

## *Humorous Assaults on Patriarchal Ideology\**

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Humor is a significant weapon in interpersonal and intergroup conflict and competition. Over the centuries, males have used humor and jokes to create and perpetuate patriarchal ideals, relationships, and structures. Today, feminists and other proponents of gender equality use humor to deconstruct patriarchal ideologies and sexist stereotypes. This exploratory study analyzes a collection of over 1,700 jokes identified as feminist and women's humor to discover what these jokes suggest with regard to the male-dominant structure in society and how these jokes are subversive in attempting to disrupt gender stereotypes and roles. We find that the humor of women and feminists seeks, in part, to discredit assumptions of males' superiority, masterfulness, sexual prowess, and extraordinary value to women and society. These jokes may, however, also work to reinforce stereotypes associated with men and women:

"If they could send a man to the moon, why not just send all of them?"

Humor can be a subversive and an empowering tool for women and feminists in the ideological battle to symbolically redefine gender roles, attitudes, and stereotypes. Historically, men and male-dominated institutions have controlled the dissemination of humor and determined what is and is not acceptable as humorous discourse. However, within the past few decades, hundreds of women and feminist comedians have become highly visible and vocal on television, in print, and on the Internet. Women comedians like Roseanne Barr and Rosie O'Donnell have used their jokes to challenge traditional patriarchal ideologies and perspectives by pointing out the frailties of the gender binary, masculinity, and men. Unlike Phyllis Diller and Joan Rivers, who used the shortcomings of women as the punch line of their jokes, men and their behaviors have become the new subjects (see Merrill 1988). Feminist humor, though, does not only address patriarchy but often addresses the shared experiences and perspectives of women, making no reference to men; this is especially true when we include black women comedians, such as Whoopi Goldberg (Bing 2004; Merrill 1988;

Rappoport 2005). In fact, the humor of females has been found to be less antimale than male humor is antifemale (Stoehr 1981).

This study examines over 1,700 jokes printed in joke books, taken from stand-up comedy programs on television, and published on the Internet that are critical of men, patriarchy, and assumptions of male supremacy. The jokes selected for this study also include those representing a response to male supremacist stereotypes and ideologies that ridicule, those that express hostility toward men, and those that assert female superiority over men. The proliferation of humor that includes men as the punch line is indicative of the current interest in and importance of the struggle among men and women to redefine appropriate roles and statuses of each in today's American culture (see Rappoport 2005). Jokes critical of men suggest that women and feminists are using humor as a way to build awareness and to challenge male domination and patriarchal social organization, as well as a response to the oppression and exploitation of women in patriarchal societies and as an expression of the desire to change the status of women. However, many of these jokes do little to subvert or challenge gender norms and may actually reinforce gender differences and stereotypes. Stillion and White (1987) suggest that the mainstream public, including both men and women, may see these jokes as demeaning for men and categorize them as male-bashing.

### **Theory and Literature**

Humor is not a peripheral or inconsequential force in our culture. In face-to-face interactions and through various media, humor, satire, and joking are important vehicles for creating and communicating meanings in daily life. Topics such as race, sex, gender, and conflict between groups are dealt with almost exclusively through joking and witty discourse within many social environments. Humor acts as a sensitivity barometer to which issues and sentiments are currently thought to be interesting and important in the sociocultural environment (Rappoport 2005). Therefore, attitudes concerning war and peace, race relations, or the price of gas are all expressed and formed through the jokes of the day. Through analysis of current humor, we can find whose perspectives toward current issues (most particularly toward contentious and controversial issues) are being represented. Humor gives individuals a greater license to express dangerous, irreverent, or even mean-spirited sentiments that would be considered inappropriate or forbidden in most "serious" forms of discourse. In fact, if a person is asked to account for an expression, he or she can quickly duck behind the "just kidding" defense and perhaps raise the "don't you have a sense of humor" offense. These are particularly effective due to the importance that virtually all Americans place on having a "good sense of humor" (Hassett and Houlihan 1979; Omwake 1937; Rappoport 2005).

### *Two Theoretical Perspectives on Humor*

To explain the nature and use of humor within a sociological context, we can rely on two very broad sociological paradigms. The first explanation is within symbolic interactionist and phenomenological perspectives, which focus on the process by which social realities, ideologies, and identities are constructed and deconstructed through the minutia of symbols, rituals, interactions, and role-playing in everyday life (e.g., Berger and Luckmann 1967; Foucault 1980; Fuchs and Case 1989; Goffman 1959; Schutz 1932 [1967]). Humor is one of those fundamental elements that work as a symbolic gesture to affirm, reinforce, or even challenge concepts and beliefs within society, especially when considering humor as an act or ritual that is often only expressed in the public sphere. Kader (1990:43) states: "Rituals such as theater, story-telling, and dance can be understood as ways in which people—especially those under-represented within dominant discourse—articulate the meanings they assign to their everyday realities." The audience for humorous discourse plays its part in the creation of meaning through its acceptance of the joke or witticism as amusing or appropriate as humor. By laughing, the audience symbolically demonstrates agreement with the premise of the joke or at least acknowledges the right of the joke teller to make such assertions. With the public's acceptance or rejection comes a form of discourse that can either affirm these jokes as ways to support stereotypes and beliefs, or as a way to build a new definition of a construct widely accepted (see Bing 2004; Merrill 1988; Rappoport 2005).

The conflict perspective provides a second theoretical approach to explaining humor. Humor virtually always has aggression or intellectual combativeness as a main, partial, or potential component. The "barb" of humor inflicts social and psychological pain or confinement that parallels the physical effect of the barb of a fishhook or the barb of a barbwire fence. In fact, the most vicious and brutal sentiments toward all manner of persons, groups, and ideas are expressed through joking. Weisstein (1973:51) notes: "Humor as a weapon in the social arsenal constructed to maintain caste, class, race, and sex inequalities is a very common thing. Much of this humor is pure slander." Freud lists the "hostile joke" as one of the three forms of humor (the others being obscene jokes and innocent jokes). He asserts that the purpose of a hostile joke is aggressiveness, satire, or defense. Freud (1960:105) states: "[Particularly] . . . tendentious jokes are so highly suitable for attacks on the great, the dignified and the mighty, who are protected by external circumstances from direct disparagement. . . ." Through the use of humor, the common person may dispute the claims of those in power to extraordinary privileges or status (Kaufman and Blakely 1980). Moreover, humor is significant in reflecting, perpetuating, or altering relationships of power and authority. Through one's performance, the joke teller asserts his or

her authority and his or her perspective. Through their laughter and approval, the audience validates their authority to “hold forth” on this topic and to define what are acceptable ideas and sentiments. Studies of who tells jokes and who laughs at them consistently show that more powerful groups and individuals are most often the joke tellers, while the less powerful laugh, nod in affirmation, or at least suffer in silent humiliation (Coser 1960; Pollio and Edgerly 1976; Stillion and White 1987). Thus, control of any social performance provides potential for gaining advantages in the definition of self and other socially created realities and gives the comedian the power to express extreme perspectives that challenge conventional explanations and wisdom because humorists transcend normal boundaries of taste, tact, or logic with some degree of impunity from normal sources of social control (Goffman 1959).

Humor, therefore, has potential utility for both the dominant and the subordinate party in interpersonal and group conflicts. For the powerful, humor provides the means to ridicule and abuse subordinate groups and to justify greater privileges, statuses, and rewards for themselves (e.g., racist, sexist, and ethnic humor). For less powerful groups and individuals, humor offers unique opportunities to express identities and perspectives in opposition to those of the dominant group (Bing 2004; Merrill 1988). Humor, like other elements of popular culture, is less rigidly controlled than other forms of communication by traditional agents such as government, business, church, or the legal establishment (Case 1992; de Lauwe 1983). Both conflict and symbolic interactionist perspectives are useful for explaining the role of humor in creating the beliefs, the identities, and in fact, the social realities that constitute society and human consciousness. Through face-to-face interactions and media representations our realities that we take for granted in everyday life are negotiated, shaped, and perpetuated. Control over the symbols, ideas, and ritual performances within a culture are tantamount to control of that society (Althusser 1971; Bourdieu 1977; Collins 1974; Gramsci 1971; Mannheim 1936). Inclusion of women and women’s perspectives on the various stages upon which comedy is performed represents one example of the challenge to hegemonic control of males over the production of social realities.

### ***Women, Feminists, and Humor***

Historically, humor has been dominated by males, and attempts by females to engage in the production and use of humor have largely been discouraged, discredited, or ignored (Auslander 1993; Bing 2004; Kaufman and Blakely 1980; Merrill 1988; Stillion and White 1987). In her review essay on women’s humor, Gillooly (1991:474) notes that “humorous writing by women has suffered even greater critical neglect than other forms of female literary production.” Barreca (1988:3) asserts: “Generally speaking, commentators on comedy continue to

treat the subject [humor] as a necessarily all-male pastime, rather like writing in the snow." This domination of humor as a means for communication is a useful and effective means for males to assert and defend patriarchal ideological tenets, while preventing opposing perspectives (feminist and other nonpatriarchal views) from being asserted in contradiction. Discussing the lack of acknowledgement and attention to the writings of Virginia Woolf, Marshall (1988:171–72) states: "The conspiracy of silence on her humor is bound up with her critique of the 'masculinist' and their culture. Criticisms women make of males and their society tend to be suppressed and made invisible" (see also Apte 1985; Neitz 1980). The absence of female faces and voices in comedy is quite evident in the most successful films of the past decade. Male stars such as Adam Sandler, Chris Rock, Owen Wilson, Will Smith, Jim Carrey, Eddie Murphy, and Steve Martin make "blockbuster" hit movies year after year. No female actor even comes close to these records of success and popularity.

The attempt of men to ignore and suppress the humor of women is likened to patriarchal societies' attempts to suppress women's sexuality. Gagnier (1988:137) writes that "men fear women's humor for much the same reason that they fear women's sexual freedom—because they encourage women's aggression and promiscuity and thus disrupts the social order. . . ." Auslander (1993:321) comments on the fear of women's humor, noting: "One clear indication that women's comedy is perceived as genuinely dangerous within 'the patriarchal public sphere' is that it is often subject to strategies of patriarchal recuperation." One strategy for discrediting women's humor is the assertion that women simply lack a sense of humor (e.g., Freud 1960). Barreca (1988:19) states: "Charges of unlaughing and laughing inappropriately have been leveled at women . . . since women began to participate in the creation of literary works." One reason for this stereotype is the reluctance of many women to encourage or applaud (through laughter) the abusive depictions of women in traditional male-dominated humor. "So when we hear jokes against women and we are asked why we don't laugh at them, the answer is easy, simple, and short. Of course we're not laughing, you asshole. Nobody laughs at the sight of their own blood" (Weisstein 1973:88).

Despite efforts to stifle women's humor, in recent years, a large number of female and feminist comedians have emerged as significant voices against traditional patriarchal perspectives. The ascendance of women's humor is both a cause and a consequence of an increase in women's power in recent decades. As Theroit (1990:6) points out: "Meaning making in the arena of language is essential in creating, maintaining, and legitimizing power relationships. . . . Change in either area affects the other and . . . is reflected in the other." Merrill (1988:278) also states: "Comedy is both an aggressive and intellectual response to human nature and experience. A cognizance of women's right to be both aggressive and intellectual is a relatively new historical phenomenon." She also suggests in an

earlier text that feminist humor is “one that affirms women’s experience, rather than denigrating it” (Merrill 1988:275). Merrill further explains feminist humor as picking apart the oppressive nature of society and ridiculing oppressive structures rather than women’s actions and attitudes. In her review of several recent works of women’s humor, Gillooly (1991:475–76) asserts: “Indeed feminist subversion . . . is the hallmark of women’s humorous production.” Barreca (1988:19) further states: “Comedy is a way women writers can reflect the absurdity of the dominant ideology, while undermining the very basis for its discourse.” Marshall (1988:172) points out that Virginia Woolf often “roasted . . . the habits, expectations, demands and beliefs which are borne of male dominance, male privilege, male power, and a male version of humanity.” Auslander (1993:316) states: “A growing strain of feminist literary theory . . . suggests that humor and comedy may be valuable as empowering ‘feminist tools,’ especially when motivated by the anger women need to express at the social and cultural limitations they confront.”

In a more recent study, Bing (2004) points out that while feminist humor should be subversive, it can have somewhat unexpected effects. Bing (2004) suggests that feminist humor can subvert the hierarchy by challenging common assumptions and stereotypes about women. By bringing attention to barriers women face and pointing out the flaws men have, women and men can begin to think about and question gender roles and stereotypes that reinforce gender stratification. They can also begin to use these jokes to possibly become what Bing (2004:28) prefers, “inclusive humor,” that clearly attacks “inequitable systems without attacking punitive mean-spirited oppressors.” Bing also suggests that feminist humor can establish an in-group for women. Like Merrill (1988), Bing suggests that feminist humor should serve as a way for women to share their experiences and tribulations. It can be “coping humor,” giving “some women reassurance that they are not alone in their difficult daily lives” (Bing 2004:26).

### **Data and Methods**

To address an analysis of women’s and feminist humor, we employed a convenience sampling of jokes resulting in a collection of 1,961 jokes. We drew this sample from four sources: joke books, television broadcasts, Internet searches, and personal sources (see Appendix A for descriptions and examples). While most of the jokes we collected came from dated materials (i.e., 1990s joke books represent 56 percent of the jokes collected), interestingly, these jokes came up repeatedly in more recent sources such as the Internet. Television performers also repeated jokes or their jokes were recorded in other sources, which increased the difficulty in establishing any substantial change or trends in the jokes over the last 15 years.

To examine the jokes’ substance and purpose, this study relied on content analysis to discern the manifest and latent messages and frequency of these

jokes. We identified concepts within each joke, and categorized like concepts and developed overarching themes. First, we identified the gendered concepts presented in each joke that represented the message or assertion of each joke (i.e., men are stupid). Several jokes had a few different concepts, so we cataloged it based on the first or strongest assertion and noted other concepts presented to identify links between concepts and categories. Second, we examined whether the concepts fit into overarching themes and structural messages to determine whether the jokes, overall, questioned the gender hierarchy or reinforced it. Finally, we examined our coding schemes, with the help of colleagues and students, to check for parsimony by coding and categorizing separately and then comparing to find any discrepancies in coding.

### Results

Table 1 presents the collection of 1,961 jokes in which we coded 2,025 assertions or concepts. Some jokes presented more than one concept; therefore, there are more concepts than jokes and there are jokes that overlapped into other categories that are important in explaining the linkages between jokes as feminist or women's humor. It also presents a ranking of categories and concepts based on the number of times we saw a particular concept or category. This gives a sense of the most frequent ideas represented in this collection of jokes. For example, the most often coded concept was that men were jerks (10.4 percent). However, the most common categorization of jokes fell under men being identified as "useless" (25.7 percent). The least mentioned concept was that men came from "disgusting families," (.6 percent) and the smallest category was "feminist subtleties" (3.8 percent), which questioned the gendered norms without using negative gender stereotypes. Finally, Table 1 also provides a thematic representation with two groupings we labeled as "male stereotypes" and "feminist critique."

The largest theme of concepts and categories are about "male stereotypes," which represent about 62 percent of all the coded concepts. These jokes suggest that men are (1) useless, (2) stupid, (3) hypersexual, and (4) disgusting. To highlight this dominating theme within these jokes, we present some examples. For instance, the most prominent category coded within the male stereotypes theme was that men are useless. Most of these assertions suggested that men are useless at home, work, and with children. Below are some examples:

- (1) **Useless for sex:** "The lovemaking was fast and furious—He was fast and she was furious."; "All men are multiorgasmic—They have a small orgasm while having intercourse and another much greater one the next day while telling their buddies about it."; "Why is a hard man good to find?—You don't have to stay up half the night massaging his ego."

**Table 1**  
Distribution of Anti-Patriarchal Jokes by Theme, Category, and Concept

	<b>Total number</b>	<b>% of coded concepts</b>
<b>Theme: Male stereotypes</b>	<b>1,252</b>	<b>61.8%</b>
<b>1. Useless</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>25.7%</b>
Useless in relationships	196	9.7%
Sexually useless (bad equipment or performance)	146	7.2%
Useless at home (housework)	97	4.8%
Useless with children	54	2.7%
Useless at work/won't work	27	1.3%
<b>2. Stupid</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>13.4%</b>
Stupid assholes (lacking intelligence/irrational)	168	8.3%
Immature (naïve, acts like a child)	72	3.5%
Thinks with their "dick"/"balls"	32	1.6%
<b>3. Hypersexual</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>11.5%</b>
Sex crazy (main purpose in life)	152	7.5%
Women as sex objects	82	4%
<b>4. Disgusting</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>11.2%</b>
Bathroom habits (belching, farting, urination)	90	4.4%
Dirty lifestyle (clothing, condition of living space, eating)	81	4.0%
Dirty mouth (cursing, cussing, and excessive profanity)	22	1.1%
Fat, ugly, and disgusting	21	1.0%
Disgusting family	12	.6%
<b>Theme: Feminist critique</b>	<b>773</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>1. Sexist pigs</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>19.7%</b>
Jerks (liars, rude, insensitive)	210	10.4%
Macho (aggressive, violent, stubborn)	99	4.9%
Ignore women or their contributions	51	2.5%
Abusive and exploitative of women	38	1.9%
<b>2. Revenge</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>10.8%</b>
Kill, hurt, get rid of, or be cruel	113	5.6%
Sexually use or exploit	71	3.5%
Turn the tables on men (make life better for women)	35	1.7%

**Table 1**  
*Continued*

	Total number	% of coded concepts
<b>3. Feminine superiority</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>3.9%</b>
Physically stronger	40	2.0%
More intelligent	20	1.0%
Emotionally stronger than men	19	.9%
<b>4. Feminist subtleties</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>3.8%</b>
Questioning the gender hierarchy	47	2.3%
Equal treatment/rights	30	1.5%
<b>Total number of concepts coded</b>	<b>2,025</b>	

- (2) **Useless at home and housework:** “How do men conserve energy?—They come home and do nothing.”; “How many men does it take to change a light bulb?—Five, one to force it with a hammer and four to take him to the emergency room.”
- (3) **Useless in general:** “He left his body to science—They sent it back.”; “Scientists have just discovered something that can do the work of five men . . . a woman!”
- (4) **Useless in relationships:** “Dear Tech Support, Last year I upgraded from Boyfriend 5.0 to Husband and noticed slowdown in overall performance . . . Husband 1.0 uninstalled many other valuable programs, such as Romance 9.5, and Personal Attention 6.5 . . .”

The second most prominent category in this particular theme is that men are stupid (13.4 percent). Within this category, by far, the leading assertion is that men simply lack intelligence. For instance, one joke states: “Why do men always have stupid grins on their faces?—Because they *are* stupid.” Another example comes in this joke: “What does a smart guy do in an M&M factory?—Proofread.” This category also includes jokes that suggest men are stupid because they are immature. For example, “Go for younger men—You might as well, they never mature anyway.” These jokes also reference men’s genitalia as the primary instrument in their decision making or thinking.

- (1) **Thinking with their “balls”:** “What do you call a man who loses 90 percent of his intelligence?—Neutered!”

- (2) **Thinking with their “dicks”:** “God made man with two heads but he only gave them enough blood to run one head at a time, so that’s why most everything in the world is about sex!”

The third largest category within the stereotype theme presents men as hypersexual (11.5 percent). Up to this point, it is apparent that discussing and degrading men within the context of sex, sexual preference, or equipment is a mutual theme within these joke categories. However, there are some jokes that just point out that men are hypersexual. For example, “What do men feel when they’ve finally met the right woman?—A tightness in their pants!” Another example sets up as a guide for women to translate “men-speak:”

When he says . . . Do you have the time?—He really means . . . to go to bed.

When he says . . . Hello—He really means . . . Let’s cut the talk and go have sex.

When he says . . . I enjoy reading—He really means . . . *Playboy*, *Jugs*, and *Penthouse*.

When he says . . . I love opera—He really means . . . I want sex, but I’ve seen an opera once.

The final category in this theme suggests that men are disgusting. In many jokes, men are “animals,” “savages,” and “slobs”:

- (1) **Dirty house/living style:** “A reason for women to like men—Leaving their shoes and socks laying around keeps the house insect free.”
- (2) **Drunkard:** “A man saw a sign that said ‘Drink Canada Dry.’ So he moved there.”
- (3) **Other forms of personal disgustingness:** “Why do men have such big nostrils?—Just look at the size of their fingers.”; “When a woman gets married she wants the three Ss [sensitivity, sincerity, and sharing]. But what does she get?—The 3 Bs: Burps, Body Odor, and Beer Breath.

Overall, these four major categories presented assertions that largely rely on stereotypes about men—often the opposite of women’s stereotypical qualities. More importantly, though, women are explicitly or implicitly recognized as the constant for being better at emotions, housework, rearing children, and relationships, supporting the same gender binary constructs reflected in American society that men and women are completely different.

Table 1 also shows four categories that go beyond stereotypical descriptions of women and men in the theme we define as the “Feminist Critique.” Of the jokes collected, 38 percent suggest a critique patriarchy in a variety of categories: men as sexist pigs, revenge by women for women, feminine superiority, and subtleties. Rather than just talking about men, these jokes place women as the focal point of the discussion, creating a rallying call for at least an awareness of patriarchy.

The most common assertion expressed identifies men as sexist pigs (19.7 percent) and many of the assertions want to “out” men for being domineering. For instance, many of the concepts coded suggest that men are jerks who lie, cheat, and are insensitive to women’s needs. One joke stated: “My old boyfriend and I weren’t compatible. I’m a Virgo and he’s an asshole.” These jokes also suggest that men are macho because they are too self-centered, aggressive, violent, or even stubborn. For instance, one joke states: “Why do men prefer masturbation? It’s sex with someone they love.” Or, “How many men does it take to screw in a light bulb?—One . . . He just holds it up there and waits for the world to revolve around him.” These jokes also suggest that men ignore women’s contributions and use or dehumanize women. For instance, one joke stated: “Why are women and donuts the same thing for men?—They can both fit on their dicks.” As an example of ignoring women, one comedian stated: “I asked some of my guy friends about what they thought about the Women’s Suffrage Movement, and one actually said to me, You mean that thing you guys suffer through every month?”

Another frequent concept articulated was an expression of hostility toward men or the need to seek revenge or turn the tables on men (10.8 percent). The most frequent expressions of hostility or revenge were:

- (1) **Desire to get rid of men (or women are better off without men):** “He said, ‘I’m going to make you the happiest woman in the world.’—She said, ‘I’ll miss you.’”; “What is the fastest way to a man’s heart?—Through his chest with a sharp knife!”
- (2) **Assertions that it is okay to “cheat” on men:** “What does a woman do with her asshole before having sex?—She drops him off at the golf course.”
- (3) **The desire to kill men or see them dead.** “‘Mommy, Daddy’s on his feet again.’—‘Be quiet and reload.’”
- (4) **Encouragement to exploit men or treat them as nothing but a sex object:** “What’s the useless piece of skin at the end of a man’s penis called?—The man.”; “What’s the similarity between linoleum and men?—If you lay them right the first time, you can walk all over them for the rest of their lives.”

Representing less than 4 percent of the jokes analyzed, the third category suggests that women are superior to men. Each joke attempted to play off the clear stereotypes of men being stupid and emotionally vacant as suggested above but clearly pointed out that women were physically, intellectually, and emotionally a cut above men. These also seem to do more male-bashing than previous jokes. Below are some examples:

- (1) "They've found something to take the place of three men—One woman."
- (2) "Remember Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did—backwards in high heels."
- (3) "What did God say after he created man?—'I can do better than that!'—and he made woman."
- (4) "Why is it good that there are female astronauts?—When the crew gets lost in space, at least she will have the brains to ask for directions."
- (5) "When a woman gets a divorce her intelligence goes up to goddamned genius!"

Finally, the least frequent type of message (3.8 percent) conveyed is a subtle critique of the gender hierarchy, gender roles, and stereotypes. Often, these jokes flipped stereotypes of men or women upside down to critique them. For example, "I'd like to open a whore house for women so we can get it the way we really want it. Men would pretend that they enjoy talking to us and they care about our lives and at the time of orgasm yell 'I can't believe how perfectly your shoes match your dress.'"

### **Conclusions**

One of the truly momentous developments of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is the challenge of patriarchal domination within many of America's institutions. One way in which people have challenged the status quo throughout history has been through humor or satire. This study examines a number of jokes labeled as women's or feminist humor to explore their content and point out their assertions. We find that the jokes attempt to discredit men and more broadly, patriarchy, by pointing out their flaws or putting men, as well as women, in their stereotypical roles. Few jokes, however, go past stereotypical assumptions to fully critique the gender.

Humor is a complex and appealing form of discourse which can help individuals and groups overcome fears and question norms and beliefs supported by the mainstream. Because humor is often exempt from many of the rules of logic, taste, and etiquette that apply to other forms of communication, humor is a particularly potent weapon in ideological battles. Those who control humorous communication and define what is "funny" are able to launch ideological barrages at others while making it impossible, inappropriate, or even in bad taste for others to reply in kind. Women and feminist humorists who criticize traditional roles and patriarchal domination are among the storm-troopers of gender warfare launching direct assaults on patriarchal ideologies. Ironically the same "defenders of the faith" (patriarchy) who have for centuries winked, nodded, and chuckled at racist, sexist, homophobic, and other humor aimed at out-groups are among those who are most outraged by the use of humor to present perspectives critical of their entrenched stereotypical ideologies and tendencies.

Humor is a major means by which critics of patriarchal ideologies and structures have gained a voice and an audience. Every main assumption of male superiority is held up for ridicule and the opposite assertion (female superiority) is gleefully flouted as an equally plausible (or implausible) alternative. This form of humor may be seen as mean-spirited or overly hostile toward men. It is perhaps so, but as long as major forces (both ideological and structural) exist to impede gender equality, humor will be an important weapon in ideological and social struggles for (and against) equality. It is in this manner that the content and incidence of jokes is a rough measure of the state of social inequalities at a given point in time. We are invited to examine the power and agency encoded in the seemingly harmless but funny joke.

#### ENDNOTE

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APPENDIX A  
List of Data Sources

Books	Performers (Television recordings)	Web sites	Personal sources
<p><b>Description:</b> The largest source of data came from books of jokes identified as women’s jokes or feminist humor. These books came from two local bookstores (Barnes and Noble and Walden Books), Amazon.com, and student contributions. For the local and online bookstores, we consulted their computerized listings to find books that related to the subject of women’s jokes or feminist humor. Of course, we could have focused on all joke books but the books we found gave us 1,105 jokes and included several jokes from different women writers and comedians.</p> <p><b>Books:</b> Brown, Judy. 2004. <i>She’s So Funny: 1,768 of the Best Jokes from Women Comedians</i>. Kansas City, MO: McMeel Publishing. Cucumber Group, The. 1992. <i>Cucumbers Are Better Than Men Because . . . Part II</i>. Watertown, MA: Ivory Tower Publishing.</p>	<p><b>Description:</b> Approximately 70 hours of stand-up comedy were recorded from two cable television stations Comedy Central and Home Box Office (HBO) to get another 319 jokes. We picked these two sources because they were more likely to show stand-up comedian shows and were known for showing more provocative stand-up shows that would include women and men.</p> <p><b>Performers:</b> Barr, Roseanne      Behar, Joy Berger, Rachel      Boosler, Elaine Brown, Julie        Butler, Brett Cho, Margaret      Cleghorne, Ellen Degeneres, Ellen   Estman, Susie Ford, Diane        Goldberg, Whoopi Kolunski, Sue      Krinsky, Lea Ladman, Cathy     Leifer, Carol Imes, Monique     Matteson, Pam Otsuki, Tamayo    O’Donnell, Rosie Poundstone, Paula Rhea, Caroline Rudner, Rita        Shear, Rhonda</p>	<p><b>Description:</b> Using Google.com, we added an additional 352 jokes from various Web sites. We used a combination of key words to do these searches that included: “women+humor;” “male-bashing;” “feminist humor;” “feminist jokes;” and “women’s jokes.” While this produced several hits of possible Web sites, we narrowed our choices down to Web sites that served as “joke centers;” that had lists of jokes.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b> Mensuck.com Jokething.com</p>	<p><b>Description:</b> As satire and humor are often done informally and passed from person to person, we asked friends, students, colleagues, and family members to gather what they thought were women’s or feminist jokes. By word of mouth, we got 185 jokes. It also included jokes posted in already-published articles, such as works from Bing (2004) and Stillion and White (1987).</p>

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jokes.html
- [http://www.angelfire.com/  
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male\\_bashing\\_jokes.htm](http://www.jokejam.com/male_bashing_jokes.htm)
- [http://www.funnypop.com/  
jokes/category/14.html](http://www.funnypop.com/jokes/category/14.html)
- [http://  
www.womansavers.com/  
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