic of sex as one of the most recurrent themes in Iranian, as well as other nations', humour.¹³⁹ Despite, and because of, such lacunae and limitations, the importance of the present study cannot be overemphasized. However, this chapter makes no claim to comprehensiveness in Iranian humour or even in Iranian gender humour, as it only focuses on gender humour as represented in two of currently circulating ethnic joke series in Iranian society. In fact, the chapter, while intended as a preliminary step towards filling some of the above mentioned gaps in the extant literature on modern Iranian humour, seeks to set the ground for further studies in Iranian gender humour and its relation to Iranian society's gender order.

THE QAZVINI AND RASHTI JOKE CYCLES: CASE STUDIES OF THEIR SOCIO-HISTORICAL ORIGINS AND POSSIBLE FUNCTIONS

Once there was a woman who married three times and was still a virgin. The first husband was a Rashti who couldn't do anything because he was as limp as old celery. The second was a Qazvini who liked boys, and that's the only way he took her. The third was a language teacher who only used his tongue. (qtd. in Amirrezvani 175)

Although all types of Iranian ethnic humour also contain gendered scripts, the Rashti and the Qazvini joke cycles are the only two that are essentially based on the respective topics of gender and sexuality. Despite this, the cycles have never been, either separately or together, studied in their relation to the structures of gender relations in Iran. Taking this as the main inquiry of this chapter, I aim to speculate on two related problems. On the one hand, it is hard to show when, by whom and under what circumstances any of the Rashti and Qazvini joke cycles

¹³⁹ For an insightful source on *sharm* and *hojb-o-haya* and their implications for self-revelation in Iranian culture, see Milani, *Veils and Words*.

have come into being and begun circulating.¹⁴⁰ Arguably of less difficulty, and yet of equal importance, are also the possible social functions of each joke cycle at large, regardless of its historical origin and of its immediate target.

Although we are not certain about the temporal origins of the Rashti and the Qazvini jokes, in known written documents they can barely be traced—with certainty—beyond six or seven decades ago. This means that both cycles are apparently the products of modern Iranian society.¹⁴¹ Building upon some previous theories about both joke cycles as well as on historiographical accounts of gender and sexuality in modern Iran, I contend that the Qazvini and Rashti jokes can be best understood in their connection with the (ongoing) process of Iranian modernization and its implications for gender and sexuality in Iranian society. Based on such a connection, I also hypothesize the social functions of the Qazvini and Rashti jokes vis-à-vis the modern Iranian gender order. I suggest that the Rashti and the Qazvini jokes, other than their possible initial historical functions, can serve societal functions that might be barely relevant to their manifest targets, but that are inevitably related to these jokes' essential themes of gender and sexuality and to the dynamics of gender relations in modern Iranian society. I deem such latent functions as the *displaced functions* of jokes with targets, and as evidence for the falsity of the exculpatory theory in humour scholarship about the inconsequentiality of such jokes.

¹⁴⁰ The origin problem per se is not unique to Iranian jokes. Davies contends that “it is impossible to trace the originators of jokes and futile to try to do so. A joke’s origins are collective and social” (*Jokes and Targets* 10). While I also see little merit in determining the very (few) person(s) who presumably created the first version of a popular joke, I hope this chapter can, among other things, indicate why seeking the “collective and social” origins of a joke cycle can be socio-historically and culturally insightful.

¹⁴¹ Following the trend in Iranian history scholarship, I take the late Qajar era (the whole era lasted from 1785 to 1925) as marking the start of modernization in Iran, a process that was intensified by the extensive reforms inaugurated by Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925-1941).

Modern Transformations in Iranian Gender Order and the Laughable Man from Qazvin

“What is a person [in some versions, ‘a woman’]?,” they ask a Qazvini. “A person [or, ‘a woman’],” replies the Qazvini, “is an appendage surrounding the bum.”¹⁴²

Since at least four to five decades ago, the man from the Iranian city of Qazvin—who had long been the emblem of foolishness and gullibility in much Persian classical humour—has been known to become the butt of the singular contemporary Farsi joke cycle about sexual orientation.¹⁴³ In this series of jokes, known as “the Qazvini jokes,” the man from Qazvin is depicted, in several roles, as someone who prefers anus (as an emblem of homoeroticism, as I argue below) over vagina (as a marker of heterosexuality). More specifically, the jocular Qazvini character is portrayed in one of three roles: a) a *bacheh-baz* (roughly synonymous with a pederast); b) a man interested in same-sex practices in general, but particularly in being the active partner in such acts; c) a (married) man excessively focused on anal intercourse with his wife or women in general.¹⁴⁴

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به قزوینیه می‌گن: «انسان رو تعریف کن.» می‌گه: «انسان جسمی است زائد که فضای اطراف کون را اشغال کرده.» (sic).

Found on several Facebook pages.

به قزوینیه می‌گن: «زن رو تعریف کن.» می‌گه: «بالام جان، زن حجمی‌ست زائد که فضای اطراف کان رو اشغال کرده!»

<http://biaboroto.blogfa.com/cat-16.aspx>

¹⁴³ For depictions of Qazvini as “fool” and as “gullible” in the work of the Persian classical humourist Obayd Zakani (ca. 1300-1370), who himself was from Qazvin, see Brookshaw 55-57. As understood from some eighteenth-century travelogues, the stereotype of the foolish Qazvini was still being circulated during the late Qajar era (see Mir Muhammad Taqi ‘Mir’ 133; Soltan Mohammad Mirza Qajar 31).

¹⁴⁴ Reza Baraheni also mentions Esfahanis as stereotypical “active homosexuals” (61). However, he seems to be referring to people from Shahreza, a town in the province of Esfahan, whom are stereotyped as being active homosexuals in Esfahan (Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 176). Unlike the Qazvini man, however, the character from Shahreza,

The imagery of the Qazvini as *bacheh-baz* is the most prevalent to the extent that in contemporary Iranian popular culture the word “Qazvini” has also come to denote jocularly a pederast or a pedophile. In contemporary Farsi, the word *bacheh* means *child* or *kid* and in certain contexts *baby*, all regardless of gender. The Farsi suffix *baz*, which is the shortened form of *bazandeh*, means *player*. Thus, *bacheh-baz* may literally be translated as one who tends to play with children. Below are jokes in which the Qazvini male character’s (sexual) interest in *bacheh* is evident.¹⁴⁵

Someone goes to Qazvin, and upon entering the city sees a child hanging down from the entrance. He goes to the main square where he sees three other kids hanging. Out of curiosity, he asks someone, “What’s up with these children?” The guy says, “*Babam jaan*, these are the awards for the Saderat Bank.”¹⁴⁶

(<http://fckshahabi.blogfa.com/post-96.aspx>

Date of access: 30/07/2011)¹⁴⁷

has never gained nation-wide infamy. Two Shahreza’i jokes are mentioned in Nabavi’s Qazvini jokes collection (*Ahd-e Jadid* 189-190).

¹⁴⁵ I have intentionally bracketed the word “sexual,” as in many Qazvini jokes the character’s sexual interest in *bachehs*, especially for first-time hearers, can be understood from those jokes’ intertextual relationship with other Qazvini jokes.

¹⁴⁶ The English translations of the Farsi jokes, unless otherwise indicated, are mine. I sincerely thank my friend and colleague Marco Katz, for editing the translations.

یه یارو می‌ره قزوین، می‌بینه یه بچه آویزون کرده‌ن ورودی شهر. می‌ره میدون مرکزی شهر، می‌بینه سه تا بچه هم اونجا آویزون کردن. از یکی می‌پرسه:

«جریان این بچه‌ها چیه؟» قزوینی به می‌گه: «بَبَم جان، اینا جوایز بانک صادراته!»

Babah in Farsi means *baby*. *Babam jan* (i.e., my dear kid) is a favourite expression in the Qazvini dialect of Farsi.

¹⁴⁷ This weblog, which is unfortunately currently inaccessible, used to contain numerous characteristic examples from all contemporary Iranian ethnic joke categories. All the jokes had been related in a colloquial tone. In cases where I do not mention a source for the jokes, this weblog as accessed during July 2011, is the source. Also, in cases where a joke is followed by the phrase “See also ...,” the first source is the above weblog.

Having stolen a million dollars from a house, a Qazvini calls the house's owner the following day, demanding, "Bring the *bacheh* and get your money back."¹⁴⁸

While in jokes such as the above ones it might sound ambiguous whether the term *bacheh* refers to a young boy or a young girl, many Qazvini jokes do make it clear that it is almost always young boys that are the targets of "the Qazvini [man] as the predatory, active homosexual" (Brookshaw 65). Here are instances:

A Qazvini is arrested while carrying a sack of boys' underpants. "What are these?," they ask him.

"My memoirs," he replies.¹⁴⁹

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قزوینی به یک میلیون دلار از خونه‌ی یک پولدار می‌دزده. روز بعد زنگ می‌زنه خونه‌ی طرف، می‌گه: «بچه تو بده تا پولارو پس بدم.»

For another version, see Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 191. Below are further examples in support of the above claim:

"A bank in Qazvin set up its clients' awards as follows: The third prize would be three *bachehs*, the second prize nine *bachehs*, and the first prize the golden key to a kindergarten."

توی قزوین یک بانک جوایز می‌ذاره: نفر سوم سه تا بچه، نفر دوم نه تا بچه و نفر اول کلید طلایی مهدکودک.

"A Qazvini had it written in his will that they cremate and donate his dead body to baby powder (*pudr-e bacheh*) manufacturers."

یک قزوینی وصیت کرد: «پس از مرگ، جسد مرا بسوزانید و خاکستر مرا هدیه کنید به سازندگان پودر بچه.»

"A Qazvini is running after a ball. 'What's going on?,' they ask him. 'Behind every ball,' he says, 'there is a *bacheh*.'"

قزوینی داشت دنبال یک توپ می‌رفته. بهش می‌گن: «چرا دنبال توپ می‌ری؟» می‌گه: «آخه دنبال هر توپی یک بچه‌ای هست.»

See <http://joktojok.blogfa.com/post-13.aspx> (The joke's punchline was in reality uttered by the Iranian Police with the obvious intention of producing more observant vehicle drivers whose carelessness might cause them to hit children while playing ball games in alleys and streets. The joke's irony is in Qazvini's claiming the utterance not to protect, but to harm, children. In another version of the joke, in Nabavi's collection, reference is made to the police [*Ahd-e Jadid* 182].) "Holding a *bacheh* in his hands, a Qazvini is running. 'What's up?,' someone asks him. 'I've got the *bacheh-bazi* exam tomorrow,' says the Qazvini, 'but I haven't yet opened this text.'"

یک قزوینی به بچه گرفته بود تو دستش و می‌دوید. یک نفر ازش سؤال می‌کنه: «چی شده؟» می‌گه: «فردا امتحان بچه‌بازی دارم؛ هنوز لاشم باز نکردم.»

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قزوینی رو با یک گونی شورت پسرانه می‌گیرن. می‌گن: «اینا چی؟» می‌گه: «دفتر خاخراتمه.»

<http://joktojok.blogfa.com/post-25.aspx>

The story of a boy at a Qazvin-based university:

As a freshman: ()

As a sophomore: (.)

During the third year: (o)

During the fourth year: (O)

Thanks goodness he did not apply for a graduate program!¹⁵⁰

For another version with “an old Qazvini,” see Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 183. The Qazvini character is also sometimes arrested while carrying a “gallon” or a “keg” of “spittle” (see Nabavi 183).

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سرگذشت یک پسر در دانشگاه قزوین: () سال اول (.) سال دوم (o) سال سوم (O) سال چهارم. خدا رحم کرد واسه فوق لیسانس ادامه نداد.

Here are two more instances from the same category: “A pretty boy goes to Qazvin. While walking, his money falls on the street. Being aware of the situation, he does not dare to bend and pick it up. An old man arrives, and asks, ‘What’s the problem, my son?’ The boy tells the story. The old man says, ‘My dear son, these things are from the past!’ Glad to hear this, the boy bends down to grab the money, when the old man gives him a good finger from behind. The boy, in dismay, says, ‘But you told me these things are from the past.’ The old man replies, ‘So am I!’.”

یه پسر خوشگل رفت قزوین و پولش افتاد روی زمین. چون از وضعیت خبر داشت، جرأت نمی‌کرد دولا بشه و پول رو برداره. یه پیرمرد از راه رسید و به پسر

گفت: «پسرم، مشکلت چیه؟» پسر داستان رو تعریف کرد. پیرمرد گفت: «پسرم، این حرفها مال قدیم قدیمهست!» پسر، خوشحال، دولا شد که پول رو

برداره که یه دفعه پیرمرد یه انگشت درست و حسابی حواله‌ی پسر کرد! پسر با تعجب گفت: «تو که گفتی این کار مال قدیمهست؟» پیرمرد گفت:

«پسرم، من هم مال قدیمم دیگه!»

(In a different version from Nabavi’s collection, the person whose money falls on the ground leaves the city without the money, but returns after thirty years to find the money surprisingly intact. Upon bending to pick it up, however, he becomes victim to a Qazvini pederast who excitedly says, “Where have you been? I’ve been waiting for you for thirty years now!” [*Ahd-e Jadid* 181].) “They ask a Qazvini, ‘When did you have the sweetest memory of your life?’ ‘The time,’ he says, ‘that I attended a wedding in which men and boys were mixed’.”

به قزوینیه می‌گن: «شیرین‌ترین خاطره‌ی زندگیت چیه؟» می‌گه: «یه عروسی رفتیم؛ مردا و پسرها قاطی بودند.»

(The Islamic Republic of Iran’s governments have mostly forced people to hold sex-segregated parties, i.e., with men/boys separate from girls/women—hence the joke’s irony. [For another version, see Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 190].)

http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes&joke_id=337&cat_id=32&jtype=

The Qazvini man's specific interest in boys becomes evident also in jokes in which he obviously prefers boys to girls. A noticeable number of such jokes, significantly enough, set their events around marriage. In many of these jokes, the Qazvini's interest in the institution of marriage is revealed to be a mere pretext under which he is actually seeking sex with his would-be bride's brother (or, less typically, her other male kin):

Seeing a beautiful girl, a Qazvini exclaims, "Oh my gosh! A babe like that must have a hot brother!"¹⁵¹ (I remember a different version of this joke from my high school years: A Qazvini goes to *khastegari* [as a suitor, he formally visits, typically with his parents, his desired girl's house in order to ask for her hand in marriage]. The girl brings the tea.¹⁵² The Qazvini exclaims, "What a beauty! Her brother must be a babe!"¹⁵³)

On his wedding night, a Qazvini says to his bride, "It's OK if you're tired. Just send in your brother."¹⁵⁴

The source for both jokes: <http://joktojok.blogfa.com/post-25.aspx>

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یه روز یه قزوینی می‌ره تو خیابون، یهو چشاش می‌خوره به یه دختر خوشگل؛ می‌گه: «وای این دختره اینقدر خوشگله، داداشش چه قدر خوشگل باشه!»

¹⁵² The bride's first appearance in a traditional *khastegari* session (which is still observed by most Iranians) is supposed to occur through her entering the room with a tray of full teacups to serve the guests. While providing the opportunity for the girl to be seen by the groom's family (particularly by his mother and sisters as the main jury), the act links the girl with house chores and hence constructs her as a *kadbanu* (a gifted housewife) as well as displays her as a polite woman. Iranian brides are expected to behave in a manner that they are not imagined as being in a hurry for *arusi* (i.e., marriage, but strongly connoting the ensuing sex).

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قزوینی می‌ره خواستگاری. دختره چای می‌آره. خیلی خوشگل بوده. قزوینی می‌گه: «خودش اینه، داداشش چیه؟!»

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قزوینی شب عروسی به زنش می‌گه: «می‌خوای اگه خسته‌ای برو بگو داداش بیاد نوی حجله!»

A Qazvini says to his wife, “Let’s talk of love.” The wife says, “You start.”

“How’s your brother?,” says the Qazvini.¹⁵⁵

The Qazvini character, despite his vested interest in having sex with boys, could in fact get married. However, in his private moments with his wife (or upon encountering women in general), if not thinking of her brother or other male kin, he is only interested in his wife’s (or other women’s) *kaan* or *kun*. The term *kaan* is, in the Qazvini dialect, the same as the Farsi word *kun*, meaning bum and anus (Below, it is translated to “anus,” “bum,” or “ass”):¹⁵⁶

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قزوینی به زنش می‌گه «عزیزم، بیا حرفای عاشقانه بزنیم.» زنش می‌گه: «تو اول شروع کن.» قزوینی به می‌گه: «داداشت خوبه؟»

Here are a few more instances from the same category:

“To promote marriage in Qazvin, they offer as a bonus the bride’s younger brother.”

برای ترویج ازدواج در قزوین، برادر کوچک عروس خانوم به عنوان اشانسیون داده می‌شود.

“They ask a Qazvini, ‘Why don’t you get married?’

He says, ‘I haven’t yet found the right brother-in-law’.”

به قزوینی به می‌گن: «چرا زن نمی‌گیری؟» می‌گه: «هنوز برادرزن دلخواهم رو پیدا نکرده‌م.»

“As grounds for a divorce, a Qazvini explains that he has been unable to consummate the marriage with his brother-in-law.”

قزوینی به تو دادخواست طلاق زنش علت طلاق رو می‌نویسه عدم تمکین برادرزن.

(What has been translated as “consummate” is *adam-e tamkin* in the original text. *Adam-e tamkin* or non-submission is subsumed by *nushuz*, a concept in Islamic jurisprudence that is rooted in a controversial verse [No. 34] from chapter four [*al-Nesa (The Women)*] in the Qur’an. “*Nushuz* literally means ‘rebellion’ and it implies the abandonment of marital duties” [Mir-Hosseini 47]. While the term in principle refers to both man’s and woman’s rights, in actuality it is mostly used to refer to a woman’s *rebellion* [47]. *Nushuz* could, among other things, lead to a husband’s depriving his wife from her *nafaqah* [allowances]. One famous manifestation of *nushuz* is the wife’s abstaining from offering sexual gratification as requested by the husband.)

¹⁵⁶ The following visual piece of humour on Iranian.com, which has apparently become controversial among some of the website’s users, plugs into the above double entendre in the word *kun* (i.e., ass and asshole):

<http://iranian.com/main/2009/feb-13.html>

A Qazvini is seated on a city bus. They tell him, “Get up and let your wife sit.”

He says, “I can’t. After last night, I don’t have the legs to stand, and she doesn’t have the bum to sit.”¹⁵⁷

How could we make sense of the Qazvini joke cycle as a social fact (Davies, *Jokes and Targets* 7-8) in its relation to other social facts in modern Iranian society? When did the cycle originate, and what functions could it serve? A few hypotheses have been put forward about the origins of the Qazvini joke cycle. Christie Davies, for instance, connects the Qazvini pederast stereotype with the fact that “the town [of Qazvin] was the home of the fourteenth-century Persian poet Ubayd-i Zakani, who wrote ribald homoerotic verse” (“Sex between Men” 157). The contemporary Iranian humourist Ebrahim Nabavi, after assessing several possibilities, also arrives at a similar explanation (Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 179-180). However, this explanation is deemed as “tenuous” by Dominic Brookshaw, because “[homoerotic] humor is common to numerous medieval writers and their works” (66). Brookshaw himself puts forward a more tenable hypothesis. Drawing upon the theory that ethnic stereotypes are often tagged to the people of culturally and geographically marginal communities,¹⁵⁸ Brookshaw suggests that the

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قزوینی‌یه تو اتوبوس نشسته بود. می‌گن: «پاشو زنت بشینه.» می‌گه: «دیشب شب جمعه بود؛ نه من پای ایستادن دارم، نه اون کون نشستن.»

(In the original text, it says “Last night was Thursday night....” In Iran, since Friday is the single holiday during the week, Thursday night has been traditionally marked as the most appropriate time for (marital) sexual intercourse.)

Here is another example from the same category: “A girl marries a Qazvini. Her mother warns her, ‘If he ever asks you to turn around, slap him in the face and come back home.’ After three years, the girl returns. The mom asks, ‘What’s up?’ The girl says, ‘My husband told me, ‘Turn around, it’s about time we tried having babies’.”

یه دختره با یه قزوینی ازدواج می‌کنه. مادرش بهش می‌گه: «هروقت شوهرت بهت گفت برگرد، یکی بزنی تو گوشش و بیا خونه.» بعد از سه سال، دختره می‌آد

خونه. مادرش می‌گه: «چی شد؟» دختره می‌گه: «شوهرم گفت برگرد، حالا وقتشه بچه‌دار بشیم.»

(This joke also hints at the old stereotype about the Qazvinis as idiots. For a longer and more detailed version, see Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 189.)

¹⁵⁸ The theory belongs to Christie Davies (see Chapter Two in his *Ethnic Humor around the World*).

Qazvini stereotype may have been induced by the combination of certain gender and geo-political changes in Iran during the past one hundred years:

[T]he modern negative stereotype about Qazvini men may have come about as a consequence of the moving of the capital to Tehran (just over 150 km from Qazvin) at the very end of the eighteenth century. As Tehran began to grow up and modernize after a European-style fashion during the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah, (r. 1848-1896), and when, by the first decades of the twentieth century, society in the Iranian capital increasingly looked to the west for inspiration and became increasingly heterosocial, more conservative towns such as Qazvin, where the public space remained noticeably homosocial well into the twentieth century, for aspirational Tehranis, who now saw the heterosexual monogamous couple and the nuclear family as the bedrock of society, perhaps came to symbolize all that was backward about past centuries, including, in their estimation, homoerotic desire. (“Have You Heard the One about the Man from Qazvin?” 66)

While further evidence is needed for why only Qazvini men (and not, for instance, men from other small towns adjacent to Tehran) have become the target of jokes during this historical process of the abjection of homoeroticism, the connection Brookshaw makes between the Qazvini jokes and the recent transformations in the gender order of the Iranian society is shrewd and worthy of further consideration.¹⁵⁹ Although Brookshaw himself does not render any

¹⁵⁹ One possibility, which I intend as an add-on to Brookshaw’s point about the shift in capital cities, is that the Qazvinis, as earlier mentioned, were already targets of stupidity jokes in much classical Persian humour. The stereotype of Qazvini people as stupid, unlike what Brookshaw assumes, does not appear to have been directly conveyed to the Turks (see Brookshaw 66). For example, in Mehdi Soheili’s collection of jokes, published in the 1950s, we still see jokes that feature Qazvini people as stupid (see Soheili 8). Even as late as in the 1970s, we hear

evidence for the contended origins of Qazvini jokes during the late Qajar era, evidence can be found in support of his claim. In the late eighteenth-century Persian travelogue *A Shi'ite Pilgrimage to Mecca: The Safarnameh of Mirza Mohammad Hossein Farahani*, the author, after emphasizing “the noble character of Qazvin” by quoting several *hadiths* to link the Qazvinis with utmost faithfulness and martyrdom, concludes that the “significance of this is that the slanders which are uttered about Qazvin and the Qazvinis are without foundation” (13-14). “The land of Qazvin,” he continues, “is very noble, and the goodness and nobleness of the people is well attested” (14). The author does not bring any examples of the “slanders” he alludes to. However, the fact that he raises the moral issues of *khubi* (goodness) and *sherafat* (nobleness) suggests that he might be referring to the issue of pederasty.¹⁶⁰

To contextualize Brookshaw’s above-mentioned connection, using Afsaneh Najmabadi’s historiographical account of Iranian modernity and its interplay with gender and sexuality—a

Qazvini jokes that target Qazvini people’s dull-wittedness. The following joke, performed by the late Iranian comic, Parviz Hassas, is a case in point (at 3:54), although Hassas notes that he will relate the joke despite its being an “old” one: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssrpJtTldKc> Thus, it is possible that the already existing stereotype about Qazvini people’s stupidity paved the way for Qazvini men’s being marked as resistive against modern reconfigurations of sex and eros.

¹⁶⁰ In a footnote to the English translation of the above pilgrimage, the editor notes that “[t]here are many popular anecdotes implying that people in Qazvin are crude, stupid or pederasts; some are recorded in Seyf od-Dowleh, *Safarnameh*, p. 31” (14). However, in Seyf od-Dowleh’s *Safarnameh* we find no direct references to pederasty. Seyf od-Dowleh says, “[The people of Qazvin] are Turk, Fars, and Kurd. They are highly badly-accented (*besyar bad-lahjeh*), *az del dur* (unrefined and unpleasant?), and mostly ill-tempered (*bad-kholghat*), stupid (*ahmagh*), and arrogant (*motekabber*) (Soltan Mohammad Mirza Qajar 31, my translation). These adjectives are then followed by “two anecdotes about the stupidity of the people of this land which I heard from its governor” [*do hekayat az hemaghat-e ahl-e in molk az hakem-e anja shenidam*] (31). As also seen in the case of another eighteenth-century travelogue, the stereotype of the stupid Qazvini has easily appeared in writing (see footnote 143 above). However, as suggested by Farahani’s defense of Qazvini people’s “nobility,” the pederasty stereotype might have been too crude to appear in writing.

source to which Brookshaw also refers—is helpful.¹⁶¹ In her book, *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, Najmabadi focuses on a critical juncture in the history of gender and sexuality in modern Iran, a juncture during the late Qajar era in which the Iranian society’s gender order underwent critical transformations. More specifically, the order altered from a compound of homo- and heteroerotic relations into a heteronormative order. Najmabadi’s book is also the first attempt in which Iranian modernity is rewritten as a process that was inevitably interlinked with gender and sexuality issues. These issues, she argues, “were central to the formation of modernist and countermodernist discourses” (8). Her account of Iranian modernity, as we see later, proves beneficial in comprehending the possible historical origins and social functions of Rashti jokes, too.

Throughout her book, Najmabadi underscores what she deems as a historical *amnesia*: the commonness in pre-modern Iran of the social identity of *amrad*, i.e., a young beardless male who was an object of older men’s desire. From its very beginning, Iranian modernity, she maintains, became entangled with some national shame regarding gender and sexuality. As Iranians gained increasing familiarity with European lifestyles, mostly through the courtly Iranians’ visits to Europe and the former’s hosting Europeans, Iranians became self-conscious about their sexual acts and desires. The powerful judgemental gaze of the other was somehow to be dealt with. As

¹⁶¹ Until around a decade ago we had no coherent historiography of gender and sexuality in Iran. This situation was changed by the publication of three important books: Afsaneh Najmabadi’s *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (2005), Willem Floor’s *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran* (2008), and Janet Afary’s *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (2009). Floor aims to provide an exhaustive history of sexual matters in Iran from the Biblical era up to the present day, by discussing the topics of *nekah*, i.e., permanent marriage, *sigheh*, i.e., temporary marriage, prostitution, homosexuality, and venereal disease. Afary’s book provides a historiographical narrative of the changing gender and sexual relations in modern Iranian society. As a groundbreaking study, Najmabadi’s book, which has apparently informed the other two books, is of special importance to my study.

Najmabadi puts it, once “homoeroticism and same-sex practices became marked as a sign of Iran’s backwardness, heteronormalization of eros and sex became a condition of ‘achieving modernity,’ a project that called for heterosocialization of public space and a reconfiguration of family life” (146-47). Thus, marriage, which was previously mostly directed towards procreation, became gradually re-imagined “as a romantic rather than a procreative contract” (7). With the increasing heterosocialization of Iranian society, certain tactics became prevalent for marking homosexuality as an “unreadable text” (58). These strategies ranged from an initial “temporal marginalization of same-sex practices” (i.e., marking such acts as temporary in the lives of many men who would allegedly all become practicing heterosexuals eventually) to other “marginalizing moves, such as effeminizing, typing, medicalizing, psychologizing, and exteriorizing (attribution to cultural disruptions of the West)” (58).

Prior to the modern era in Iran, particularly during the medieval times and up to the early modern period, homoerotic relations similar to man-boy relationships in Greco-Roman societies were common (Afary 92). Similarly, different terms were used to refer to the *active* (the penetrator) and the *passive* partner in the relationship. While the active partner was, among other things, called *fa’el* (doer), *gholam-bareh* (lover of pages), *jamal/surat-parast* (lover of beautiful faces), *bacheh-baz* (paedomaniac), and *luti* (sodomite, from the word *lavat*, i.e., sodomy), the passive guy, who was normally of a younger age, was described by such terms as *ma’bun/maf’ul* (catamite/receiver), *amrad* (beardless adolescent),¹⁶² *kudak* (child), *now-khatt* (one with a budding moustache), *bi-rish* (beardless), and *pesar* (boy) (see Afary 86-92; Floor 293-294). Due to the pressure to typologize sexuality, Najmabadi states, the notions of *bacheh-bazi* and *bacheh* were also transformed:

¹⁶² The beard, in much classical Persian literature, is considered as “the destroyer of youthful beauty” (Javadi, ‘*Obeyd-e Zakani* 22).

Previously the word *bachchah* [. . .] had connoted older man–younger man sexual practices. The word *bachchah* was more like the contemporary meaning of a teenager. Once older man–younger man sexual practices became unnatural vice, *bachchah* was transformed into what we now name a child, and the sexual practices became what we now call pederasty. (60)

Najmabadi’s point is clearly reflected in the *bacheh-baz* entry in *Dehkhoda Persian Dictionary*, where we have *bacheh-baz* defined as “a person who desires *amrad* (beardless) boys,” or a person who is “obsessed with *amrads*” or “a man who, more than women, desires *sadeh* (beardless) boys” (“Bacheh-baz”). In fact, as Homa Katouzian maintains, it could be argued that the terms *bacheh* and *bacheh-bazi*, as associated with the Qazvini jokes, are remnants of the old *bacheh-bazi* tradition in Iran, and therefore must be interpreted with an eye on this past tradition.¹⁶³ That we should not be misguided to take the modern sense of *bacheh-bazi* (very close to pedophilia) as the main or only theme of the Qazvini jokes is best inferred from some examples of these jokes in which—despite the jokes’ being arguably recently created—the protagonists’ desire for (young) adult males, and not young boys per se, is also exposed:

A Qazvini man [to his bride], on their wedding night: Darling, let’s talk sexy!

The wife: Look at my breasts.

The Qazvini: Darn it, turn me on!

The wife: Look what I’ve got down there for you!

The Qazvini: Cut the crap! Tell me about your father’s ass. Tell me about your brother’s bum.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Personal correspondence with the author, 6-9 June 2013.

¹⁶⁴

A group of Qazvinis called Mr. Bush at the White House recently and told him that they were holding Osama Bin Laden captive. They went on to say that they would be willing to negotiate a prisoner exchange if he would sent [sic] them Leonardo Di Caprio.¹⁶⁵ (Appleton 65)

In light of the above mentioned, it would be plausible to take the Qazvini man as a comical scapegoat who, despite the modern Iranian society's increasing drive towards normative heterosexuality, is still driven towards the anus as a marker of homoeroticism as opposed to vagina as a symbol of heteroeroticism. The dichotomy calls to mind the Qajar Persian humourist

قزوینیه شب زفاف: «عزیزم، حرفای سکسی بگو.» زن: «سینه‌مو نیگاه.» مرد: «آه، بابا حرف‌های تحریک‌کننده بزن.» زن: «لایامو نیگاه کن.» مرد: «چرا

کس شعر می‌گی؟ از کون بابا و داداشت تعریف کن!»

¹⁶⁵ For a version in which the Qazvinis demand “Kamran and Hooman” (two Iranian-Canadian brothers and singers residing and working in the United States), see Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 183. The famous Iranian comic Hamid Mahi-Sefat relates a variant of Nabavi's version here (13:05-13:22):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=fvwp&v=xWlpXMv8HU&NR=1>

Here are more examples to support the above claim:

“A Qazvini has it written on his wedding card, ‘It is mandatory that you bring along any children under the age of fifteen!’”

قزوینیه عروسی می‌کنه. توی کارت عروسی‌اش می‌نویسه: «آوردن اطفال زیر پانزده سال الزامیست!»

See http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes_category&cat_id=32&from=180&

- Who's the most courageous man in the world?

- Qazvin's *Imam Jom'eh* (i.e., Friday prayer leader).

اگه گفتی شجاع‌ترین مرد جهان کیه؟ - امام جمعه‌ی قزوین.

“A Qazvini goes to a pharmacy and asks for 99 condoms. ‘Would you like me to make it 100 for you?’, asks the pharmacist. ‘You too?!’ replies the Qazvini [Literally, ‘it seems you’re also asking for it!’].”

قزوینیه می‌ره داروخونه، می‌گه: «نود و نه تا کاندوم بده.» دکتره می‌گه: «یه دفعه صد تا ببر دیگه!» قزوینیه می‌گه: «مثل اینکه کون تو هم می‌خاره‌ها؟»

See <http://forum.iranproud.com/showthread.php?354764-chand-ta-joke-ghazvini>

“Qazvini proverb: If your friends are true friends, you'll never have to ask for your wife's bum [originally, ‘favour’].”

ضرب‌المثل قزوینی: «اگه رفیق رفیق باشه، آدم منت زن شو نمی‌کشه.»

Iraj Mirza's (1874-1926) most well-known work, "Aref Nameh" [literally, "Letter to/on Aref"] (1921), a satirical poem that was written during the same juncture in which, according to Najmabadi, the Iranian gender order was bending towards heteronormativity. The poem is a phallogentric *hajn* (invective satire) in which Iraj Mirza attacks his friend, Aref Qazvini (1882-1934), a well-known poet and musician, for not having stayed with Iraj Mirza after visiting the latter's hometown. In part of the poem, Iraj Mirza, who himself had been known for pederasty, attributes pederasty to Aref, too, and complains of the spread of the act of *bachsch-bazi* which he condemns as a sign of Iranians' lack of enough civilization compared to Europeans. While taking women's veil as the main cause of men's tendency towards homoeroticism (I discuss this in further detail in the following section), Iraj Mirza significantly puts the *kos* ("cunt") in contrast with the *kun* ("ass") as respective markers of heteroeroticism and homoeroticism, while rendering the latter as a ludicrously *abject* object of desire:

You've never tasted what a cunt can be,/ Or else you'd spit on *kuns* and sodomy!
Where there's the rosy vagina, you twit,/ Why even consider assholes, they shit?
[. . .] So tell Aref, that public spectacle:/ He's fishing in the wrong receptacle./ To
bugger and pretend it's normal screwage/ Is like masturbating with stinking
sewage. (Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* 82-83)¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ (Juxtaposing *shit* and *homosexuality* for constructing same-sex relations as repulsive is not unprecedented. The technique is also found in some Western jokes about homosexuality. For instance, on the following page on "gay jokes" from the previously discussed website jokes4us.com [see Chapter Two above], eight jokes revolve around the above juxtaposition: <http://www.jokes4us.com/dirtyjokes/gayjokes.html>.) In *Divan-e Khakshir-e Esfahani* (*The Complete Works of Khakshir-e Esfahani*, published in 1956), we also see many poems which reveal anxieties over vagina and anus as objects of desire. A free scanned version of Esfahani's book, which has little bibliographical information and is no longer available for purchase, may be accessed here: <http://ketabnak.com/comment.php?dlid=7168> For the relationship between the sexual themes in "Aref-Nameh" and Iranian modernity, see Najmabadi 149-150. For a brief discussion about the abjection of male same-sex practices in

The Qazvini man's preferring anus over vagina also calls to mind a pre-modern hierarchy of bodily openings in Iranian *hazl* (i.e., bawdy language) and *hajv* (i.e., verbal aggression or assault; invective): "In the *hazl* hierarchy of orifices," as Sprachman puts it, "the anus of a pathic boy (catamite = *gholam*; *amrad*) is preferred to a woman's anus, which, in turn, is superior to her vagina" (*Suppressed Persian* xxxviii). Unsurprisingly, the Qazvini man's most desired orifice, *kun*—or, as uttered in the Qazvini dialect, *kaan*—becomes the very subject of some contemporary Qazvini jokes:

The Qazvini trousseau list: Ab-garm*kun* (water-heater), Ab-sard*kun* (water cooler), Shir-dagh*kun* (milk heater), Chai-saf*kun* (tea strainer), Sorkh*kun* (deep fryer), makhlut*kun* (blender), khord*kun* (grinder), dar-vaz*kun* (bottle/can opener).
Most importantly, all must be of the *Kun*-wood (Kenwood) trademark.¹⁶⁷

Iraj Mirza's "Aref-Nameh," in light of Judith Butler's and Julia Kristeva's concept of *abjection*, see Abedinifard, "The Gender Politics of Iraj Mirza's 'Aref-Nameh'."

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جهیزیه‌ی قزوینی‌ها: یک. آبگرم‌کون؛ دو. آبسردکون؛ سه. شیرداغ‌کون؛ چهار. چای‌صاف‌کون؛ پنج. سرخ‌کون؛ شش. مخلوط‌کون؛ هفت. خُردکون؛ هشت. دَرَوازکون. و از همه مهم‌تر! همه از مارک معروفِ کون‌وود!

The joke draws on certain features of the Qazvini dialect. While the *k* sound is pronounced with greater intensity in the Qazvini dialect, the vowel "o" in *kon* (a frequently used suffix in Farsi, meaning "maker; causer") is also pronounced as if it were "u" in *kun* (buttocks, anus). Here is another to support the above claim: [The Qazvini List of the Most Favourite:] The most favourite soccer player: Oliver Kahn / The most favourite singer: Hamed Hakan / The most favourite organization: Hemayat az Kudakaan [Child Support] / The most favourite city: Ardakaan [city in Yazd Province, Iran] / The most favourite animal: Pelikaan [pelican] / The most favourite glassware: Estekaan [tea glass] / The most favourite sightseeing: Seeing kaan [*kun*; asshole]/ The most favourite contact: Bumping into kaan/ The most favourite hobby: Fucking a *kaan* in a *dokaan* (shop), and if not possible, in a *Paykaan* (Paykan, an automobile previously manufactured by Iran Khodro Company) / The most favourite head of sports organization: Dadkaan.

محبوب‌ترین فوتبالیست: آلیور کان؛ محبوب‌ترین سازمان: حمایت از کودکان؛ محبوب‌ترین شهر: اردکان؛ محبوب‌ترین حیوان: پلیکان؛ محبوب‌ترین محصول شیشه: استکان؛ محبوب‌ترین نگاه: دیدن کان؛ محبوب‌ترین برخورد: برخورد با کان؛ محبوب‌ترین تفریح: کردن کان در دُکان، اگر نشد در پیکان؛ محبوب‌ترین رییس فدراسیون: دادکان.

As touched upon earlier, in our attempt to identify the social functions of jokes with targets, we must not assume that all functions are necessarily related to the obvious targets. Each joke cycle with a target could occupy several functions that may not be related to their immediate targets, but which do concern the central themes of the joke cycle. I deem such functions as the *displaced functions* of jokes with targets. Other than the above meaning, in using the term *displaced* I would like to imply some degree of unconsciousness in social agents' use of the jokes, too.¹⁶⁸ Failing to note displaced functions for jokes with targets might cause us to think that jokes with stereotypes are not worthy of academic research since, some contend, "ethnic associations are based on little more than subjective taste and preconceptions. They result in stereotypes that cannot be substantiated and therefore are best avoided" (de Bruijn, par. 3). Additionally, and more importantly, the above attitude might lead to the "exculpatory" viewpoint of humour, as represented by Christie Davies (see Weaver 8-9), namely that jokes are not consequential. "Jokes," Davies believes, "are a thermometer, not a thermostat" (*Jokes and Targets* 248). According to him, therefore, "it is wrong to deduce that [. . .] jokes have any impact on society" (248). Davies is most explicit in this regard when he states, "The argument that jokes 'reinforce' the social order is meaningless" (248).

The Qazvini and Rashti jokes are pertinent cases for discussing the displaced functions of jokes with targets, and to refute claims similar to that of Davies about such jokes. These joke cycles might or might not affect Iranians' perceptions of Qazvini men and of Rashti men and

See <http://forum.iranproud.com/showthread.php?354764-chand-ta-joke-ghazvini>

¹⁶⁸ On a socio-psychological level, the Qazvini character seems to provide a comic outlet for modern Iranians' anxieties and contradictions in the realm of sexuality. Despite the apparent disappearance of *bacheh-bazi*, in its old sense, as a conventional social tradition in a past not so far from Iranians, there have always been Iranian men who, despite self-identifying as heterosexual, have sustained a vested interest in having (occasional) sex with boys or other men. Thus, the very existence of a dynamic series of jokes centering on *bacheh-bazi* could inform us of the existence of the phenomenon in the society, albeit with an altered meaning and content from that in the past.

women.¹⁶⁹ However, the peculiar popularity of the jokes among many Iranians does suggest a significant connection between such jokes on the one hand and the hegemonic masculinity of the contemporary Iranian society on the other. (See also Abedinifard, “Rev. of *Jokes and Targets*” 58-59.)

The Qazvini man, as touched upon earlier, has apparently deserved a chuckle due to his untimely desire for *bacheh-bazi* (either class-based homosexuality or pederasty) in a heteronormative and increasingly modernizing society. In this sense, the Qazvini joke cycle could be viewed as a socio-cultural remnant of the issues of gender and sexuality as contestations which, according to Najmabadi, “were central to the formation of modernist and countermodernist discourses [and] continue to be central to contemporary politics of Iran and many other Islamic societies of the Middle East” (8). Such a disciplinary function for the Qazvini joke cycle among Iranians could be confirmed via actual evidence. One of my colleagues, Evan Siegel, informed me about an Iranian family friend of his who had had to change his surname from “Qazvini” to a less sensitive name only to escape his colleagues’ teasing remarks that associated him with the funny *bacheh-baz* from Qazvin.¹⁷⁰ Likewise, in an amusing scene from

¹⁶⁹ Demonstrating this claim requires empirical study. On a basic level, however, we could say that the *unlaughter* aroused by much ethnic humour is a blatant sign of the possible effects and consequences of such humour. A relevant case in point is the Iranian cartoonist Mana Neyestani’s joking with the Azeris, allegedly based on the jocular Turks-are-idiots stereotype, in an Iranian national newspaper (see <http://iranian.com/Satire/Cartoon/2006/June/soosks.html>), which resulted in vehement protests by Iran Azeris as well as in Neyestani’s being imprisoned. (For more information on the protests, see: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5024550.stm. In his recently published comics autobiography, Neyestani reveals the significance and lasting effects of the event in his life [see Neyestani].) As another instance of possible effects and consequences of jokes on their stated targets, an Internet user, in the comment he puts on a critical essay on Rashti jokes, remarks that according to his lived experience, the jokes can affect non-Gilani people’s ideas about the Gilani people, while also negatively impacting some Gilani people’s morale. See <http://www.akhbar-rooz.com/ideas.jsp?essayId=33785&direction=backward&first=32773>

¹⁷⁰ Personal email correspondence, May 30, 2013.

David Ignatius' *The Increment: A Novel*, which is a fictional narrative concerning the recent U.S.-Iran relations, a character is accused of being Qazvini for his cautions about having heterosexual relations:

“I want a woman,” said Hossein. He was drunk. They had finished the first bottle of home brew and started a second.

“Do you want a disease, too?” asked the Young man. “Because they go together.”

“You are too careful. What’s the matter with you? Have you been visiting Qazvin?” That was an insult. Iranians liked to joke that the men of the city of Qazvin, northwest of Tehran, were all homosexuals. (38)

Yet, the Qazvini joke cycle, in line with the socio-historical contextualization in this section, may be argued to serve homophobic functions, too. The fact that the Qazvini character is an active—and not a passive—partner in same-sex practices is pivotal to this possible function. As in some Latin American cultures, in Iran an “active gay can be proud of his action, but a passive gay is ashamed of himself. Suicides are rather frequent among young men who have been found to be the passive partner in male homosexual intercourse” (Baraheni 57-58).¹⁷¹ As Ali Delforouh, after a reference to Qazvini jokes, states in his memoir *The Iranian Chronicles: Unveiling the Dark Truths of the Islamic Republic*, “[i]n present day Iran, being gay is often stereotyped along two popular depictions: *bachebaz* and *evakhahar*. The former is widely described as a vicious, sex-crazed child molester, while the latter describes a gay man who is

¹⁷¹ As Steven Kurtz remarks in his essay “Cuban and Puerto Rican Gay Masculinities in Miami,” “[m]ale homosexualities, like masculinities, are not [. . .] identically constructed across or within cultures [. . .]. [M]achismo—the Latin American construction of hegemonic masculinity—produces a stigmatized homosexual identity only for those men who engage in receptive anal intercourse (*pasivos*) and inserters (*activos*, or *bugurrdnes*) retain their masculinity. Because being sexually penetrated contradicts the masculine ideal—as penetration affirms it—*pasivos*, variously identified in Latin cultures as *mariposas* (butterflies) and *muricons* (faggots) are socially cast as highly effeminate men” (372).

effeminate” (230). In this dichotomy, and in terms of sexual politics, the Qazvini man, since he is the *penetrator*, not only feels no cultural shame, but could even feel proud of his act. Therefore, his character might instigate a conflicting range of emotions in some (particularly male) audiences of the Qazvini jokes. On the one hand, the Qazvini man can be viewed as abnormally and ludicrously bent towards anal hetero- and homosexual sex. On the other hand, however, he may be seen as a macho character who is to be, simultaneously, coveted and feared.¹⁷² The following Qazvini jokes, while revolving around homophobia, suggest social agents’ probable use of the Qazvini jokes as a cathartic tool and coping mechanism:

If you’re ever stuck in a blind alley with a Qazvini, you’ve got three options: turn into water and go beneath the earth, turn into smoke and go up in the air, or lean against the wall and rely on God.¹⁷³

In Qazvin, a student’s ring binder drops. He quits school for well-known reasons. Next year, he participates in the [nation-wide university] entrance exam, and starts studying in a different field. (Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 185)¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² This contention could be a starting point for some empirical research in this regard. My personal memories prove the point. During the first two years of my undergraduate years in Tehran, in the dormitory room where I lived along with four other students, we had a Qazvini roommate. Despite being a highly polite and reticent person, he was sometimes provoked to use his privileged status as a Qazvini to joke with others at their expense. I also remember that along with a close Esfahani friend of mine, I would frequent the dorm room of a Shahreza’i friend of his in Tehran. Our host, during our conversations, would sometimes benefit from his jocular and amusing yet also powerful subject position as a stereotypically active homosexual, at our expense.

¹⁷³

اگه با یه قزوینی افتادی تو کوچهی بن‌بست، سه راه داری: آب بشی بری تو زمین، دود بشی بری تو هوا، دست‌تو بزنی به دیوار و توکل کنی به خدا.

¹⁷⁴

یه دانشجو تو قزوین کلاسورش می‌افته زمین. به دلایلی ترک تحصیل می‌کنه، سال بعد در کنکور شرکت می‌کنه و در رشته‌ی دیگه‌ای به درس ادامه می‌ده.

In the following joke, homophobia is projected by the Qazvini character himself:

They ask a Qazvini, “What’s your best memory?”

“An alley and a kid (*bacheh*),” he says.

They ask, “What’s your worst memory?”

“An alley and me—as a kid”¹⁷⁵

The above claim about the homophobic function of Qazvini jokes gains more tangibility in light of further contextualized evidence. In part of his memoir *Poets and Pahlavans*, Marcello Di

(As fabricated as the narrative is, it is a reminder of the disgrace that, as mentioned by Baraheni above, passive homosexuals must endure in Iranian society. I personally know of a past neighbour in my hometown, Kermanshah, whose adolescent boy had to leave town forever as he had been raped and disgraced in a homosocial circle of drunk friends.) Below are further examples to support the above claim:

“One day in Qazvin a boy bends down and ties up his shoes. From then on, he is named The Brave Boy.”

یه روز یه پسر تو قزوین خم می‌شه بند کفش شو می‌بنده و بدون هیچ مشکلی بلند می‌شه. از اون روز به بعد اسم شو می‌ذارن پسر شجاع.

(The joke hints at a Japanese cartoon series, titled Don Chuck Stories, which features the adventures of a young beaver called Chuck and his friends. The series was on Iranian TV during the early 1980s. However, its title as well as the protagonist’s name was changed into “The Brave Boy” [*Pesar-e Shoja*] in the dubbed Farsi version.)

“As you enter Qazvin, there is a sign on the side of the road that says, ‘Welcome to Qazvin.’ As you leave the city, the sign says: ‘Did you enjoy it?!’

می‌گویند وقتی وارد شهر قزوین می‌شوی، کنار جاده یک تابلو زده‌اند که «به شهر ما خوش آمدید.» بعد که از شهر خارج می‌شوید، روی تابلو نوشته:

«خوشتان آمد؟!»

(The joke is related by the famous Iranian author Iraj Pezeshkzad, who, significantly, indicates he heard it “from a friend of mine who himself is Qazvini” [For the English transliteration of the joke on [www.Iranian.com](http://iranian.com/Satire/Pezeshkzad/index1.html#jok), see <http://iranian.com/Satire/Pezeshkzad/index1.html#jok>. For the English version on the same website, see <http://iranian.com/Satire/Pezeshkzad/index1.html#jokes>.])

“Upon entering Qazvin, you see a big sign that says, ‘We sell iron shorts.’ Upon leaving the city, you’ll see another sign saying, ‘We buy scrap iron.’

دم ورودی شهر قزوین نوشته: «شورت‌های آهنین می‌فروشیم.» بعد از قزوین هم نوشته: «آهن پاره خریداریم!»

See http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes&joke_id=2226&cat_id=32&jtype=

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به قزوینیه می‌گن: «بهترین خاطره ت چیه؟» می‌گه: «یه کوچه و یه بچه.» ازش می‌پرسن: «بدترین خاطره ت چی بوده؟» می‌گه: «یه کوچه و من بچه.»

For a more detailed version, see Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 181-182.

Cintio, while relating his stay at a friend's in the city of Qom, and his consternation at being offered alcoholic beverage in such a *holy* city in Iran, writes:

Amir [the narrator's host] asked me if I had tried araq [Iranian home-made wine] before. When I told him about my visit to Qazvin, he and Kaveh looked at each other and giggled.

"You should not go to that fucking place," Kaveh squeaked.

"Why not?"

"*Bacheh-baz*," Kaveh said. "They play with children."

"There is a story about the men in Qazvin," Amir explained. "They have a reputation for sleeping with small boys." (60)

Likewise, in Fred Reed's memoir, *Persian Postcards: Iran after Khomeini*, the narrator, who is being accompanied in his Iran tour by his local friend, Majid, notes, upon entering Qazvin:

As we turn down a boulevard lined with scruffy evergreens Majid's chipper voice suddenly jars me out of my meditation on how societies give shape to cities. Our entry into Qazvin has touched off a rapid-fire series of scabrous anecdotes about the town's citizens. No matter where you go in Iran, you will find the town's male residents being ridiculed on account of their reputed proclivities for buggery, pederasty and dullwittedness, explains my walking encyclopedia of Iranian apocrypha. (I later asked friends in Tehran about the Qazvinis, and inevitably got in return an amused rolling of eyes.) Yes, it is true, Majid assures me with theatrical sincerity—the rhetorician lurking in every second Iranian—ladies refuse excellent marriage offers from men of the town. Visitors dare not pick up

loose change should it fall to the sidewalk. Appropriate advice for those coming to Qazvin for the first time, then, would be: keep your back to the wall and under no circumstances bend at the waist, I venture. Majid laughs: “Here, you must be careful all the time.” (48)

While clearly indicating the potentiality of Qazvini jokes for serving as homophobic discourse, and as instances of tension-relieving humour, these examples also prove the aforementioned point that the term *bacheh-bazi* in its relation with such jokes cannot be reduced to pedophilia. In fulfilling a homophobic function, the Qazvini jokes also tend to strengthen the aforesaid binary oppositions of the *penetrator/penetrated* in the Iranian culture. Such a hierarchy of homosexuals is itself related to the feminization of the *maf'ul* (passive) homosexual (Najmabadi 3, 59), and is therefore suggestive of the possible patriarchal effects of the Qazvini jokes, too. All of these possibilities, in light of the above mentioned historicity and context of the Qazvini jokes, endorse the claim, developed in previous chapters, that the mainstream gender humour in a society serves to sustain and reinforce the gender order in that society. The well-known contemporary Iranian jokes told about the man and the woman from the northern Iranian city of Rasht, as we will see in the following section, provide further evidence for these claims.

The Stigmas of Lacking *Gheirat* and *Effat*: The Rashti Cuckold and His Wanton Woman as National Lessons

Rasht is the capital city of the Iranian province of Gilan. Along with its adjacent province of Mazandaran, Gilan lies along the Caspian Sea, which gives both provinces a unique climate within Iran. In modern Iranian humour, “Rashti men are gullible cuckolds, while their wives are adulterous and sexually loose” (Brookshaw, “Have You Heard the One about the Man from

Qazvin?” 65).¹⁷⁶ While mentioning characteristic instances of Rashti jokes in this chapter, I argue that at the heart of such jokes lie the central and interrelated discourses of men’s *gheirat* (a specific construction based on a man’s sense of honour, possessiveness and protectiveness towards certain female kins of his) and women’s *effat* (chastity). Therefore, before discussing any examples, I briefly explain these concepts.

While discussing “The Exclusive Rights of the Muslim Husband and the Wife’s Obligations,” Zahra Tizro, in her book *Domestic Violence in Iran*, remarks that in Islam “the ethico-juristic code of *mahram’iyat*” entails that the “contact circle of a woman should perfectly be limited to the *mahram*,” i.e., a legitimate circle of people as opposed to the non-*mahram* or the strangers. In fact, a “woman can be seen unveiled only by other women, by the legitimate owner of her sexuality, or by those men with whom she can only have a sex-neutral relationship” (Valentine Moghadam, qtd. in Tizro 51). Tizro, while identifying the *effat-gheirat* discourses as “an important feature of the army of control mechanisms in traditional Islamic discourses,” explains them and their constituent elements as follows:

Gheirat is the protective and possessive shield constructed around a woman, who is perceived as carrying and personifying a Muslim man’s honour (*namus*).

Gheirat (sexual jealousy) is the right of the owner of the sexual faculties to defend

¹⁷⁶ The Rashti character is also stereotyped for his or her Gilaki accent (Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 145). The accent stereotype, however, is secondary to the central themes of the Rashti man’s cuckoldry and the Rashti woman’s wantonness. Davies erroneously mentions Rashtis as merely stereotyped for stupidity (*Jokes and Targets* 155; *Ethnic Humor around the World* 12, 27). While this is objectionable, as also mentioned by Brookshaw (65), there are Rashti jokes in which the Rashti man’s stupidity (with no references to his cuckoldry) is at stake: e.g., in Nabavi’s collection, see the jokes titled “Hassan Agha Baz-neshasteh Mishavad” [“Hassan Agha Gets Retired”] (*Ahd-e Jadid* 148) and “Shomal-e Amrika” [“Northern U.S.”] (153). However, such jokes are not many, and I would argue that, even in their relying on the mere stupidity script, they maintain an intertextual relationship with typical Rashti-man-as-cuckold jokes.

his territory, passionately and sometimes aggressively. It is a code of behaviour entitling and obliging men to ensure the fulfilment of the exclusivity condition in the marriage contract. A woman is expected to internalize the monopolistic right of the man to her sexuality by observing the codes of chastity (*effat*) and modesty (*haya*). If she does not observe the *effat-haya* codes, she is punished by the codes of *gheirat* at different levels of society. (51)

In light of these key concepts, the most predominant script for Rashti jokes is that of a Rashti man's failure to do *gheirat* in the face of his woman's (mostly his wife's, daughter's, or mother's) outrageous violation of the *effat-haya* codes. Upon learning of such a breach, the Rashti man not only fails to show any *gheirat* as an essential component of the hegemonic masculinity in his society, but he incongruously displays extra lack of, and sometimes ludicrously inopportune or reverse, *gheirat*. Here are some examples:

They say to a Rashti, "We saw your wife in a Renault 5, with five men!" The Rashti says, "Good job, Renault!"¹⁷⁷

One day Hassan Agha goes out with his wife. While walking together, his wife is jostled by another man. She says to her husband, "Shame on you, *gheiratless* man! He just jostled me!" Hassan Agha accosts the man, telling him, "Hey, get over there, give her a kiss, and start sweet-talking!" (Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 156)¹⁷⁸

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به رشتیه می گن: «زنت رو دیدیم تو یه رنو با پنج تا مرد. رشتیه می گه: «آفرین رنو!»

For a version with Paykan, see Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 153.

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Hassan Agha's wife arrives home late. He gets *gheirati* [jealous; zealous; extremely mindful of the honour of one's wife or daughter], aggressively asking her, "Where've you been until now?" She says, "Asghar Agha the butcher was fucking me in his shop." He says, "Alright, ten minutes for you there; what about the rest?" (Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 154-155)¹⁷⁹

حسن آقا با زنش می‌ره بیرون. وسط راه یه مرده تنه می‌زنه به زنش. زنه به حسن آقا می‌گه: «ای خاک بر سر بی‌غیرت کنن؛ تنه زد به من.» حسن آقا به مرده می‌گه: «زودباش برو ماچش کن از دلش دربیار.»

In his collection of Rashti jokes, Nabavi, deliberately avoids using the word *Rashti* whom he names as "Hassan Agha" (Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 147). Similarly, many Iranians, when telling Rashti jokes in circles where a Rashti audience might be present, replace the word "Rashti" with the ironical epithet *khosh-gheirat*, which, opposite to its literal meaning (i.e., he who has *gheirat*), is an "insult" meaning *bi-gheirat* (lacking *gheirat*) (see "Khosh-Gheirat"). For a slightly different version of the above joke, see:

http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes&joke_id=5382&cat_id=22&jtype=

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زن حسن آقا دیر می‌آد خونه. حسن آقا غیرتی می‌شه؛ می‌گه «تا حالا کجا بودی؟» می‌گه: «اصغر آقا تو قصابی داشت منو می‌کرد.» می‌گه: «ده دقیقه اصغر آقا، بقیه شو کجا بودی؟»

See also: http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes&joke_id=4954&cat_id=22&jtype= For a version with the Rashti's daughter who claims she "has been raped," see http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes&joke_id=5370&cat_id=22&jtype= Below are further examples in support of the above statement: "One day a Rashti says to his friend, 'Shame on you, you *gheiratless* man! My wife has seen the tattoo of your sister's body on Abbas Agha's belly!' [Abbas Agha is a stock lover character in Rashti jokes.]

یه روز یه رشتیه به رفیقش می‌گه: «خاک بر سر بی‌غیرت کنن؛ زنم خالکوبی عکس خواهرتو روی شکم عباس آقا دیده!»

"A Rashti man leaves his wife and motorcycle while picking up something at a store. Another man runs in, yelling, 'Hey, someone just rode off with your wife!' Looking out the window, the Rashti replies, 'Never mind her. Look at that bike's acceleration!'

رشتیه با زنش رو موتور بوده؛ یه لحظه پیاده می‌شه بره چیزی بخره، یهو یه نفر موتورشو با زنش می‌بره ... می‌گن: «زنتو بردن!» می‌گه: «زنمو ول کن، شتابو بچسب!»

See also http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes&joke_id=5862&cat_id=22&jtype=

A frequent scenario in the Rashti jokes is the husband's returning home only to encounter his wife's lover or one-night partner in the wardrobe, on the terrace, or under the bed. The following meta-Rashti joke draws on these themes: "Going into a shop to buy a wardrobe, Hassan Agha tells the shopkeeper, 'Do you have a wardrobe with no one in it when I come back home?'" (Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 166).¹⁸⁰ As though a perfect supplement to the Rashti man, in his exemplary lack of *gheirat*, the Rashti woman is an emblem of wantonness. She is basically a slut:

A Rashti woman wants to go abroad by herself. Upon showing the officials her husband's permit, she is told, "Not accepted. For you, we need a collective permit."¹⁸¹

"Upon arriving home, a Rashti finds his wife in the shower with another man. He gets *gheirati* and turns off the water heater."

رشتیه می‌ره خونه می‌بینه زنش با یکی توی حمومه. غیرتی می‌شه آب گرم کن رو خاموش می‌کنه.

See <http://www.jokworld.blogfa.com/post-15.aspx> (Date of access: 29/07/2011)

See also Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 153, as well as

http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes&joke_id=4932&cat_id=22&jtype=

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حسن آقا رفت برای خانه کمد بخرد. گفت: «یه کمد ندارین که وقتی آدم می‌آد خونه، هیچ کی توی کمد نباشه؟»

Here is another version: "A Rashti goes to a carpenter and says, 'Please make me a wardrobe with no *Asghar Aghas* in it' [Here, Asghar Agha is assumed to be a stock lover character.]

رشتیه می‌ره نجاری می‌گه: «قربون، یک کمد بساز اصغر آقا توش نباشه!»

http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes&joke_id=5673&cat_id=22&jtype=

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زن رشتیه می‌خواسته تنها بره خارج. اجازه‌نامه‌ی شوهرش رو می‌بره؛ بهش می‌گن: «قبول نیست. شما باید استشهدا محلی بیارید.»

Here are two more examples: "A Rashti girl is walking down the street when a boy grabs her breasts. The girl says, 'I'll count to a thousand; either let them go or I'll scream!'"

یه دختر رشتیه داشته توی خیابون می‌رفته. یه دفعه یه پسر محکم سینه‌هاشو می‌چسبه. دختره می‌گه: «تا هزار می‌شمرم، ول کن وگرنه جیغ می‌زنم!»

See <http://joktojok.blogfa.com/post-28.aspx> (For another version, see Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 149. Woman's wantonness also exists in Persian classical humour, e.g., in much humour from Obeyd Zakani's complete works.

Thus, in such jokes, the Rashti woman's "nightie" is also her "work clothes" (Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 153), and the first thing she does "upon waking up in the morning" is "to go home" (152, 162).¹⁸² Due to his inherent lack of *gheirat*, the Rashti man surprisingly endures—even apparently enjoys—living with his woman-as-a-slut:¹⁸³

One day a Rashti returns home from work and finds a crowd of men lined up to get into his house. He asks the man at the end of the line what is going on. 'We are queuing up to fuck your wife,' the man says. 'You really should divorce her.' The husband replied [sic], 'I can't divorce her. Then I will have to go to the back of the line.' (qt. in Di Cintio 60-61)¹⁸⁴

Hassan Agha divorces his wife and goes broke. (Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 156)¹⁸⁵

However, while in the past wantonness was arguably a stereotype for women in general, in modern Iranian humour the Rashti woman becomes the exclusive target.)

"A Rashti woman tells her friend, 'Had you heard about the Night Bat in Tehran? He's a serial rapist.' The friend reacts, 'Ahoouooo! All the good facilities are for Tehranis!'. "

زن رشتیه به دوستش میگه: «شنیدی توی تهران خفاش شب اومده به زنا تجاوز می کنه؟» دوستش می گه: «اووووو! هرچی امکاناته مال این تهرونی یاس.»

(For a slightly different version, see Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 148. "Night Bat" was the nickname given to Gholam-Reza Khoshru, a contemporary Iranian serial rapist and killer of girls and women, who was arrested and prosecuted in 1997 on many charges, including several instances of murder and rape. "Ahoouooo!", in less exaggerated form, is a common exclamation in Gilaki language. While telling Rashti jokes, performers deliberately pronounce the exclamation as if it were a wolf's howling.)

¹⁸² See also http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes&joke_id=4838&cat_id=22&jtype=

¹⁸³ I intentionally use "woman" and not "wife" here. Although the majority of the Rashti jokes target the chastity of the Rashti man's wife, his other female kin, e.g., his daughter and mother, are also depicted as *kharab* (impure) or *ghahbeh* (slut) in Rashti jokes (for instance, see Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 163).

¹⁸⁴ Here is a shorter Farsi version:

به رشتیه می گن: «جلو خونه تون صف کشیده دارن زنتو می کنن. چرا زنتو طلاق نمی دی؟» می گه: «طلاق بدم بعد خودم برم آخر صف؟!»

Hassan Agha goes to [work in] Japan. His wife sends him money. (157)¹⁸⁶

Interrelated with the above mentioned themes are also the Rashti man's simultaneous *impotency* and *infertility*. Thus, while being a cuckold, the Rashti man and his children are also deemed as illegitimate. Being unable to impregnate his wife, for instance, the Rashti husband has “to ask for the public's help” (Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 150) or “to move house” (to find more potent neighbours) (150) or “to marry an already pregnant woman” (160) or “to kick out his wife and warn her to never return unless she has a bun in the oven” (161). Upon visiting his doctor, we read in Nabavi's collection, an infertile Rashti is asked, “Is there a history of infertility in your family?,” to which he responds, “[Yes,] my dad” (156). Also, being impotent, the Rashti man has to rely on either other men¹⁸⁷ or other things—e.g., a cucumber¹⁸⁸ or a dildo¹⁸⁹—to consummate his marriage or to satisfy his wife.¹⁹⁰

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حسن آقا می‌ره ژاپن، زنش براش پول می‌فرسته.

(In reality, an Iranian man would be working in Japan to send money back to his family in Iran.) Here are three more examples: “[A] Rashti man was stopped on his way home. He was told that the neighbor's boy was at his house when he was away—while his wife was alone. The Rashti man replied, ‘Wow! Little Ali has become a grown man!’.” (Narrated by Iraj Pezeshkzad; See <http://iranian.com/Satire/Pezeshkzad/index1.html#jokes>. For the English transliteration of the Farsi version, see <http://iranian.com/Satire/Pezeshkzad/index1.html#jok>.)

“A Rashti was asked if he checked out his would-be bride. ‘Sure,’ he replied. ‘All of her previous clients were satisfied.’” (Told to me by a friend in June 2012)

رشتیه زن می‌گیره. بهش می‌گن: «راجع بهش تحقیق کردی؟» می‌گه: «آره، هرکی کرده راضیه.»

“They ask a Rashti, ‘How do you [Rashtis] do birth control?’ ‘We just close the doors and the windows,’ he says.”

از رشتیه می‌پرسن: «شما چه جور از بچه‌دار شدن جلوگیری می‌کنین؟» می‌گه: «در و پنجره‌ها رو می‌بندیم.»

See <http://www.jokworld.blogfa.com/post-7.aspx> (Date of access: 29/07/2011)

See also Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 147. In another version, the Rashti guy says they change the “locks” to their doors.

See http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes&joke_id=5616&cat_id=22&jtype=

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As an emblem of *impotency* and *infertility*, the Rashti man provides a receptacle for projecting the notion of masculinity as virility. This notion is supplemented by some instances in which the Rashti man—somewhat reminiscent of the Asian and the Jewish men in Anglo-American jokes—is granted an outlandishly tiny penis, too. Here is an example:

Once a Tehrani, a Rashti, and an Arab are trapped in a cannibals' island. The cannibals tell them, "We'll add up the lengths of your dicks. If they make no less than a meter, we'll set you free." The Arab provides a good 90 cm. The Tehrani's penis also comes to a 9 cm. Finally, the Rashti antes up 1 cm, and so the whole party gets released. On the way back, the Arab man says, "I'm wondering what you'd do without me!" The Tehrani says, "My 9 cm were also a major help, I guess." The Rashti says, "What the hell! You were lucky I could get a boner today."¹⁹¹

زن رشتیه شب عروسی می پرسه: «بلدی چیکار کنی که؟» رشتیه می گه: «آره، منتظرم یکی بیاد.»

<http://www.jokworld.blogfa.com/post-7.aspx> 29/07/2011

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رشتیه سی سال بوده با خیار با زنش کار می کرده. زنش می فهمه و می گه: «خیلی لاشی هستی!» رشتیه می گه: «لاشی تویی که با خیار پنج تا بچه آوردی!»

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رشتیه داشته لوازم توی کیف خواهرزن شو نگاه می کرده، یه دفعه یه آلت مصنوعی پیدا می کنه. زنش از اون طرف داد می زنه: «صغر آقا، چیکار می کنی؟»

رشتیه می گه: «هیچی، با باجنابق مون گپ می زنیم!»

<http://www.jokworld.blogfa.com/post-7.aspx>

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¹⁹⁰ Rashti joke creators' juxtaposing *infertility* with *impotency* (i.e., two issues not necessarily related), could be of sociological significance. Daphna Birenbaum-Carmeli and Marcia Inhorn, in their essay, "Masculinity and Marginality: Palestinian Men's Struggles with Infertility in Israel and Lebanon," note the "largely mistaken conflation of infertility with impotence" and how such conflation intensifies the stigma of male infertility (24). Also in their essay "Masculinity, Infertility, Stigma and Media Reports," Cannon, Glover and Abel observe "a frequent conflation of fertility and potency" in a Western context (1174).

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The Rashti joke cycle, with its unique subject matter in modern Iranian humour as well as its several-decade popularity, raises important questions about the cycle's possible origins and societal functions. Almost no coherent theory seems to have been put forward regarding the origin of Rashti jokes. However, some working theories could be inferred from the many incidental remarks made about Rashti jokes. A common theme in many if not most of these theories is the highly contrasting lifestyle of the Gilanis, particularly their specific gender division of labour, when compared to that of the non-Gilani Iranians (e.g., see Howard and Haeri 69). As Christian Bromberger puts it about gender relations in Gilan,

[t]he division of activities and spaces between the sexes is quite distinct in the province of Gilan. On the Iranian plateau, and in the Middle East in general, feminine is opposed to masculine as the inside is to the outside, as private is to public, as gardening is to field work, as domestic tasks are to the craft industry. Not so in the Caspian world: here roles and tasks are distributed according to a more flexible pattern: to a large extent, women take an important part in agricultural work; in their homes, the line between male and female spaces is blurred; craftwork, industrial, and commercial activities are not the exclusive prerogative of men in this region. ("GILAN xvii" par. 1)

یه بار، تهرونیه و رشتیه و عربیه گیر آدمخورها می‌افتن. آدمخورها بهشون می‌گن که طول معامله‌هاتون رو با هم جمع می‌کنیم، اگه از صد سانت بیشتر شد، ول‌تون می‌کنیم. عربیه می‌آد و نود سانت می‌ذاره. تهرونیه هم نه سانت می‌ذاره. رشتیه هم یه سانت رو جور می‌کنه و خلاص می‌شن. تو راه برگشت، عربیه می‌گه: «اگه من رو نداشتین چیکار می‌کردین؟» تهرونیه می‌گه: «اون نه سانت من خیلی مهم بود.» رشتیه می‌گه: «چی می‌گید بابا! شانس آوردید که من امروز تونستم شق کنم.»

http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes&joke_id=4465&cat_id=22&jtype=

As previously touched upon, in contemporary Iranian humour, the Arab man is endowed with an abnormally large penis. The above joke also exists in Western folklore at the expense of Jewish men.

Based on this idiosyncrasy, it is often thought that the Rashti joke stereotype came into being upon non-Gilani Iranians' increasing encounter, during the 1960s and the 1970s, with Gilanis' strikingly contrastive lifestyle. As the Iranian scholar Nasrin Rahmieh, herself a native of the Gilani town of Anzali, puts it about the origins of Rashti jokes in an autobiographical narrative about her teenage years,

When I was older, I would hear fellow Gilanis dismiss the jokes as rooted in fear of our liberal ways. Gilani women worked alongside their men, perhaps worked harder than the men, and did not kowtow to male authority. It followed that Gilani men were seen as putty in the hands of their wives. (117-118)

However, the oft-cited theory of Rahimieh's narrator (e.g., see Farjami 14; Nabavi, *Ahd-e Jadid* 145-147), while being plausible on certain grounds, seems to be not explanatory enough. First, the said gender division of labour is not unique to Gilan. Its neighbouring province, Mazandaran, has also long featured a similar sexual division of labour (Paidar 37). Furthermore, in this theory it importantly remains inexplicable as to why the city of Rasht, and not any other Gilani cities, has been designated in the joke cycle.¹⁹²

As with the Qazvini joke cycle, a reference to the historical background of Iranian modernity proves helpful in seeking the origin of Rashti jokes, which, as we will see, will be

¹⁹² As Rahimieh mentions, non-Gilanis (often) do not differentiate residents of different cities in Gilan (117). Based on my personal experience, many Iranians go beyond this by interchangeably using the word "Rashti" for all people resident in the two northern Iranian provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran. (See also <http://abays.blogfa.com/page/38378378378387338796738.aspx>, in which the author states that "in such jokes [Rashti jokes], the attribute Rashti often includes all the residents of the region extending from Astara [western Gilan] to Gonbad [eastern Golestan, itself located in east of Mazandaran].") Despite this, a theory about the origin of such jokes still needs to explain the jokes' specific reference to the city of Rasht. Similar criticism is also applicable to Christian Bromberger's food-based theory for the origin of the Rashti jokes. According to him, the jokes are the result of Gilani people's idiosyncratic culinary habits in the eyes of non-Gilani Iranians (see Bromberger "Eating Habits"; "Usual Topics").

helpful in understanding the socio-historical functions of these jokes, too. In his essay on “The Banning of the Veil and Its Consequences,” and in reference to Reza Shah Pahlavi’s banning the veil as part of his modernization program, Houshang Chehabi states, “Popular reaction to the state’s forced unveiling differed from class to class and from region to region. In the northern parts of Iran, long exposed to European culture through contacts with Russia, it was accepted without much resistance [. . .]” (212).¹⁹³ In a footnote immediately following this statement, Chehabi comments, “It may well be that the figure of the impotent and cuckold Rashti, a staple of Persian jokes, originates in the failure of the men of Rasht and the rest of Gilan to ‘defend’ the honour of their womenfolk in the 1930s” (220). While failing to serve as reliable evidence, Chehabi’s speculation is, as I explain below, somewhat valid.¹⁹⁴

Although Reza Shah officially commanded the unveiling of women, the process had already begun by some modernists towards the end of the Qajar era (1785-1925). This initial call

¹⁹³ Following the example of Western countries—particularly the then nascent modern republic of the Eurasian Turkey under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk—Reza Shah (also called Reza Khan) (r. 1925-1941), the father of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1941-1979), initiated an extensive plan for socio-cultural and industrial modernization of the Iranian society. Among his agenda was the mandatory change of all men’s and women’s public attire.

¹⁹⁴ Determining the temporal origin of the Rashti jokes is still under debate. In an e-mail correspondence with the author, Nasrin Rahimieh states, “Based on my memory, however, I would say the jokes already existed before the 60s.” (Date of correspondence: 4 June, 2013.) There exists some evidence that the Rashti jokes were probably circulating as far back as by the 1950s, at least among the Tehranis. In a 1950s Farsi collection of risqué humour titled *Asrar-e Magu* [*Taboo Secrets*], which is ascribed to the late Iranian poet Mehdi Soheili (1924-1987) and believed to have been distributed anonymously, there is a Rashti joke that gathers together many of the contemporary Rashti joke stereotypes, including the Rashti man’s lack of *gheirat*, the Rashti woman’s lack of *effat*, the stock lover character, and even the wardrobe motif (see *Asrar-e Magoo* 16-17). (Unfortunately, I was not able to have access to the original copy of the book, and could only use an abridged version on the Internet.) A selection of the book’s humour also exists in Nabavi, *Ahd-e Ghadim* 433-75. (In e-mail correspondence with the author, Homa Katouzian, in response to a question about whether he had read *Asrar-e Magu* upon its original publication, responds, “I did read *Asrar-e Magu* in my youth and even then it was believed to have been authored by Mehdi Soheili” [Date of correspondence: 7 June, 2013].)

for unveiling, however, more than tying it to women's emancipation, deemed it as necessary to the modern heterosocialization of Iranian society. The issue of women's veil was, according to Najmabadi, entangled with the aforementioned issue of homoeroticism and its relation to Iranian modernity. Long before Reza Shah's call for modernization, "[t]he veil's backwardness stood for the backwardness of homosociality and homoerotic affectivity" (Najmabadi 3, 148-150). Along with this abjection of the veil came a strong albeit controversial call, on the part of Iranian modernists, for unveiling women. However, instead of the literal veil, and as a precondition for women's justifiable presence in the public heterosocial space, women's observance of another internal veil, *hejab-e effat* (the veil of chastity) was strongly promoted (Najmabadi 152). Such encouragement on the part of modernists was especially to serve as a rhetorical strategy against a group of traditionalists who strongly objected against women's unveiling.

The objectors were mostly religious laymen led by the conservative clergy. Not surprisingly, amidst these events, the genre of *resaleh-ye hejabieh* (i.e., a [religious] tract on women's veil) became popular among Iranians (Tavakoli-Targhi, "Zani Bud, Zani Nabud" 86). In such tracts, the authors, usually from among renowned clergymen, would quote and refute their rivals' pro-unveiling views. Tavakoli-Targhi shows how in many of these tracts as well as in many Europe travelogues written by some Iranian visitors to Europe, the unveiled (European) woman was strongly imagined and scripted as a lewd woman and a slut, and that *veil* and *unveiling* were linked, more so than before, to the respective notions of *chastity* and *impurity* ("Negaran-e Zan-e Farang" 68-69). In this process, the European woman served as an *other* against which the Iranian woman was being constantly imagined and re-imagined ("Zani Bud"

89).¹⁹⁵ Equally important, in the same texts the European woman's unveiledness was also linked to the European man's lack of manliness and *gheirat* ("Zani Bud" 93-94 ; "Negaran-e Zan-e Farang" 69).

In many of the tracts written in defence of the veil, Tavakoli-Targhi demonstrates, the authors would deploy ridicule in order to force men to discipline their women lest the latter opt to become unveiled. Those men who defended unveiling would therefore be labelled as *zan-sefat* (feminine), *shahvat-parast* (lecherous), *bi-gheirat* (lacking *gheirat*), *zani* (adulterous), *khuk-sefat* (piggish),¹⁹⁶ and *farangi-mo 'ab* (European) ("Zani Bud" 95, 98). Also, many poems and stories were contrived by the opponents of unveiling (99). In many of these narratives, Tavakoli-Targhi remarks in a footnote, "the northern Iranian city of Rasht, due to its being in the forefront of Iranian women's movement, was imagined as the center for moral corruption and *gheirat*lessness while the Rashti man was visualized as impotent and overly 'effeminate'" (110, my translation). "Many of the Rashti jokes popular in Iran," Tavakoli-Targhi concludes, "are products of the anti-modernity discourse" (110).¹⁹⁷

Tavakoli-Targhi's observation, while providing vigorous evidence for the possible roots of the stereotypical abjection of Rashti men and women, proves the benefits for Iranian humour

¹⁹⁵ As Tavakoli-Targhi shows, this relational imagination and re-imagination of the Iranian woman is also noticeable in the works of the modernist Iranians who visited European countries (see "Negaran-e Zan-e Farang").

¹⁹⁶ In Islam, pig is considered to be a *najes* (impure) animal. Therefore, consuming pig's meat and milk is prohibited. Also, male pigs are, in religion and folklore, believed to be lacking *gheirat*. Accordingly, one reason raised for its prohibition is to avoid losing one's *gheirat*.

¹⁹⁷ The idea of Rasht as a progressive city in modern Iran has become an obvious fact in the scholarship concerning modern Iranian history. The official website for Rasht Municipality, on a page titled "Nezhad va Khosusiat-e Mardom-e Rasht [Origins and Characteristics of the People from Rasht]," draws upon an old source to boast that in open-mindedness, the Rashti people have at least been twenty years ahead of the Tehranis: http://rasht.ir/ShowPage.aspx?page_=form&order=show&lang=1&sub=0&PageId=1239&PageIDF=1189&tempname=maintemp

scholars of extensively reading many *non-humorous* texts and documents. Tavakoli-Targhi's claim is compatible with the fact that even today the Rashti stereotypes serve as palimpsests for re-inscribing anti(-gender)-democratic tendencies. In a joke in Nabavi's *Ahd-e Jadid*, for instance, the Rashti cuckold, in response to the question, "At your home, do you go by *zan-salari* [matriarchy; literally, the governance of women] or *mard-salari* [patriarchy; literally, the governance of men]?", responds, "None; we go by *mardom-salari* [democracy; literally, the governance of the public]" (155).¹⁹⁸

This joke is an appropriate example of what I discussed earlier, regarding the Qazvini jokes, as the displaced functions of jokes with targets. Such functions are conceivable about Rashti jokes, too. Obviously, the above joke's final aim is not to attack the residents of the Iranian city of Rasht per se. Rather, by projecting onto the Rashti joke some critical issues within the current Iranian politics and public opinion, the joke adopts and promotes an obviously conservative stance towards liberal democracy in general, and gender-democratic tendencies in particular. In fact, the joke draws on the ready-made cultural repertoire in the Rashti jokes to threateningly construct democracy as a discourse that erodes men's *gheirat* and women's *effat* and *haya*, therefore turning the former into some Westernized *gheiratless* pigs who are married to some uncontrollable sluts. By indirectly warning men of becoming cuckolds, the joke is simultaneously endorsing a masculinity which the audience—through the intertextual relationship between this particular joke as a *parole* facing the whole *langue* of the Rashti joke

¹⁹⁸ Given the word *mardom-salari*, which became popular if not coined during Mohammad Khatami's presidential period in Iran (1997-2005), the joke seems to be not very old.

cycle—is to take and perceive as completely opposed to the masculine performance of the Rashti man character.¹⁹⁹

If the Qazvini jokes, among other things, promote a hierarchical relationship among men by emphatically constructing a phallocentric *fa'el/maf'ul* (active/passive) dichotomy between same-sex practicers, Rashti jokes provide a unique opportunity for constructing dimensions of a hegemonic masculinity by juxtaposing masculinity and femininity. Given the central and inter-related discourses of (men's) *gheirat* and (women's) *effat* as reflected (on) in Rashti jokes, we can argue that one of the most significant disciplinary functions of such jokes concerning gender is the promotion of a hegemonic masculinity particularly characterized by *authoritarianism* and *control* as well as *aggression*—if not *violence*—towards the feminine. If you do not want your woman (your sister, your wife, or your mother) to wind up being like a Rashti slut, the Rashti jokes seem to communicate to their male audience, then make sure to control and discipline your woman by displaying some *gheirat*. The scenario becomes complete when the joke cycle simultaneously constructs the Rashti woman as a lecherous, insatiable, and in cases guileful creature that takes every opportunity to sleep with others. While in depicting the Rashti woman as wanton the Rashti jokes plug into the classical Iranian humour, the Rashti woman's (often implied) guile also draws upon the familiar imagery of the negatively guileful woman in Persian

¹⁹⁹ Here is a similar joke that reveals some anxiety over what the joke deems to be a thin line between being open-minded and losing *gheirat* altogether: "One time a Rashti returns home to find his wife in bed with a stranger. Yet, he sits aside and only keeps watching them silently. After an hour, the stranger leaves, and the wife asks her husband, "What was the matter with you, sitting there and staring at us?!" The Rashti [man] joyfully responds, "Weren't you impressed by my open-mindedness!"

یه روز رشتیه می‌ره خونه می‌بینه زنش با یه مرد غریبه ...! بعد می‌شینه ساکت نگاه‌شون می‌کنه. بعد از یک ساعت طرف می‌ره. بعد زنه می‌گه: «چت بود،

ما رو نگاه می‌کردی؟!» رشتیه با خوشحالی می‌گه: «جنبه رو داشتی، خانوم!»

literature.²⁰⁰ Since such behaviours are perceived to be endangering a man's territory, he must pre-empt.²⁰¹

As cited earlier from Tizro, “[g]heirat (sexual jealousy) is the right of the owner of the sexual faculties to defend his territory, *passionately and sometimes aggressively*” (51, my emphasis). Thus, the Rashti jokes could be conceived as validating if not also encouraging male violence, too. This connection is by no means haphazard. All of the previously discussed examples in which the Rashti man becomes *gheirati* or overzealous presume the audience's expectation that a *real* man would show some aggression upon becoming even slightly suspicious of his woman's behaviour. Furthermore, there are other Rashti jokes that obviously indicate—and almost always deride—the Rashti cuckold's failure to employ due violence against his woman's client or lover. In a joke cited in Palmis Seifikar's M.A. thesis, “Asses and Cuckolds: Regional Ethnic Jokes from Iran,” for instance, a Rashti man, upon learning that he has been cuckolded, picks up a gun and “[attempts] to kill his wife and his lover” (16, 19).²⁰² However, for a Rashti joke to be a Rashti joke, no lovers must be killed. Despite the presence of

²⁰⁰ In next chapter, while discussing Obayd Zakani's humour, I will mention examples of such humour. For more on the guileful woman in Persian literature, refer to Milani, “The Mediatory Guile of the Nanny in Persian Romance.”

²⁰¹ In her essay on feminist humour, Cindy White, while referring to the stereotype of women lacking a sense of humour, remarks that “[w]ith the emergence of the contemporary women's movement, the stereotypic image of the humourless female assumes a new twist. Rather than seeing the broad category of all women as lacking a sense of humor, the new humourless woman is in a specific category—feminists” (77). In light of what was mentioned about the Rasht as a city famous for its progressive social movements, the wantonness of the generic Iranian woman—as attested in classical Persian literature, including humour—similarly seems to have been conveyed to a specific category of modern Iranian woman, i.e., the Rashti woman, to make her a typical example for other Iranian women who might want to espouse feminist ideas or embody.

²⁰² In depicting such failed violence, the Rashti jokes are also promoting an obviously *traditionalist* and anti-modern form of life, too, in that in the secondary world of the Rashti jokes, legal institutions are absent or disregarded.

various potential tools for violence in such jokes, they are rarely if ever deployed by the *gheiratless* Rashti man. In fact, in Rashti jokes, a gun, in order to be an appropriate element in the narrative, should never be a Chekov's gun. In this sense, therefore, Rashti jokes seem to urge the audience to deploy due violence in reality, if necessary. The following joke not only depicts the theme of the derision of Rashti man's failed employment of *gheirat*-as-violence, but also gathers together several of the aforementioned themes in Rashti jokes:

A friend of a Rashti goes over to stay at his place. Upon entering the house, the friend notices a gun hanging on the wall. He asks, "What's that for?" The Rashti says, "For protecting the *namus*!"²⁰³ So, the friend understands that he must watch his own behaviour. At night, while everyone is sleeping in the [same] room, the [Rashti's] wife snorts, "The gun's not working!" The [Rashti's] daughter snorts, "It has no cartridges either!" The Rashti man himself says, "And I'm sleeping!"²⁰⁴

²⁰³ *Namus*, similar to *gheirat*, is a key concept in understanding Rashti jokes. *Namus* literally means "religion" or "divine creeds" ("Namus", *Dehkhoda*). By extension, it also means "law" or "rules." However, the word has figuratively come to mean also "good name," "reputation," and "honour." According to *Dehkhoda*, *namus*, as used in the term *bi-namus* (i.e., lacking *namus*), is equal to "wife and [other] women belonging to a man, such as [his] mother, sister(s), daughter(s), and so forth." In another dictionary, *namus* is defined as "chastity," "the honour of one's wife or daughter," and "principle, law, [and] canon" and the adjective *namusi* defined as "pertaining to the honour of one's closest family members" ("Namus", *Farhang-e Moa'ser*). The word also appears in such terms as *jenayat-e namusi* and *ghatl-e namusi*, which are translated as "a crime of honour" or honour killing, i.e., "a crime committed to uphold the honour of the family." A *bi-gheirat* (i.e., lacking *gheirat*) man is basically a *bi-namus* (i.e., lacking *namus*) man, and vice versa (see "Gheirat").

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رفیقِ رشتیه می‌آد خونه‌ش مهمونی. وارد اتاق که می‌شه، می‌بینه یه تفنگ به دیوار آویزونه. می‌پرسه: «این واسه چیه؟» رشتیه می‌گه: «واسه حفظ ناموس!»
 خلاصه یارو حساب کار خودشو می‌کنه. شب ردیف تو اتاق خوابیده بودند؛ زنه می‌گه: (با خروپف) تفنگ خرابه! دخترش می‌گه: (خروپف) «فشنگ نداره!»
 رشتیه می‌گه: «منم که خوابم!»

Even when the Rashti man manages to display violence, there is a turn of the events to annul it as inopportune violence and *gheirat*, and thus draw our attention to the familiar and the expected in such jokes:

A Rashti wife is being screwed by a man, when her husband arrives and beats the man up. The wife says, “Good job! I’m really impressed by your *gheirat*!” The Rashti says, “Honey, the hell with *gheirat*! I’d definitely do the same to you if you were to come in bed with your shoes on.”²⁰⁵

It is therefore tenable if Soheila Vahdati, in a note on the Internet titled “Why Do We Laugh at the Rashti Jokes?,” which has become controversial among some of its readers, connects such jokes with the phenomenon of *honour killing* in Iran.²⁰⁶ In fact, as Tizro also shows regarding domestic violence in Iran, the codes of the *mahram/namahram* could lead to social violence (51). As shown above, the codes are central to the Rashti joke’s basic script. Interestingly, while discussing some “cultural differences” in southern and northern Iranian cities, and how such differences influence the gender relations among couples in these areas, Tizro alludes to the Rashti jokes (38), yet she does not expand on the theme which she implies as irrelevant merely because “[a] man from the north can be as *gheiraty* (jealous) as men from any

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زن رشتیه داشته به یه مرده می‌داده، یکهو شوهرش می‌آد و می‌زنه یارو رو له و لوره می‌کنه. زنش می‌گه: «بابا ای‌ول! عجب غیرتی داری!» می‌گه: «خانم جان غیرت چیه! اگه تو هم با کفش بیای رو تخت، همین بلا رو سرت می‌آرم.»

http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes&joke_id=4951&cat_id=22&jtype=

See also <http://reza-mostaghimi.persianblog.ir/post/11>

For a slightly different version, in which the Rashti man chases the lover away, see http://www.jokekhoone.com/?page=jokes&joke_id=4862&cat_id=22&jtype=

²⁰⁶ I could find Vahdati’s writing in two addresses. In both cases, the note has raised vehement debates and responses in its audiences (see both entries for Vahdati in Works Cited). For the only extant source on honour killing in Iran, published outside Iran, see Bakhtiar-Nezhad.

other part of Iran” (138). In claiming so, Tizro ignores the possibility that the Rashti jokes themselves might have been modifying some Rashti men’s attitudes towards gender relations and masculinity in particular during the past several decades. Tizro’s notion of the inconsequentiality of Rashti jokes is a reminder of Davies’ general contention, earlier critiqued, that humour cannot modify reality. The possible disciplinary functions of Qazvini and Rashti jokes, however, strongly question if not refute that contention.

SUMMARY

Following on the previous chapter arguments, this chapter examined the contemporary Persian Qazvini and Rashti joke cycles as the only lasting series of jokes in modern Iran that specifically center on gender and sexuality. The cycles’ enduring popularity suggests that they may deal with certain social needs without which such humour would have reasonably stopped being circulated. By adopting a socio-historical approach to the topic, I introduced various examples of each joke cycle, and advocated the idea that the jokes have most probably been triggered by certain critical events and reconfigurations related to the Iranian gender order around a century ago. The transformation of modern Iranian society’s gender order, from a specific combination of hetero- and homoerotic relations into a heteronormative order, has apparently accounted for the production and circulation of the Qazvini jokes. There is also the issue of women’s unveiling, which was first triggered by early Iranian modernists who deemed veil as a marker of Iranian women’s backwardness. This issue, by dichotomizing Iranian society, appears to have helped induce the Rashti joke cycle since the city of Rasht was—due to its well-known history of progressive tendencies—specifically targeted as the center of (men’s)

*gheirat*lessness and (women's) *effat*lessness in the writings of the opponents of women's unveiling.

The jokes were most probably initially created as discursive reactions to the above transformations and re-arrangements within the then Iranian society as well as to the implications such modifications had for the quality content of the Iranian hegemonic masculinity in its relation to femininity and to the subservient masculinity of the *amrad* or *beardless* boy figure. Later on, in a society that had already accepted heteronormativity, the Qazvini jokes, while providing a psychological outlet for the release of possible sexual anxieties and contradictions as well as coping with the loss of a homoerotic tradition in the not-so-distant past, could also serve as a constant reminder for potential homosexually *fa'el* (active) men that the tradition of *bacheh-bazi* (pederasty) no longer fitted a modern lifestyle of monogamous heterosexuality. On the other hand, and as part of the same modernizing process, the heterosocialization of the public space in the Iranian society—which relied on women's unveiling as its necessary precondition—demanded that Iranian men be more observant of their women lest their becoming unveiled should cause men to lose control on women (i.e., to lose their *gheirat*) altogether. In this process, as mentioned above, the European man and woman were the palimpsests on which the Rashti men and women were inscribed and imagined as national examples to be avoided. For this very reason (linking lack of *gheirat* and *effat* to Westerners), the Rashti joke cycle, although it seems to have been initiated by anti-modernists, appears to have been equally endorsed by modernists, too. This possibility is best indicated by early Iranian modernists' promotion of the discourse of the internal veil (*hejab-e effat*) as a replacement for the removal of women's literal veil.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Woman's veil has never since stopped serving as a focal point in Iranian political arena. As Afary notes, the 1979 Islamic Revolution occurred partly due to the coalition of "two oppositional factions" over "the sexual norms

Accordingly, the Qazvini joke cycle initially served a disciplinary function in favour of a nascent heteronormative gender order. However, as indicated by the inferred possible displaced functions of such jokes, the jokes seem to have gained additional disciplinary functions on behalf of a heteronormative gender order. The most probable functions are constructing homosexuality as pedophilia as well as inducing homophobia by subscribing to the *fa'el/maf'ul* (active/passive) binary in men's same-sex relations. Likewise, the Rashti man and woman stereotypes apparently initially served a resistive function towards some interference in a gender order that could not imagine women as unveiled participants in the social space. However, like the Qazvini joke cycle, the jocular Rashti stereotypes, with their persisting presence in Iranian society, seem to serve additional functions. By emphasizing the *effat-haya* discourse through the sheer *effatless* figure of the Rashti woman, the jokes tend to re-create the extant binary of pure/impure woman in Iranian culture. By frequently depicting the Rashti woman as a guileful woman who cuckolds her husband, the jokes also draw on the discourse of woman as a *makkar* and *hileh-gar* (i.e., guileful) creature in Persian classical literature and culture, thus advising men to be heedful of them. Pertinently, by centralizing the issue of *gheirat* and ridiculing its absence in the Rashti man's character, the jokes are defining a hegemonic masculinity one of whose most characteristic features is to observe the codes of *gheirat* against a female kin who has breached the *effat-haya* codes. Since the *gheirat* discourse already entails displaying passion and aggressiveness, Rashti jokes, as also verified by their narrative structure, plausibly promote male violence, too.

These findings problematize the *exculpatory* approach to humour as represented by Christie Davies' contention that jokes cannot reinforce the social order. In his one-way formula

of the modern urban woman": the leftist critics of the Pahlavi despotism, of Western imperialism, and of consumerism on the one hand, and the conservative Islamists on the other (11, 237-244).

(i.e., “Jokes are a thermometer, not a thermostat”), Davies only pays attention to jokes’ functions in relation to their stated targets, e.g., the Rashtis and Qazvinis. Instead, as this chapter shows, in order to discern the possible consequences of certain jokes with target we need to consider what I deem as the *displaced functions* of such jokes. My reading of the Qazvini and Rashti jokes indicates that while they might or might not affect Iranians’ notions about the residents of the cities of Rasht and Qazvin, the jokes are likely to affect many people’s perception of gender and sexuality as the central themes in these long-standing joke cycles.

Chapter Four

Gendered Ridicule as a Persuasive/Punitive Tool: Humour and the Rhetorical Power of Hegemonic Gender Norms

INTRODUCTION

The past two chapters showed that the discussed societies' mainstream gender humour reflects and, through ridicule, polices and reinforces those societies' gender orders. The current chapter argues that such humour, due to its dependence on hegemonic gender norms, is also often deployed as a rhetorical tool for more effective communication of social and cultural messages, even when such messages do not concern gender in the first place. This, on the one hand, obviously indicates that in the process of rhetorical utilization of gendered ridicule, gender meanings themselves are reproduced. The process, subsumed by a broader cultural process, proves that "our communication shapes society's views of masculinity and femininity and, by extension, of women's and men's roles and rights" (Wood 65; see also Herrick 263). However, particularly at stake is that our primary texts, in their resort to gender humour, prefer mainstream gender humour over fringe gender humour. This can suggest that mainstream gender humour, since it relies on hegemonic gender norms, is normally assumed to have further rhetorical power in communications and arguments. (This conclusion will comprise the premise for my argument in the next chapter.)

The primary texts in this chapter come from Iranian and Anglo-American societies. Accordingly, the chapter has two main parts. For the Iranian part, I examine the gendered aspect of socio-political satire featuring sexual imagery. While I am particularly concerned with modern Iranian satirists and their work (I briefly discuss Iraj Mirza, Ebrahim Nabavi, Alireza Reza'ee,

Nikahang Kowsar, and Mana Neyestani as prominent examples), I also discuss the long-standing tradition of phallogentric *hajv* (personal invective) and its deployment for satirical purposes by the fourteenth-century Persian humorist Obeyd-e Zakani (d. ca. 1370). This historical survey provides valuable insights related to my main argument about the relationship between gender humour and gender order. Despite the distinguished place of Zakani as “pre-modern Iran’s most accomplished satirist” (Brookshaw, “Regionalist Humor” 44), and his legendary position in the mind of many contemporary critics, his works, which notoriously feature sex and sexuality, have never been examined through the lens of gender. Besides our rereading Zakani, our familiarity with the tradition of *hajv* (personal invective, best understood as certain *gendered insult*) as used by Zakani helps us better grasp many modern Iranian humorists’ resort to similar techniques in their socio-political satire, while also suggesting interesting insights about how humour is related to gender order in different historical eras.

In the part dealing with Anglo-American humour, I discuss a prominent case in contemporary (humorous) advertising industry, that is, the Get a Mac ad campaign (2006-2009) by Apple Inc.²⁰⁸ The campaign, comprising a total of sixty-six ads, has been repeatedly acclaimed and awarded the 2007 Effie Award for being “culturally influential” (Dahlen, Lange, and Smith 24). I study how, in order to enhance their persuasive power, the gendered ads tend to draw upon elements from the current Anglo-American gender order, as previously discussed in Chapters One and Two. Such elements include *sexuality* (as opposed to asexuality), clear-cut *sex/gender dichotomy*, *heteronormativity* and *bodily normativity*, all of which are subsumed by a

²⁰⁸ For this section, I initially intended to examine ads from several ad campaigns, including the Miller Light Company’s “Man Up” ads and the Old Spice Company’s “Old Spice” ad series. However, the “Get a Mac” ad campaign is, for the purpose of the argument in this chapter, advantaged over the above ad series. While these latter ads publicize products that are already gendered and that target specific genders, the “Get a Mac” ads curiously tap into gender meanings to market presumably non-gendered products.

comparison in all ads of two *male* computers, and in some ads of two modes of masculine performance.

PHALLOCENTRISM AS A PUNITIVE/PERSUASIVE TOOL IN HUMOUR: FROM CLASSICAL PERSIAN HAJV TO MODERN IRANIAN SATIRE

“Phallocentrism” is defined as “the condition where the phallus, signifier of the symbolic order of masculine power, is privileged as the dominant perspective” (Davison 475). Rather than being the physical penis, phallus signifies “an external representation of the penis that symbolically stands in for the power and patriarchal authority of men and masculinity” (475). The concept has often been used by feminists “to critique the taken-for-granted presence and supremacy of hegemonic masculinity in social, gendered and cultural relations” (475). Thus, a phallocentric perspective could be described as one that subscribes to the hegemonic masculinity in a society. Therefore, our discussions about gender hierarchy and hegemony in Chapter One can also be framed through the concept of phallocentrism. The concept is particularly pertinent in analyzing sex/coitus-based imagery in humour, which abounds in the humour instances in this section.²⁰⁹

As Kate Millet remarks in her germinal book, *Sexual Politics*,

[c]oitus can scarcely be said to take place in a vacuum; although of itself it appears a biological and physical activity, it is set so deeply within the larger context of human affairs that it serves as a charged microcosm of the variety of attitudes and values to which culture subscribes. Among other things, it may serve as a model of sexual politics on an individual or personal plane. (23)

²⁰⁹ Much of the theoretical discussion in this section is a translation, from Farsi, of a similar discussion I have undertaken elsewhere (see Abedinifard, “The Sexual Politics of Iraj Mirza’s ‘Aref-Nameh’.”)

In other words, Millet contends, sexual intercourse may possess complex political aspects suggestive of symbolic meanings in human relationships. In light of this quote and our discussion about gender hierarchy in Chapter Two, we can define phallogentric language as that which, presuming coitus as a site for unbalanced power relations—a situation that automatically leads to the construction of binary oppositions—associates hegemonic masculinity with power while linking femininity and non-hegemonic forms of masculinity with lack of power. Drawing on and subscribing to sexual imagery based on the above relations, which represent power imbalance, phallogentric language manages to exercise symbolic power.

Given this definition, the gendered aspects of a significant portion of the humorous literature in (Arabic and) Persian literary tradition(s) become highlighted. (Shedding gendered light on this literature, when it is compared to similar humorous literature in modern Iran, is, as we will see, insightful for understanding the connection between ridicule and gender structure.) This humorous literature is often described as comprising the three categories of *hajv* or *heja* (“verbal aggression and assault”), *hazl* (the “bawdy”), and *tanz* (“satire”) (Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* vii).²¹⁰ Paul Sprachman reframes these concepts in light of the Islamic taboo notion of *awrat*, meaning the bodily “region that stretches for men from the navel to the knees, and for free-born women extends to the rest of the body except the face and the hands as far as the wrists” (ix). This region, according to Islamic teachings, must not be revealed, either verbally or actually. As Sprachman remarks, especially in *hajv* (personal invective or satire [Haidari 117]) and *hazl* (meaning nonsense, humour, or facetiousness, often opposed to *jedd*, i.e., seriousness), the Islamic taboo of *awrat* is breached to the extent that some instances of these humorous categories “[*awratize*] the universe,” e.g., by personifying (Islamic) monuments and places as

²¹⁰ On the importance of Arabic in the development of the classical Persian literary tradition in general, and the above mentioned humour categories in particular, see Sprachman’s introduction to his book, *Suppressed Persian*.

possessing *awrat* (xxix). (Although I also mention instances of *hazl* in this section, I emphasize *hajv* and *tanz*, as they clearly foreground the rhetorical and persuasive aspects of humour.)

Borrowed by Persian poets from Arabic poetry, *hajv* was originally employed by members of “superior” Arabic tribes to cause shame and defamation in the members of other “inferior” tribes (Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* xxvii). The genre gradually evolved into “a highly elaborate literature of verbal aggression,” and an important change occurred in its rhetoric, due to which *hajv* lost its previous tribal specificity and took on a predominantly sex-related diction (xxvii). Accordingly, “in *hajv*, the *hajja* (ridiculer, invectivist) would castigate his *mahju* (ridiculed, victim)” (xxvi) that could be either of these:

‘individuals’ (the *hajja*’s literary rivals; stingy or former patrons; other contemporaries); ‘groups’ (inhabitants of particular cities; members of a particular profession or social class; members of a particular religion or sect); and ‘nonhuman targets’ (the poetry of other poets [parody and pastiche]; the idolatrous religions and their idols [polemic]). (xxvii)

Importantly, the world of *hazl* and *hajv* is patriarchal and, in particular, misogynistic.²¹¹ As Sprachman remarks, “[t]he belief in the inherent inferiority of women is a basic motif of Persian *hajv* and *hazl*” in which “women are reduced to the genital part of their *awrat*: i.e., holes to be filled or violated and wombs to be impregnated” (*Suppressed Persian* xxxvii-xxxviii). Important to our purposes about the relationship between (humorous) discourse and social structure, the above symbolic misogyny reflects reality, as woman’s inferiority in Persian *hajv* “is justified in

²¹¹ According to Sprachman, this symbolic misogyny has roots in reality, as woman’s inferiority in Persian *hajv* “is justified in literature typically by appeals to nature (‘women are the weaker sex’),” certain “parts of the Qoran (in which women’s share of inheritance and credibility in a court of law are ordained to be less than men’s), and the reported sayings and behaviors of the Prophet” (*Suppressed Persian* xxxvi-xxxvii).

literature typically by appeals to nature ('women are the weaker sex')," certain "parts of the Qoran (in which women's share of inheritance and credibility in a court of law are ordained to be less than men's), and the reported sayings and behaviors of the Prophet" (*Suppressed Persian* xxxvi-xxxvii).

Pertinent to the highly misogynistic and objectifying aspect of *hajv* are also the rhetorical tools in the genre that mostly target men's sense of manhood. These tools were—and, as I show below, still are—specifically phallogentric. In their particular emphasis on men's gendered insecurities, such tools have been intended as social control strategies. What Sprachman lists as the characteristic rhetorical devices used in the *hajv* poetry of the twelfth-century Persian poet Suzani of Samarkand, whose "poetry is best known for its obscenities" (18), are arguably typical of most other Persian *hajv* writings, too: (My discussion, however, only focuses on the *gendered* tools.)

In his *heja* ' Suzani essentially uses taboo words as weapons in order to lower the social or ritual status of his victim. Typical of this verbal aggression are implied or open references to a man's wife or daughter, accusations of illegitimacy, disparaging references to the victim's ancestry (especially allusions to intimacy with animals), causing doubt upon the victim's sexual preferences, innuendo based on cuckoldry, and attacks of a coprophobic nature on ritual purity. His *hazl* consists of oblique references to various parts of the body and bodily functions as well as *tafakhor* (boasting) about the size of his sexual organs ("I'm Suzani, soft[wax]-hearted and granite-phallused"). ("Persian Satire" 226-27)²¹²

²¹² In his reference to the connection between obscenity and classical Persian humour, de Bruijn also refers to some of the above techniques in *hajv*: "Obscenity has always been a favorite comic effect in all kinds of classical Persian humor. This includes both hetero- and homosexual acts and the accusation of being a cuckold or a pimp

Attacks on a man's related woman (e.g., his daughter, sister, mother, wife—and in modern times girlfriend, too) have inseparable connection with his sense of honour. As Jerome Neu remarks about the relations between masculinity, honour, and shame in *The Sticks and Stones: The Philosophy of Insults*,

in many societies, especially small, face-to-face communities of the Mediterranean type, honor is strongly male and strongly sexualized, often tied to the chastity of one's women—and, symbolically—to the inviolability of one's own (male) rear. This goes back at least to the ancient Greeks. (43-44)

The violability of a man's rear, or his *anal disintegrity*—as put by the Persian poet Obeyd-e Zakani—is also one of the most central rhetorical devices in the genre of *hajv*. (I will discuss Zakani's concept in detail later in this part.) Instances of phallocentric *hajv* as a weapon in interpersonal debates can be found in almost every book of poetry by both the renowned and less distinguished Persian poets (Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* xxviii).²¹³ Such a weapon was

(*qaltaban*), as well as the use of vulgar expressions for the sexual organs. This feature of Persian humor had often been denounced by modern critics, both in Persia and in the West, and has received scant attention" (par. 10).

²¹³ For instance, in a quatrain by the twelfth-century female Persian poet Mahsati Ganjavi, the poetic persona punishes her bloodletter, with whose work she is dissatisfied, with (among other things) a phallocentric idiom: "To that bloodletting Jew whose faith is nil,/ Whose tongue is dull, but whose scalpel can kill,/ I said, 'Open me no broader than my cunt;'/ But wider than his wife's ass went his drill" (Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* 3). (Sprachman takes the quatrain as a combination of *hazl* and *hajv* [3]. For other examples from Ganjavi's *hajv*, see <http://www.rawzana.com/Maeste%20-ganjawie.htm>.) As another example, the twelfth-century Persian poet, Sanai of Ghazna, had as his regular *hajv* target a poet named Ali Seh Buseshe, about whom little is known today. In one of Sanai's frequently anthologized quatrains, the poetic voice penalizes Seh Buseshe by launching a manifold attack on his social status and sense of honour: "O, Seh Buseshe, I'll compose *hajv* for you./ This little piece will really spice your life:/ Your beard inside a bleeding woman's cunt;/ A donkey's boner up your father's wife" (Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* 5). (In Old Persian culture, full beard was highly associated with honour, inviolability, reputation and face [see "Rish"]. As Najmabadi states, full beard, in pre-modern Iran, also "marked adult manhood, the adolescent male's transition from an object of desire to a desiring subject" [15; see also El-Rouayheb 11, 15]. It is no surprise that in Zakani's works, any disrespect towards a man's beard counts as an insult [e.g., see Mahjub

also extensively practiced by the fourteenth-century Persian poet, Obeyd-e Zakani. Zakani's renowned "Jalq Nameh" ["The Book of Masturbation"], for instance, contains perhaps one of the most characteristic phallocentric lines ever composed in Persian poetry: "If life is not what we anticipate,/ A boner up the ass of life and fate" (Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* 50).²¹⁴ Zakani's "Rubaiyat" ["Quatrains"] and especially his "Qet'eh-ha va Tazmin-ha" [The Pieces and the Tazmins] are, as we will see, also full of phallocentric *hajv*.²¹⁵ One of Zakani's *hajv* pieces, for instance, ends with the persona granting a donkey's erected penis up the anus of his *mahju*'s wife (see Sprachman *Suppressed Persian* 47; Mahjub 224, no. 28).²¹⁶

However, what drastically distinguishes Zakani from other Persian *hajv*-composers is his manipulating *hajv* as a tool for social criticism, too. In fact, as Sprachman notes, it is only in the works of Zakani that the long-standing traditions of *hazl* and *hajv*, as employed in Persian literature, eventually evolve into social satire (*Suppressed Persian* vii, 44). According to

358-59, 362].) The tradition of *hajv*-writing in Iran was only deinstitutionalized by the disappearance of the courtly patronage around a century ago (de Bruijn, par. 15). For more comprehensive accounts of *hajv* and *hajv*-writers in Persian (and Arabic) poetry, see Behzadi Anduhjerdi 854-908, and chapter two in Halabi, *Tarikh-e Tanz va Shukh-Tab'i*.

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روزگار ار به کام ما نبود،/ کیر در کون روزگار کنیم. (Mahjub 201)

²¹⁵ *Tazmin* refers to a poetic piece parts of which are direct quotes from other (normally famous) poets. While one major aim in *tazmin* is to pay homage to the previous poet, Zakani's *tazmins*, by profaning others' (sometimes highly esteemed) poems can create contrary effects.

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ای برادر شهاب الدین حیدر/ خر نماید ولی سگی باشد/ بد او گرچه گفته‌ام بسیار/ چون که وایینی اندکی باشد/ دی یکی گفت کیست این گفتم/ خدمتش زشت مردکی باشد/ کیر خر در کس زنش گفتیم/ سخن مردمان یکی باشد.

O that Shahab al-Din Haydar, my brother:/ Looks like an ass, but he's a dog, no other./ It seems that I have said of him a lot;/ But when you look with care, you'll see it's not./ The other day, one asked me, "Who's this guy?"/ "An ugly little man," was my reply./ A donkey's boner up his wife's gourd;/ Real men don't ever go back on their word.

Sprachman, “[m]any of Zakani’s comic works bridge the gap between the raw monstrosities of *hajv* and *hazl* and true satire as exemplified by the writings of Aristophanes, Juvenal, Erasmus, Rabelais, Swift, Dryden, Pope, Voltaire, etc.” (*Suppressed Persian* 44). As we will see below, however, Zakani’s “true satire,” for its efficacy, oftentimes relies on problematic notions, in terms of gender, that have apparently been ignored before.

The Rhetorical Power of *Anal Integrity* in Zakani’s Sexual Satire

Obeyd-e Zakani (d. ca. 1370) was born in a village named Zakan in the Qazvin province. The Zakanis were originally Arab people who had, during the past centuries, immigrated to Qazvin (Halabi, *Zakani-Nameh* 10). Little is known about Zakani’s life, especially of the time he spent in his hometown. However, as inferred from his poetry, at some point in his life Zakani left Qazvin for Shiraz, then the capital city of Persia, where he served as a high-ranking person in the courts of a few rulers. This is especially understood from the *madh* (eulogy) and *hajv* poems he composed for his patrons (18-19). Although many serious poems are left from Zakani, he is most known for his humorous and bawdy writings, which comprise around ten short and long books and treatises (11).²¹⁷

As Hasan Javadi, the English translator of Zakani remarks, his “works have not received proper attention in the past. Often, old-fashioned scholars have dismissed him as a writer of bawdy stories and obscene verses, and it is only in the past few decades that he has been seriously noticed” (Javadi, *Ethics of Aristocrats* 9). The most conspicuous feature of Zakani’s work, as recognized by many contemporary critics, is his satirical wit, which, they mostly agree,

²¹⁷ For other useful sources on Zakani’s life and works, see Javadi, *Ethics of Aristocrats* 9-24; Sprachman, *Licensed Fool* 14-24 and *Suppressed Persian* 44-47.

he has aptly put into the service of critiquing the vices and follies of his own time, i.e., “an age of moral depravity and social degradation” (16).²¹⁸

Zakani frequently adopts both Horatian satire (i.e., having a mild and gentle tone) and Juvenalian satire (i.e., having disdainful and abrasive tone) (Abrams 321). Also, he adroitly avails of direct satire (i.e., by adopting a first person satiric speaker) and indirect satire (i.e., by communicating through fictional narratives) (320-321). For instance, his treatise of “Sad Pand.” i.e., “One Hundred Pieces of Advice,” relies on a combination of direct satire and irony. The narrator, directly addressing the reader, initially adopts a mild literal tone, thus creating the illusion that we are facing a typical treatise on moral advice. However, the table is turned shortly after, when, to our consternation, we are (perhaps not always ironically, but merely jocularly) encouraged to behave completely opposite to the conventional counsel. It is in this second part that Zakani is mostly understood as critiquing his contemporaries.²¹⁹ For instance, in what seems to be an ironical attack on his contemporaries’ depreciation of honesty and faithfulness, he says:

As much as possible, refrain from speaking the truth, so that you may not become a bore to other people, and cause undue annoyance.²²⁰ (Javadi, *Ethics of Aristocrats* 64)

Do not [overdo] being honest and faithful, lest you become afflicted with colic or other such ailments.²²¹ (Javadi, *Ethics of Aristocrats* 67)

²¹⁸ For references to the decline of morality in the time of Zakani, see Eqbal 20-24.

²¹⁹ The degree of Zakani’s irony, that is, his seriousness in facetiousness, is under debate. One of the main arguments of Sprachman in *The Licensed Fool* is that “the reason why the comic works of Obeyd endure and continue to be influential is that often they are not redemptive of anything” (ix).

²²⁰

«تا توانید سخن حق مگویید تا بر دل‌ها گران مشوید و مردم بی‌سبب از شما نرنجند.» (Mahjub 318)

Elsewhere, he seems to be complaining of some interrelated moral issues, including the prevalence of debauchery and sexual decadence as well as some hypocritical approaches to practicing Islamic teachings:

Have anal intercourse with the daughter of your neighbor and do not tamper with her hymen so that you will not have betrayed your neighbor's trust and so you will have been a considerate and good Moslem. Thus, on her wedding night, she will not be ashamed before the bridegroom and she will be proud among the people.²²² (Javadi, *Ethics of Aristocrats* 51)

This attitude towards virginity is reiterated in a chapter of Zakani's "Dah Fasl" [The Ten Chapters] where he defines "Virgin" as "a girl who is yet unaware of giving cunt" and "Virginity" as "a name denoting nothing" (Atabaki 323).²²³

Particularly typical of Zakani's wit and satire, as noticeable in the few examples above, is his plentiful use of sexual imagery and obscene language. This profane language is so much characteristic of Zakani's works that Paul Sprachman, in his latest book *The Licensed Fool: The Damnable Foul-Mouthed Obeyd-e Zakani*, coins the word *obeydvari* [i.e., the Obeydian] to refer to "a constant in Persian discourse" (5), known as "a type of writing often angry, always offensive, and, at times, witty" (5). *Obeydvari* has partly brought about the aforementioned

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«در راستی مبالغه ننمایید تا به قولنج و آماس جگر و مالیخولیا و دیگر امراض مزمن مبتلا نشوید.» (Mahjub 324)

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«دختر همسایه را از کون بگایید و گرد مهر بکارت مگردید تا طریق امانت و دیانت و شفقتِ مسلمانی و حق همسایگی به جای آورده باشید و نیز به وقت عروسی دخترک در محل تهمت نباشد و از داماد خجالت نکشد و پیش خدا و خلق روسفید باشد.» (Mahjub 321)

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«البکر: دختری که از [ک]س دادن وقوف نداشته باشد؛ البکاره: اسم بی‌مسمی.»

dismissal of Zakani's works, particularly in the past, by some critics who regard him as some "damnable maligner" (Sprachman, *Licensed Fool* 14-17).

In exact reaction to this moralist attitude to Zakani, however, many modern Iranian literary scholars have sought to construct a completely different Zakani, one as a "mirror of evil times" (17-20).²²⁴ Thanks to this modern reconstruction, Obeyd is now mostly known as "the greatest satirist of the classical period of Persian literature" (Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* 44; also Brookshaw, "Regionalist Humor" 44), and praised with such titles as "a political intellectual and a social critic" (Shamisa 170). In response to traditional views of *obeydvāri*, most modern scholarship recognizes the "social" and "critical" values of Zakani's use of obscenity (see Atabaki xi-xiii; Eqbal 20-24; Javadi, *Ethics of Aristocrats* 9-24; Mahjub xliii-xliv; Shamisa 170-82). As Brookshaw maintains, "Obayd's humor [. . .] goes beyond mere entertainment, and acts as a form of social or even socio-political criticism, aimed at mocking the circumstances of his age and the narrow-mindedness of his contemporaries" ("Regionalist Humor" 48). The late Iranian literary scholar Parviz Natel Khanlari goes even further, claiming that "Obeyd never uttered an obscene word without having some socially redeeming aim in mind" (Sprachman, *Licensed Fool* 23).

However, a gender-conscious reading of Zakani's sexual humour, given that the gendered is subsumed by the social, would refute Khanlari's contention while also problematizing the laudatory view many modern scholars in general hold of Zakani. However, I should note that in my analysis of Zakani's sexual *hajv* and *tanz*, more than the influence he might have had on modern Iranian satire, I am interested in how certain similarities in the hegemonic gender meanings in Zakani's society and the present-time Iranian society might be responsible for his

²²⁴ This new picture is arguably related to Iranians' familiarity with the Western notion of satire (see the first chapter in Tajabbor).

and our modern Iranian satirists' similar exaltations of phallocentric language as a rhetorical and shame-inducing weapon. In other words, in juxtaposing Zakani and the modern Iranian satirists, I would like to indicate the close relationship between gendered ridicule as a rhetorical tool, on one hand, and the structure of gender relations in a society, on the other.

In focusing on Zakani's work from a gender-conscious view, two related topics are of particular importance: Zakani's sexual politics and the way he deploys this politics as a rhetorical tool in his invectives and social satire. In fact, Zakani's work constructs a gender hierarchy through legitimating a "hegemonic masculinity" at the expense of marginalizing women and other masculinities. Furthermore, based on this gender hegemony, Zakani, in his sexual *hajv* and social satire, avails of the phallocentric notion of *anal disintegrity*, itself dependant on the active/passive binary, to punish (targets) and/or persuade (his audience).

The hegemonic masculinity Zakani constructs is, in its basic form, embodied by a full-bearded man who maintains dominance over women in general and over non-bearded men (young *amrads* and particularly the *mokhannas* men [i.e., catamites]).²²⁵ Femininity, for Zakani, is particularly associated with sexual receptivity. Significantly, although he recognizes male same-sex acts, his idealized man only validates, and even takes pride in, the adoption of the

²²⁵ A more detailed examination of hegemonic masculinity in Zakani, which is beyond the scope of this chapter, would reveal further attributes, including being *free* (i.e., non-slave), non-*zangi* (i.e., non-black. E.g., see Mahjub 216, no. 55), non-regionalist, and able-bodied (especially non-aged, well-endowed, and lacking sexual dysfunction). For a discussion of regionalism in Zakani's humorous works, see Brookshaw "Regionalist Humor" 51-66. For well-endowment and lack of sexual functionality as virile features, see Mahjub 211, no. 28; 214, no. 46; 221, no. 14; 330; Atabaki 320. Moreover, a hierarchy of women's bodies can also be discerned in Zakani. For instance, see Mahjub 207, no. 1; 224, no. 32; 225, no. 34. Zakani is most explicit and detailed about this hierarchy in one of his Arabic anecdotes in his *Resaleh-ye Delgosha* [The Joyous Treatise] (see Mahjoub 261-262, no. 41; 270, no. 41).

active role in such acts. This is because, for Zakani, passive homosexuality is an ultimately inferior position closely associated with femininity.²²⁶

To survey completely all of Zakani's humorous works is beyond the aims and scope of this section. However, for our purpose, namely to debate Zakani's gender hierarchy with a special focus on his phallocentrism, it would be appropriate to look at his bawdy quatrains and pieces, while supplementing our observations by examples from his other works.²²⁷ Zakani's "Quatrains" (comprising sixty-four quatrains; see Mahjub 207-217) as well as his "Qet'eh-ha va Tazmin-ha" (The Pieces and the Tazmins) (sixty-one items; see Majhoub 219-230) feature his most obscene tone. Often disregarded even by modern scholars of Zakani, these humorous quatrains and pieces establish many of the gendered sexual motifs widespread throughout Zakani's other works.²²⁸ In these short poems, through the extensive use of personification, Zakani enlivens his three favourite and symbolic *k*-word characters: *kir* ("prick"), *kos* ("cunt"), and *kun* ("ass"). The penis, as discussed below, symbolizes the phallus and thus stands for Zakani's hegemonic masculinity. While the vagina and the anus stand for women, the anus

²²⁶ What El-Rouayheb remarks about a dominant cultural strand affecting the pre-modern Arab-Islamic societies' attitudes towards sexual relations, seems pertinent to the above discussion. According to him, "the 'active' or 'insertive' role in sexual intercourse was uniquely appropriate to a man, and the 'passive' or 'receptive' role was uniquely appropriate to a woman. A man who willingly assumed the latter role was violating conventional gender roles, and was often stereotyped as effeminate and thought to suffer from an abnormal or pathological condition. However, a man who sought to have 'active' or 'insertive' intercourse with a beardless male youth was not violating gender roles, nor was he stereotyped in the same way" (12). This notion, reminiscent of our similar discussion regarding the Qazvini jokes in the previous chapter, is still prevalent in Middle Eastern cultures (21).

²²⁷ There are available, to my knowledge, only three non- or less bowdlerized editions of Zakani's works: Atabaki; Eqbal; Mahjub. I will be using the most recent edition, i.e., that of Mahjub, while also having at hand the other two. Unfortunately, I could only access a deficient PDF version of Eqbal's edition on the Internet.

²²⁸ These quatrains and pieces are deemed as *humorous* (i.e., subsumed by *hazl*, *hajv*, or *tanz*) by Mahjub, and thus separated from Zakani's *serious* quatrains and pieces (Mahjub xli). According to Mahjub, for instance, other than eleven *hajv* and *tanz* quatrains, "[Zakani's other quatrains] are all nonsense and worthless" [*baqi hameh hazl va bi-arzesh ast*] (xli).

simultaneously stands for the men who take on the *maf'ul* (passive) position in same-sex relations. This is particularly evidenced by those poems in which explicit reference is made to women and to *maf'ul* men as equal objects of desire for the personas' penises.²²⁹ All pieces in both collections obviously assume a similarly-minded audience, i.e., one that presumes the phallic power. Therefore, a textual (homosocial) space of hegemonic masculinist, erotic—if not also masochistic—pleasure is also constructed. The pieces feature few recurring themes which are all embraced by the overarching theme of *phallicism*, i.e., worshipping the phallus.²³⁰

In a great number of the poems, the (fully erect) penis is depicted as a dominant character over the vagina and the anus, both of *which* are simultaneously pictured as objects of desire for the penis.²³¹ In other related poems, the penis is shown as strongly yearned for or competed over

²²⁹ In these short poems women and/or girls as well as men and/or boys are deemed as sexual objects (see Mahjub 207, no. 3; 209, no. 13; 215, no. 49; 222, no. 20; 226, no. 44; 227, no. 48). (The passive men are referred to by such names as *sadeh* [simple], *keng* [passive homosexual], *pesar* [boy], Turk [Turk], *gholam* [slave], etc..) As Brookshaw notes, “[s]ome of ‘Ubayd’s anecdotes suggest it was not unusual for adult males to have sexual relations with both women and (younger) men” (“To be Feared and Desired” 734).

²³⁰ In one piece (Mahjub 229, no. 56), the penis is turned into a divine being worshipped in Sufist circles (*majlis*).

In another one (Mahjub 220, no. 220) to mount the penis of the poetic persona is deemed as deserving a divine reward (*savab*) equal with that promised for a thousand pilgrimages made to Mecca on foot (as opposed to on horseback). For a *hadith* about the preference of on-foot pilgrimages over those made on horseback, which Zakani is apparently referring to, see

<http://www.wikifeqh.ir/%D8%AD%D8%AC%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87>):

«جانا تو را هنوز بدین حسن و این جمال / نه وقت حج رسیده و نه توبه درخور است / گر در پی ثوابی و در بند آخرت / بشنو حدیث بنده که این رای

بهتر است/ بر کبر من سوار شو از روی اعتقاد/ کان با هزار حجّ پیاده برابر است.» (Mahjub 220, no. 6).

²³¹ For the penis as dominant over the vagina and the ass as objects of desire for the penis, see, e.g., Mahjub 213, no. 39; 214, no. 43; 215, no. 48; 216, no. 55; 220, no. 9; 226, no. 41. For the vagina and the ass as enchanted by the penis, see Mahjub 211, no. 24; 213, no. 39; 217, no. 62; 223, nos. 25 & 26; 224, no. 29; 225, no. 36; 226, no. 39; 227, no. 47; 228, no. 52; 229, no. 60.

by the vagina and the anus, with both shown as infatuated with the penis.²³² While in most of these examples the notions of masculinity-as-virility and phallic-penetration-as-domination vis-à-vis the vagina and the anus are widespread, some of the personas spotlight these concepts by straightforwardly boasting of their own virility. One persona, while bragging about his penis, rather bestially claims that it even puts donkeys into pain (Mahjub 210, no. 19).²³³ Another persona, in what evokes Sprachman's aforesaid remark about the *awratization* of the universe in *hazl* and *hajv*, compares his penis to a *minaret* that would behead a hundred men to gain their wives (Mahjub 211, no. 25).

The theme becomes all the more gendered in a narrative poem in which the voice advances a comparison between his own virile power and that of other men who, he implies, lack manhood. Having “fucked a beautiful fairy-like [married] woman the way a donkey does his mare,” the narrator, a while later, happens to see the woman in an alley, while she is walking with a group of women. Catching sight of the narrator, the woman turns to her companions, saying, “If fucking is what this donkey [of a man] does, then I’d say our husbands shit on our cunts” (Mahjub 228, no. 50).²³⁴ It is not insignificant if, in “Ta’rifat-e Molla Do-piazeh” [another “Book of Definitions” which is attributed to Zakani], “man of all men” is “that who [even] fucks *kongs* [i.e., a man with a powerful physique]” (Atabaki 323).

While the men who are not considered virile enough are emasculated by Zakani, the men who take on the *maf’ul* (passive) role in same-sex relations are relegated to the status of women.

²³² For instance, see Mahjub 209, no. 14; 211, no. 24; 213, no. 39; 217, no. 62; 223, nos. 25 & 26; 224, no. 29; 225, no. 36; 226, no. 39; 227, no. 47; 228, no. 52; 229, no. 60.

²³³ Zakani uses bestiality as a satirical tool for condemnation, too. For instance, see Mahjub 212, no. 32; 292, no. 113.

²³⁴

«گر جماع این است کاین خر می‌کند/ بر کس ما می‌ریند این شوهران.»

In his “Book of Definitions,” Zakani explicitly defines the “beardless [man]” (i.e., a young boy who can be the object of full-bearded men’s desire) as an “unveiled woman” (Atabaki 323), and defines the “*gholam*” (literally meaning *slave*, but also meaning “[male] youth” [see El-Rouayheb 2]) as the “infertile woman/wife” (322).²³⁵ For Zakani, as for other Persian *hajv*-composers, women are already inferior to men. Thus, a male who would serve sexually as a woman, as seen in the above two definitions, becomes the subject of ridicule and humiliation. Accordingly, Zakani adopts as an invective (*hajv*) tool the concept of being a *maf’ul* in same-sex relations.

However, different from all his previous Persian *hajv*-writers in their rhetorical attitude to male sexual passivity, Zakani extensively puts the tool in the service of social satire (see Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* 45). In one of Zakani’s quatrains, for instance, the satiric voice aggressively attacks mullahs, calling them *kengs* (i.e., passive homosexuals), and contending that he would not deserve to be called “a man” if he does not put “the head [of his penis?] into the cunt of their wives” (Mahjub 215, no. 51).²³⁶ Yet, Zakani’s key word in his social satire is *kun-dorosti*, i.e., *anal integrity*.²³⁷ In fact, “Zakani divides the world into two classes: those who are *kun-dorost* (right-arsed, whole-bummed) and those who are not” (Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* 46). A major punishment awaiting Zakani’s satirical targets, therefore, is anal disintegrity as loss of manliness. Closely related to this is the already existing and politicized

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«بی ریش: زن روباز؛ غلام: زن نازا.»

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من منکر چنگ و باده و نرد نیم/ جز دشمن شیخکان دم سرد نیم/ در محشر اگر بیابم این کنگان را/ سر در کس زن شان نهم، مرد نیم.

Dekhoda Persian Dictionary defines *keng* as an *amrad*, i.e., passive homosexual, with a powerful physique (see “Keng”). Mahjub’s edition, however, records the word as *kong*, which seems erroneous in the above context. In *Dekhoda*, *kong* is “a man with a strong constitution or a man with a powerful physique” (see “Kong”).

²³⁷ For some references to the concept in Zakani’s works, see Mahjub 300, no. 152; 321, no. 55; 321, no. 57;

binary in Persian of *kardan/dadan* (do/give; to screw or penetrate/to be screwed or penetrated).

For Zakani, in his satire, the binary serves as a means to stigmatize, disapprove, and ridicule.²³⁸

In his “One Hundred Pieces of Advice,” for instance, Zakani attacks many high-ranking titles in his society by ironically inviting his (of course, male) audience to “bugger” as a passive homosexual in youth so that they can gain good reputation in old age (Mahjub 321, no. 53).²³⁹ In the same treatise, in what seems to be an attack on the decline of the *pahlevani* (i.e., chivalric) manners in his time, Zakani ironically deems a real champion to be a passive homosexual (Mahjub 322).²⁴⁰ Also, in an attack on *sheikhs*, while mocking their tone in giving religious advice, Zakani encourages his audience to *do* sheikhs’ sons: “Try to lie with the sons of the sheikhs by whatever means because this is considered a virtue comparable to a great pilgrimage to Mecca” (Javadi, *Ethics of Aristocrats* 91).²⁴¹ These phallogocentric attacks find strong resonance in Zakani’s *mock treatise*, “Akhlaq al-Ashraf” [“The Ethics of Aristocrats”] which is considered

²³⁸ The binary may also be used to create humour, as is the case in an anecdote in Zakani’s *Maktub-e Qalandaran* [The Letter of the Antinomian Dervishes]: Confiding to a man from Bukhara, a person says he has long not been *doing it*, to which the man from Bukhara responds, “Oh dear, [at least] you might want to give it lest you [completely] forget the trade” (Mahjub 309, no. 209).

«شخصی با بخارایی گفت که مدت‌هاست تا جماع نمی‌کنم. گفت ای جان دادر چون نمی‌کنی باری می‌ده تا صنعت فراموش نکنی.»

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«در کودکی کون از دوست و دشمن و خویش و بیگانه و دور و نزدیک و ترک و تاجیک و پیر و جوان دریغ مدارید تا در جوانی نیک‌نام باشید و در پیری به مرتبه‌ی شیخی و واعظی و جهان پهلوانی و سرافرازی برسید.»

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«آن کس را پهلوان خوانید که پشت دیگران بر زمین آرد. پهلوان حقیقی آن کس است که روی تواضع بر خاک مذلت نهد و یک گز کیر بی‌تحاشی در کون گیرد.»

241

«شیخ زادگان را به هر وسیله که باشد بگایید تا حج اکبر کرده باشید.» (Atabaki 210; Eqbal 241)

This “advice” does not exist in Mahjub’s edition.

as his “most important work” (Sprachman, “Akhlaq al-Ašraf” par. 1; see also Halabi, *Zakani-Nameh* 11) as well as his magnum opus in social satire.²⁴²

“The Ethics of Aristocrats” is Zakani’s satirical complaint about the decadence of some traditional virtues in his era: wisdom, bravery, decency, justice, generosity, forbearance, fidelity, prudence, honesty, mercy, and compassion. The book is divided into seven chapters, each of which attends to one or more of the above virtues:

Each chapter is divided into two parts; the first presents the rejected or outmoded view (*mazhab-e mansukh*) while the second [. . .] describes the accepted or contemporary view (*mazhab-e mokhtar*). [. . .] Zakani praises the wisdom of his contemporaries who have rejected old values like courage, justice, and generosity, and have attained success through assiduous cowardice, tyranny, and greed.

(Sprachman, “Akhlaq al-Ašraf” par. 1).

Anal disintegrity and the *kardan/dadan* (to screw/to be screwed) binary play central roles in “The Ethics” too. In the second chapter of the book, which is allotted to courage, after describing the abrogated view, Zakani turns to the current view, that of “our present masters” (*ashabona*), according to which courage is sheer idiocy partly because the fearful catamites tend to live longer and happier lives than those who risk their lives for ideal causes (see Mahjub 237). In support of this, Zakani then mentions an anecdote in which he chastises an “upstate Isfahani” who, while encountering “a Mongol soldier” only manages to escape by offering to be buggered by the Mongol (see Javadi, *Ethics of Aristocrats* 36; Mahjub 238). Zakani’s resort to *anal disintegrity* as a rhetorical tool in satire reaches its climax in the next chapter of his treatise, which concerns *effat* (i.e., chastity), and in which he parodies the story of Rostam and Tahmtan

²⁴² For the genre of *mock treatise* in Arabic and Persian humour, see Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* 44.

from the well-known *The Book of Kings* by Hakim Abul-Qasim Firdausi. In this travesty, unlike what we read in *The Book of Kings*, the legendary Iranian *pahlevan* (i.e., champion) Rostam is but a passive homosexual. Prior to the parody itself, Zakani mentions most famously satirizing some of his contemporary high-ranking titles by deeming them as those who *lend their asses* to others.²⁴³

Plausibly, Sprachman links Zakani's emphasis on anal disintegrity as a satirical tool to the Greek era, and especially to "the political satire of Aristophanic comedy," which abounds "the standard ... assumption that 'pathics and male prostitutes' make the most successful politicians" (45). According to Sprachman, during the ninth to twelfth centuries, which witnessed many literary and philosophical translations from Greek to Arabic, the Arabic grammatical words of *fa'el* (i.e., subject, agent) and *maf'ul* (i.e., direct object) were adopted, by Persian authors, as equivalents for the passive and active partners in Greek man-boy relationships. Since "sexual passivity was and is almost always associated with social and moral inferiority in Arabic and Persian cultures, invectivists often assert that their *mahjus* [*hajv* targets]

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«... [مشاهده می‌رود که از زن و مرد هرکس که جماع نداد همیشه مفلوک و منکوب می‌باشد و به داغ حرمان و خذلان سوخته و به براهین قاطعه مبرهن گردانیده‌اند که از زمان آدم علیه‌السلام تا کنون هرکس که جماع نداد میر و وزیر و پهلوان و لشکرشکن و قتال و سرافراز و مالدار و دولتیار و شیخ و واعظ و معرف نشد و دلیل بر صحت این قول آن که متصوفه جماع دادن را علیه‌المشاخ گویند و از بزرگی شنیدم که با پسر خود می‌گفت ای جان پدر: "جهد کن تا فراخ‌کون باشی/ کار کارِ فراخ‌کونان است" و در تواریخ آورده‌اند که رستم زال آن همه ناموس و شوکت از کون دادن یافت.» (Mahjub 240)

"[I]t has been observed that any person, whether woman or man, who has not put out is forever miserable and tortured, seared by privation and self-denial. In fact, it has been established [...] that from the time of Adam [...] until now any person who failed to put out never achieved the rank of amir, vizier, champion, slayer of armies, killer or never became august, propertied, or favoured by fortune, or a Shaykh, preacher or chief protocol. Supporting this assertion is the fact that in Sufism, being fucked is termed "the Shaykhs' Affliction." [As I heard a man advise his son, "Strive to be wide-assed,/ Since the day is that of the wide-assed."] It has also been chronicled that Rostam, the son of Zal, acquired his wide reputation and renown through anal intercourse" (Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* 58). Sprachman's translation, which is based on a different edition from Mahjub's, lacks the part I add in brackets.

are *mafuls*” (45). Zakani, like Aristophanes, extended sexual passivity “to entire classes of people, thereby transforming one of the most common conventions of ad hominem *hajv* into a tool for social satire” (45). Hopefully, the discussion in this section has shown that even in its interpersonal aspect, *hajv*, by drawing on broader structures in social (here, gender) relations, dealt with more than a person’s emotions or personal sensitivities (i.e., *ad hominem*). As we will see in the following section, even seven centuries past Zakani’s era, similar sexual satirical tools are recognized in the social and political satire of his modern day Iranian successors.

Overlaps in Old and New Gender Structures: *Hajv*, Gendered Insults, and the Modern Iranian Satire

Despite its humorous turn, *hajv* has an inseparable connection with insult, and has “insult” among its meanings (Halabi, *Tarikh-e Tanz va Shukh-Tab’i* 34-40). Given this, we may observe that Zakani, in his social satire, actually bestowed a sociocritical value upon gendered insults. Interestingly, modern Iranian political satire, as practiced by some well-known contemporary satirists, still resorts to strikingly similar rhetorical tools. In this regard, a brief discussion of the contemporary gendered insults in Iranian society and culture will be beneficial. As mentioned before, more than the probable influence of Zakani on modern Iranian satirists, I am interested in noting what the above discursive similarities reveal to us about the interplay of gender structure and ridicule as a form of humour as well as about possible connections between the structures of gender relations in Iranian society over different historical eras. This should in turn strengthen our previous claims about the relationship between mainstream gender norms and gender humour.

A survey of some of the popular insults in contemporary Iran shows that such obscene terms serve as shame-inducing tools directed towards exercising social control in interpersonal

relations. Similar to what we saw in *hajv*, almost all modern Iranian sexual insults assume a phallocentric or hegemonic masculinist perspective and target men's vulnerabilities either by explicitly referring to their female kin (normally a wife or another *mahram* kin, e.g., daughter(s), sister(s), or mother) or by directly attacking the derided man's masculine identity. Some of the currently functional insults in Iranian society and culture are as follows:

madar/khahar-jendeh (i.e., “mother/sister-whored”); *zan-jendeh/zan-qahbeh/zan-kundeh* (i.e., “wife-whored” or “wife-bugged”); *khar kos-deh* (i.e., “sister-whored”); *(ey) kharesho/madaresho/etc. (gaidam)* (i.e., may [I fuck] his sister/mother/etc.); *bi-namus/ bi-gheirat/ pofyuz / bi-rag* (i.e., “*namus*-less”/ “*gheirat*-less”);²⁴⁴ *jakesh/kos-kesh/kun-kesh/dayyus* (i.e., “cuckold” or “[his wife's] pimp”); *kir(am) tu dahanesh/kunesh/kos-e khaharesh/etc.* (i.e., “may [my] penis get into his mouth/his ass/ his sister's cunt/etc.”); *pedar-sag/tokhm-e sag* (“son of a bitch”);²⁴⁵ *valad-e zena/tokhm-e haram* (i.e., “born out of wedlock”); *kundeh/(bacheh)-kuni* (i.e., “bugger” [that who gives/lends his ass to others]); *bacheh-khoshgel* (i.e., “pretty boy”)

In contemporary Farsi, the generic terms of *fohsh-e namusi* (i.e., “*namus*-related profanities”) and *fohsh-e khahar (va) madar* (i.e., “sister- [and] mother-related profanities”) are commonly used to refer to the above insults. Both terms are a reminder of Jerome Neu's previously mentioned discussion about the connection between insult, shame, and a man's sense of honour. The above *namus*-related profanities clearly assume a hegemonic masculinist viewpoint. Some

²⁴⁴ For the concepts of *namus* and *gheirat* in Iranian culture, see Chapter Three.

²⁴⁵ “Son of a bitch” was chosen for lack of more accurate equivalents in English. However, both obscenities have different connotations, and literally attack the chastity of the derided person's mother in a specific way: that the person has been reproduced through his mother's copulation with a dog as his father.

of the insults are interestingly comparable to those in Connell's list, mentioned in Chapter One, about homosexual and effeminate heterosexual men in the West (see p. 25 above), which might be taken as a sign of overlaps between gender meanings in modern Iran and many Western countries.

The insults maintain a mutual relation to the gender structures of contemporary Iranian society. On the one hand, they signify an underlying patriarchal gender order. This order presumes women as possessions of certain male kin of theirs, and thus subscribes to the overall dominance of men over women, while keeping under surveillance various femininities and masculinities, too; e.g., in contrast with other members in the same sex category, a *whore* and a *man engaged in passive same-sex relation* receive abject gendered identities, leading to the creation of hierarchies within femininities and within masculinities.²⁴⁶ As Peter Murphy remarks regarding the relationship between the discourse and social roles in his book, *Studs, Tools, and the Family Jewels: Metaphors Men Live By*,

[w]e objectify women in our language because our behavior objectifies them.

Metaphors that reify women are imaginable because they make sense from what we experience in life. We could not use objectifying language if we did not engage in objectifying. It would not make sense. (5)

The same, we could argue, holds true about men who perform non-hegemonic masculinities. On the other hand, the above insults also seem to occupy a role in symbolically constructing certain gender meanings in Iranian society. Such meanings are in turn reproduced through other discourses. One such discourse is that of the social and political satire. Not all of the above insults directly appear in the satirical works of modern Iranian satirists; however, a significant

²⁴⁶ This is comparable to Pascoe's aforementioned discussion of "the fag discourse" as an *abject* discourse in relation to which certain heterosexual masculine identities are constructed (see Chapter One).

pattern is discernible, indicating that the contemporary sexual swearing still serves effective rhetorical purposes for some famous and influential Iranian satirists. While “[t]he freedom with which classical authors dealt with sexual matters, in particular through the mention of the taboo words for the sexual organs and racy, often exceedingly coarse stories, has been drastically curtailed in more recent times” (de Bruijn, par. 12), phallocentric imagery still finds its way into the modern satirical discourse.

In his short survey of humour in Iranian history, after referring to the old forms of humour in Iran, including *hajv* or personal satire, de Bruijn remarks that “[i]n modern Persian literature certain forms of classical humor in poetry and prose survived, but they were applied in new ways and in new genres, which were introduced mainly under Western influences” (par. 15). For instance, as courtly patronage disappeared in modern Iranian society, de Bruijn observes, little motivation was left for composing personal satire. (As previously mentioned, poets sometimes would compose *hajv* against their patrons if their patronage was delayed or not paid.) “If individuals still were lampooned,” he continues, “this was done within the framework of issues of a wider public interest, such as the politics of the day, and the exposure of corruption and social injustices” (par. 15). However, what is most remarkable here about de Bruijn’s observation is that the modern Iranian society, even though for different purposes from those in the past, continued to find meaningful and effective the sexual insults previously used by poets in the *hajv* tradition.

Perhaps one of the most significant earlier examples of this reintroduction of *hajv* for social-satirical purposes in modern times are some of the works produced by the late Qajar poet

and satirist Iraj Mirza (1874–1926).²⁴⁷ Similar to Zakani, Iraj Mirza is also notorious for his “freely and skillfully [using] non-literary and even obscene terms in his seemingly serious poems, in a way which might shock a casual reader unfamiliar with the thrust and historical background of his works” (Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari, par. 8). However, again similar to Zakani, Iraj Mirza’s “light verse” has been found to abound with harsh criticism of the socio-political conditions of Iran. “A frequent theme,” as Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari notes, “is the question of the use of the veil (*hejab*) by women, which effectively barred them from active participation in social affairs” (Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari, par. 7). In fact, Iraj Mirza is well known for having “defended in particular the case of women in Persia” (de Bruijn, “Humor” par. 17).

While the *hejab* theme appears in more than a few of Iraj Mirza’s poems (see footnote 49 in Abedinifard, “The Gender Politics of Iraj Mirza”), it takes center stage in his most well-known *hajv* poem, “Aref-Nameh” (see p. 148 above).²⁴⁸ In this long piece of rhymed couplets, Iraj Mirza attacks his musician friend Aref Qazvini, seemingly for not having visited Iraj during his journey to the poet’s town. Somewhat halfway through the poem, however, the theme of insulting Aref is overshadowed by the topic of the veil, with the poet announcing that he would like to tell us a story about the *hejab* and its disadvantages. As Najmabadi declares, the poem has been mostly read as comprising of two separate stories (148-149). However, upon closer examination and contextualization of the poem, it becomes clear that both stories, i.e., that of Aref’s *hajv* and that of the veil, are indeed skilfully interwoven in the form of a narrative which

²⁴⁷ The case of Iraj Mirza is all too important because his poetry is both informed by and helps inform certain socio-political and literary processes, especially those relating to the veil and its connection with heteronormativity, during the early modernization in Iranian society (see Najmabadi 148-150; see also Chapter Three above). These processes had been initiated well in advance of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, but they gained momentum at the time of the Revolution and shortly thereafter.

²⁴⁸ For a good translation of parts of this poem, see Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* 78-90.

reflects and supports some prevalent contemporary discourses regarding gender, sexuality, and modernity. Following the course of such earlier Iranian modernists as the social and literary critics Mirza Fath-Ali Akhund-Zadeh (1812–1878) and Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani (1854 - 1896/97), and following the then prevalent course in Iran of rushing towards heteronormativity, Iraj Mirza takes the veil responsible for the spread of male same-sex practices, and thus asks for the abolition of veiling (Najmabadi 148). Interestingly, while Iraj Mirza himself has been well-known for doing same-sex practices, he takes the very issue of homoeroticism as a tool to assault Aref. (Elsewhere, I show in detail how in the first part of the poem, i.e., the *hajn* of Aref, the poetic persona seeks in phallocentric binary oppositions much of the symbolic power he tends to exercises over the character of Aref [see Abedinifard, “The Gender Politics of Iraj Mirza’s ‘Aref Nameh’”].) The strongly implied binary oppositions include those of penis/ass, penis/vagina, active (homosexual)/passive (homosexual), to penetrate/to be penetrated, man/non-man, man/*amrad*, man/beardless, anal integrity/anal disintegrity, top/bottom (with sexual connotation). While Iraj Mirza’s other works reveal some tension regarding his stance towards homosexuality, “Aref-Nameh” obviously struggles to establish a nascent heteronormativity contemporaneous with its composition and initial circulation.²⁴⁹

Relying upon phallocentric imagery in modern Iranian (social/political) humour has apparently continued after, and perhaps also been influenced by, Iraj Mirza. While any discussion here will necessarily be incomplete, I end this section by focusing on some more recent examples of the use of phallocentric notions in Iranian socio-political satire during the past decade. Ironically enough, as in the case of Iraj Mirza, my examples come from satirists who are known for their liberal-humanist tendencies. Yet, I would like to begin here with an

²⁴⁹ See the unnumbered footnote in Afary 94. See also Najmabadi 148-150.

analysis of two events which not only reveal much about the dynamics of gender in current Iranian society and culture, but that also serve as foils against which we can later better analyze and understand our satirical examples.

On December 6, 2009, and during the aftermath of the disputed 2009 Iranian presidential election, the Iranian student activist Majid Tavakoli was arrested by the government. On the following day, the government-affiliated *Fars News Agency* (associated with the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution, and representative of radical right tendencies), published a photo of Tavakoli, which showed him as fully clad in Islamic *hejab*, beside a similar photo of Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, the first post-revolutionary Iranian president (1980-1981), who had been claimed by the then Iranian officials to have fled the country in women's attire.²⁵⁰ While claiming that Tavakoli had intended to escape in female disguise, the *Fars News* clearly aimed at jocularly humiliating him as a student leader before his companions and followers, while also implying a warning to other potentially troublesome students.

Also, on April 15, 2013, the Iranian "police paraded a convicted [Kurdish male] criminal through the northwestern city of Marivan [in the Kurdistan province in Iran] dressed in traditional Kurdish women's clothing."²⁵¹ This incident, too, given the particular constructions of masculinity among the Kurds, was specifically intended to undermine the convict's masculinity and to urge other men to self-restrain.²⁵² While both stories, as I explain later, did not quite end as expected by the Iranian government, they both do suggest some potentiality within the current

²⁵⁰ For the news on *Fars News*, see <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8809171089>

For *The Guardian's* coverage of the story, see <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/dec/11/iran-regime-male-student-chador>

²⁵¹ <http://observers.france24.com/content/20130419-iran-police-punish-man-dress>

For a video featuring this event, see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eXTSYnuSZI>

²⁵² In regard to the constructions of masculinity among Iranian Kurds, it is notable that the Kurdish provinces of Kermanshah and Kurdistan have cities with high rates of *honour killing* (see Bakhtiar-Nezhad 41-42)

structure of gender relations in Iranian society for relatively legitimizing this form of gendered denigration as retribution, or, more specifically, emasculation as inferiority and humiliation. Both incidents, particularly because they were induced by the theocratic government itself, might be considered as expectable.²⁵³ However, similar recourse to the phallic power as rhetoric may also be found in much less expected venues, thus indicating a far serious dynamic between gendered ridicule and the gender structure in modern Iranian culture.

Ebrahim Nabavi, Alireza Reza'ee, Nikahang Kowsar, and Mana Neyestani are presently among the most famous, if not the most famous, Iranian political satirists. All four have chosen self-exile during the past decade or so, and are currently penning diatribes and/or drawing cartoons with liberal-humanist and democratic themes against the Iranian government. All of these men, however, sometimes seek in phallocentrism the effectiveness of their critique. Ebrahim Nabavi, in two notes he wrote in 2008 and 2009, relied on phallic power in his verbal assault on Fatemeh Rajabi, a pro-Ahmadinejad female official and a vehement critic of Iranian reformists. Rajabi's husband, Gholamhossein Elham, is also a right-wing official who had several key positions during Ahmadinejad's presidential period. Early in his first note, titled "The Biography of Saint Fatemeh Rajabieh," and written as a parody of historical *tazkerahs* (i.e., [saints'] biographies), Nabavi puns on the surname of Rajabi's husband Elham (meaning inspiration) as well as on the word *dadān* (i.e., to give/lend [one's orifice]) to create a sexual innuendo at Rajabi and her husband's expense. Nabavi describes Rajabi as *dahandeh-ye elham*,

²⁵³ One of the serious consequences of the 1979 Revolution was the establishment of certain Islamic laws regarding gender relations. Most of these laws were to replace some gender-democratic laws already passed under the previous regime, i.e., Mohammad Reza Shah's. The new laws "included a requirement that hair be covered in public and that women wear the chador, a traditional Iranian garment. The government also lowered the legal age of marriage from eighteen to nine, legalized polygamy, reinstated stoning as a legal punishment, and repealed the Family Protection Act, which had afforded protection to women in such matters as choice of spouse, divorce, and financial support" (Stiehm 185).

literally meaning *inspiration-giving* or inspiring, but also evoking her as being screwed/pimped by Elham (literally, “the giver/lender (belonging) to Elham”). Shortly after in the text, Rajabi is described as *sukhteh-ye Mahmud dar eshtiaq* (i.e., the one who is scorched in the love of Mahmud [Ahmadinejad]), thus drawing upon the familiar theme in Persian *hajv* of the accusation of extramarital relationship as a rhetorical tool.²⁵⁴ Finally, Rajabi is also called “the typical specimen of *qaht ol-rejal* [i.e., the (sign of the) scarcity of the male species].”²⁵⁵

In his second note on Rajabi, titled “Dir Hossein Mousavi and the Nervous Fati [intimate form of Fatemeh],” Nabavi continues to attack Rajabi through *awratization*. Throughout the note, Nabavi addresses Rajabi as “Fati jan [dear Fati].” In a culture in which many (particularly religious) husbands refrain from directly referring to the names of their wives in the company of the *namahram* people, Nabavi’s satirical technique of calling a famous man’s wife by her first name in public (writing) can serve as a successful rhetorical tool to punish and silence his target.²⁵⁶ The tool gains extra strength when Nabavi’s narrator puts forward his ironical reason for addressing Rajabi with a term conventionally reserved for her most intimate kin. Rajabi is naughtily implied to be a slut while apparently being deemed as a historical hero:

²⁵⁴ For Nabavi’s note, see <http://www.doomdam.com/archives/000483.php>. Nabavi’s diatribe requires some background knowledge. After Ahmadinejad was elected president in 2005, Rajabi famously penned a book which, as mentioned in its title, deems Ahmadinejad to be *The Miracle of the Third Millennium*. (In this regard, see <http://iranpulse.al-monitor.com/index.php/2012/10/500/ahmadinejads-one-time-ardent-supporter-bids-farewell-to-politics/>.) As an Arabic word literally meaning “the one who has been worshipped,” the word “Mahmud” signifies, in Islam, one of the names of Allah (see “Mahmud”). Therefore, Nabavi’s reference to the word also makes literal sense, especially in the context of the genre of *tazherah* the parody of which Nabavi chooses as a humorous frame for his satire.

²⁵⁵

«آن مصداق بارز قحط الرجال.»

²⁵⁶ For the term *namahram*, see Chapter Three. For a reference to Iranian men’s refraining from using their wives’ names in front of strangers, see Milani, *Veils and Words* 47-48.

No doubt, you might get upset of my addressing you as Fati, whereas you and I are strangers, and thus it would be out of question for one to call you Fati. Yet, believe me, you no longer only belong to yourself, you do not any longer only belong to your husband and children, you belong to all people, just like historical heroes and great figures.²⁵⁷

The addressing appears frequently in the rest of the note. Other phallocentric techniques are also used. At one point, for instance, Nabavi puns on the word *kardan* (i.e., to make, to do, to screw) in the phrasal verb *elham kardan* (i.e., to inspire), at the expense of Rajabi and his husband, Gholamhossein Elham.²⁵⁸

Likewise, the Iranian cartoonist Nikahang Kowsar has frequently relied on phallocentrism in his verbal and visual political satire. When, following the 2009 presidential election, it was officially announced that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had won 62.3 percent of the vote, Kowsar's artistic reaction was to depict Ahmadinejad (who had already shown a vested interest in displaying statistical charts to people during his campaign talks) as giving the audience a middle finger chart.²⁵⁹ Further, in other cartoons of his, Kowsar draws on the finger-as-phallus icon.²⁶⁰ Also, in a blog note addressed to Hossein Shari'atmadari, the managing editor

²⁵⁷

«البته ممکن است ناراحت بشوی که چرا من تو را فاطمی خطاب کرده‌ام، در حالی که من و تو با هم غریبه‌ایم و اصلاً معنی ندارد کسی شما را فاطمی خطاب کند، ولی باور کن شما دیگر متعلق به خودت فقط نیستی، تو متعلق به شوهر و بچه‌هایت فقط نیستی، تو متعلق به همه‌ی مردمی، مثل همه‌ی قهرمانان و بزرگان تاریخ.»

²⁵⁸

«تو چطور می‌تونی موفق شدی این کار را بکنی، واقعا غلامحسین الهام کرد یا خودت الهام شدی؟»

²⁵⁹ <http://nikahang.blogspot.ca/2009/06/626.html>

²⁶⁰ For instance, see <https://www.khodnevis.org/node/35016> and <https://www.khodnevis.org/node/35110>. In Iranian culture, the erect thumb icon functions similarly to that of the middle finger in Western culture. Kowsar draws on both.

of the notoriously conservative Iranian newspaper *Keyhan* (*The Cosmos*), and phallocentrically titled as “Brother Hossein, Your Excellency’s Posterior is Probably Itchy,”²⁶¹ Kowsar follows the tradition of sexual *hajv* by greeting Shari’atmadari with a humorous turn on religious epistolary greetings: “To Mr. Shari’atmadari, Whose Excellency’s Bum Is Wide.”²⁶²

Shari’atmadari has also been harshly targeted by Alireza Reza’i, another liberal-humanist satirist, who in a blog note exercises phallic power simultaneously over Shari’atmadari, his parents, and his sister. While Reza’i deems Shari’atmadari as the illegitimate child of a cuckold father, his mother and sister are also suggested to be sluts.²⁶³

Finally, in some of his cartoons, Mana Neyestani, one of the most critically acclaimed Iranian cartoonists and satirists today, also trusts in the symbolic power of the phallus for further effect. For instance, in the first frame of a two-panel cartoon, titled “Sarkub [Suppression],” we see an oversized hand showing a V sign, with a green band tied to the forefinger, obviously

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«برادر حسین، بخش پسین جنابعالی حتماً می خارد.»

Kowsar’s mentioning itchiness is a reference to *obnah*, an Arabic term which has traditionally denoted the “disease” of a male person who desires, allegedly due to his itchy rectum, to be anally penetrated. For this reason, in many sources, the term is simply rendered as close to *passive homosexual* (see El-Rouayheb 6, 19; Clarence-Smith 69).

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«آقای شریعتمداری، فراخ ماتحتت.»

For Kowsar’s note, see: http://nikahang.blogspot.ca/2011_03_01_archive.html Kowsar’s most recent phallocentric cartoon appeared upon Ayatollah Khamenei’s announcing that the Iranian government was ready, in its nuclear talks with the West, to show some “heroic flexibility” (*narmesh-e qahremananeh*). Linking Khamenei’s surprising stance to Ayatollah Khomeini’s desperately drinking “the cup of poison” upon the end of the Iraq-Iran war in 1988 (<http://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/21/us/khomeini-accepts-poison-of-ending-the-war-with-iraq-un-sending-mission.html>), Kowsar depicts Khamenei as bending down and showing his naked buttocks to an implied West, and uttering with gaiety, “Heroic flexibility is similar to the cup of poison; it only hurts more!” (<https://khodnevis.org/cartoon/52659>).

²⁶³ For Reza’i’s note, see <http://alirezarezaee1.blogspot.ca/2011/02/896.html>

indicating that the hand belongs to a Green Movement activist.²⁶⁴ Beside the hand, we see a furious repressor as an emblem of the current Iranian government, who has raised an axe to cut the fingers. In the second panel, in which the axe has descended, we see the forefinger fallen on the ground to the dismay of the oppressor who is now facing an erect middle finger.²⁶⁵ Similarly, in another cartoon, titled as “Namus-Parasti-e Eqtesadi” [“Economic Namus-Worshipping”], Neyestani takes as the subject for his cartoon an already phallogentric statement uttered by an Iranian official: “The market is the *namus* of the country’s economy.”²⁶⁶ In reaction to this statement, Neyestani draws a state brothel in which Iran’s personified economy is being pimped by the artist’s stock character, “Aqa-ye Sarkubmanesh [Mr. Oppressor].” The rhetorical aspect of Neyestani’s cartoon is clearly suggested to be as follows: “You guys claim to be the protectors of the *namus* of our economy, and yet you are the very ones who are actually screwing this economy.”²⁶⁷

From one perspective, and as instances of the subversive culture, all of our satirical examples could be regarded as acts of “writing back” to the empire of the theocratic government’s gender politics.²⁶⁸ In other words they could be interpreted as rebellious. However, such an act, since it capitalizes on the very essential norms it purportedly attacks, is simultaneously doomed to be conservative and disciplinary regarding gender, too. All examples,

²⁶⁴ For an informative source on the Iranian Green Movement, see Dabashi.

²⁶⁵ See http://zamaaneh.com/zamtoon/2009/11/post_225.html

²⁶⁶

«بازار مصرف، ناموس اقتصاد کشور است.»

For *namus*, see Chapter Three.

²⁶⁷ Neyestani’s cartoon may be found at <http://www.mardomak.org/cartoons/full/70317>. For an insightful discussion on the rhetorical aspect of visual arguments, including those raised by cartoons, see Blair.

²⁶⁸ This is particularly important as most of the examples postdate the claims, raised in 2009, regarding rape in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s prisons. For more information in this regard, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8192660.stm>.

seen in light of the Tavakoli and the Marivani criminal cases, also signify the interplay between gender structures and ridicule as a form of humour. The fact that satirists, sometimes contrary to their overall pro-democracy projects, choose certain hegemonic gender norms as rhetorical tools for bringing their points home to their readers, or for punishing their targets, can indicate the somewhat determining power of such norms or of gender structures in general.²⁶⁹ Finally, all examples also suggest the simultaneous multi-functionality of humour, in that, while they may serve critical and rebellious roles in some realms (social, political, etc.), they apparently occupy quite disciplinary functions in another, i.e., that of gender.

While phallogentric satire in contemporary Iran has, to my knowledge, incited little if any feminist criticism, the cases of Majid Tavakoli and the convict from Marivan did precipitate what we could call gender-conscious reactions by many men (and women), from Iran and elsewhere, who initiated or participated in Internet campaigns—mostly on Facebook. The campaigns were aimed at condemning what their supporters deemed as the symbolic humiliation of women. In the case of Tavakoli, many Internet pages or forums were initiated under such titles as “Veiled Men,” “I am Majid,” and “We Are All Majid,” primarily comprising photos and/or videos of men intentionally clad in headscarf and/or *chador* to sympathize with Tavakoli.²⁷⁰ Many renowned academic and political figures also supported the campaign.²⁷¹ Some Internet users, in an obviously retaliatory effort, which also reveals the conditioning nature of gender

²⁶⁹ For a similar discussion about gender structures conditioning gendered practices, see Connell, *Gender in World* 74.

²⁷⁰ For a short informative essay on the campaign, see: <http://tavaana.org/en/content/we-are-all-majid-international-solidarity-iran>. For more on “The Campaign of Veiled Men” and its ramifications for the gender order of Iranian society, see Sadeghi 130-132. Typing “we are all majid tavakoli” on YouTube would also bring up many interesting videos regarding the campaign.

²⁷¹ See <http://www.shahrvand.com/archives/1708> and http://hambastegi.info/2009/12/12/nikahang_nikgoo_meninscarf

structures, created a “digital parody of the photograph of Majid Tavakoli featuring the face of Iran’s supreme leader.”²⁷²

The Facebook campaign in the case of the man from Marivan, titled “Being a woman is not humiliating and should not be considered punishment,” also constitutes of many photos showing (Kurdish) men in Kurdish women’s clothes.²⁷³ Before this Internet campaign was initiated, the local organization of Marivan Women’s Community had also denounced the punishment as insulting to Kurdish women in general. Seventeen Members of the Iranian Parliament also objected to the method chosen for punishing the convict, contending that the act was “offensive to chaste and virtuous women’s clothing.”²⁷⁴ Such efforts eventually convinced Iran’s Police Chief Commander to apologize officially to Kurdistan women.²⁷⁵ No doubt, this was remarkable success for activists of Iranian women’s rights.

These two campaigns, when seen in the background of our general discussion and cases in the past two sections—from Zakani to our modern satirists—strongly suggest the existence of a tension, if not crisis tendency, within the structure of gender relations in the current Iranian society and culture. Whereas to pursue this hypothesis is beyond our aims, we can nevertheless assert that much rhetorical utilization of hegemonic gender norms through ridiculing humour is taken for granted in the current Iranian society and culture. However, such a ridicule-based

²⁷² <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/12/09/irans-state-media-mocks-arrested-student-leader-pictured-in-womens-clothing/?scp=2&sq=khamenei&st=cse>

²⁷³ For the Facebook page of the campaign, see <https://www.facebook.com/KurdMenForEquality>

²⁷⁴ See <http://www.bultannews.com/fa/news/136231/%D9%BE%D9%88%D8%B4%D8%B4-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D9%86-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B0%D9%84-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B4-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85>

²⁷⁵ <http://www.mehrnews.com/detail/News/2054326>

rhetorical deployment of gender norms is apparently not limited to the Iranian society, and does not always appear as explicitly phallogentric as do the cases analyzed in this section. In order to provide further evidence, I attend to the same topic in another case of *humour as communication*, this time from contemporary Anglo-American culture.

GENDERED RIDICULE AS A RHETORICAL TOOL IN CONTEMPORARY ANGLO-AMERICAN HUMOUR: THE CASE OF THE GET A MAC AD CAMPAIGN (2006-2009)²⁷⁶

In 2006, Apple Inc.'s advertising company initiated an ad campaign called Get a Mac. The ads, directed by Phil Morrison, featured the actor Justin Long as the Macintosh computer, or "the Mac," and the author and humorist John Hodgman as "the PC," which represents any computer using Microsoft's Windows operating system. The ads, which featured a simple core plotline, quickly became a hit, and successfully ran for four continuous years. The *Slate Magazine* author Seth Stevenson opens his essay "Mac Attack: Apple's Mean-Spirited New Ad Campaign" with a concise explanation of the template for the ads:

Two men stand side by side in front of a featureless, white background. "Hello, I'm a Mac," says the guy on the right (who is much younger and dressed in jeans). "And I'm a PC," says the guy on the left (who wears dorky glasses, ill-fitting khakis, and a jacket and tie). The two men discuss the many advantages of using a Mac and seem to agree that Macs are "better" than PCs.²⁷⁷ (par. 1)

²⁷⁶ I am thankful to Saeed Sabzian for bringing the campaign to my attention.

²⁷⁷ http://www.slate.com/articles/business/ad_report_card/2006/06/mac_attack.html

All of the ads may be accessed at this address: <http://edit.adweek.com/adfreak/apples-get-mac-complete-campaign-130552>

Throughout his essay, Stevenson, a self-proclaimed PC-user, seeks to show how the Apple Corporation's juxtaposing the two opposingly constructed characters, i.e., a "cool kid [i.e., Mac] versus [a] nerd [i.e., PC]," might unintentionally and ironically work against the company's intentions. "[T]hese days," asks Stevenson, "aren't nerds like John Hodgman the new cool kids? And isn't smug superiority (no matter how affable and casually dressed) a bit off-putting as a brand strategy?" As clearly stated in the title of his essay, Stevenson simply thought that the ads were somewhat "mean-spirited." On somewhat similar grounds, *The Guardian's* Charlie Brooker also criticizes the characterization in the ads as potentially hazardous to Apple's aims. While Stevenson critiqued the North American series of the ads, Brooker focuses on the very similar U.K. campaign of Get a Mac. He finds intriguing the juxtaposition of the comedians David Mitchell and Robert Webb. Both actors, he says,

are best known for the television series *Peep Show*—probably the best sitcom of the past five years—in which Mitchell plays a repressed, neurotic underdog, and Webb plays a selfish, self-regarding poseur. So when you see the ads, you think, "PCs are a bit rubbish yet ultimately lovable, whereas Macs are just smug, preening tossers." In other words, it is a devastatingly accurate campaign.²⁷⁸ (par.

4)

Both authors seek to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the Get a Mac ads. Regardless of their opinions, however, both the North American and the U.K. campaign ads, many of which were also adapted into a Japanese campaign, proved to be highly influential. While a *PC Mag* author commends the campaign as "the most effective ad campaign technology has ever seen,"²⁷⁹ the ads actually did cause a market share growth of forty-two percent due to which "the campaign

²⁷⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/feb/05/comment.media>

²⁷⁹ <http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2327233,00.asp>

was seen as “culturally influential” and achieved a prestigious American Marketing Association 2007 Effie Award in the process” (Dahlen, Lange, and Smith 24). Put in more palpable numbers, “[t]he highly successful campaign dramatically increased sales of the Macintosh computer by more than a million units between December 2005 and December 2007 alone” (Santa Maria and Knowles 83). Where, one might ask, does this *cultural influence* come from?

The reasons could include the allegedly “shameless promotion” of the Mac product, as Brooker puts it (par. 1), as well as the fact that the ads construct difference, where there is no or little difference, by re-introducing as dissimilar two technically very similar products.²⁸⁰ However, other strategies might also be at work for this campaign to have acquired such a remarkable success. In an essay titled “Get a Mac Campaign Analysis,” Kelton Rhoads enumerates some of “the core influence tactics that forward the campaign” (6). While, similar to Stevenson, Rhoads suggests that the campaign capitalizes on the existing stereotype about the Mac and the PC as being basically different, he mentions other factors that deal with the personified characters of Mac and PC in the ads. Whereas PC is depicted “as aggressor,” Rhoads states, the Mac is by contrast portrayed as a “friendly and empathetic” person who also “shows humility.” Equally important, Rhoads points out, the whole series revolves on a “witty and humorous” mode (9). “Apple’s GAM campaign,” he mentions, “is a form of gentle stand-up comedy, a ‘vaudeville comedy duo’ as the *LA Times* called it” (9). This is true, since all episodes are intentionally made to look like a joke as they all end on punchlines.²⁸¹

The campaign deploys *literal anthropomorphism* (Santa Maria and Knowles 84) and thus equalizes both products with, and contrasts them as, human beings. Therefore, the aforementioned authors’ emphasis on the comparative aspect of the ads and on the products’

²⁸⁰ <http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2327233,00.asp>

²⁸¹ See <http://flowtv.org/2011/04/myth-of-classlessness/>

characterization is valid. Generally speaking, as Stevenson remarks, “[t]he ads pose a seemingly obvious question—would you rather be the laid-back young dude or the portly old dweeb?” (6). “And,” as if answered by Livingstone in his essay on the “messages of consumption and class” in the ads, “why wouldn’t we want to be Mac?” (par. 2).

However, Stevenson’s question could become more specific if we consider the vital yet seemingly invisible issue of gender in the ads. “Like verbal rhetoric,” as Diane Hope remarks regarding advertising as a principal genre of visual rhetoric,

visual rhetoric depends on strategies of identification; advertising’s rhetoric is dominated by appeals to gender as the primary marker of consumer identity. Constructs of masculinity or femininity contextualize fantasies of social role, power, status, and security as well as sexual attractiveness. (155)

This consideration is clearly intended by Santa Maria and Knowles in their paper, “Representations of Gender in the ‘Get a Mac’ Ad Campaign.” Yet, the authors only focus on the absence of women from most spots, and on the insignificant roles occupied by the women who do act in some spots. Such a focus, as Santa Maria and Knowles note, is important in revealing the socializing power of the media. However, they unfortunately fail to notice the already gendered relationship between the two products/male characters themselves, and the implication of this relationship both for the rhetorical aspect of the ads and for their socialization value.

No doubt, gender would have been raised frequently, perhaps too often, had the directors personified one product as a man and the other as a woman. Such a strategy might have produced, market-wise, unsolicited results for the company.²⁸² The directors did, instead, choose

²⁸² For instance, it would be difficult to predict the target audience’s reactions in terms of their identification with the personified male and female products. Even personifying both products as women, given their definitive associations with femininity (vs. the culturally superior construction of masculinity), might have proved risky for the

to personify both products as men, hence avoiding blatant gender implications while also gaining the opportunity to avail of gender meanings in a subtler manner. In fact, in its current format, i.e., man vs. man, the ads are capable of competing for different degrees of identification on the part of the male audience members, while also (though this obviously naturalizes heterosexuality) being intended to compete for the attention of female audience members, too. At the risk of repeating myself, it is most pertinent here to remind ourselves of Raewyn Connell's caution that

not all gender relations are direct interactions between women on one side and men on the other. The relations may be indirect—mediated, for instance, by a market, or by technologies such as TV or the Internet. Relationships among men, or among women, may still be gender relations - such as hierarchies of masculinity among men. (*Gender in World* 73)

This is the case with the Get a Mac campaign, and hence the relevance of the concept of hegemonic masculinity (see Chapter One). Some ads, as we will see, explicitly refer to, or hint at, the characters' gender performances (this, plausibly enough, normally occurs when they are in the presence of female characters). In these ads, the resort to hegemonic gender norms within a humorous framework becomes obvious. Yet, many other ads also imply or state comparisons, from various aspects, between the Mac and the PC characters as two *human beings* or, specifically, *men*. The comparisons, which could be claimed to frame the computers'/men's gender performances, often revolve around issues of bodily normativity, particularly those of ability/disability (age, fitness, etc.) and illness/health. In all such cases, the upper hand is granted to the Mac (character), who is always implied to enjoy a more reliable (social/gender) *performance*. In this sense, I would argue, a significant part of the ads' effectiveness is accounted

company. A similar case holds true about the racial aspect of the ads, i.e., if the company had opted to employ any non-white characters.

for by their tapping into the hegemonic (gender) norms in Anglo-American societies, mostly through indirect, but also sometimes direct, ridicule.

As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, one key feature of the Western hegemonic masculinity is bodily normativity. This attribute has been considered in designing the contrasting embodiments of the Mac (as the advertised product) and the PC (as the negated product) characters, with the aim of increasing the possibility of the target audience's identification with the desired product/character, i.e., the Mac. The discrepant embodiments are clearly signified through the many visible bodily features of the Mac and the PC, i.e., those of Justin Long and John Hodgman in the U.S. campaign. While both characters, in their appearance, are clearly intended to evoke younger versions of Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, the PC obviously looks older, slightly overweight as well as less attractive. The Mac character, who is noticeably more bodily fit, is supposed to represent some allegedly highly light product.

The issues of age and weight seem to find further resonance in many of the ads where the topic of *health* in general becomes central. Being older and slightly overweight, the PC is also shown as more apt to develop viruses or diseases quickly as well as to run or act more slowly. The ads titled “Viruses,”²⁸³ “Trust Mac,”²⁸⁴ “Biohazard Suit,”²⁸⁵ “Surprise,”²⁸⁶ and “Top of the Line”²⁸⁷ obviously foreground the PC's susceptible body. In the ad “Accident,”²⁸⁸ the PC, as a wheel-chaired person is shown in his most vulnerable state. Due to someone's merely stepping

²⁸³ The ad is accessible at <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-viruses-94103>

²⁸⁴ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-trust-mac-94110>

²⁸⁵ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-biohazard-suit-94152>

²⁸⁶ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-surprise-94159>

²⁸⁷ www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-top-line-94160

²⁸⁸ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-accident-94108>

over his “cord,” the PC has broken his arms and legs. Similarly, in the spot titled “Stuffed,”²⁸⁹ we face an extremely rotund PC who simply cannot function or act normally. Also, the ads “Restarting,”²⁹⁰ “Surgery,”²⁹¹ “Computer Cart,”²⁹² “Party Is Over,”²⁹³ “Group,”²⁹⁴ “Calming Teas,”²⁹⁵ “Bean Counter,”²⁹⁶ “V Word,”²⁹⁷ “Trouble Free,”²⁹⁸ “Time Traveller,”²⁹⁹ “Broken Promises,”³⁰⁰ “PC News,”³⁰¹ and “Teeter Tottering”³⁰² all either plainly emphasize or suggest the dysfunctional state of the PC character compared to the Mac, while ads such as “Tech Support”³⁰³ show that the PC character is deficient compared to the perfect Mac.

Still, a noticeable number of the spots put forth the bodily normativity and health topics in the more explicit form of *bodily fitness*. While the Mac always enjoys a healthy, fit, functional and agile body (see, e.g., the spot “Out of the Box”³⁰⁴), the PC is now and then in need of a yoga trainer (see “Yoga”³⁰⁵) or a personal trainer (see “Trainer”³⁰⁶) both of whom are dissatisfied with his performance, and reveal, to the PC’s consternation, their subservience to the Mac. Not only,

²⁸⁹ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-stuffed-94124>

²⁹⁰ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-restarting-94102>

²⁹¹ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-surgery-94119>

²⁹² <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-computer-cart-94122>

²⁹³ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-party-over-94127>

²⁹⁴ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-group-94139>

²⁹⁵ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-calming-teas-94143>

²⁹⁶ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-bean-counter-94148>

²⁹⁷ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-v-word-94149>

²⁹⁸ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-legal-copy-94153>

²⁹⁹ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-time-traveler-94155>

³⁰⁰ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-broken-promises-94163>

³⁰¹ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-pc-news-94164>

³⁰² <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-teeter-tottering-94165>

³⁰³ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-tech-support-94120>

³⁰⁴ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-out-box-94105>

³⁰⁵ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-yoga-94138>

³⁰⁶ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-trainer-94161>

as seen in the spot “Touché,”³⁰⁷ is the PC depicted as a moronic character, but his inability to cope with Mac’s superior performance and popularity causes the former to develop mental and moral issues, too. In the spot “Angel/Devil”³⁰⁸ the PC is suggested to be neurotic and in the two spots “Counsellor”³⁰⁹ and “Breakthrough”³¹⁰ he is literally shown as taken to the therapist by the considerate Mac. Many ads also touch upon the PC’s resort to immoral competitive methods.³¹¹

Admittedly, the above spots are not gendered by themselves, as their references to the hierarchical relationship between the two characters’ embodiments are, rarely if ever, obviously framed within gender relations. However, these spots do make preparations for the explicit comparisons advanced between the characters’ gender performances in yet other spots. In these latter ads, in which the PC and the Mac obviously represent two modes of gender performativity, the above bodily normativity features serve as some significant *capital*, or lack thereof, based on which the Mac and the PC advance their gendered battles—almost always over female characters. Mainly due to his lesser bodily normativity, and hence lesser patriarchal capital, the PC character is incapable of competing with the Mac in the market or in “patriarchal economy” (Buchbinder 68-70). This is, for example, clearly noticeable in such spots as “Elimination,”³¹² “Top of the Line,” and “Teeter Tottering,” in which, upon both *computers’* competition over a *female* purchaser, the Mac always wins her.

The “Elimination” spot, after the usual brief self-presentations of the Mac and the PC, introduces a conflict: our male computers are on either sides of a girl who wants to choose the

³⁰⁷ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-touch-94106>

³⁰⁸ www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-angeldevil-94109

³⁰⁹ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-counselor-94112>

³¹⁰ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-counselor-94112>

³¹¹ See spots no. 18, 19, 20, 33, 35, 45, 48, 51, 52, and 60 at the following address:
<http://edit.adweek.com/adfreak/apples-get-mac-complete-campaign-130552?page=1>

³¹² <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-elimination-94157>

better computer. Behind the PC we see standing a long line of men whom the PC describes as “the whole range of [PCs]” he has brought by “to help find the one that’s best for her.” PC then turns to the girl, and the spot’s main dialogue begins:

PC: So, what do you want?

The Girl: Well, I want a computer with a big screen.

PC [Points to his men]: OK, small screens, beat it. [Two of the men leave the line.]

PC [Turns to the girl]: What else?

The Girl: Well, I want it to have a fast processor.

PC: OK, slow PCs, go. [We see a few other men leaving.] What else?

The Girl: I just need something that works without crashing, or viruses, or a ton of headaches.

PC: Did you say no viruses, or crashes, or headaches?

The Girl: Yeah.

PC [Frustrated]: Ah! [Addressing the Mac] She’s all yours.

Mac [To the girl]: Hi, How are you?

The Girl: Good.

Mac: I’m a Mac.

The Girl: I’m a Megan.

While the spot, on one level, advances its regular comparison between the “PC” and the “Mac” as computers, on another level a gendered scene is set in which the aforementioned issue of health is scripted on emotional aspects of gender, i.e., on what Connell deems as *cathexis* (*Gender and Power* 111-112). The girl desires a man with a *normally* functional body. The PC’s

body fails, and the girl is conjoined with the Mac: “She’s all yours.” However, much visual rhetoric is also at work in the spot. While the girl is clad in casual clothes that obviously evoke those of Mac rather than the PC’s solemn appearance, all the men lined behind the PC are also more or less the same age as, if not older than, the PC as well as similarly clothed. In this sense, the spot intertextually relates to many other spots in which the Mac’s appearance, as an obvious marker of his casual and leisurely approach to life, is prioritized over PC’s business-stricken look.³¹³

Another spot, “Top of the Line,”³¹⁴ which has a scenario almost identical to that of “Elimination,” strongly suggests that the above comparison between two types of appearance concerns masculine identities, too. Other than the long line of men, in lieu of which we have a “hunk” (played by Patrick Warburton) in “Top of the Line,” all narrative features, even most of the dialogues, are the same in both spots. In this latter ad, upon seeing the “top of the line” man, the girl turns to the Mac, saying, “Oh, Cool!” The sexual connotation of the man’s utterance, “Some say I’m too fast,” in response to the girl who asks, “And a really fast processor,” is remarkable. The hunk, however, is also rejected for health and virus issues, perhaps suggesting that he is too much concerned with his business (“Look, lady, any PC just gonna have those

³¹³ Given the assumed target audience for the product, which presumably includes many if not most students, one could take the appearances of the Mac and the Girl as representative of contemporary students. These looks are clearly opposed to the PC’s which seems to represent the more traditional suit-wearing academic or business person, probably a representative of the past, and some present, generations of fathers and teachers. This notion is strongly suggested in the spot titled “Pep Rally,” in which the PC is turned down by a group of teenage cheerleaders who prefer the Mac over him. For spots in which the binary opposition of leisure/work is corresponded with the Mac/PC comparison, see “Good Will,” “iLife,” “Gift Exchange,” “Meant for Work,” and “Flashback.” (Such ads might also be read as promoting some false consciousness regarding class issues. For an interesting discussion on how the campaign, despite its efforts to conceal class, reveals class issues, too, see Livingstone’s essay “The Myth of Classlessness in Apple’s ‘Get a Mac’ Campaign”: <http://flowtv.org/2011/04/myth-of-classlessness>.)

³¹⁴ www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-top-line-94160

problems”). Before leaving the girl to Mac, the good-looking man offers the girl a business card, saying to her, “When you’re ready to compromise, you call me.” But, there is also another suggestion: the hunk business-man, who is depicted as the idealized species of the PC man genus, is simply suggested to have an outmoded masculine identity, at least for the ads’ target audience.

The spots “Teeter-Tottering” and, to some extent, “Network” also have similar gendered aspects. For instance, in “Network,” the Mac character is suggested to be more *fertile* and perhaps also more *virile* than the PC. Yet, I would like to end this discussion, and the chapter, with a reference to the “Better Results” spot the gendered implications of which add much to our debate, particularly in terms of the complexity of gender relations, as reflected in Connell’s gender hierarchy model. The spot opens with the Mac and PC characters just meeting and expressing surprise about the fact that both just made home movies. Upon prompting each other to show their movies, Mac’s literally anthropomorphized home movie appears first. To the PC’s blatant consternation—he remains open-mouthed for seconds—the Mac’s home movie turns out to be a highly attractive and sexy girl (played by Gisele Bündchen), “dressed and made up as if she is going on a date” (Santa Maria and Knowles 92). As if with a complete change of mind, the PC utters a “Bye” and is about to leave when the Mac and his “home movie” insist on seeing the PC’s movie, too. His *movie*, however, turns out to be a gender-troubled person, mostly looking like a man “dressed in the same low-cut mini-dress Gisele Bündchen wears [. . . with] a long flowing wig of similar hair. He is unshaven, however, has visible chest hair and a deep voice” (92). The spot closes with the Mac jocularly calling PC’s “home movie” a “work in progress.”

The spot literally summarizes the main inter- and intra-relations in Connell’s gender hierarchy model. First, the spot, like all previous gendered spots, assumes *sexuality* or *sexualness*

(as opposed to asexuality [see Chapter Two above]). In all such spots, we are invariably interpellated or hailed into a subject position in which asexuality is completely out of question. One must have sexual desire towards others. However, these others are only certain others. First, they cannot be of the same sex—hence the spots’ naturalization of heterosexuality, too. Second, the embodiments of these desired others need to meet certain gender norms before they could be deemed as an appropriate target of one’s emotion or *cathexis* (Connell, *Gender and Power* 111-116). In doing so, therefore, the spots also presume a binary sex system, any violation of which could easily render one as accountable towards his/her gender performance (West and Zimmerman 135). In fact, the funniness of the appearance of the PC’s home movie, as opposed to that of the Mac’s, is only hoped to arise from the PC *home movie*’s sheer violation of sex dichotomy in his gender-confused body and appearance. The fact that the PC home movie is a *man* in women’s clothes and that he is deemed a “work in progress” cannot but evoke the idea of hermaphroditism, an abject position which transgresses the taken-for-granted order and clarity of the binary sex system. This is strongly suggested by the supposed ridiculousness, if not repulsiveness, of the PC home movie’s exaggerated *male-female embodiment*. Even if taken as a girl—as done by Santa Maria and Knowles (92)—the PC’s home movie, with her strongly suggested undesirability, foregrounds the *beauty myth* as it is promoted among women in patriarchal cultures (see N. Wolf). Within a patriarchal economy, the body of the PC’s home movie would at best be regarded as *afflicted with hirsutism*, and thus unable to compete with Gisele Bündchen’s oppositely valued body, which is an appropriate example of what Connell conceptualizes as “emphasized femininity” (*Gender and Power* 183-188). Going back to the central theme of compared masculinities, we would notice that the “Better Results” spot also clearly suggests that the Mac, as a man/product, would get *better results* than the PC—hence the

spot's coaxing its audience's identification with/desire towards the Mac. The most important point, however, is the way the ad smoothly draws on all such complexities within the mainstream gender politics of its target audience's society to sell its message, which purportedly has little if anything to do with gender.³¹⁵

SUMMARY

While in the past two chapters I read mainstream gender humour as reflecting and reinforcing hegemonic gender norms in a society, in the current chapter I argued that such humour—precisely because it reflects those hegemonic norms—is also frequently deployed as a rhetorical tool for advancing social and cultural messages. In the process, the gender norms are assumed and reinforced.

We started with a discussion of phallocentrism in sexual *hajv* (personal invective), as a long-standing tradition of rhetorical use of ridicule in Persian, and how some central notions in sexual *hajv* underlie much of the socio-political satire of Obeyd-e Zakani, as “the greatest satirist of the classical period of Persian literature” (Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian* 44). The discussion was hoped to contextualize culturally and historically the phenomenon of phallocentric sexual satire as a currently common practice among some modern Iranian humorists. It was argued that while serving critical and reformist aims in certain social and political contexts, the socio-political satire based on sexual imagery, due to its resort to hegemonic gender norms as a

³¹⁵ Just as I was putting the finishing touches on this chapter, I noticed an intriguing satirical essay recently published on *The Onion* website. The essay, written by Joyce Carol Oates, is titled “If You Wish To Be A Writer, Have Sex With Someone Who Works In Publishing,” and uses phallocentrism for its satirical and humorous effect. See <http://www.theonion.com/articles/if-you-wish-to-be-a-writer-have-sex-with-someone-w,32687/>

rhetorical tool, ends up symbolically reproducing and hence reinforcing gender hierarchies and inequalities.

A similar use of gendered ridicule was shown in the Get a Mac ad campaign. While ads are in themselves ideal examples of practicing rhetoric, the campaign's humorous edge, its particular attention to gender issues, and its demonstrated socio-cultural influence made it particularly appropriate for our discussion. We saw how some of the ads subscribe to significant elements in the current Anglo-American gender order to enhance their persuasive power. Such elements include *sexuality* (as opposed to asexuality), clear-cut *sex/gender dichotomy*, *heteronormativity* and *bodily normativity*, all overarched by the assumed comparison in many ads between the Mac and the PC as two men with hierarchical (masculine) performances.

Interestingly, in both cases, only hegemonic gender norms, and not norms subscribed to by subordinate groups, were taken to be persuasive and/or punitive enough for conveying the humorous texts' desired message to the audience, be it an interpersonal verbal revenge (*hajn*), a social critical point (*satire*), or the promotion of a product over another (*advertisement*). This well proves the superior rhetorical power of hegemonic norms over the non-hegemonic ones. The patriarchal discourse as culturally ascendant, needless to say, involves power relations:

[C]ertain social groups have a greater opportunity to be heard in public debates than do others. This fact raises a concern for the role of *ideology* in rhetorical transactions. The 'privileging' of some voices or points of view over others means that they are awarded preference or superiority in the persuasive transactions that shape public beliefs and attitudes. [. . .] Feminist rhetoricians have pointed out how male values, male ways of thinking, male beliefs, and male motives have dominated Western rhetoric for more than two thousand years. (Herrick 20)

In light of this concern, we might importantly ask why such an imbalance of persuasive powers should occur. To reframe the discussion through Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity would be helpful here. In other words, changing the rather limited male/female binary to the more demonstrative binary of the hegemonic masculine vs. the feminine and the non-hegemonic masculine, would hint at an obvious answer: The dominant gender norms win the day simply because they have gained hegemony or cultural ascendancy. Such norms, drawing on the previously mentioned notion of "norm circles" (see p. 57 in Chapter One), enjoy superior *discursive power* than the non-hegemonic gender norms because they are endorsed by a far larger number of norm groups or communities in a society. This larger number also means the institutionalization and naturalization of dominant gender norms in a society. Such a state of affairs would make it far more difficult than otherwise for social individuals to commit gender non-conformity among other things, can be punished with ridicule. The fact that our modern Iranian satirists, despite their arguably being pro-liberal democracy authors and/or activists, readily opted for Zakani's favourite tool of *anal disintegrity* for ridiculing or disgracing their targets clearly indicates an unwritten pact between these satirists and their audience about what gender norms are culturally acceptable and hence rhetorically effective. Similarly, the Get a Mac ad campaign would have also never chosen to reverse the roles of the PC and the Mac, or the roles of their female acting partners, as this would have jeopardized their initial purpose of publicizing their desired product.

Additional (sub-)arguments may also be inferred from this transitional chapter. Our historical discussion about the *hajv* tradition and the Zakani case, while shedding light on the cultural and historical background of the modern Iranian satirists' deployment of *gendered insults* as a rhetorical tool, has interesting historical implications, too. The gender hierarchy

discerned from Zakani's sexual humour indicates that a man's being anally penetrated was, for him and his contemporaries, a definitive sign of humiliation and inferiority. While we might commit oversimplification if we considered this as an outright instance of homophobia in its immediate context,³¹⁶ it looks self-evident—particularly in light of our discussions, in Chapter Three, about the transformation in modern Iranian society's gender order—that Zakani's resort to anal disintegrity as a rhetorical tool can evoke homophobia for present-day audiences of his.

Furthermore, references to such specific social identities as *amrad*, *keng/kong*, *pesar*, etc. in Zakani's works indicate the textual, perhaps also actual, presence of those social identities during Zakani's time. This textual presence might or might not have been consistent during different historical eras; however, we know that it was gradually eroded with the modernist tendency in Iran towards heteronormativity around a century ago (see Chapter Three above). Despite such unfamiliar aspects of Zakani's works for modern readers, studying the shared phallocentrism in Zakani's (and other classical Persian *hajv*- and/or *tanz*-writers') texts and those of modern Iranian satirists indicates probable imbrications between the modern and the pre-modern Iranian societies' gender orders. This hypothesis depends on our inferring from the classical historical anecdotes some *gender norms* that were apparently observed when those narratives were (re)put into writing and addressed to their immediate audiences in the past. Accordingly, we can hypothesize about the degree to which we may rely on humorous anecdotes for historical purposes. It seems plausible that while humour in general may not provide a stable ground for reliable socio-historical *facts* per se, some humorous anecdotes inform us of the

³¹⁶ For an insightful discussion on how modern historians may problematically project their own views of homosexuality onto a variety of same-sex relations in medieval/early modern era in many Islamicate societies, see El-Rouayheb 2-3.

hegemonic social norms in a society at a specific point in time.³¹⁷ This means we may be able to claim *shared norms* of some sort (between the creators and receivers of humour texts) to be a, if not the, main condition for appreciating humour from other eras and even cultures.³¹⁸

Finally, our discussion of the Get a Mac ad campaign also provides topics for further research. The campaign contrasts hierarchically two versions of masculinity which could arguably be regarded as compatible in certain other contexts. In doing so, the campaign apparently draws on the changing patterns of gender in contemporary Anglo-American society in order for the company's desired product/character (i.e., the Mac) to win the day. Compared to the PC character, the Mac is more of a metrosexual character. This might be because the target audience, which includes such educated and computer-savvy populations as academics, does not endorse or embody a rough and tough type of masculine performance (as revealed by the ads "Boxer"³¹⁹ and "Top of the Line"³²⁰), and yet may not monolithically sanction subordinate masculine performances, either. This reveals the relative nature of hegemonic masculinity, too. Conceivably, although his masculine performance is preferred within the campaign itself, the

³¹⁷ Brookshaw ("To be Feared and Desired" 732) and Nabavi (*Ahd-e Qadim*, 11-18) argue, albeit to different extents, for the sociological use of humorous anecdotes. Brookshaw, for instance, mentions, "I would argue that the profusion of references to sexual liaisons with Turks (and other boys/young men) in the works of 'Ubayd reflects, to a certain degree, a contemporary reality. How else can we explain how/why 'Ubayd's audience would have found his anecdotes or maxims either amusing or instructive?" While this seems plausible, it is not necessarily true. Even the frequent *textual* presence of such social identities (e.g., in the works of Zakani's contemporaries) would have sufficed for his immediate audience's familiarity with those social entities. In our time, the contemporary Rashti and Qazvini jokes serve as familiar counter examples since, although many Iranians now find funny instances of both joke cycles, the jokes, as discussed in the previous chapter, have no proved roots in reality.

³¹⁸ Interestingly, a degree of the humour audience's identifying with the norm(s) implied/stated in humour rests at the heart of the most recent theory about what induces humour, i.e., Peter McGraw and Joel Warner's *benign violation theory*. (McGraw and Joel have a forthcoming book on their theory, titled *The Humor Code: A Global Search for What Makes Things Funny* (April 2014).)

³¹⁹ <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-boxer-94128>

³²⁰ www.adweek.com/adfreak/get-mac-top-line-94160

Mac's character would dramatically fail in another ad campaign about, for instance, the effectiveness of bodybuilding supplements on male athletes. However, as also indicated in Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity (see pp. 45-46 above), the Mac's masculinity still brings him dominance over the women he deals with. Finally, while several of the ads have been translated to some European languages, the whole series has also appeared in Japanese, which gives the campaign a partially global coverage.³²¹ Therefore, a comparative discussion of the various regional campaigns, in terms of the topics of gender and humour, appears to be rewarding in light of the ongoing discussions on globalization and gender.

³²¹ For instances of the campaign in Japanese, see
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h30LQY3xWEI&list=PL10654DE48389D521>

Chapter Five

Fringe Gender Humour and the Subversion of Gender Hierarchy: The Cases of the Feminist and Lesbian Humour

INTRODUCTION

Discussing the disciplinary aspects of humour would be incomplete without considering what is often mentioned as “rebellious” (Billig, *LR* 202), “contestive” (Holmes, qtd. in Billig, *LR* 202), or “subversive” (Holmes and Marra 70) humour. The previous chapters focus on the norm-reinforcing and punitive aspects of gender humour. Readers might legitimately wonder if one could perceive an antithetical type of gender humour focused on gender-egalitarian themes or capable of having revolutionary functions against hegemonic gender ideologies. In other words, are there humorous discourses capable of criticizing, opposing and undermining the conservative and normalizing power of mainstream gender humour? The current chapter takes up this possibility by studying *fringe* (as opposed to *mainstream*) gender humour. As examples of this type of humour, in-group feminist and lesbian humour, with particular attention to their tendency and capacity for resisting or challenging the patriarchal gender order, is discussed.

As discussed later, the dominant trend towards humour is laudatory and regards it as inherently rebellious. In line with such a perception, feminist humour scholars have often argued for the subversive effects of feminist, lesbian, and queer humour. By contrast, a less orthodox body of literature focuses on the limitations and the unsolicited conservative functions of fringe gender humour. In accordance with this latter literature, the present chapter maintains a critical attitude towards the supposed rebelliousness and subversiveness of fringe gender humour. I argue that such humour, despite its allegedly subversive capacities, may not only incite

unwelcome punitive effects, but it might hardly achieve its subversive goals. This is because, since it draws on non-hegemonic gender norms, fringe gender humour contains little rhetorical power and thus is less likely to affect mainstream perceptions of gender significantly. However, I do accept that in-group fringe gender humour may have such a positive function as the enhancement of solidarity among the in-group members.

The chapter comprises two main parts. The first, titled “Fringe Gender Humour and Its Subversive Possibilities,” includes three sections. In the first, I discuss feminist humour as the most representative type of rebellious or contestive gender humour, for which I also propose the more general term of fringe gender humour. Second, I debate the unsolicited conservative and reinforcing functions of feminist humour. Finally, I evaluate and critique claims about the rebellious functions of *inclusive feminist* and *lesbian* humour. I support this critique with a following discussion, in the second part of the chapter, of a relevant case study. I take issue with Helene Shugart’s argument for the subversive aspects of gender parody, as put forward in her essay, “Parody as Subversive Performance,” in order to problematize her reading as subversive the parodic performances of the title character of the sitcom *Ellen* (1994-1998) in select episodes from the series. I show that in all of Shugart’s select episodes, there are disregarded fissures and gaps which make the episodes yield other readings. The chapter ends with some conclusions drawn from the arguments.

FRINGE GENDER HUMOUR AND ITS SUBVERSIVE POSSIBILITIES: CHALLENGING THE OPTIMISM IN GENDER HUMOUR STUDIES

In terms of its relationship with power and the powerful, humour is often divided into two types. When conforming to the dominant norms and thus sustaining the status quo, humour is

described by such terms as “disciplinary” (Billig, *LR* 202), “repressive” (Holmes, qtd. in Billig, *LR* 202), and “reinforcing” (Holmes and Marra 70). By contrast, the humour that tends to break the rules or mock the powerful is termed as subversive, contestive or rebellious. As Michael Billig asserts, due to the ambiguity of humour and the complexities of its reception, we cannot clearly demarcate between the above mentioned functions. Humour can simultaneously be experienced as disciplinary and rebellious by different audiences. For instance, almost all of the humour instances analyzed in the past three chapters, as representative of *disciplinary* humour, can also be experienced as rebellious in certain contexts.³²²

As if in line with what Michael Billig critiques as “ideological positivism” in humour studies (see pp. 34 above), the literature on gender humour frequently stresses the resistive, challenging and even subversive aspects of such humour. Therefore, certain types of humour such as *feminist* and—to a lesser extent—*lesbian* and *queer* humour, as representatives of anti-gender hierarchy or pro-gender democracy humour, are often foregrounded as discursive tools for attacking patriarchy and particularly the patriarchal effects of conservative gender humour. However, such unconventional humour, in a patriarchal society, is imaginably not expected to be induced or circulated by mainstream gender norm circles but instead through unorthodox circles.³²³ I find *fringe* to be an appropriate term to describe generally such unorthodox forms of gender humour; such forms normally deal with the marginal gender identities and contrast with *mainstream* forms of gender humour in a society. In humour studies, fringe gender humour is

³²² For instance, such humour, when performed by stand-up comedians, or mentioned in joke book collections, or displayed on TV, might be claimed to be or taken as a breach of the decorum of political correctness.

³²³ For the concept of *norm circle*, see p. 57 in Chapter One.

often discussed as deriding dominant gender ideologies, e.g., sexism and heterosexism, and thus as subscribing to and promoting non-hegemonic gender norms.³²⁴

Rebellious Gender Humour: The Case of Feminist Humour

As the most characteristic anti-gender hierarchy humour, feminist humour is the most frequently debated form of fringe gender humour. As a distinct category of humour, feminist humour originated as a rhetorical move by second-wave feminists and their descendants who reacted to the mainstream ridiculing of women in general, and of feminists in particular, for their purported lack of a sense of humour (White 75). In her introduction to *Pulling Our Own Strings* (1980), an early and frequently cited collection of “feminist humour,” Gloria Kaufman contends that feminist humor presumes that “societies have generally been organized as systems of oppression and exploitation, and that the largest (but not the only) oppressed group has been the female” (13). Feminist humour, she claims, “is also based on conviction that such oppression is undesirable and unnecessary. It is a humor based on visions of change” (13). Thus, it is no surprise if Kaufman associates feminist humour with the didacticism in satire, asserting that “reforms,” whether achieved or not, are the final ideals of feminist humour and satire (14). Feminist humour has been similarly defined as that which is “grounded in criticism of the patriarchal structure of society and aspires to reform it” (Franzini, qtd. in Shifman and Lemish, “Between Feminism And Fun(Ny)Mism” 873).

Despite such claims to reforms, however, little has been mentioned as to how any improvement could occur through humorous discourse. Presumably, the proponents of feminist humour seek to attain *at least* a certain degree of consciousness-raising through the distribution and reception of their desired gender humour. Compatible with this inference is Cindy White’s

³²⁴ To describe non-mainstream gender humour, “specifically that which attacks the dominant culture,” Joanne Gilbert also uses the term *marginal* (172).

contention that feminist humour is “about exposure” in that it “exposes the sources of imbalance and attempts to eradicate them” (78). Such an optimist, positivist, and reformatory attitude toward feminist humour resonates with much of the scholarship on the subject, which presents feminist humour as clearly rebellious and seditious. Lisa Merrill, in her pioneering essay on the topic, titled “Feminist Humor: Rebellious and Self-Affirming,” politicizes humour in general, describing it as always potentially disruptive:

Because humor depends upon a perception of events or behaviour as unexpected or incongruous, the individual who publicly points up such inconsistencies risks making a statement about the status quo. Consequently, satire, irony and comedy pointedly directed can wield enormous social and political power. (272)

No doubt, feminists wish this political power to be directed towards subverting the gender hierarchy. Janet Holmes and Meredith Marra, in their essay “Over the Edge?,” contend that “[w]hile the powerful may use humor to maintain control, it is also available to the less powerful as a socially acceptable means of challenging or subverting authority” (65). Adopting a similarly promising tone about the revolutionary aspects of feminist humour, Mary Crawford, in her essay “Gender and Humor,” states that “[f]eminist humor frequently acknowledges men’s ability to define reality in ways that meet their needs. Yet, in making that acknowledgement public, it subverts men’s reality by exposing its social construction” (1426). The same claims have also been put forward regarding the humour found in specific forms of popular culture. For instance, in “Subversive Sitcoms: *Roseanne* as Inspiration for Feminist Resistance,” Janet Lee reads the situation comedy *Roseanne* (1988-1997) as a resistant and subversive text regarding gender relations. Helene Shugart, too, analyzes select episodes of *Ellen* (1994–1998) as possessing subversive functions in relation to dominant gender ideologies.

I will return to some of these claims and particularly review Shugart's main arguments in detail below. However, it is noteworthy here that the above authors, while expressing their hopes about the subversive aspects of feminist humour, almost always seem to assume that mainstream gender humour and feminist humour are identically received by all audiences. However, not only does this seem implausible, but it also begs important questions. In her essay on feminist humour, Lisa Merrill makes a passing comment that ironically sheds light on how such humour is received by mainstream audiences. According to her, "those few women writers and performers who have achieved mainstream acclaim in this traditionally 'unfeminine' genre [i.e., comedy] are those who are so self-deprecating as to 'make fun of' other women, or themselves" (273). Given this observation, it becomes important to ask by whom, i.e., by the members of which norm circles, is feminist humour most probably received?

The disposition theory of humour, developed by Zillmann and Cantor in their essay "A Disposition Theory of Humour and Mirth," has relevant insights to offer. According to the theory, "humour appreciation is facilitated when the respondent feels antipathy or resentment towards disparaged protagonists and impaired when he [sic] feels sympathy or liking for these protagonists" (93). As Paul Lewis also reminds us, "how we respond to jokes depends not only on how clever they are but on our relation to their subjects and butts as well" (18). Such claims have interestingly been verified concerning feminist humour which, as Audrey Bilger notes, "demands that its audience share an awareness of women's oppression and a desire to reform an unjust system" (11). Stillion and White, in their empirical study titled "Feminist Humor: Who Appreciates It and Why?," discern a significant gap in feminist humour studies, stating, "There have been no studies investigating reactions to feminist humor, and thus we do not know whether sympathy toward feminist values is required in order to appreciate it or even if there are sex

differences in reactions to it” (220). Through their own research, they find out that “both gender and feminist sympathy influence reactions to feminist humor” (219). Similarly, Joanne Gallivan, in her essay “Group Differences in Appreciation of Feminist Humour,” conclude that gender and feminist sympathy influences appreciation of feminist humour (369, 373). Such results are compatible with the aforementioned relation between humour and rhetoric (see Chapter One).

Other vital questions, concerning the alleged subversiveness of feminist humour, are: Whose ideology does feminist humour intend to subvert? If feminist humour, to begin with, is not uniformly welcome by all audiences, particularly by mainstream audiences, could we be hopeful of the educative, let alone subversive, effects of such humour? In other words, if feminist humour is mostly sympathized with by like-minded minorities, how could we expect such humour to influence effectively the ideas of a majority who think differently? If the above mentioned empirical studies have any merits, it appears implausible that anti-gender hierarchy humour in general, including feminist humour, can exercise the same amount of persuasive power as mainstream gender humour does in the social realm. To complicate things further, anti-gender hierarchy humour, in its attempts to undermine hegemonic gender meanings, may ironically end up having contrary effects. This significant yet understudied possibility is the topic of the next section.

The Disciplinary Functions of Rebellious Humour: Feminist Humour and Its Possible Unsolicited Effects

According to Michael Billig in *Laughter and Ridicule*, the prevailing trend in humour studies, since the decline of the popularity of the superiority theory in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has been to favour rebellion over discipline. This trend is dominant not only in the works of the contemporary humour scholars whom Billig classifies as “ideologically

positivist” (see Chapter One), but also in the research by some distinguished critical theorists who also often “have a preference for rebellion over discipline” because “[v]iews that applaud laughter as an instrument of rebellion are likely to receive a favourable hearing” (Billig, *LR* 200). One famous example Billig mentions is Mikhail Bakhtin. Billig admires Bakhtin’s insights about the dialogical nature of language; however, he believes that Bakhtin’s “views on humour [. . .] parallel aspects of ideological positivism” (201). Bakhtin divides laughter into two categories: “the joyful, open festive laugh” and “the closed, purely negative satirical laugh” (qtd. in Billig, *LR* 201); he sympathizes with the former: “Ridicule was festive if it mocked authority, but was negative if it served the interests of maintaining social order” (201).³²⁵ Likewise, Freud, compatible with his stress on human self-deception in his oeuvre, “provided the basis for a

³²⁵ Bakhtin’s laughter has more frequently than not been read as subversive. For instance, Umberto Eco, similar to Billig, understands Bakhtin as a full-fledged supporter of laughter and the comic as inherently rebellious, and tends to critique him accordingly (see Eco 1). This is not surprising, given the emphasis Bakhtin puts in his book *Rabelais and His World* on the festive laughter of the common folk and the democratic structure of power relations during the carnival festivities in medieval Europe, which he opposes with, and often aggrandizes in the face of, the sombre seriousness of the officials and the different structure of power relations during official feasts (see, e.g., pp. 4, 6-8, 10, 72-73, 92). However, Bakhtin does hint, although perhaps insufficiently, at the fact that the subversive possibilities of the carnival is but “temporary” (see *Rabelais* 10). Read in this manner, Bakhtin’s views could in fact support Billig’s contention that the laughter of the carnivalesque may well end up serving disciplinary effects. (I owe the above insight to my supervisor Jerry Varsava who, in part of his comment on the above paragraph, mentions, “Bakhtin’s notion of the ‘carnavalesque’ sees subversive humor as operating in a kind of temporal ghetto where Christian Europeans are able to be ritualistically subversive once a year during the immediate pre-Lenten period, but not at all for the rest of the year. Ergo, it might be argued, that audiences may appear to embrace humor as subversion during a ‘performance’ but not carry that sentiment beyond the time-space of the performance itself in their day-to-day lives.”) I find this insight worthwhile, and make reference to it below. However, since I foreground two humorous discourses, i.e., those of the mainstream and fringe gender humour, rather than a humorous discourse vs. a serious one as is the case in Bakhtin’s theory, I will be primarily drawing on a different set of arguments—which foreground humour’s recourse to norms—for showing the punitive effects of the rebellious gender humour.

critical approach to humour” (166); however, he tended to omit/forget the disciplinary laughter both in his humour theory and psychoanalysis (200).³²⁶

Therefore, the above mentioned tendency among many feminist humour scholars, to promulgate the naughty and seditious side of humour at the expense of its punitive aspects, could be regarded as part of the broader inclination, in humour studies, to consider humour as inherently subversive. Before putting forward his argument about ridicule as a universal maintainer of social order, Billig, upon referring to the above tendency in humour studies, inserts a vital caveat in his discussion: “But if ridicule is necessary for maintaining social order, then humour will not be intrinsically or essentially rebellious, as Freud supposed. It may even help maintain the order that it appears to mock” (*LR* 200). Billig extends this thought under three sections respectively titled as “Disciplinary Humour,” “Rebellious Humour,” and “Disciplinary Functions of Rebellious Humour” (202-214). Admitting the difficulty of distinguishing in practice between the functions of particular instances of humour, Billig nevertheless finds the above division useful for theoretical purposes. To support his approximate division and especially his claim about the disciplinary functions of rebellious humour, Billig thus maintains another loose yet useful distinction between “the psychological nature of humour” and “its sociological consequences”:

Those who laugh might imagine that they are daringly challenging the status quo or are transgressing stuffy codes of behaviour. [. . .] However, the consequences of such humour might be conformist rather than radical, disciplinary not

³²⁶ According to Billig, while in Freud’s theory, his Jewish joke examples are a nice fit for laughter as rebellion, he tends to not consider the probable disciplinary aspects of such jokes. Also, in his psychoanalytical theories, as Billig shows by re-reading some of Freud’s famous case histories, Freud disregarded the laughter of the parents at the expense of their children (see *LR* 228-231).

rebellious. [. . .] [In such cases,] the momentary release takes meaning from the enduring power of constraint. The joke simultaneously teaches the conventions and takes innocuous revenge against them. [. . .] Far from subverting the serious world of power, the humour can strengthen it. (211-212)

The association Billig builds between humour and conventions on the one hand and humour's inability to disturb genuinely the social order—i.e., its innocuousness—on the other, is significant. This feature of humour, albeit for different purposes, has also been embedded into two of the most recent accounts of humour. McGraw and Warren, for instance, regard humour as the product of some *benign violation* of a norm (be it moral, linguistic or other) if the receiver of the humour simultaneously perceives both the violation and its benignity (“Benign Violations” 1). Also, Simon Weaver, in his attempt to complement the incongruity theory of humour by explaining which particular incongruities cause humour, draws upon Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to suggest that “humorous incongruity will push away from the habitus before returning to it.” According to Weaver, “[h]umour is a type of incongruity that does not ‘threaten’ the existence of the habitus” (26).

The limitations, the problems, and the unsolicited conservative functions of rebellious humour have been discussed by other humour scholars, too, even though they have not granted ridicule the central position Billig has.³²⁷ For instance, Mary Crawford admits that “power relations can be inverted in the humor mode without lasting consequences” (“Gender and Humour” 1420). Thus, despite her aforementioned observation about the subversive possibilities of feminist humour (see p. 234 above), Crawford is cautious enough to note that “[j]oking about those in power, whether politicians, religious leaders, or the rich and famous, vents feelings,

³²⁷ See, for instance, Mulkay 5; Speier 1395; Wilson 214-15; Zijdeveld, *Reality in a Looking-Glass* 27-30.

questions the justice of the hierarchy, and temporarily appropriates the power of ridicule, but usually does not change the power hierarchy” (1420).³²⁸ Billig would complement this observation by adding that the issue goes beyond humour as a “safety valve.” In fact, “[t]he mechanism,” he contends, “is that of self-persuasion. Rebellious joking permits a clear conscience that does not recognize that rebellion has thus become a joke” (213). More specifically, in her book, *Performing Marginality: Humour, Gender, and Cultural Critique*, Gilbert analyzes the rhetorical features of women’s stand-up comedy in order to delineate the relationship between gender, humour and power in such comedies. Gilbert, somewhat disappointingly for some feminist humour scholars, concludes that

[t]his investigation has illustrated that within the genre of stand-up comedy, no genuinely ‘feminist’ humor exists. [. . .] [H]umor renders its audience passive. It disarms through amusing. [. . .] Although it sends a double message, if it is successful, humor produces laughter. And laughter does not constitute a radical politics. (172)³²⁹

Such claims about the inefficacy of feminist humour might be thought of as mere speculations. However, as my discussion about lesbian humour will reveal, these deliberations are strong counterarguments which feminist humour scholars must consider if they insist on feminist humour subversive effects. Indeed, critical outlooks on feminist humour are based on more than conjectures. An important case in point is Janet Bing’s essay “Is Feminist Humor an Oxymoron?” While exploring different types of feminist humour, Bing primarily focuses on

³²⁸ The claim is also supportable through a different reading of Bakhtin from that which is proposed by Billig. See footnote 325 above.

³²⁹ However, as she later indicates, humour can nonetheless “call attention to cultural fissures and fault lines” (177).

feminist jokes, and aims “to identify those that are potentially most effective in bringing about change and subverting systems of oppression and exploitation” (22).³³⁰ Particularly drawing upon Lisa Merrill’s description of feminist humour as that which “recognizes the value of female experience,” Bing makes a distinction between *divisive* and *inclusive* feminist humour. By divisive jokes Bing means those that attack persons, i.e., males, rather than patriarchal systems, which she explains are targeted by inclusive jokes (27-28). Therefore, most of Bing’s examples for divisive jokes include male-bashing jokes as well as jokes which Shifman and Lemish categorize under postfeminist humour and aptly deem and discuss as “Mars and Venus” type of humour (“‘Mars and Venus’ in Virtual Space” 261-265). In this latter type of humour—as if a humorous version of John Gray’s universally known book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*—men and women are presumed to belong to dramatically different physical *and hence* behavioural categories. Here are two examples, taken from Bing’s essay, which represent both of the above humour forms:

Q: How can you tell is a man is aroused?

A: He’s breathing.

Q: How many men does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: ONE. MEN WILL SCREW ANYTHING. (sic) (24)

As Bing notes, while such divisive jokes can provide fun, they may also have unanticipated negative effects (27). In part of her discussion of divisive jokes, Bing refers to sexism and its

³³⁰ Bing defines “*feminist joke* as a joke created by a feminist that assumes the shared values of most feminists” (22). While admitting the diversity in definitions of feminism and feminists, she assumes that “[f]eminists have often been self-identified as people who work toward equal opportunity for women, a definition that includes males as well as females” (22).

underlying principles, which she implies are insightful in describing the negative effects of jokes such as the above mentioned. Among other tenets, she mentions “biological essentialism” (the belief in the essential difference between women and men), “gender polarization” (“the ubiquitous organization of social life around the distinction between male and female”), and “biological determinism” (27). Feminist jokes like the ones quoted above are best described by what Raewyn Connell calls *character dichotomy*, i.e., the belief that “[w]omen are supposed to have one set of traits, men another,” and thus promote a pessimist and conservative model of gender according to which “body [is] a machine that produc[es] gender difference” (*Gender in World Perspective* 60, 53). Such a view clearly does not anticipate any change of behaviour in men (and women), and consequently tends to reinforce the status quo. This condition is clearly stated in the following joke, from a collection titled *New Woman Little Book of Bloke Jokes*: “How is a bloke like the weather? –Nothing can be done to change either one of them” (Johnson, Louise n.p.).

Bing’s reference to gender polarization may also be related to *the naturalization of (hetero)sexuality* (see p. 85 above). Jokes such as the following one, again taken from Johnson’s collection, are committed to such naturalization by universalizing the sexual attraction in the first place, and by assuming that it exists merely between males and females: “What does a girl have to say to seduce a bloke? – Hi” (n.p.). Another important message transmitted by such jokes as the last one and, to a lesser extent, the ones formerly cited from Bing’s essay, is an implied validation of rape myths. Male persons, such jokes seem to imply, should not be held responsible for any possible sexual aggression on their part. Therefore, such purportedly feminist jokes ironically subscribe to the themes conveyed by obviously sexist joke series, found in many

patriarchal societies, which revolve around women's *fantasizing about* or *secretly enjoying* being raped.³³¹

The idea of the disciplinary functions of rebellious humour, here anti-gender hierarchy humour, provides us with a strong tool to re-read critically much allegedly feminist humour. One relevant example is an American joke series, mainly circulating in the 1980s, about why cucumbers are better than men. The late distinguished American folklorist Alan Dundes, in a chapter of his 1987 book *Cracking Jokes: Studies of Sick Humor Cycles and Stereotypes*, cites a version of the series and seeks to shed feminist light on it. He juxtaposes these jokes with another curious set of jokes, apparently created in reaction to the first list, about why sheep are better than women (82-95). Since then, the series have triggered sets of jokes with a similar format which compare men or women on one side and such curious objects as bicycles, beer, computer, etc. on the other. Dundes implies the Cucumber joke series to be feminist humour when he takes the series as evidence for the refutation of the cliché that “feminists have little or no sense of humor” (83), implying that the series represents feminist humour. He also reveals how he regards such humour as merely rebellious, when he hopes, “Let men squirm for a change from the series of barbs. Let there be partial vengeance for the centuries of anti-female jokes told by men” (84).

Dundes' brief discussion, however, would have benefitted from incorporating gender theories. Some jokes in the series emphasize important gender-related issues by criticizing certain attitudes or behaviours supposedly dominant among some male (heterosexual) partners in Anglo-American societies. For instance, one item (no. 31), raises an implied complaint against female bodies' devaluation upon aging: “No matter how old you are, you can always get a fresh cucumber.” Another joke (no. 74), attends to some men's feelings of insecurity in their dealing

³³¹ Elsewhere I mention and briefly discuss some such jokes in contemporary Iranian culture (See Abedinifard, “The Gender Politics” 213-14).

with female partners who earn more incomes: “Cucumbers don’t care if you make more money than they do.” Jokes nos. 83 and 84 comment on the patriarchal society’s emphasis on women’s having (male) babies: “Cucumbers never expect you to have little cucumbers.” “Cucumbers never say: ‘Let’s keep trying until we have a boy’.” And as a last example, joke no. 87 hints at the issue of stalking, which is arguably not unrelated to male privilege in a patriarchal society: “It’s easy to drop a cucumber.”³³² However, upon a more careful study of the Cucumber list, it shows to be presuming a sexual (as opposed to asexual), heteronormative, gender-essentialist and ableist viewpoint. Also, the series reduces the interplay between social structure and social practices to a matter of categorical deficiency.

The Cucumber list, as indicated by its title, and since it assumes a female narrative voice, is strongly suggestive of (hetero-)sexuality. The three opening jokes in the list directly concern sex while also revealing two of the hegemonic features by which the male heterosexual body in Anglo-American cultures, even if hypothetically, would be subject to evaluation, i.e., penis size and sexual function (see Chapter Two):

The average cucumber is at least six inches long.

Cucumbers stay hard for a week.

A cucumber won’t tell you the size doesn’t matter. (Dundes 84)

All three jokes bring to mind the previously discussed notions of the *hierarchy of bodies* and *body as currency* (see pp. 105-06 above), and hence promote ableist viewpoints of masculinity, too. The normalization of such criteria in patriarchal societies could lead to many men’s feeling insecure regarding aspects of their embodiment. Ironically enough, the Cucumber list does touch

³³² I thank Henry Suderman for providing me with cultural background regarding many of the cucumber jokes.

upon such insecurities, too, as a base for criticizing men. For instance, in three consecutive jokes we have:

Cucumbers never need a round of applause.

Cucumbers never ask: “Am I the best?” “How was it?” “Did you come? How many times?”

Cucumbers aren’t jealous of your gynecologist, ski instructor, or hair dresser.

(Dundes 85)

Other than emitting such pro-gender hierarchy ramifications, the series reveals another important problem. If we agree with Dundes that the Cucumber list represents feminist goals and values, then we are led to believe that the list must also anticipate some changes among the men it is supposedly addressing. Such a hope for change is particularly suggested in some of the complaint-like jokes, such as the ones previously mentioned (i.e., nos. 31, 74, 83, 84, 87) as well as the following examples: “A cucumber will always respect you in the morning” (Dundes 85) and “A cucumber never forgets to flush the toilet” (86). However, in all such instances—to evoke the sociologist Allan Johnson, in his discussion of the relationship between social systems and individuals by respectively likening them to forests and trees (see *The Forest and the Trees*)—it is only the trees that the list is criticizing, thus neglecting the existence of an underlying and conditioning forest. Some scholars, however, have tried to find a way out of such limiting discussions about the subversive aspect of fringe gender humour, by paying attention to what they consider as *inclusive feminist* and *lesbian* humour. In the next section, I mention and critique some of the most important arguments put forward in this respect.

Inclusive Feminist and Lesbian Humour: Solutions?

Despite her critical view of humor, Bing, like most feminist humour scholars, appears to favour the rebellious side of humor over its reinforcing aspect. She ends her above mentioned essay, i.e., “Is Feminist Humor an Oxymoron?,” on an optimistic tone about the capacity of humor to subvert and revolutionize. Under a section titled “Inclusive Humor as Subversive,” she defines and mentions examples of a type of feminist humor which, as opposed to *divisive*, she calls *inclusive* and advocates. However, Bing shrewdly concludes the section by maintaining that “even with much inclusive humor, males still remain the center of attention” (28). At this point and in search for “the humor *by* and *for* women, humor that ignores men altogether, humor that allows feminists to define themselves rather than always reacting against the definitions of the wider society,” Bing suggests that *lesbian humour* is the quintessential rebellious gender humour, and thus must be modeled by feminist humorists. This claim had been put forward formerly by Bing and Heller in their essay “How Many Lesbians Does It Take to Screw in a Light Bulb?” (2003). The authors had explained that by lesbian humour they meant non-mainstream (or in-group) lesbian humour, which they in turn favoured over mainstream lesbian humour.

In this section, I take issue with Bing’s (and Heller’s) main arguments. I challenge Bing’s concept of inclusive feminist humour through re-reading the examples she singles out and praises, and by questioning the extent to which such inclusive humour may be effective. While for Bing any humour that focuses on feminist experience and includes men can be effective, I think there are further impediments—particularly in terms of reception—to the efficacy of a piece of feminist humour. Later, I evaluate Bing and Heller’s discussion of lesbian humour. Particularly drawing on the disposition theory of humour, I argue that non-mainstream lesbian

humour, exactly because of its receptive conditions—i.e., that it is at best prevalent among gender-minority communities—can barely if ever gain widespread reception among mainstream audiences. Therefore, such humour, I argue, is most likely to remain accepted only by (some) members of lesbian (and feminist) communities. This stands in contradiction with Bing and Heller's claims about the subversive qualities of lesbian humour which necessarily requires a reach farther than the lesbian and feminist community members.

While Bing defies much feminist humour, she praises certain inclusive feminist humour in which, she implies, men are not the centerpiece (28). According to Bing, “[w]hereas divisive humor often attacks people, inclusive humor makes fun of absurd attitudes, ideas, beliefs and systems that keep females at a disadvantage” (28).³³³ Bing then discusses three examples which she defends as appropriate examples for her inclusive feminist humour. Her first example is (the description of) a cartoon by Mary Henley with a male victim of robbery complaining to two policewomen. The cartoon depicts a role-reversal of a supposedly typical incident in which a female victim of rape by men reports to the police. The robbed man's pleas are given a flat denial when one of the policewomen says, “I mean, if you arouse somebody financially, you’ve GOT to follow through....” (qtd. in Bing 28). Rather than focusing on or attacking men, the humorous piece, Bing states, “effectively reveals why victim-blaming is absurd” (28). As Bing implies, inclusive humour seeks to enhance men's understanding, since “the assumption seems to be that if men really understood, they would change their attitudes” (28). To support further this claim, Bing mentions another instance of inclusive feminist humour, a *Sally Forth* comic by

³³³ What Bing calls inclusive feminist humour, other critics might simply call *feminist* per se: “Unlike misogynist male humor, feminist humor does not elevate the value of women at the expense of men. Rather than beginning from the assumption that men are the enemy, feminist humor adopts the view that all oppression and exploitation is harmful, unnecessary, and must be repudiated” (White 78).

Greg Howard, in which, “Hilary’s father asks what she’s reading. Hilary says she’s studying the American Revolution and reading the chapter about the founding mothers. The dialogue continues”:

Father: Really? I never studied the founding mothers in school.

Hilary: Compare history to arithmetic, Dad. How would you feel if they had taught you to add but not to subtract?

Father: I’d feel they left out half of it.

Hilary: Bingo! (28)

“Comics like this,” Bing asserts, “suggest alternatives to the status quo, in this case, history books that report only the lives and achievements of males” (28). Both examples, compared to the divisive humour we previously discussed, contain much less if any direct aggression towards men, and at most imply an attack on (some?) men’s *attitudes*. While the first example successfully depicts the fallacy represented by some rape myths, i.e., that women ask to be raped by the way they dress, the second example deploys the Socratic method to motivate critical thinking about women’s exclusion from history. However, the smooth receptivity of both examples by a mainstream audience is never guaranteed. As previously mentioned, welcoming feminist humour requires a certain degree of *a priori* sympathy towards some basic feminist presumptions. To this we must add the obvious yet significant fact that in patriarchal societies, feminists and pro-feminists constitute a minority. If we accept these conditions, then we must agree that although the above examples tend to reveal the absurdity of certain patriarchal ideologies, we cannot be confident that such humorous pieces will be unproblematically received and enjoyed by all audience strands. This could challenge Bing’s contention that “[w]ith inclusive jokes, both an in-group and an out-group can laugh” (28).

Studying Bing's last example reveals even further problems concerning feminist humour's alleged rebelliousness. The example, a piece of e-mail humour, is titled "Reasons why E-mail is like a penis." In some versions found on the Internet, the joke targets the similarity between the "Internet" itself and penis. Here is the joke, as mentioned by Bing:

Some folks have it, some don't. Those who have it would be devastated if it were cut off. Those who have it would be devastated if it were ever cut off. They think that those who don't have it are somehow inferior. They think it gives them power. They are wrong. Those who don't have it may agree that it's a nifty toy, but think it's not worth the fuss that those who do have it make about it. Still, many of those who don't have it would like to try it. It can be up or down. It's more fun when it's up, but it makes it hard to get any real work done. [. . .] If you don't take proper precautions, it can spread viruses. [. . .] If you play with it too much, you go blind. (qtd. in Bing 28; omissions are hers)³³⁴

On the surface, this humorous piece looks quite inclusive. As Bing clarifies, it "makes fun of penis envy and of e-mail" (28). She even assures us that "both males and e-mail users that I have shared it with have laughed, and have denied being offended" (28). Bing implies the piece as capable of triggering change in some people's ideas, that is, in some men's belief in penis envy, because it gets "people to laugh at their own pretensions and beliefs" (28). Yet, the joke, in leaving out from its entire picture certain males, namely those with lacks or disabilities related to sexual organs, proves to be quite exclusive. Although the piece cannot be easily deemed as heteronormative, it could still be read as punitive in its treatment of gender and its presumption of physical ability. It might be objected that the joke could be interpreted as inclusive of such

³³⁴ For a full Internet version, see <http://www.funnigurl.com/jokes/w.html> (Date of access: Dec. 5th, 2013).

disabled men, too, particularly due to its emphasis on “those who don’t have it.” However, the phrase “many of those who don’t have it would like to try it” suggests that the joke’s narrative line is most probably constructed around the opposition of men and women rather than that of some men and other men. In such an opposition, the disabled males will fall short if not feel ashamed. Given this scenario, and contra Bing’s commentary, there are some men (and/or their male or female partners) who might feel excluded and/or offended by the joke. Therefore, to Bing’s reason for the inefficacy of much inclusive feminist humour— i.e., that it might focus on men at the expense of women—we might add that such humour could face *reception* problems, too. Such problems are particularly applicable to lesbian humour, which Bing and Heller suggest be modeled as rebellious humour par excellence by feminists.

Specifically, they regard lesbian humour as “a mode of social critique that offers transformative possibilities” (78). According to Bing, “jokes told by lesbians for lesbians” (Bing 29) better than many feminist jokes exemplify Lisa Merrill’s “rebellious and self-affirming” humour (22). Therefore, Bing believes, “straight feminists who create and tell jokes can learn from their lesbian sisters to stop focusing on males and start making women and women’s concern central” (22). Bing and Heller provide two definitions for lesbian humour or lesbian joke. As we later learn in their essay, the first definition is supposed to describe the overall standpoint of the heterosexual communities or norm circles, whereas the second depicts the supposed perspective of homosexual communities:

‘Lesbian joke’ may thus be defined as the positing of the lesbian as object, an object of humor whose difference emphasizes the opposition of female homosexuality to standards of so-called normality. In this case, the legitimization of ‘lesbian’ depends on her construction as ‘other.’ At the same time, ‘lesbian

joke' or 'lesbian humor' may be defined by the positing of the lesbian as subject, an agent who claims the right of self-definition. Lesbian jokes proceeding from this definition acknowledge and reject the definition of lesbian as 'other,' and by noting the self-sufficiency of lesbians, judge society's standards of normality to be irrelevant and artificial. (159)

For the authors, while both types of lesbian humour are characterized by a unique "script involving at least two women in a same-sex relationship" (163), each type treats the relationship differently. The script in mainstream lesbian humour, they believe, primarily concerns sex, whereas that in the in-group lesbian humour thwarts such mainstream expectations. Specifically, *genuine* lesbian humour—a term Bing and Heller use to refer to the in-group lesbian humour—tends to "challenge the dominant culture's negative sexualization of lesbians or the dehumanizing reduction of the lesbian to sexual actor" (166). This deflation of anticipations itself constitutes part of the humour in this type of lesbian jokes. One of the main examples Bing and Heller mention (and is mentioned later by Bing in her own essay) for this in-group lesbian humour is the following joke:

Question: What does a lesbian bring on the second date?

Answer: A U-Haul. (166)

The joke, Bing and Heller explain, re-routes the mainstream audience's attention from their expected sexual script to an opposed script in which lesbians are identified through other aspects of their humanity, too. As they put it, "lesbians" and "anyone who is familiar with complex emotional dynamics of lesbian courtship" must find the joke funny "because it challenges the tendency to reduce lesbianism to physiology, redefining it instead in terms of the emotional euphoria that often compels lesbian coupling" (166). As Bing concludes, the joke, by frustrating

popular stereotyped definitions of lesbians—which are also prevalent even among some lesbians—deconstructs the clear dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality, and thus re-designates lesbian identity as that which can also be defined in relation to the domestic (29). However, this valorization can be challenged, both with regards to the reception issue and the various possible interpretations of the joke.

Right after quoting the joke, Bing and Heller, ironically enough, inform their reader of the fact that when one of them related the joke to “a group of self-identified heterosexual academics, nobody in the group ‘got’ the joke” and a male colleague totally misinterpreted the joke (166). This observation is significant. Given the joke’s ambiguity, we might ask important questions of Bing and Heller. How would the joke be able to occupy a subversive role concerning gender relations if it most probably fails to be understood, or is misunderstood, by (some of) the very persons whom the joke should target for consciousness-raising purposes, i.e., the mainstream (heterosexual) audience? Also, even if the joke is understood by the mainstream audience, to what extent could we be certain of their welcoming the message the joke is attempting to convey—i.e., avoiding “the tendency to reduce lesbianism to physiology”? This is particularly important as the message Bing and Heller infer from the joke presumes an a priori validation of, and sympathy towards, the lesbian identity in the *serious* mode of discourse. In other words, the joke, if it is to fulfil the goal stated by Bing and Heller, necessarily requires the audience’s a priori *understanding* of lesbianism as something beyond physiology. This condition is best fulfilled among in-group lesbian communities, thus causing the joke to be more effective as a tool for enhancing in-group solidarity rather than for removing out-group members’ ignorance and educating them about the insiders.

Another noteworthy point is the possibility of misreading the joke, as the authors note in the case of their said male colleague. He “assumed that the purpose of the U-haul was so that one of the women could leave her husband for a lesbian relationship” (Bing and Heller 166). Christie Davies, in his response to Bing and Heller’s paper, also takes issue with the authors’ interpretation of the joke. After mentioning some alternative readings, Davies notes that the joke, contrary to Bing and Heller’s emphasis that in-group lesbian jokes merely draw on non-sexual scripts, could also be understood as containing a sexual script. According to Davies, “the punchline U-Haul is not free of all sexual references” since the “couple are, as the Victorians would have put it, going to keep house together” (“A Reply to Janet Bing and Dana Heller” 313). Davies’ point is compatible with how the joke has also been read as mainstream lesbian humour. In a *New York Times* article, titled “Young Gay Rites,” the author, Benoit Denizet-Lewis, refers to the above joke as “a longstanding joke [. . .] that is supposed to satirize the way some lesbians rush into cohabitation” (par. 21).³³⁵ He continues to say, “The joke is sometimes paired with a second one about gay men rushing into bed: *What does a gay man bring on a second date? What second date?*” (par. 21).

This alternative interpretation of the joke, which opposes the in-group interpretation advocated by Bing and Heller, suggests that the joke, for the mainstream audience, might signify lesbians’ *eccentric* behaviour rather than enlighten this audience on the non-sexual aspects of lesbian persons’ humanity and identity. From this viewpoint, the joke could reinforce, and not challenge, hegemonic gender ideologies. The above argument is likewise applicable to some of the other lesbian jokes Bing and Heller introduce as self-defining and subversive. Here are some examples:

³³⁵ See http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/27/magazine/27young-t.html?_r=2&oref=slogin& (Date of access: 3 Jan. 2014).

Question: What can two femmes do in bed?

Answer: Each other's makeup.

Question: Why can't lesbians go on a diet and wear makeup at the same time?

Answer: You can't eat Jenny Craig with Mary Kay on your face.

Question: What do you call an open can of tuna in a lesbian household?

Answer: Potpourri. (Bing and Heller 174-176)

Such jokes might have been originated as in-group humour by lesbians themselves. For instance, Bing and Heller explain how the first joke originated in the 1980s as part of the way lesbian humorists "addressed the divisiveness that existed within many lesbian communities over the value of butch/femme roles" (174). However, such jokes have apparently been co-opted by mainstream audiences, too, for different purposes. Here are slightly modified versions of two of the above jokes, respectively found in a collection of jokes titled *The Mammoth Book of Dirty, Sick, X-Rated and Politically Incorrect Jokes* (2005) and on the Internet websites *jokes.com* and *jokes4us.com*:

Q: What do you call an open can of tuna fish in a lesbian's apartment?

A: Air freshener. (Tibballs 273)

- Why did the lesbian put a can of tuna on their coffee table?

- Potpourri.³³⁶

- Why don't fem (sic) lesbians go on dates?

- Because it's hard to eat Jenny Craig when you've got Mary Kay on your face.³³⁷

Given the contexts in which these jokes appear, it seems safe to claim that the jokes may sometimes not be intended to leave subversive effects regarding gender. Rather, they can be told to evoke jeering laughter at a supposedly striking incongruity between lesbians' and non-lesbians' sense of smell, itself taken to be a direct consequence of lesbians' sexual practices. Therefore, the meanings and the effects of the laughter at such jokes in different groups could not be identical. We might say that the in-group members' laughter of solidarity can turn, among members of the mainstream audience, into an out-group laughter of ridicule. Therefore, it might be true that for some lesbians, as Bing and Heller remark, the second joke above about lesbians' diet can mean to criticize "a culture that commodifies women's bodies and eroticizes their engagements with consumer culture" (176). Also, their third joke featuring tuna and potpourri might, for some lesbians, assume that "the lesbian body is a 'natural' body, a body resistant to the unhealthy shame and self-loathing that women are induced to experience in relation to their bodies, and specifically in relation to their vaginas" (Bing and Heller 176-177). However, for many if not most members of heteronormative gender norm circles in Anglo-American societies, the jokes can simply evoke and reinforce the *abjection* of the lesbian body. This is not far-

³³⁶ See <http://www.jokes.com/funny-dirty-jokes/4pjher/tuna-helper> (Date of access: 3 Jan. 2014). For the joke Bing and Heller mention about lesbians' diet, see <http://www.jokes.com/funny-dirty-jokes/cav8cf/lesbian-diet> (Date of access: 3 Jan. 2014).

³³⁷ <http://www.jokes4us.com/dirtyjokes/lesbiansjokes.html> (Date of access: 3 Jan. 2014)

fetched, given the association mainstream lesbian jokes often make between lesbians' vaginas and typically unpleasant odours or between lesbians' sexuality and certain culturally abjected notions related to food and eating. The following examples, two of which are taken from the above-mentioned joke collection by Tibballs, confirm our observation:

- What is the definition of confusion?
- Twenty blind lesbians in a fish market. (Thripshaw 295)³³⁸
- What do you call two lesbians in a canoe?
- Fur traders. (Tibballs 273)
- What is the leading cause of death among lesbians?
- Hairballs. (Tibballs 274)³³⁹

A Google search for the key words "lesbian" and "fish" or "tuna" will result in many pages in which a limited yet frequent set of jokes and humorous sayings are mentioned about lesbian persons. Interestingly, although there exist (men's) cunnilingus jokes too, they do not render the (presumably heterosexual woman's) vagina as abject.³⁴⁰ There is a short way from such jokes as

³³⁸ For another version with "three blind lesbians" see <http://www.jokes4us.com/dirtyjokes/lesbiansjokes.html> (Date of access: 3 Jan. 2014)

³³⁹ For the last two jokes, see also See also <http://www.jokes4us.com/dirtyjokes/lesbiansjokes.html> (Date of access: 3 Jan. 2014). In another joke with the same theme, found on [jokes4us.com](http://www.jokes4us.com), we have: "Q: What does a lesbian want for christmas [sic] more than anything else? A: a brand new carpet to munch on." (See <http://www.jokes4us.com/dirtyjokes/lesbiansjokes.html>; Date of access: 3 Jan. 2014).

³⁴⁰ On an Internet website titled "Oral Sex Jokes," many cunnilingus jokes can be found. I bring as examples four such jokes in which cunnilingus is rendered somehow as a *cool*, rather than weird, practice: (Most of the jokes on the website reveal a male heterosexual narrative voice.)

"How can you tell if your date went really well? - You have stretch marks on your tongue."

"What's worse than fellatio with buck teeth? - Cunnilingus with five o'clock shadow."

the above ones about lesbians to those jokes, even though infrequent, which associate lesbian sexual practices with feces. For instance, in Tibball's collection we have: "Two lesbians were in bed. One said, 'What do you mean, my crack tastes like shit?' 'Sorry,' said the other. 'Just a slip of the tongue'" (273).³⁴¹ The fact that such humour exists, regardless of the degree of its circulation, is a reminder of Mimi Schipper's apt concept of "pariah femininities" (see Chapter One) which include the gender performances of female homosexuals in Western culture.

Bing and Heller's essay, whose title constitutes part of a lesbian joke, ends on an implied upbeat tone concerning subversive aspects of lesbian humour. The full version of the essay's title joke, as told by the authors, reads: "Q: How many lesbians does it take to screw in a lightbulb? A: Seven. One to change it, three to organize the potluck and three to film an empowering documentary" (157). Revisiting the joke at the end of their paper, and in light of their earlier arguments concerning the subversive capacities of lesbian humour, the authors indicate that the joke

reveals a lesbian community different from popular stereotypes. For a community whose very visibility and survival has depended largely on its ability to continuously organize itself, document itself, feed itself, and attend to its internal conflicts and inequities, this joke, like many others (sic) jokes that lesbians share, will refer at once to the miracle of lesbian survival and to the personal and political price that lesbians have paid for that survival. (179)

"What is the area between the vagina and the anus called? - A chin rest."

"How do you eat a frog? - One leg over each ear" (See http://www.yuksrus.com/sex_oral.html; Date of access: 3 Jan. 2014).

³⁴¹ Such an association, for what is perhaps further sensitivity to men's same-sex practices, is more noticeable in jokes about homosexual men. For at least eight jokes which connect men's homosexuality with feces, see <http://www.jokes4us.com/dirtyjokes/gayjokes.html> (Date of access: Aug. 2013).

No doubt, this interpretation, which is informed by adequate knowledge of typical lesbian communities, expands the hermeneutical scope of the joke as a text. It might be taken as an instance of in-group lesbian humour which contains some mild self-deprecation directed towards strengthening inner circle solidarity. It may also be taken as serving potentially didactic functions for certain out-group communities. However, we may not be too certain of the latter possibility. If anything, such self-deprecating humour, since it concerns a minority community with lesser-known and often devalued norms, could easily turn into ridiculing laughter among unsympathetic audiences. It is not surprising if a slightly modified version of the above joke is found on a mainstream humour website:

Q: How many lesbians does it take to screw in a lightbulb?

A: Four. One to change it, two to organize the potluck and one to write a folk song about the empowering experience.³⁴²

As this instance indicates, the audience issue is a serious challenge to claims about the subversive possibilities of fringe gender humour. While not all such humour may be adopted by mainstream audiences, it would be equally inconceivable to expect that such unconventional humour gain widespread acceptance with unsympathetic or hostile audiences. To put this claim in a more palpable context, in the following final section of this chapter I critique a case study of three episodes from the sitcom *Ellen* (1994-1998), whose author advances a full-fledged defence of the titular character's performance as subversive in select episodes from the series.

³⁴² <http://www.jokes4us.com/dirtyjokes/lesbiansjokes.html> (Date of access: Aug. 2013).

REVIEWING A CASE STUDY: A CRITIQUE OF HELENE SHUGART'S INTERPRETATION OF *ELLEN* (1994-1998)

Helene A. Shugart's essay "Parody as Subversive Performance: Denaturalizing Gender and Reconstituting Desire in *Ellen*" makes an excellent case for re-examining and contextualizing my primary points about the incapacities of fringe gender humour as subversive discourse, particularly when we are dealing with mainstream audience. In her essay, Shugart renders close readings of select episodes from the sitcom *Ellen* (1994-1998), focusing on the parodic performances of the titular character in each episode. Shugart frames her essay around Judith Butler's view of gender performativity and particularly of parodic performances as subversive. While Butler focuses on drag, Shugart draws her readers' attention to the curious absence in Butler's work of "subversive performances of femininity by women and of masculinity by men," and chooses to focus on women parodying femininity particularly because of "the heightened political consequences of gendered performance for women that contribute so profoundly to their oppression" (96). Shugart examines three episodes from the sitcom *Ellen* (1994-1998) to argue that the series' main character, Ellen Morgan, played by Ellen DeGeneres, renders subversive performances of femininity and female sexuality "by engaging the strategies of conspicuous performance, contextual incongruities, and excess" (96). Such strategies, Shugart claims, work together to "denaturalize gender and challenge heterosexual desire" (96).

In this regard, "humor and its relationship to audience" are particularly important to Shugart (97). While espousing the idea, reminiscent of the disposition theory of humour, that "[a] male-identified audience may not perceive feminist humor to be amusing just as a feminist audience may not perceive sexist humor to be amusing" (105, see also 98), Shugart expresses interest in speculating on *mainstream audiences'* reception of Ellen's performance in her select

episodes, while also conjecturing on another audience, i.e., a “spectator audience.” This latter audience “is aware of or suspects DeGeneres’ lesbianism” (105).³⁴³

Before I discuss Shugart’s arguments, a brief explanation about the sitcom and synopses of the episodes Shugart focuses on are in order here. The American comic and actress Ellen Lee DeGeneres is today mostly known, particularly among the younger generation, as the host on her well-known talk show *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* (2003-). However, she in fact started to gain fame before the show launched with a TV series initially titled *These Friends of Mine* and later renamed *Ellen*. The series, which ran from 1988 to 1994, features as its central figure the title character Ellen (Morgan), a single woman in her late thirties, who owns a bookstore. The shop is often a meeting place for Ellen’s closest friends, and is where the stories in the series are initiated or evolved among the characters. As Shugart notes, compared to typical sitcoms, *Ellen*’s main character features unconventional elements, particularly in her appearance and her unorthodox sexual—or asexual, to be more exact—behaviours. While depicted as a heterosexual person in the series, Ellen’s sexual manner and dating practices could at best be described as awkward and weird. In fact, “Ellen’s personality,” as Shugart notes, “stands in sharp contra[s]to the standard of alluring feminine mystique that characterizes most female leads in television series” (100). For Shugart, Ellen’s character as such contains the probability of constituting profound challenges to patriarchal beliefs (101).

The three episodes Shugart singles out, she thinks, particularly “function, overtly and successfully, to challenge stereotypes” (101). “The Trainer,” the ninth episode of the first season (1994-1995), features Ellen who stands in as a personal trainer for the boss of her friend Paige, who works as a secretary for a Hollywood film company. In “Witness,” the sixteenth episode of

³⁴³ All three episodes analyzed by Shugart were aired before Ellen Degeneres (and her character) came out (on the show) (Shugart 98).

the second season (1995-1996), Ellen plays the role of a witness in a mock trial for her cousin, Spence, who is trying to finish a law school course. Finally, in part of the episode “Not-So-Great Expectations,” the eighth episode of the third season (1996-1997), Ellen makes a dating service video, not to benefit dating services but as a precondition to gain access to a video created by the man whom Ellen’s mother is dating. All three episodes feature the unique element of having Ellen the actor acting yet another role within the narrative. According to Shugart, in all three cases, Ellen’s performances, due to the elements of *conspicuousness*, *incongruence*, and *excess*, serve to reveal the “imitative structure” of gender (101). By conspicuousness, she means that in each episode the audience is aware that the character Ellen is going to perform as yet another character. Therefore, the audience is certain that they are “witnessing a performance rather than as an expression of some enduring aspect of [Ellen’s] own character” (101). By incongruence, Shugart intends to emphasize how in each performance case, the character played by Ellen Morgan remarkably is inconsistent with the “real” character we know of her in the series (103). Finally, Shugar asserts, all of Ellen’s parodic performances in the select episodes feature the strategy of excess which heightens the incongruence of those performances, and in turn contributes to their subversive effects relating to gender (105). Of these interrelated concepts, I focus on incongruence or incongruity, not least because my critique of Shugart’s ideas also foregrounds incongruity and its relation to ridiculing laughter in each episode.

In “The Trainer,” as Shugart explains, the incongruity occurs due to Ellen’s wearing a thong, as a typically feminine garment, on her non-voluptuous body as well as due to her not behaving stereotypically in that thong. “Rather than strutting provocatively as sexily attired women on television generally do,” notes Shugart, “Ellen lumbers in casually and spends considerable time doing what women wearing thong normally do not do—repeatedly adjust

them” (103). Ellen’s parodic performance in the thong, Shugart believes, defetishizes the outfit while revealing the constructed nature of the gendered meaning of the garment as well as of gender itself. In “Witness,” the incongruities rest in the striking discrepancy between Ellen Morgan’s character and appearance and those of the stripper character she is playing during the mock trial. Against our expectations, Ellen appears in “loose, non-descript, conventionally masculine clothing: black slacks, sport coat, white shirt, and loafers” (104). The name of the character Ellen plays, i.e., Lola Bigcups, as well as Ellen’s stripper discourse and behaviour during the mock trial, Shugart contends, add to and heighten the incongruity. “The multiple incongruities that characterize this scene,” Shugart claims, “function subversively to the extent that they desexualize the notion of the stripper—perhaps the epitome of the sexualized, fetishized, and objectified femininity” (104). Finally, in “Not-So-Great Expectations,” Ellen, for first time since the series’ beginning, “is fully made up, her hair curled, and her dress feminine, revealing considerable cleavage” (104). Paige, who has lent Ellen her clothes for the “makeover,” also coaches her by advising her to be “sultry and seductive” (105). Likewise, Shugart believes, the incongruity between Ellen’s character and Paige’s requests, which is revealed by the former’s *intentionally* ludicrous attempts to be voluptuous, functions as subversive towards gender meanings. As Shugart puts it, “the episode exposes the female sexuality that Ellen performs for the camera as a construct, a role assumed to achieve a goal. Once again, the implication is that gender is performed” (105).

However, I think Shugart’s speculations could be improved in light of our discussions of ridicule in previous chapters as well as those of mainstream audiences’ perception of rebellious gender humour in this chapter. In this regard, Shugart’s view of mainstream audience as having basically sympathetic sensibilities towards anti-gender hierarchy beliefs is to be questioned. Due

to this assumption, I argue, she neglects the possibility of such an audience's ridiculing laughter at Ellen's expense. Therefore, it would not be inappropriate to assert that Shugart, similar to most feminist humour scholars, tends to favour rebellion over repression, even when the mainstream reception of gender humour is at stake. As Shugart puts it, "[t]he invited interpretation for [mainstream] audience is that the feminine qualities enacted by Ellen as she role-plays the various personae are unnatural and contrived" (105). This possibility cannot be cancelled out completely. However, not only could a subversive reaction on part of the mainstream audience not be the only probability but, given the superior rhetorical power of hegemonic gender norms, it is unlikely that Ellen's acts are (desired to be) interpreted subversively by the mainstream audience. In fact, significantly absent from Shugart's debate is the probability of such audience's ridiculing laughter—at Ellen's expense. Such a laughter could conceivably be induced by the very above mentioned incongruities in Ellen's parodic performances in Shugart's select episodes.

From this viewpoint, in the episode "The Trainer," the incongruity between Ellen's usual appearance in the series and her having put on a thong could cause (part of) the mainstream audience's possible laughter during the scene rather than (only) provide a basis on which such an audience may build a critical view towards gender. If, as it was cited from Shugart, we take the thong as a symbol of emphasized femininity, then the thong can be described as representing a normalized attire against which Ellen's body and physique, as we know them throughout the series, stand as ludicrous. From this perspective, Ellen's appearance and behaviour could be read as *abnormal* and thus serve to reinforce the very norms they are apparently undermining. Thus, the mainstream audience's possible laughter during the scene might simply occur because they find Ellen outlandishly *out of context*. Such a laughter, as our discussions of ridicule show throughout the first three chapters, can have disciplinary, rather than subversive, effects.

Shugart's presumption that the mainstream audience is sympathetic towards Ellen as well as towards feminist teachings creates a gap in her argument. This is best demonstrated where she remarks, regarding the above episode, that "[t]he mainstream audience is aware that the stereotypical feminine guises and behaviors that Ellen Morgan reluctantly adopts are not natural, comfortable, or enjoyable to her, *thus* pointing up the contrived nature of traditional femininity" (102, my emphasis). As it is suggested by our discussion in the past couple of paragraphs, it remains inexplicable how Shugart's premise in her above statement warrants her conclusion.

The same objections, I think, are also applicable to Shugart's reading as subversive Ellen's mock trial performance in the episode "Witness." Here, the incongruous discrepancy between Ellen and the character of the stripper she is playing could similarly *cause* mainstream audience's laughter rather than serve as an introduction to gaining knowledge about and critiquing gender constructions on their part. Having the typically asexualized character of Ellen Morgan play the role of a stripper whose very name, Lola Bigcups, proves to be a huge exaggeration of Ellen's body will most probably create a jeering laughter as would also the video-making scene, in which Ellen borrows and wears Paige's clothes. This is important as Paige is the only character in the series whose femininity has been strongly emphasized.

In short, Ellen's parodic performances, particularly given her regular sexual and dating behaviours throughout the series, could acquire quite different meanings for each of the *mainstream* and *spectator* audiences. While Shugart suggests that Ellen's infrequent dates approve of her being depicted as a heterosexual person in the series (100), such behaviours could as well indicate Ellen Morgan's being a sexually odd and eccentric person. In other words, whereas Shugart's spectator audience might take her eccentric behaviour as a sign of her lesbianism and thus willingly interpret her parodic performances as subversive towards the

hegemonic gender meanings, the mainstream audience's suspicions about Ellen's possible lesbianism are likely to add to the jeering element in her parodic acts while also causing them to make more sense in the eyes of many if not most members of this latter audience.

SUMMARY

The previous chapters concerned disciplinary aspects of gender humour. This chapter considered the possibility of gender humour as having counterhegemonic effects concerning gender. As typical instances for such humour, which I described with the term *fringe*, feminist humour and lesbian humour were examined. I argued that fringe gender humour cannot be unproblematically taken as subversive discourse if we are to assume that subversion requires at least some degree of consciousness-raising and/or influence. Others have shown that much feminist humour, if based on aggressive strategies, can simply have reverse effects by subscribing to the same gender norms it purportedly overthrows. I added that even what Janet Bing calls "inclusive" feminist humour may, from a feminist viewpoint, have undesirable gendered ramifications. In this respect, the issue of audience perception was particularly stressed. According to the disposition theory of humour, our degree of sympathy or antipathy with humour targets can directly affect our receptions of humour. Remarkably, the disposition theory has been verified regarding receptions of sexist and feminist humour. Based on these observations, and through detailed discussions of numerous feminist and lesbian jokes as well as a re-reading of Helene Shugart's interpretations of select episodes from the American sitcom *Ellen* (1994-1998), I contended that the degree to which fringe gender humour may be smoothly received by mainstream audiences appears to be conceivably insignificant. This implies that fringe gender humour may not be expected to affect and change easily the gender ideology of

mainstream audiences. This conclusion, when seen in light of my previous arguments for the disciplinary effects of mainstream gender humour, reiterates Christopher Wilson's remark, in *Jokes: Form, Content, Use, and Function*, that "ridicule will be far more effective when it reflects popular conventional opinion than when employed as a radical force for change" (230).

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I pursued two main aims. First, I attempted to demonstrate that ridicule, as a form of humour, serves as a social control and norm-reinforcing strategy directed towards sustaining a society's *gender order*. This aim was intended as a contribution towards filling a gap, in gender and masculinities studies, regarding the role of ridicule concerning gender. The gap, as shown in Chapter One, is discernible not only in the general related literature but also in many sources which particularly address the question of what sustains gender hegemony in the first place. Such discussions frequently—yet only in passing—mention ridicule's function in policing gender without granting it the theoretical significance it requires.

I also contributed to the textual analyses of gender humour in humour studies. Showing that many of the analyses are theoretically bereft, I suggested that we use a comprehensive model of gender relations to enhance our reading of that which is gendered in gender humour. I used Raewyn Connell's gender hierarchy model as an exemplary solution. The model attends to certain gender-related intricacies, including the interrelation of gender and sexuality and the intersection of gender with other identity elements. Moreover, it has been successfully adapted in research related to non-Western gender orders. The first four chapters of my dissertation addressed these aims. In the last chapter, I addressed a hypothetical objection to my main argument. The objection would read as follows: Given the norm-reinforcing and disciplinary functions of ridicule, we could naturally re-deploy it toward opposite goals, that is, establishing counterhegemonic gender norms. I considered this possibility through discussing feminist and lesbian humour as representatives of contestive or rebellious gender humour in a patriarchal society. I showed that such fringe gender humour, while arguably serving in-group solidarity-making purposes, is less likely to meet widespread reception by mainstream audiences,

particularly because it reflects and subscribes to non-hegemonic gender norms. Consequently, such humour seems less likely to affect the public opinion by *raising their consciousness*.

I articulated the above arguments in five chapters. Below, I summarize the main arguments and findings of each chapter, while also pointing out some limitations of the research, and indicating avenues for further research. In Chapter One, through discussing and integrating debates on ridicule and gender hegemony, particularly those by the social psychologist Michael Billig and the sociologist Raewyn Connell, I argued that ridicule apparently plays a central role toward maintaining gender order in a society, and even in creating gendered beings in the first place. In his attempt to solve the problem of the particularity and yet universality of humour, Billig argues that humour is universal because one of its aspects, i.e., ridicule, helps universally maintain the social order through a process involving fear of embarrassment in social interactions. Based on this hypothesis, I undertook to study the relationship between gender order (as only one type of social order) and gender humour. My own hypothesis was that we should expect certain humour, featuring ridicule, to form around the gender order of a society.

Chapter Two categorized various types of gender humour based on Connell's model, and particularly its key concept of hegemonic masculinity. Through analyzing and categorizing gender jokes as found in currently circulating books and websites associated with the U.S. and U.K. societies, and instances of gender humour from the sitcom *Two and a Half Men*, I argued that there exists a systematic cluster of society-wide Anglo-American gender humour that, mainly drawing upon ridicule, deals with and patrols corresponding aspects of the current Anglo-American gender order. These aspects, which include the central elements within Connell's hierarchy, are mirrored in and guarded through sexist, homophobic, bodily normativity-directed, and ethnocentric types of gender humour. Moreover, the fundamental assumptions on which the

gender hierarchy is built—i.e., its being a sexual (as opposed to asexual) and two-and-only-two sex system—were also reflected and patrolled in types of humour featuring a support for sexual dimorphism and the primacy of (heteronormative) sex.

My analyses of humour in Chapter Two, which were mostly based on Connell's model, also illustrated that heeding the intricacies of gender in gender humour can enhance our understanding of seemingly banal humour texts. Connell's model clearly connects gender and sexuality and emphasizes the intersection of gender with other identity elements such as class, race, age, and bodily non-normativity including disability. Such intersections are increasingly attracting the attention of scholars in critical diversity studies.³⁴⁴ The findings of this chapter suggest that such studies can be improved by emphasizing the role of humour—as a seemingly insignificant popular and everyday cultural phenomenon—in constructing and maintaining gender relations. Moreover, my analyses and categorizations in this chapter serve pedagogical purposes by providing an intriguing way for teaching the interrelatedness of identity elements as properly emphasized in critical diversity studies. Finally, the chapter also emphasizes the role of asexuality, as an emerging concept in sexuality studies, in discussions of gender and gender humour.

In Chapter Three, to extend the findings in Chapter Two for my main argument about the disciplinary functions of mainstream gender humour, I studied the contemporary Persian joke cycles about the Rashti (man and woman) and the Qazvini (man) characters, that is, the only two Iranian joke cycles revolving around gender and sexuality. Adopting a historical approach to the topic and using historiographical accounts of events and transformations related to the modern

³⁴⁴ Different editions of Kimmel and Ferber's edited volume *Privilege: A Reader* as well as Fred L. Pincus's book *Understanding Diversity* are appropriate cases in point. The latest editions of both books add religion and disability to previous versions.

Iranian gender order, I categorized and analyzed many instances of both joke cycles, and argued that the cycles are apparently connected with those historical events and transformations. Both joke series, I argued, appear to have originated as disciplinary discursive tools to manage such events and transformations, and to continue to serve norm-reinforcing and disciplinary functions in regard to the contemporary Iranian society's gender order.

Chapter Three also provided an opportunity to question the exculpatory approach to humour, as represented by Christie Davies' contention that jokes cannot reinforce the social order. Davies' one-way formula about the relation between jokes and the social order (i.e., "Jokes are a thermometer, not a thermostat") only considers the functions of jokes in relation to their stated targets, for instance the Rashti men and women in Rashti jokes or the Qazvini men in the Qazvini jokes. Such a simplistic link, I argued through my concept of the *displaced functions* of jokes, is unnecessary and can be misleading. As my readings of the Qazvini and Rashti jokes indicate, while such jokes might or might not affect Iranian people's ideas about the residents of the cities of Rasht and Qazvin, the jokes, due to their widespread circulation, seem to reflect and inform many people's notions of gender and sexuality as the primary themes in both widespread joke cycles.

Chapter Four showed that mainstream gender humour is deployed to enhance the rhetoric of social and cultural messages that might or might not concern gender in the first place. This possible process indicates how via various other communicational channels, gender humour may shape the public sphere's conceptions of gender. Such rhetorical deployment of gender humour, since it relies on mainstream gender humour—i.e., a type of humour which reflects *hegemonic* gender norms—implies the superior cultural power of such humour as opposed to gender humour relying on non-hegemonic gender norms. This implication later shaped a premise in

Chapter Five. The chapter also resulted in further secondary hypotheses worthy of investigation within (gender) humour studies and Iranian studies. (For details, see Chapter Four's Summary.)

Chapter Five, as previously mentioned, proposed a hypothetical objection to my main argument in its previous chapters. Given ridicule's punitive power, one could object, could we not re-deploy ridicule in the form of humour to subvert hegemonic gender norms? Through discussing feminist and lesbian humour, as examples par excellence of deconstructive gender humour, I showed that such non-mainstream or fringe gender humour is less likely to meet the public success enjoyed by mainstream gender humour. For gender humour to attract the mainstream audience's attention, it must respect hegemonic gender norms, i.e., those subscribed to by mainstream norm circles. This condition strongly implies that *serious* cultural credit is needed for the success of a particular type of *humorous* discourse.³⁴⁵ Such serious cultural credit, in the case of feminist and lesbian humour, is only shared and enjoyed by limited numbers of people in patriarchal societies. This limitation confirms that ridicule, as Christopher Wilson puts it, is the prerogative of the powerful, not a tool at the disposal of the powerless (230).

Despite my arguments, my research has limitations that necessitate further studies. In discussing disciplinary functions of humour, since we presume impact and effect on the audience, we may only gain precise results through ample empirical evidence. This condition becomes particularly important due to "the polysemicity of humorous incongruity" (Weaver 191). A more empirical theory of gender humour as panopticon could become possible through

³⁴⁵ Based on benign violation theory, some degree of norm overlap is necessary in order for welcoming a humorous text. Therefore, as previously mentioned, gender-hierarchical humour, e.g., sexist, homophobic, and misogynist humour, is potentially or actually acceptable within a societal or cultural community *as long as* the members of that community maintain, consciously or unconsciously, a degree of subservience to serious gender-hierarchical beliefs. To put this using the more exact concept of *norm circle*, we could say that particular types of humour are only acceptable within particular norm circles (see p. 57 above).

the field work of survey- and interview-based research. Such research, given the favourable results of many relevant empirical studies referred to throughout my chapters, is expected to approve of my results. As far as gender studies are concerned, the significant role of ridicule in maintaining gender order can validate policy conclusions suggested by some related empirical studies (e.g., see Pascoe 167-174).

A relevant study to be conducted in this regard would be one which pursues my hypothesis, in Chapter One, that ridicule may have a necessary role in the *creation of gendered beings*. As previously mentioned, one of the areas in which Billig's theory of ridicule appears as promising are the social aspects of Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. Billig believes that this contribution can be made by a focus on the "the place of [parental] ridicule in the social development of children" (201). By the same token, and more specifically, we need to examine the particular role of parental ridicule in the formation of gender identity among children.

There are practical implications to my research on the individual and interpersonal levels. In other words, readers might ask, what is to be done before the disciplinary power of mainstream gender humour as a widespread discourse? The effectiveness of the competing discourse of fringe gender humour was already questioned in Chapter Five, although the presence of such humour must be noted. On a broad level, I think, there remain three further paths: ignoring mainstream gender humour, censoring it, or taking it seriously. Given the demonstrated effects of such humour, ignoring it would naturally result in no positive changes toward gender democracy. Censoring mainstream gender humour, as is the case with other types of humour, never seems to be favourable (e.g., see Weaver 191), particularly because such a strategy, apart from being suppressive, ignores the underlying social motivations for the humorous discourse. Due to humour's inevitable relationship with serious social life, censoring

humour would only mean avoiding the serious issues raised by it. Therefore, I propose that mainstream gender humour simply be marked as *serious*, as is the case in critical humour studies. In terms of interpersonal approaches to mainstream gender humour, I suggest that we take “paths of greater resistance” (as opposed to “paths of least resistance”) as explained and promoted by Allan Johnson in his oeuvre (e.g., see *The Gender Knot* 32-3, 225, 238-43).

Johnson’s concepts are based on the practice-based theory of social structure in general, and of gender structure in particular, according to which a social structure is produced and reproduced through the proliferation of enough legitimating individual acts:

A society isn’t some *thing* that sits there forever as it is. Because a system only happens as people participate in it, it can’t help but be a dynamic process of creation and recreation from one moment to the next. In something as simple as a man following the path of least resistance toward controlling conversations (and a woman letting him), the reality of patriarchy in that moment comes into being.

This is how we *do* patriarchy, bit by bit, moment by moment. It is also how individuals can contribute to change—by choosing paths of greater resistance.

(*The Gender Knot* 225; see also *The Forest and the Trees* 17-18)

This practice-based theory also helps us to refute an important hypothetical objection against Billig’s theory. It might be suggested that this theory depoliticizes the realm of the social by promoting social determinism (i.e., the social structure fully determining our uses of humour or our reactions to others’ use of humour). However, the claim conflates the existence of *social structure* (i.e., “powerfully determined patterns in social relationships” which give meaning to our otherwise random acts [Connell, *Gender* 74]) with *social determinism*. As Connell remarks

regarding the structure of gender relations, the fact that our acts are to some extent predicted and conditioned by social structures does not mean that our acts are pre-determined:

We make our own gender, but we are not free to make it however we like. Our gender practice is powerfully shaped by the gender order in which we find ourselves [... Yet, a] structure of relations does not mechanically decide how people or groups act. That is the error of social determinism, and it is no more defensible than biological determinism. But a structure of relations certainly defines possibilities and consequences for action. In a strongly patriarchal gender order, women may be denied education and personal freedoms, while men may be cut off from emotional connections with children. (*Gender* 74)

Similarly, people's use of, and reaction to, gender humour as a social act in any society, while conditioned by the gender structure of that society, are never unalterably pre-determined. This possibility of choice is obviously confirmed by our freedom to use and promote pro-minority gender humour, and of course by the possibility of "unlaughter" (see footnote 39 above) as a reaction to humour. Taking humour seriously also manifests itself in critiquing mainstream gender humour. As Charles R. Gruner observes on the power dynamics of humour, "[r]emoval from a humorous situation (joke, etc.) what is won or lost [...] removes the essential elements of the situation and renders it humorless" (*The Game of Humor* 9). Gruner's statement is a reminder of the American humourist E. B. White's famous quote that "[a]nalyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it" (qtd. in Gulas and Weinberger 139). Such an unfunny process, however, needs to be accomplished if we are interested in studying humour as a discourse among other discourses. As inferred from Billig's general argument about the necessary disciplinary role humour occupies in social life, once a gender

order is modified, changes in its corresponding gender humour will necessarily follow.

Accordingly, our critique of gender humour, by exposing and promoting the change of the social structures underlying such humour, helps complement other serious pro-gender equality activities. After all, critiquing questionable humour implies a vigorous invitation to change aspects of our *serious* world that has given rise to such humour in the first place.

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