



10.2478/genst-2021-0005

EXPLORING GENDER IDEOLOGIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA JOKES DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

BENEDICTA ADOKARLEY LOMOTEY

University of Ghana

balomotey@ug.edu.gh/ adokarley@hotmail.com

***Abstract:** This paper investigates contemporary gender ideologies as manifested in social media during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. Using a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis approach, the author analyses jokes in memes and news items posted through social media in the form of videos, pictures, and texts. Specifically, it focuses on how gender stereotypes and ideologies are constructed and sustained through humour, in several themes built upon gendered representations. The author analyses the complex configuration of factors such as beliefs, stereotypes, and ideologies, which, closely interwoven, form the tapestry of the gender order. Additionally, in order to establish the constancy of gender ideologies over time and across cultures, a correlation is made between the gender ideologies reflected in proverbs and those manifested in the internet memes. The study contends that the complex role of humour enhances the subtle propelling of gender stereotypes and ideologies and ultimately, the existing gender status quo.*

***Keywords:** gender stereotypes and ideologies, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, humour, memes, coronavirus.*

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic in Wuhan in the latter part of the year 2019 generated a fountain of emotions and ripple effects. Given its novelty, the virus was shrouded in mystery, causing uncertainty, leading to anxiety, speculations, and confusion. Added to these was a surge in social media messages that attempted to create

humour about the situation. These texts, pictures and videos increased just as rapidly as the number of cases of infected people worldwide. The pandemic has allowed an unprecedented interest in and bird's eye view of global events. It has shown the world what humanity has in common despite the diversity of sociocultural backgrounds. People have joked about everything, including religion, obsessive compulsive behaviours and gender relations. Gender, in particular, has been a constant theme in many of the jokes, making the current worldwide discourse a rich source for feminist research. As Mills (2008) notes, since the 1960s, feminist theorists and activists have been interested in the representation of women in advertisements, newspapers and magazines, and also in the ways that women are “named and addressed in texts and in interaction” (p. 1). Undoubtedly, feminist interest in the role of discourse in the propagation of the gender order (see Section 2) presently represents “a privileged field to add scientific rigor to social relevance” (Amâncio, 1993, p. 164).

Before tackling the issue of the inappropriateness of such jokes through a gender studies lens, it is important to account for why jokes became so widespread during the pandemic. The answer to this question can be found in existing theories of humour.

Several studies confirm the hypothesized association between laughter and dissociation¹ (Keltner & Bonanno, 1997; LaFollette & Shanks, 1993; Morreall, 1989). These studies have shown that humour functions as a coping mechanism, improves global optimism, decreases depression to negative life stress and predicts improved psychological functioning during distress. Indeed, as odd as an association between a global-scale sickness, death and humour might appear, Carus noted its normalcy as far back as in 1898. He stated that “men² like to be merry [...] Sometimes the worse their own situation is, the more they enjoy a laugh to balance their sorrows” (Carus, 1898, p. 268) and “the mere idea of a reversed world suffices to excite merry laughter” (p. 269).

Most notably, Keltner and Bonanno (1997) explain that theories of humour and positive emotion show that laughter enables “dissociation from the subjective experience of distress, occurring as a shift from negative to positive emotion ... from danger to safety ... or from incongruous information to insight and understanding” (p. 698). Basing their argument on the findings of emotion theorists and cognitive analysts, they explain that “positive emotions are ‘undoers’ of negative emotions” (Levenson, 1988, as cited in Keltner &

¹ Rodin et al. (1998) define dissociation as “a psychological process by which information- incoming, stored or outgoing- is deflected from integration with its usual or expected associations” (p. 161). Simply put, it can be explained as being disconnected from what one is experiencing as a coping mechanism in stressful or traumatic events.

² Interpreted generically here.

Bonanno, 1997, p. 688) and that “the smile of joy follows the reduction of fear and distress” (Keltner & Bonanno, 1997, p. 688). This proposition constitutes the basis of the ‘laughter-as-dissociation’ hypothesis: “laughter accompanies the dissociation from potentially distressing arousal brought about by a positive reinterpretation of the source of distress” (Keltner & Bonanno, 1997, p. 688). These assertions are consistent with recent studies that have pointed out the playful aspect of laughter; e.g., Gervais and Wilson (2005) and Morreall (2017). The former state that Duchenne laughter³ “functions to create a playful mood” (Gervais & Wilson, 2005, p. 407). On his part, Morreall (2017, n.p.) maintains the following:

When in potentially stressful situations we shift to the play mode of humor, our heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension decrease, as do levels of epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol. Laughter also increases pain tolerance and boosts the activity of the immune system, which stress suppresses.

Once we have a good understanding of the association between danger, play, humour and laughter, it becomes less baffling how fast the jokes on the coronavirus spread despite the gravity of the situation. Actually, laughter has been described as an example of the “larger category of primitive emotional contagion” (Hatfield et al., 1994, cited in Gervais & Wilson, 2005, p. 402). Together with yawning, it has been traditionally perceived as “embodying the best examples of contagious behaviors in humans” (Provine 2000, as cited in Gervais & Wilson, 2005, p. 406). Notwithstanding the benefits of humour and laughter, it is essential to examine the role of this apparently harmless, but highly contagious human activity as an excellent (incognito) vehicle for the transportation of beliefs, stereotypes, and ideologies.

The present exploratory research builds upon the contributions of previous studies on gender and discourse by focusing on how gender stereotypes and ideologies are supported and perpetuated through humour in the present-day context of the popularity of social media. It seeks to examine (1) the ideological nature of gender-related jokes during the pandemic, correlated with the role of memes in reproducing such ideologies and (2) the role played by language in maintaining gender distinctions and naturalizing gender hierarchies. It attempts to add to the debate on why gender based discriminatory judgements, evaluations, and attributions remain relatively persistent despite decades of feminist activism. I foreground my discussion of the significance, functionality, and insidiousness of beliefs, stereotypes, and

³ Gervais & Wilson (2005) define Duchenne laughter as one which is “stimulus-driven and emotionally valenced” whereas non-Duchenne laughter is “self-generated and emotionless” (p. 396).

ideologies in connection with real-world concerns in order to create an awareness of the pervasiveness of gender bias. By making use of the consciousness-raising function of jokes and proverbs, I seek to provide a convincing argument that language is not a mere tool for communication as postulated by the detractors of feminist language activism. Rather, beguiling discourses such as jokes and proverbs reflect and perpetuate existing beliefs. I will first discuss beliefs, stereotypes and ideologies. I will then present how coronavirus jokes can be interpreted from the perspective of ethical understandings of humour and I will extend this discussion to memes and the social media.

2. Gender beliefs, stereotypes, and ideologies

Considering the aforementioned significant benefits of humour, one might ask why some people might be offended by seemingly harmless jokes that appear to do more good than harm. The answer to this question can be found in humour ethics, a field that has been greatly researched by philosophers over the centuries. Before proceeding to briefly describe some of its propositions, it would be necessary to explain the main concepts at the basis of the current research, namely beliefs, stereotypes, and ideologies.

Culture is a complex term that encompasses many phenomena such as beliefs, myths, and taboos. Beliefs in particular are significant in the functioning of a given society, given that they often shape what is accepted as the norm and function as the pillar around which the behaviours of the members of a society revolve. LaFollette & Shanks (1993) for example, note that “what we find humorous depends on what other beliefs we have ... and these are not easily *disentangled* from the society and culture in which we ourselves are *embedded*, nor from the minority groups to which we may belong” (pp. 336-337; my emphasis). Beliefs can sometimes traverse distinct cultural borders and cease being peculiar to a particular society. They then become a characteristic of human thinking. Amâncio (1993) confirms this from a social-psychological perspective by pointing out that “gender beliefs are largely shared by groups of different ages and different *nationalities*” (p. 164) and they “influence other processes of social perception, such as behavioural explanations and expectations” (p. 166). Many of these beliefs are often reflected in jokes as well as proverbs and are often brought to the fore by scholars through discourse analysis.

Beliefs are closely related to ideologies. The latter can generally be defined as the “system of beliefs by which people explain, account for, and justify their behavior, and interpret and assess that of others” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 35). Gender

ideology, in particular, is the “set of beliefs that govern people’s participation in the gender order, and by which they explain and justify that participation” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 35). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) note that the dominant gender ideology “does not simply prescribe that male and female *should* be different”, but rather “it insists that they simply *are* different” and “ascribes these differences to an unchanging essential quality of males and females”, a view which is referred to as ‘essentialism’ (p. 23). Dominant ideologies normally become successful not because of physical force and conscious imposition, but rather, as a result of the fact that people do not acknowledge the role of ideology and tend to believe that things are natural the way they are. As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) maintain, this process, which is known as ‘naturalization’, refers to “people’s sense of what needs no explanation” (p. 43).

Essentialism and naturalization, which are the bedrocks of gender ideologies, are greatly sustained by gender stereotypes. Amâncio (1993) interprets stereotypes as “collective ideologies that give sense to the self and the group membership and orient expectations of behaviour” (Amâncio, 1993, p. 164). Talbot (2003) explains that stereotyping consists of a strategy of rigid contrasting, “splitting”, reducing, and simplifying of gender traits, roles and identities and it “enables the maintenance of the social and symbolic order” (pp. 470-471). They (stereotypes) consist of power play and, as Talbot (2003) notes, they often help to keep subordinate groups (e.g., ethnic minorities and women) in their place. Just like ideologies, they are closely linked to hegemony (see Gramsci, 1971, for this concept), which has to do with the “processes that allow a particular group to acquire and sustain dominance not simply through the use of force but through ‘cultural consent’” (Budgeon, 2014, p. 322). In relation to jokes, scholars in humour ethics have argued that certain forms of humour have the propensity to “transform the ways in which we think about persons and the relations between them” because of their ability to “both establish and reinforce racial and sexual stereotypes” (LaFollette & Shanks, 1993, p. 336). Consequently, gender stereotypes are closely related to gender ideologies in that they both “reproduce naturalized gender differences” and “in doing so, they function to sustain hegemonic male dominance and female subordination” (Talbot, 2003, p. 472).

In the present study, an analysis of the connection between jokes and gender beliefs, ideologies and stereotypes will reveal the underpinnings of the gender order. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) define the concept of the ‘gender order’, which was first introduced by Jill Matthews in 1984, as “a patterned system of ideological and material practices, performed by individuals in a society, through which power relations between women and men are made,

and remade, as meaningful” (p. 61). Although the present study focuses primarily on jokes, parallels are drawn between jokes and proverbs, given that proverbs constitute another rich manifestation of gender issues. Schipper (2010) describes them (proverbs) as “short, pithy sayings, ingeniously embodying an admitted truth or cherished belief” (p. 22). She points out some characteristics of proverbs which, as I will show, are shared with jokes. Both proverbs and jokes have evaluative and conservative functions in society; they are (often) anonymous in origin and both make frequent use of stereotypes and humour. Even to a certain extent, one may argue that jokes, just like proverbs, have authoritative validity since they also make assertions that confirm the gender order. Indeed, they both usually represent a dominant view, and they are both highly *contagious*. Described as the “mother of all sciences” (Schipper, 2010), proverbs (like jokes) present “‘typical’ traits” which “aim at people’s suspending their own independent thought, so that they automatically agree” (Schipper, 2010, p. 27). Gender-related assumptions made in jokes are endorsed when the hearer confirms his/her acknowledgement by laughing. Likewise, as Schipper points out, “proverbs exaggerate, idealize, simplify, stereotype, jest and joke, and in contextual usage their truth is less relevant than their potential for negotiable meaning” (Schipper, 2010, p. 29).

The intermittent allusions to proverbs will be opportune given that, although proverbs and jokes often reflect persistent gender ideologies, some scholars claim that the stereotypes and ideologies reflected in proverbs are outdated. This perception is erroneous because, as I will show, proverbs still have a significant influence on our lives since they function as the vessels on which ideologies and stereotypes sail. As stressed in the *Penguin Dictionary of Proverbs*, “though the proverb is abandoned, it is not falsified” (as cited in Schipper, 2010, p. 21). Subsequently, the correlations with proverbs will be useful as they will enable the triple objective of examining the currency, prevalence, and cross-cultural spread of gender ideologies.

3. No laughing matter. Or is it?

Before addressing the basic arguments underlying the theories of humour and the fundamental propositions of the ethics of humour, let us first look at what the term *jokes* means in this paper. Jokes are formally defined as “short witty narratives with a punch line near the end defeating the expectations nurtured during the build up” (Thielemann, 2011, p. 152). However, as Dynel (2009) notes, “speakers often use [the] words ‘joking’ and ‘joke’ informally (as in ‘I’m only joking’ or ‘That was a joke’) to convey the idea that they do not

genuinely mean something, even if the humorous forms produced cannot be classified as canned jokes” (p. 1297).⁴ In the present study, it is predominantly in the latter sense that I use the term ‘jokes’. In other words, the term *jokes* is generally used to represent the impression speakers intend to give that ‘this is play’ in relation to their underlying intent (Bateson 1953; as cited in Dynel, 2011, p. 220) in the messages (memes etc.) they circulate on social media.⁵

Three main theories have been posited regarding the philosophy of humour: the “Superiority Theory”, the “Incongruity Theory” and the “Relief Theory”. The Superiority Theory postulates that humour “involves a feeling of pride [...] that occurs when one compares oneself to others and finds oneself superior in some way” (Shaw, 2010, p. 114). According to the Incongruity Theory, humour involves enjoying incongruity. In other words, something is perceived to be humorous when “one perceives it to be incongruous in some way and that one relates to this incongruity as a source of amusement rather than anxiety or as requiring problem-solving” (Shaw, 2010, p. 116). The Relief Theory, which has traditionally been traced back to Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud, establishes a connection between humour and the ways through which we let out suppressed mental energy (Shaw, 2010, p. 117). Morreall (2011) illustrates the Relief Theory with an analogy of the build-up of excess steam in a steam boiler: “boilers are fitted with relief valves to vent excess pressure...and laughter serves a similar function in the nervous system” (p. 16).

The jokes surrounding the coronavirus pandemic can generally be described as falling within the relief and incongruity hypotheses. These jokes centre on reversed patterns and properties that violate our set of expectations.⁶ People who delighted in them shifted from the traumatic experience and the associated negative emotions into a playful mood. In other words, the incongruence provided the dissociation and relief that was needed to escape the situation. In the current study, I will, however, show that, whereas the jokes about the coronavirus were generally incongruity jokes which were occasioned by the need for relief, those relating to the sexes in particular were superiority jokes.⁷ The problem with such jokes

⁴ An encompassing term used to represent the different types of verbal humour that do not formally resemble jokes is ‘conversational humour’, which is defined as the “various verbal chunks created spontaneously or repeated verbatim for the sake of amusing the recipient, either directly contributing to the semantic content of the ongoing conversation or diverting its flow into a humorous mode/ frame/ key, in which speakers need not genuinely mean what their humorous verbalisations convey” (Dynel, 2009, p. 1286).

⁵ The term also applies to the sample which are jokes with a punch line. Note however that not all the data analysed here fall within the category of canned jokes.

⁶ For example, the constant washing of hands, the fear of an invisible danger (virus), the demands of social distancing and the lockdown.

⁷ This theory involves laughing at others (e.g., minority groups) but it may also involve laughing at oneself. As Shaw (2010) explains, “one can laugh at oneself by distancing oneself from oneself and separating off another

resides in the question of why and how gender-related humour is often ethically objectionable.

Indeed, researchers who have studied the ethical dimensions of humour have observed that it is “much more difficult to show that merely finding something funny could be wrong than one might suppose” (Smuts, 2010, p. 334). In order to attempt this, let us refer to Smuts, who identifies three stages in joke responses, namely, joke comprehension, finding a joke funny, and laughing at jokes (Smuts, 2010, p. 334). These stages correspond to the following processes respectively: comprehension corresponds to recognition of the underlying assertions and beliefs which sustain the joke. Finding the joke funny implies an acceptance of the underlying beliefs; and laughing at the joke indicates an endorsement of the beliefs expressed in it. This argument is sustained by Sousa in his seminal 1987 work, *When is it wrong to laugh?*. He introduces the “Attitudinal Endorsement Theory” and argues that sexist jokes can be unethical in virtue of the prior knowledge and attitudes listeners need to possess in order to fill in background assumptions and understand them (as cited in Shaw, 2010, p. 113). LaFollette and Shanks (1993) also explain that a person will find an event, action, or claim humorous only if he or she holds the same underlying beliefs. For example, a joke which derides women will only be funny to someone who shares the core belief of the joke, i.e., “that women are mentally or morally inferior to men” (p. 337).

In this study I will highlight how gender-related jokes that circulate through memes function subtly as mechanisms for the (re)enforcement of the gender order by presenting beliefs that take the form of bona fide justifications.

4. Internet memes, virality and social influence

The term ‘meme’ was first introduced in 1976 by the biologist Richard Dawkins. Basing his observations on a comparison with genes, Dawkins maintains that memes are “a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation” which “propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain” just like “genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs” (1976, p. 192, as cited in Castaño Díaz, 2013, p. 84). Following Dawkins’ (1976) proposal, Sperber (1996) views memes as “cultural replicators or symbols stored in the human mind” as mental, public, or cultural representations (as cited in Molina, 381). Mental representations involve replicators within

part, the part that does the laughing in order to cope with challenging situations and elevate ourselves above them” (p. 115).

the individual (e.g., beliefs); public replicators involve those outside the individual (e.g., paintings); and cultural representations are a fusion of the first two, (mental and public representations) within a social group (Castano, 2013, p. 85, cited in Molina, p. 381). Internet memes are cultural representations because they are “external visual representations with embedded cultural value understood by certain groups of people” (Molina, p. 381-382).

With respect to communication disciplines, although internet memes do pose definitional problems (Dobson & Knezevic, 2017), they are basically defined as “individual bits of cultural information that propagate from person to person while undergoing variation, selection, and retention” (Guadagno et al., 2013, p. 2313). They may be hyper-links, videos, images, texts or phrases that spread rapidly like a virus through e-mails, chats, forums, or social networks (Castaño Díaz, 2013, p. 97; see also Dobson & Knezevic, 2017). Memes are characterised by certain features. They are visual, intertextual, culture or group specific, viral, characterised by imitation and evolution and they have a stance (Molina, 2020, p. 387).

Studies show that most memes are created to generate entertainment (Molina, 2020, p. 380), and social commentary (Guadagno et al., 2013, p. 2312) and that the goal of memes “is to be known well enough to replicate within a group” (Castaño Díaz, 2013, p. 97). Tama (2018) points out that the typical Millennial watches 20–30 memes every day (as cited in Molina, 2020, p. 380). One factor that enhances the virality of memes is humour (Guadagno et al., 2013; Castaño Díaz, 2013; Dobson & Knezevic, 2017; Molina, 2020). Indeed, Bauckhage (2011, p. 42) describes internet memes as “inside jokes or pieces of hip underground knowledge, that many people are in on” (as cited in Molina, 2020, p. 384). In addition to providing humour and entertainment, internet memes also reveal sociocultural values while reflecting and facilitating the formation of public opinion (Dobson & Knezevic, 2017, p. 779). They can be described as “documentations of the fabric of societies” (Nahon and Hemsley, 2013, p. xii, as cited in Dobson & Knezevic, 2017, p. 779), since they reveal what is important at any given time.

Guadagno, Rempala, Murphy and Okdie (2013) report two factors that facilitate the proliferation of internet memes and its consequent social influence: (1) emotional contagion⁸, i.e., “the convergence of one’s emotional state with the emotional states of those with whom one is observing or interacting” (p. 2312) and (2) social validation, i.e., “the tendency for individuals to look to others to see what others are doing to determine if a behavior is normative and appropriate” (p. 2313). Memes are therefore a powerful source of social

⁸ “A particular form of ‘contagion’”, which is the “rapid spread of influential information among people” (Guadagno et al., 2013, p. 2312).

learning which transmits cultural traits that are constantly adopted or rejected “through a complex interplay of social, emotional, and cognitive processes” (Guadagno et al., 2013, p. 2312). Indeed, they play a crucial role in reproducing, reinforcing, and circulating social stereotypes (Dobson & Knezevic, 2017). Dobson and Knezevic (2017) posit that “some memes do the subtle work of spreading not just the text-image messages themselves, but also the underlying values and judgments” (p. 778) since “memes are a site of ideological reproduction” which “not only reflect stereotypes, but also impact the way people understand them” (p. 779). Consequently, the stance of a meme, which is the “social role of the content”, can promote micro-aggressions, since memes can be used to ridicule certain groups of people and reinforce negative stereotypes (Molina, 2020, p. 385). Memes can therefore be perceived as pieces of social commentary infused with humour. They have significant social influence because they enable the subtle but rapid and effective spread of stereotypes and ideologies mainly because they are considered as jokes.

5. Method

5.1 Materials and procedure

The data for this exploratory research were collected between March and June 2020 through a random selection of internet memes and other forms of gender-related messages that were circulated through social media, mainly WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional data were also gathered from newspaper reports that were circulated via WhatsApp (in the form of jokes) as well as magazine articles that collected and commented on the internet memes. Messages that were reflective of gender ideologies and stereotypes were selected. Specifically, the main genre collected for analysis was that of the joke as recontextualized in memes and circulated on social media.

Since memes “braid text and image” (Milner 2013b, 2363, as cited in Dobson & Knezevic, 2017, p. 784), the data of the present study includes both visual and textual elements such as videos, texts, and images from different countries. Whereas it was easy to identify the source of some of these samples (e.g., Ghana, Spain, and Greece), in the case of others, it was not. Nonetheless, the inability to identify the specific geographic source of all the materials did not negatively affect the study. Rather, since the COVID-19 pandemic was not restricted to any particular society(s), it allowed reflections on how the crisis had spread and reduced the world into a global village, bringing together people from widely different backgrounds in one common experience.

Reference to the ‘coronavirus’ or ‘covid19’ either in the data itself or the comments it generated on social media was an essential criterion in gathering the corpus. In addition, statements and other nonverbal reactions (e.g., use of emojis) from people were particularly helpful in identifying which of the data were (sexist) jokes and was therefore also used as a criterion. As Smuts (2010, p. 334) notes, there are two competing views of what constitutes a sexist joke. For the purposes of the present paper, I merged both views in my definition given that, as I will show in this study, both claims are relevant. I will therefore define a sexist joke as one which expresses a sexist view, and which can cause a sexism-related harm.

5.2 Analytical framework: (Feminist) Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)

Gender violence is an insidious social problem which has been described as a “secret pandemic”. This definition presents a picture of a problem which is known to exist worldwide but yet qualifies to be described as hidden. The paradox in this definition lies mainly in the fact that gender-related dominance is often sustained by hegemony (Van Dijk, 2001) and discourse is indeed one of the powerful vehicles that subtly perpetuate the gender order (see Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk, 2001).

The term ‘discourse’ has been defined by Fairclough (2003) as “ways of representing aspects of the world - the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the ‘mental world’ of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world” (p. 124). In relation to gender, a “discourse of gender or varied discourses of gender” refer to “the working of a particular set of ideas about gender in some segment or segments of society” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 42).

Just as discourse serves for the reproduction of the gender order, it is also an equally powerful channel for challenging the gender status quo. Hence, one efficient way for analysing these dynamics is through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which critically investigates “social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use (or in discourse)” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 10). CDA has been defined as “being fundamentally interested in analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 10).

A characteristic example of “opaque (and sometimes transparent) structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 10) is sexism. From a feminist perspective, Lazar (2007) points out that “issues of gender, power, and ideology have become increasingly more complex and subtle” (p. 141). Feminist

Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) builds on the tenets of CDA and has been described as “a political perspective on gender, concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power, and ideology in discourse” (Lazar, 2007, p. 144). It has a “radical emancipatory agenda” of revealing “gender as an ideological structure”, examining “the complexity of gender and power relations”, and highlighting “the role of discourse in the (de)construction of gender” through feminist analytical activism (Lazar, 2007).

Indeed, language is a pervasive part of everyday human existence. And so are gendered oppositions (differences) which have been described as “ubiquitous, permeating our experience by appearing in all kinds of sites and in all kinds of forms” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 37). Some linguistic genres such as jokes and proverbs form intrinsic parts of our everyday lives as well and, thus, become excellent tools for the reiteration of gender values and expectations. The discourses they circulate are carriers par excellence of gender oppositions which function as the substratum of the gender status quo. Proverbs⁹ will be advantageous for the present study in that the themes identified in the data on jokes will be categorised according to the gender ideologies reflected in proverbs. They will be valuable because in concise fixed artistic forms, proverbs sum up the stereotypes and ideologies about which jokes are created. As Schipper (2010) notes, there is a remarkable similarity between proverbs from different cultures, and “quite a number of proverbs transmit exactly the same idea” since they are “*synonyms*, even though this idea is expressed in widely different images” (p. 26).

Schipper’s (2010) work on gender ideologies in proverbs is therefore used as an instrument for establishing the following themes that are identified in the sample:

- 1) the objectification of women
- 2) the image of men as ‘naturally’ polygamous
- 3) the cunning nature of women who attempt to control men
- 4) surprise about the existence of caring men
- 5) the assumption that female intelligence and power is destructive

These themes are articulated around particular (stereotypical) representations of men and women and involve evaluations and assumptions that can be linked to underlying

⁹ The proverbs in this study were selected from Schipper’s (2010) seminal collection of proverbs around the globe, *Never marry a woman with big feet*. It is interesting to note that some of the countries from which the data were gathered were also sources of the proverbs selected from Schipper (2010), e.g., Ghana, Spain and Greece.

ideologies. At a broader level, they are part of gendered discourses, as “ways of representing the world” (Fairclough, 2003).

6. Analysis

In this section, we will discuss the ramifications of gender-based jokes from the perspective presented above. The analysis is exploratory.

6.1 “Woman and horse want a worthy rider” [Greek]¹⁰

A key theme identified in the memes is the objectification of women. A striking example was a video in which a man displayed the things he had stocked up for the lockdown. These included an abundance of groceries, a video game, alcoholic beverages, and a gagged woman locked up in what looked like a closet. The discourse that represents women in this way enhances their image as objects for the satisfaction of men as they classify women with objects such as animals and food. This ideological representation is reflected in several proverbs as in the German proverb “bed, wine and woman comfort the body” (Schipper, 2010, p. 192).

Writers such as Morreall (2017) have made the important distinction between humour as play and laughter as signal. That notwithstanding, it remains clear that both humour and laughter on the part of hearers of jokes like these indicate, at the minimum, a perception of normalcy of the ideology inherent in the joke. In other words, the circulation of such jokes suggests that these ideological beliefs are acceptable and, thus, they normalise the assumption that women are objects of pleasure. As LaFollette and Shanks (1993) point out, in order to find a discourse humorous, one “must think that those patterns (of beliefs) contain or imply some insight or ‘truth’ about the persons, things or events in question” (p. 334). Consequently, humour serves to anchor the negative stereotypes which are circulated and perpetuated through the viral messages.

Humour can have negative consequences due to the role played by stereotypes in supporting gender prejudice and injustice. It (humour) is a potentially “powerful political tool because ... it is capable of focusing our attention to particular descriptions of persons, things or events” and “like any tool, it can bring destruction or build beautiful edifices, depending on who wields the tool, and for what purposes” (LaFollette & Shanks, 1993, p. 336).

¹⁰ Proverb from Schipper (2010, p. 185).

Certainly, sexist jokes not only endorse the stereotypes and ideologies inherent in them, but they also promote violence against women. Strikingly, the present linguistic analysis reflects the current social realities of the COVID-19 era. The UN announced a significant increase in gender violence worldwide and the Executive Director of UN Women described it as a “shadow pandemic” (April 6, 2020). As Mills (2008) affirms:

... when any group, be it lesbians or women in general are repeatedly treated as sex objects rather than as human beings in jokes, in pornography, in advertisements, in the media, in films, in books, etc, it is quite possible that this dehumanisation makes it easier for others to restrict, rape, assault and even kill individuals from these groups (p. 72)

6.2 “If a man is unfaithful to his wife, it is like spitting from a house into the street, but if a woman is unfaithful to her husband, it is like spitting from the street into the house” [Chinese; English, USA] ¹¹

The image of men as ‘naturally’ polygamous, unwilling to stay at home with their wives, and weighed down due to the quarantine was a recurring theme which was reiterated in numerous memes. Conversely, several of the COVID-19-related jokes showed women extremely elated at the prospect of having their husbands at home with them due to the restrictions. This reinforces the assumption reflected in several proverbs that men have a ‘natural tendency’ to strive for freedom: “The woman and the cat have their room in the house, the husband and the dog in the yard [Letzeburgish]”; “Women and cats at home; men and dogs in the street [Catalan/French]” (Schipper, 2010, p. 288).

In one cartoon, an extremely bored looking bulldog sat in a couch with a bottle of water on a table beside him and with the inscription “*married* men right now at *home*” (my emphasis) above the picture. Another stance found on the internet read “when you get corona virus along with your wife and it was your only chance to get away from her” (Vandana, 2020). Other illustrative texts include:

TEXT 1: Daily Smile at Covid-19's Expense ;-)

Coronavirus stress relief:

...

This virus has done what no woman had been able to do...cancel all sports, shut down all bars, and keep men at home!!! (Reers, 2020)

¹¹ Proverb from Schipper (2010, p. 181).

and

- TEXT 2: I am beginning to suspect a woman invented this Corona virus because:
1. Mostly men die.
 2. Football matches cancelled.
 3. Sports events cancelled.
 4. Bars & pubs closed.
 5. No socializing in public
 6. You have to stay at home *with your wife* for 24/7!!! (my emphasis)

The use of the word ‘suspect’ in text 2 reflects a cautious distrust and refers to another common stereotype about women which will be discussed in the following section, namely the notion that women are questionable, cunning, or dangerous. In other videos, men were jubilant for having been quarantined away from home (Danan, 2020).

This imagery of men as belonging to the public sphere as against women belonging to the private sphere¹² is closely related to men’s ‘rights for sexual adventures’ as compared to the need to control and limit the movement of women in order to repress female sexual activity: “For a girl there is one door ajar, and it has a wooden bolt, for a man there are forty doors ajar [Komi]” (Schipper, 2010, p. 276). Other examples of memes which focus on these stereotypes include the following:

TEXT 3: For only \$3,500, I and my crew will come to your house dressed as coronavirus rescue team. We will rescue you from your wife, take you to your girlfriend’s place for 14 days quarantine and bring you back home afterwards. (With two smiley face emojis inserted after text). (Millionaire Businessman, 2020)

TEXT 4: If you are staying at home with money you are in isolation, if you are staying at home, broke, you are in quarantine, but if you are staying at home, broke, and with a troublesome wife, you are in total lockdown. (With four one-eye-closed-tongue-out emojis inserted after text).

TEXT 5: Avoid overcrowded place (sic) like your boyfriend’s heart. Is somebody jotting things down? (With one closed-eye-smile and two tears-of-joy emojis inserted after text)

TEXT 6: PRESS RELEASE
The Married Women Association of Ghana (MAWOAG) has expressed their profound gratitude to the President of Ghana Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo for taking bold measures to curb the deadly coronavirus outbreak.

¹² This is what Schipper, among others, terms gendered places and spaces (2010, p. 287).

According to the secretary of the association, Madam Jennifer Lopez Odenkey, the bold steps will go a long way to save the people of this country especially members of the association. The statement said, although there has (sic) been few recorded cases of fighting in some homes, yet the number of sexual intercourse has gone up by 75% within the first week of the STAY AT HOME.

According to the secretary, the association will support the government to extend the STAY AT HOME period when the need arises to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The statement calls on all members to be in short and attractive dresses, and even naked when necessary within this period. They have warned against unnecessary fighting that can force the government to lift the ban, but rather extend the lockdown to cover all the regions for their members to enjoy.

SIGNED:

JENNIFER LOPEZ ODENKEY
SECRETARY (MAWOAG)

In text 6, the repeated use of capital letters for ‘stay at home’ emphasises the deep-seated wish of some married women that their husbands spend more time with them at home.

Certainly, the relegation of women to the private sphere enables the delimitation of the freedom of women and the establishment of hierarchy within the gender status quo. This is because stereotypes prescribe and thus serve to control the behaviour of both women and men. The “good” stereotypes prescribe how to behave, and the “bad” how not to (Talbot, 2003, p. 473). An example is seen in a similar proverb: “If a man sins it is like spitting out of the window, if a woman sins it is like spitting in through the window [Estonian]” (Schipper, 2010, p. 181). Prescription and delimitation result in naming and shaming. As Schipper (2010) notes, “in proverbs, female behaviour qualified as ‘deviant’ is usually stigmatized as ‘badness’” (p. 300). Proverbs and jokes are similar in this regard in that the latter also “serve to keep the minorities ‘in their place’ and thus to perpetuate, with varying degrees of subtlety, various forms of oppression” (LaFollette & Shanks, 1993, p. 337).

The image of women as mainly dependent on men economically, and men on women sexually was also reinforced in the data analysed. This gender ideology has been one of the ways through which women have been sexually objectified and dominated. The perpetuation of discrimination through jokes is even more subtle and peculiar in that these memes employ humour and are supposed to be taken lightly. Gervais and Wilson (2005) note this by affirming that “laughter (and the joy associated with it) does indeed appear to be linked with play, not only in children but also in apes and human adults” (p. 408). Nonetheless, it is

exactly this characteristic that makes them an insidious and powerful tool in the perpetuation of gender injustice. As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) have incisively noted, “the fact that these themes emerge in joking lends them an established status – a status as old information rather than as a new topic” (pp. 42-43). It therefore becomes a means of representing and perpetuating the negative stereotypes about women and, subsequently, naturalizing the gender order. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, a dominant feature shared by jokes and proverbs which highlights the important relationship between discourse and ideology is anonymity. Mills (2008) explains:

... jokes are a complex way of constituting women as a ‘minority group’ without taking responsibility for that exclusion. Sexist jokes allow generally unacceptable views of women to be expressed, because the person who tells the joke generally can claim that they themselves did not make up the joke. (p. 71)

6.3 “The husband is the head, the wife is the neck; she can turn him whichever way she wants” [Russian]¹³

In contrast with the dominant social order, which is often perceived as the ‘natural’ order, the image of women as significantly influential and powerful is also remarkably persistent in jokes and proverbs alike. Closely related to men’s desire to be free is the image of the woman as nagging, controlling, burdensome and having a greater amount of evil than good. Several of the jokes analysed convey the idea that although the man is supposed to be the leader, like the head, he is controlled by the woman who is equated to the neck. This is confirmed in proverbs such as “he who takes a wife finds a master [French/English, USA]” (Schipper, 2010, p. 255), “A wife is a giant (Ga)” and “A woman’s willpower will pierce even a rock [Japanese]” (Schipper, 2010, p. 238).

The sample analysed in this study reveals this widespread assumption. In one meme, which was circulated via WhatsApp and online during the pandemic, a man and a woman were depicted as having an online wedding. They both appeared on separate computer screens in front of a priest and the following inscription was added to the image:

TEXT 7: Margaret, do you take Ryan to be your husband? If so, hit the “control” button.

¹³ Proverb from Schipper (2010, p. 38).

In another sample that was analysed, a man sat behind a computer with his hand in a rubber glove and his wedding ring *on* the glove. The following caption was added:

TEXT 8: When you are more scared of your wife than the virus. (With one tears-of-joy emoji inserted after text). (Marieeee, n.d)

Several common memes which normalise this stereotype about women as nags were also circulated. In a video that went viral, an elderly Greek man was reported by the *Greek City Times* to have revealed that he could not stay home because there was another virus in his home (his wife) and “his biggest fear was not the coronavirus, but staying at home with his wife” (GCT, March 17, 2020). Such positions highlight male and female differences and the resultant conflicts as reflected in the proverb: “Cups and spoons cannot live without tinkling [Udmurt]” (Schipper, 2010, p. 271). As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) assert, “gender oppositions focus not simply on difference but on the potential for conflict, incomprehension, and mystification: the *battle of the sexes*” (p. 36). Women are thus often perceived as treacherous, burdensome and evil: “Ninety-nine tricks of a woman you can discover, but the hundredth even the Devil did not find out [German]” (Schipper, 2010, p. 248). They are “consistently portrayed as ... strident nags patiently endured or kept in check by strong and silent men” (Graddol & Swann, 1989, p. 2, as cited in Talbot, 2003, p. 469). This common stereotype which makes womanhood synonymous with evil was portrayed in some COVID-19 jokes (TEXT 9) as well as some others which were not directly related to the pandemic but were shared during the lockdown (TEXTS 10 & 11). Text 9 appeared with a picture of a dug empty grave and shovels:

TEXT 9: Day 7 of the quarantine. My wife took up gardening but won't tell what she's going to plant.

TEXT 10: Cashier: That'll be \$345

Satan (With one devil emoji inserted): Tell ur man it's \$500.

Her: Baby, everything came up to \$1500.

Satan: (With one hand on face emoji) Jesus Christ!!

TEXT 11: Even if she doesn't check your phone she knows when you are cheating or talking to another lady. It's a gift Satan gave them. (With one one-eye-closed-tongue-out emoji inserted after text).

6.4 “Girl, rejoice not over your wedding dress; there is much trouble behind it.”

[Arabic]¹⁴

Gender stereotypes about men and women are often built on a set of oppositions that are strikingly similar cross-culturally. On the one hand, men are believed to be “strong, aggressive, sex-driven, impassive, and rough” whereas on the other hand, women are perceived to be “weak, passive, relationship driven, emotional, and gentle” etc. (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 35). Men are associated with “the positive poles of the traits of independence, rationality, and assertiveness” whereas women are associated with those of “expressivity and affectiveness” (Amâncio, 1993, p. 164). An individual who tends to display the traits not associated with her/his group normally draws a lot of attention. For example, showing tenderness and being caring is hardly seen as a masculine trait. These oppositions form the basis of societal preconceptions and gender stereotypes. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) highlight the force of these oppositions by noting that they are “extremely powerful, both because of their place in gender ideology, and because of the ways in which their representations permeate society” (p. 36).

In line with this, another theme which emerged in the memes that were circulated during the pandemic was surprise about the existence of caring men. These memes consisted of home settings which depicted men who were undoing their wives’ braids or weaves. Another meme which normalised the stereotype of gendered places (i.e., woman as the homemaker and cook) and how unusual it is for a man to be nice to his wife features text only and states:

TEXT 12: Be nice to your wife. Restaurants are closed! (With about seven laughing emojis inserted).
(Vandana, 2020)

Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) have argued that traditional gender oppositions “are closely tied to a division of labor that permeates society at every level” and “this is not simply a division of physical and mental labor, but of emotional labor as well” (p. 37). Having been assigned the emotional labour of toughness and indifference, men are typically not associated with caring attitudes but are rather seen as the source of a woman’s ruin once she enters into marriage: ‘The pearls the bride wears at her wedding, are the tears she will cry afterwards [Spanish]’ (Schipper, 2010, p. 99). Jokes and proverbs that insist on the “(un)naturalness” of certain behaviours of men and women, further reify the “web of

¹⁴ Proverb from Schipper (2010, p. 99).

associations that constitutes gender” and which happen to be “tied together in the popular mind” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 36).

6.5 “Women’s wisdom destroys houses” [Russian] ¹⁵

Another revealing detail about the COVID-19 jokes was related to the perception of feminism. Several are the proverbs which highlight a ‘lack of intelligence’ in women: e.g., “Woman’s intelligence is a child’s intelligence [West Africa]” (Schipper, 2010, p. 40). Some of these proverbs applaud the display of lack of intelligence in women: “When a woman has no talents, she is already doing very well [or: she is already virtuous] [Chinese]” (Schipper, 2010, p. 208). Others warn about the consequences of women being too clever: “If too clever a woman gets married, she does not succeed (Twi)”; “a mule that whinnies and a woman that speaks Latin never come to any good [English, USA]” (Schipper, 2010, p. 208). These beliefs reflect the widespread assumption that women’s wisdom disrupts the existing gender order. Subsequently, such ideologies become instrumental in curtailing female power.

This theme of female intelligence and power was reflected in a coronavirus-related meme in which feminists were bundled together with other negatively perceived groups (dictators, republicans, terrorists etc.) as part of the destructive forces of Spain. The term ‘feminazis’ which is a combination of ‘feminism’ and ‘nazi (dictatorship, chaos)’ is popularly used in Spain (and elsewhere) to describe feminists who have been perceived as ‘destroyers’ of the family unit which is an important building block of society.¹⁶ In the afore-mentioned joke, the coronavirus icon is seen saying “Bah, con España ni os molestéis. Aquí ya se matan ellos [*Uh, don’t even bother yourselves with Spain. They are already killing themselves here.*]” (VariousAuthors, 2020).

7. Summary and discussion

Certainly, masculinity and femininity are neither experienced nor defined in identical ways everywhere. Subsequently, we cannot make sweeping conclusive statements on hegemonic male dominance and female subordination. That notwithstanding, as Schipper (2010) notes, an extensive cross-cultural analysis of proverbs illustrates the existence of universal patterns since there is “a core message in each proverb” that “remains constant

¹⁵ Proverb from Schipper (2010, p. 208).

¹⁶ Valenti (2007) notes that ruining the family unit is one of the chains of ‘the horrors’ that ‘pesky feminists’ are supposedly responsible for (2007, pp. 11-13).

despite the changing contexts” (p. 28) and “the underlying worries subsist” (p. 274). The same can be said about gender-related internet memes. In the present study, the diverse jokes that were gathered from varied geographical locations, yet with similar thematic overtones, suggest that there is much similarity between gender ideologies worldwide.

Indeed, joking during the COVID-19 pandemic must have been beneficial in that by providing comic relief during the traumatic events, it mitigated the fear and pessimism that characterised the period. Nevertheless, this paper has also shown that despite the aforementioned benefits of the coronavirus jokes in general, humour in the gender-related memes in particular, like any other play, camouflaged and discreetly perpetuated negative stereotypes and ideologies about gender (among others) and were therefore morally objectionable. As Hristova (2014) argues, memes develop at “moments of contestation of dominant narratives and through their participatory structure of imitation and mutation, they allow for the dissolution of points of ideological conflict as well as for the reestablishment of a normative narrative” (p. 265, as cited in Dobson & Knezevic, 2017, p. 778). Due to their features of subtlety and anonymity, these jokes functioned as excellent tools for reproducing the gender order.

As shown in this paper, although the coronavirus-related jokes can generally be classified as incongruity jokes which fulfil a function of relief, those related to gender issues cross over categories. They are indeed superiority jokes which are efficiently subsumed under incongruity and relief jokes, which makes them even more insidious and powerful in gender enforcement. This is especially so because another important feature of the culture of humour is that “we do not simply hear jokes but *reiterate* them” (Shaw, 2010, p. 116). Gender-related jokes and proverbs are therefore particularly disturbing given the inevitable influence of public language on sex role socialization and the reinforcement of stereotypical images of women (Schipper, 2010, p. 300). The internet, as a medium for mass communication, has been enormously instrumental in the dissemination and reification of gender stereotypes at a time when the entire world was already riveted in a disturbing international observatory.

8. Conclusion

Gender inequalities and discrimination are still prevalent worldwide and they continue to persist because the underlying beliefs, stereotypes, and ideologies which sustain them are widely circulated in discourse and deeply entrenched in our subconscious minds. The study looked at five key themes and the perspectives built around them, which reflect such beliefs,

stereotypes and ideologies in the sample analysed: the objectification of women, the perception of men as ‘naturally’ polygamous, the perception of women who attempt to control men as cunning and dangerous, surprise about the existence of caring men and the assumption that female intelligence and power is destructive.

The rapid circulation of the underlying ideologies through viral social media jokes in memes (and through proverbs) plays an important role in the transmission and reproduction of social norms as well as the reinforcement of prejudice. They add to, as well as impact, public discourse on gender issues. They influence human thoughts and behaviour and serve to maintain (or transform) the status quo by confirming, legitimising, and reproducing power relations between the sexes. Jokes in particular are extremely powerful, given that they are often seen as play and are thus easy vehicles for camouflaging the import of the ideologies they reiterate. Some of these discourses illustrate positive characteristics of women as well as men. However, unfortunately, the majority of them only reify the negative stereotypes associated with women. The playful feature of jokes and the widely accepted characteristic of proverbs as commonsensical truths often stop us from becoming aware of the effect of the circulation and reproduction of such marginalising discourses on the normalisation of gender discrimination.

These findings are particularly noteworthy when one considers that humour is a pervasive feature of human communication, making it an ever-available vehicle for circulating existing beliefs. The existing status quo is often perceived as natural and normal because of the prevalence of these gender ideologies, which are part of a patriarchal system of power relations between men and women. However, rather than embracing such ways of thinking under the guise of essentialism and naturalization, we must beware of how easily these ideologies spread through genres such as jokes and proverbs, especially on social media nowadays, and, based on their commonness, tend to be perceived as normal. Rather than argue that the prevailing gender order is natural because of the commonness of gender ideologies, it must be noted that it is rather the commonness of gender ideologies that makes them seem natural. Subsequently, a cross-cultural analysis of gendered discourses such as the one attempted in the present study are essential since they contribute to the identification of the underlying currents necessary to transform mentalities.

References

- Amâncio, L. (1993). Stereotypes as ideologies. The case of gender categories. *Revista de Psicologia Social*, 8(2), 163-170.

- Budgeon, S. (2014). The dynamics of gender hegemony: Femininities, masculinities and social change. *Sociology*, 48(2), 317-334.
- Carus, P. (1898). On the philosophy of laughing. *The Monist*, 8(2), 250-272.
- Castaño Díaz, C. M. (2013). Defining and characterizing the concept of Internet Meme. *CES Psicología*, 6(2), 82-104.
- Danan, P. (2020). 16 March. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/PaulyDanan/status/1239677667680620544?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etwetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1239677667680620544%7Ctwgr%5E&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thenewsminute.com%2Farticle%2Fmisogyny-time-coronavirus-lockdown-can-sexist-jokes-stop-now-121316 [Accessed: 30 June 2020].
- Dynel, M. (2009). Beyond a joke: Types of conversational humour. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 3(5), 1284-1299.
- Dynel, M. (2011). Joker in the pack. Towards determining the status of humorous framing in conversations. In M. Dynel (Ed.). *The pragmatics of humour across discourse domains* (217-241). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Dobson, K., & Knezevic, I. (2017). 'Liking and Sharing' the stigmatization of poverty and social welfare: Representations of poverty and welfare through Internet memes on social media. *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society*, 15(2), 777-795.
- Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (2003). *Language and gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge: London.
- Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. A. Van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction* (pp. 258–284). London: SAGE. – please move this after the references to Fairclough as single author
- GCT. (March 17, 2020). I'm not staying home, there is another 'coronavirus' there ... my wife. *Greek City Times*. Retrieved from <https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/03/17/im-not-staying-home-there-is-another-coronavirus-there-my-wife/> [Accessed 2020, May 17].
- Gervais, M., & Wilson, D. S. (2005). The evolution and functions of laughter and humor: A synthetic approach. *The Quarterly review of biology*, 80(4), 395-430.
- Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Guadagno, R. E., Rempala, D. M., Murphy, S., & Okdie, B. M. (2013). What makes a video go viral? An analysis of emotional contagion and Internet memes. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(6), 2312-2319.
- Keltner, D., & Bonanno, G. A. (1997). A study of laughter and dissociation: distinct correlates of laughter and smiling during bereavement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73(4), 687-702.
- LaFollette, H., & Shanks, N. (1993). Belief and the Basis of Humor. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 30(4), 329-339.
- Lazar, M. M. (2007). Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a feminist discourse praxis. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 4(2), 141 — 164.

- Mariece, A. (n.d). Retrieved from <https://ifunny.co/picture/when-you-re-more-scared-of-your-wife-than-the-5IyrhVza7> [Accessed 2020, May 17].
- Matthews, J. (1984). *Good and mad women: The historical construction of femininity in twentieth century Australia*, Sydney: George Allen and Unwin.
- Mills, S. (2008). *Language and sexism*: Cambridge University Press Cambridge.
- Millionaire Bussinessman (2020). 30 March. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/tboss_guy/status/1244576630028337153?lang=en (Accessed: 30 June 2020).
- Molina, M. D. (2020). What makes an internet meme a meme? Six essential characteristics. In S. Josephson, J. Kelly & K. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of visual communication: Theory, methods, and media* (pp. 380-394). New York: Routledge.
- Morreall, J. (1989). The rejection of humor in western thought. *Philosophy East and West*, 39(3), 243-265.
- Morreall, J. (2011). *Comic relief: A comprehensive philosophy of humor* (Vol. 27): John Wiley & Sons.
- Morreall, J. (2017). Philosophy of humor. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition). Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/humor/> [Accessed 2020, April 5].
- Pilcher, J., & Whelehan, I. (2004). *Fifty key concepts in gender studies*. London: Sage.
- Reers, B. (2020, November 4). Just a smile. Retrieved from <https://staedan.org/just-a-smile> [Accessed 2020, November 5].
- Rodin, G., de Groot, J., & Spivak, H. (1998). Trauma, dissociation, and somatization. In J. D. Bremner, & C. R. Marmar (Eds.), *Trauma, memory, and dissociation* (161-178). Washington DC: American Psychiatric Press.
- Schipper, M. (2010). *Never marry a woman with big feet: Women in proverbs from around the world*. Netherlands: Leiden University Press.
- Shaw, J. (2010). Philosophy of humor. *Philosophy Compass*, 5(2), 112-126.
- Smuts, A. (2010). The ethics of humor: Can your sense of humor be wrong? *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 13(3), 333-347.
- Talbot, M. (2003). Gender stereotypes: Reproduction and challenge. In J. Holmes & M. Meyerhoff (Eds.), *The handbook of language and gender* (Vol. 25, pp. 468–486). Maiden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Thielemann, N. (2011). Displays of “new” gender arrangements in Russian jokes. In M. Dynel (Ed.), *The Pragmatics of humour across discourse domains* (147-171). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Valenti, J. (2007). *Full frontal feminism: A young woman's guide to why feminism matters*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. Hamilton (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 352-371). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Vandana, M. (2020). Misogyny in the time of coronavirus lockdown: Can the sexist jokes stop now?, Opinion. *The News Minute*. Retrieved from <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/misogyny-time-coronavirus-lockdown-can-sexist-jokes-stop-now-121316> [Accessed 2020, June 30].

VariousAuthors. (2020, 26th February 2020). *El Jueves* 2231, 92. Retrieved from <https://www.nubico.es/premium/el-jueves-2231-varios-autores-2061561047628> [Accessed 2020, June 30).

Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2009). Critical discourse analysis: History, agenda, theory and methodology. In R. Wodak (Ed.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (Vol. 2, pp. 1-33). London: SAGE.

Benedicta Adokarley LOMOTEY is a senior lecturer at the Department of Modern Languages (Spanish Section) at the University of Ghana. She completed a doctorate degree in Spanish Language and General Linguistics at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Madrid (Spain). Her main areas of research are Language and Gender and Foreign Language Teaching and Learning.