Hooked on Humour:
Achieving Rapport in Humorous Interactions between Men and Women who are Friends

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Dedication

😊 For dad, mum, and sis – life is all *haha hehe* 😊
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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Statement of authentication

List of tables (v)

List of appendices (vi)

Abstract (vii)

**Chapter 1: Introduction**  

1.1 Justification for the study  5

1.2 Research question  10

1.3 Scope of the present study  12

1.4 Overview of the study  15

**Chapter 2: Literature review**  

2.1 Defining humour in everyday interaction  19

2.1.1 Intercultural perspective on humour  26

2.1.2 Positive and negative perspectives on humour  27

2.1.3 Speaker and hearer(s): Verbal and non-verbal communication  38

2.2 Quantitative approaches to understanding humour and gender  47

2.3 Humour in the group setting  56

2.3.1 Strangers and friends in the group setting  61

2.3.2 Focused and non-focused humour in the group setting  64

2.4 Qualitative approaches to understanding humour  69

2.5 Theoretical perspectives of humour  81

2.5.1 Superiority theory  82
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2</td>
<td>Incongruity theory</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3</td>
<td>Relief or release theory</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>A model for considering impromptu humour in everyday interaction among friends</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 3: Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Explanation and rationale for the qualitative approach</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Minimising bias</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Research methods: Conversation analysis (CA) and ethnography</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1</td>
<td>Conversation analysis (CA)</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2</td>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Ethical issues</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Pilot studies</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Participants in the study</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.1</td>
<td>Size and composition of groups</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.2</td>
<td>Formation of mixed-gender groups: Friends interacting</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Role of the researcher</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Data collection procedures</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.1</td>
<td>Settings and tape recording</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.2</td>
<td>Non-participant observation and note taking</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.3</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Procedure for identifying and classifying humour into categories</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9.1</td>
<td>Step one: Identifying humour - the humorous instance (HI)</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9.2</td>
<td>Step two: Classifying the HIs into categories</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9.3</td>
<td>Speaker’s humour</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9.4</td>
<td>Hearer(s) response to humour</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.10 Analysis of data excerpts using CA and ethnographic techniques 180
3.11 Conclusion 184

Chapter 4: Quantitative analysis of humorous interaction 187

4.1 Men’s and women’s humour 189
4.1.1 Speaker’s humour 194
4.1.2 Recipient response to humour 195
4.1.3 Audience response to humour (one male or one female in audience) 197
4.1.4 Audience response to humour (two males or two females in audience) 199
4.2 Findings of the humour model 200
4.2.1 Facilitating conversational involvement 201
4.2.2 Clarifying and maintaining boundaries 205
4.2.3 Theoretical perspectives 208
4.3 Questionnaire 209
4.3.1 Closed questions 210
4.3.2 Open questions 220
4.4 Conclusion 224

Chapter 5: Qualitative analysis of humorous interaction 227

5.1 Facilitating conversational involvement 230
5.1.1 Collaborative construction of humour 231
5.1.2 Repetition 239
5.1.3 Mimicking 246
5.1.4 Self-disclosure 251
5.1.5 Expressing common ground 258
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1.6</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Clarifying and maintaining boundaries</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>Sexual humour</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2</td>
<td>Talking humorously about gender</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 6: Achieving rapport through humour**

| Section   | Title                                                                 | Page |
|-----------|                                                                      |------|
| 6.1       | Research question: What communication behaviours are employed by friends in mixed-gender groups to convey humour and maintain rapport in informal social interactions? | 309  |
| 6.1.1     | Focusing humour outside the group                                     | 313  |
| 6.1.2     | Focusing humour on a person in the present group                      | 317  |
| 6.1.3     | Self-focused humour                                                  | 324  |
| 6.1.4     | Non-focused humour                                                   | 327  |
| 6.1.5     | Humour and gender: Similarities and differences                       | 329  |
| 6.2       | Implications of the study for theory and contributions to knowledge  | 335  |
| 6.2.1     | Confirming the humour model                                           | 336  |
| 6.2.2     | New definition of humour                                              | 337  |
| 6.2.3     | Expanding the definition of rapport in humorous interaction           | 339  |
| 6.2.4     | Expanding the humour theories in everyday interaction                 | 341  |
| 6.3       | Limitations of the research                                          | 344  |
| 6.4       | Recommendations for further research                                  | 347  |
| 6.4.1     | Practical applications for using the humour model                     | 352  |

**Chapter 7: Hooked on humour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

iv
List of references 367

List of tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1</td>
<td>Non-verbal behaviours in the communication of humour</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.2</td>
<td>The humour model</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Non-verbal behaviours for identifying humour in this study</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>Five humour categories into which the HIs were coded</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Categories into which HIs were coded according to speaker’s humour</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4</td>
<td>Categories into which HIs were coded according to hearer(s) response</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Mean number of HIs contributed by men and women in four interactions</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Mean number of total HIs for men and women in each Humour Category</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>Order of occurrence of HIs by gender in the five Humour Categories</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.4</td>
<td>Number of instances of male and female speaker’s humour by type</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.5</td>
<td>Number of instances of male and female recipient responses to humour by type for the Ingroup (male) and Ingroup (female) categories</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.6</td>
<td>Number of instances of male and female audience response to humour by type (one male or one female in the audience)</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.7</td>
<td>Number of instances of male and female audience response to humour by type (two males or two females in the audience)</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.8 Facilitating conversational involvement: Number of times humour strategies contributed by men and women in each Humour Category 202
Table 4.9 Clarifying and maintaining boundaries: Number of times humour strategies contributed by men and women in each Humour Category 206
Table 4.10 Occurrence of each humour theory in the four group interactions 208
Table 4.11 Number of men and women reporting the most humorous person 210
Table 4.12 Number of men and women reporting the least humorous person 211
Table 4.13 Number of men and women reporting a sense of humour 212
Table 4.14 Number of men and women reporting being told they had a sense of humour 213
Table 4.15 Number of men and women commenting on the importance of a sense of humour in a romantic partner 214
Table 4.16 Number of men and women reporting how they used humour in social situations 216
Table 4.17 How the men and women reported feeling before the group interaction 218
Table 4.18 How the men and women reported feeling after the group interaction 219

**List of appendices**

Appendix A Definitions of key terms 399-401
Appendix B Transcription conventions 402
Appendix C Selected transcripts 403-430
Appendix D Questionnaire for PhD research 431
Appendix E Flow of topics 432-435
Abstract

Based on analyses of recorded real-life social interactions among English men and women friends living in England, this study shows how crucial it is to use a range of communication behaviours to express humour and maintain rapport. Men and women are keen to learn how to improve and preserve their social relationships (Mulac, Bradac & Gibbons, 2001). However, the immense literature on human communication ignores the multifaceted and positive force of humour in the social interactions of friends (Lynch, 2002). In addition, there is an absence of firm theoretical principles on which to develop counselling sessions and teach individuals to develop humour skills. Therefore, this study examines how participants incorporate humour in their ongoing conversation to achieve rapport in face-to-face social interaction in mixed-gender groups.

This investigation is situated within the fields of human communication and humour and gender research. The necessarily communicative approach involved qualitative data collection and description, namely conversation analysis (CA) and ethnography, complemented by quantitative analysis.

Communication context, that is, interactants’ attitudes and personality, their history, background knowledge, and how they relate to each other, are shown to play an important role in preserving friendships and maintaining rapport. Light is thrown on specific behaviours that could help men and women nurture their
friendships and it is explained why there is a need for individuals to view
humour as a positive force in their communication with one another.

It is argued that misunderstandings may arise if men and women do not
understand the way each gender uses humour. Thus, men and women could
empower themselves by objectively examining how they interact, challenge the
perceptions each may have about their own communication, and gain a more
thorough understanding of verbal and non-verbal strategies for facilitating
humour. By harmonising their verbal and non-verbal behaviours, men and
women can use humour not only to express affiliation and commonality but also
as a strategy for testing the boundaries of gender in a non-threatening way, to
minimise differences, and to discover more about the opposite gender.

In time and with further academic inquiry, humour could be acknowledged as a
critical communication tool for establishing and sustaining relationships. The
hope is that this study could be a catalyst for future research on promoting
humour as a key element of daily social interaction.
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief; original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

.................................................................

(Signature)

Linda Ann Candita
Chapter 1  Introduction

The communication of humour has long been a fascinating phenomenon in western society. Although humour occurs almost wherever people are engaged in social interaction, it seems to defy examination. For two and a half thousand years, scholars from Plato and Aristotle, Descartes (1649/1989) and Hobbes (1651/1974), Kant (1790/1972) and Schopenhauer (1819/1964), to the more recent Bergson (1911/2005) and Freud (1905/1960), have tried to understand and provide explanations for it (see Chiaro, 1992). The following brief review of western humour from ancient Greece and Rome to present times provides a contextual background against which to view humour among friends in real-life everyday interaction.

The term humour derives from the Latin meaning liquid or body fluid. The concept of people’s personality in modern western thinking originates from ancient physiological theory, which was still present in the European Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Arikha, 2007; Henley, 2007). The theory holds that the human body is filled with four fluids, that is, cardinal humours. The humours, namely yellow bile, black bile, phlegm and blood, were thought to determine a person’s health, mood, and character. When one humour predominated, physical or mental illness resulted. Accordingly, individuals with too much blood were considered sanguine, those with too much yellow bile were choleric, those with too much black bile were thought to be melancholy, and
people with too much phlegm were phlegmatic. Although modern medicine eventually proved this theory to be false, it continued for many centuries (Arikha, 2007). Furthermore, the terms, melancholic, sanguine, choleric, and phlegmatic are still used today to describe a person’s character (Henley, 2007). Therefore, the theory of the four humours has deeply affected modern ideas of health and personality.

Similarly, as Russell (1991) argues, ancient comic writings have influenced the comic writings of today. Nonetheless, the appropriateness of humour may vary between different periods in history, and between different cultures or social milieu. Russell explains that comedy in ancient Greece and Rome was deeply rooted in folklore and had a huge impact on its citizens. The ancients held comedy and laughter in high esteem and they believed that laughter was a magic means of bestowing life. The aim of comedy, performed at various religious festivals, was chiefly to amuse and entertain, often using ridicule, exaggeration, or criticism of human nature and institutions, and usually ending happily. The humour in the plays written by Greek comedy dramatist, Aristophanes, and the comic plays of Roman dramatist, Plautus, for example, was lewd and coarse. However, humorous vulgarity was perhaps what the audience relished most (Matthews, 2004; Russell, 1991).

In the centuries that followed the fall of the Roman Empire came the Dark Ages, a time of economic and cultural decline in Europe. Documentation for the era is
sparse because there was a suppression of classical culture, including classical comedy during the general instability of the Dark Ages. Nonetheless, the Christian monks preserved ancient knowledge by carefully transcribing Greek and Roman texts (Chadwick, 1993).

By the Middle Ages, Bakhtin (1984) points out, humour was once again seen as having a central place in people’s everyday lives through medieval carnival. Humour was built on ancient comedy and inspired by various forms of comic folk culture. During this era, humour had a marked philosophical meaning, finding its way not only into the middle classes but also into the upper echelons of the church. Further, in its connection with medieval carnival, humour had the ability to create a sense of equality, that is, to make people feel equal. Carnival involves the "temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men … and of the prohibitions of usual life" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 15).

During the Renaissance, there was a revival of Roman stage comedies, which strongly influenced the comedies of Elizabethan dramatists such as Shakespeare and Ben Johnson (Dillon, 2003).

However, by the seventeenth century, according to Bakhtin (1984), the attitude toward humour had changed yet again. Humour was trivial rather than universal and frowned upon because of its association with the behaviour of the so-called lower classes. If people laughed too much they were perceived as foolish or morally depraved. Such a lack of understanding meant that even though
medieval carnival humour still had an influence on people’s lives, the influence was interpreted as negative and narrow. Bakhtin remarks that for some, humour gained favour as a social corrective and a means for condemning human stupidity and foolishness. This more formalised attitude toward humour carried over in the centuries that followed.

To some extent, the post-Renaissance view has influenced present-day thinking about humour. For instance, Ryan and Kanjorski (1998) and Ziv and Gadish (1990) consider humour as a negative activity that contains an element of aggression and hostility toward others. Furthermore, there is often the assumption that there is a time and a place for humour, and if something is humorous it cannot be important or have much significance. It is only since the early twentieth century that it has been regarded as a desirable social feature of a person’s personality to have a sense of humour (Wickberg, 2000). Possessing a sense of humour usually means that an individual is able to perceive, appreciate and express humour. If someone has a sense of humour it casts him or her in a positive light as a person who is approachable, friendly, and who does not take themselves too seriously (Craik, Lampert, & Nelson, 1996).

However, one of the difficulties with humour is its intrinsically subjective nature. What is humorous to some people may not be humorous to others. What seems humorous today may not be so at another time. What people consider humorous is influenced by various contextual factors, such as communication context, the
relationship between interactants, their shared beliefs, values, background knowledge, and personality characteristics. A further variable mentioned by some scholars is that of gender. According to Palmer (1994), it is a widely held view that humour is possible or permissible within a certain context depending on whether individuals are men or women.

Although it would seem that humour is a universal human phenomenon and has been of interest to scholars throughout the ages, research on the topic was mostly neglected until the mid-1970s. Since then, researchers have carried out much work with contributions from a diverse range of disciplines including communication studies, social anthropology, philosophy, social psychology, psychiatry, film studies, management, medicine, socio-linguistics, computer science, sociology, and folklore.

1.1 Justification for the study

Despite the vast literature on humour (Kotthoff, 2006), few studies have analysed the extent to which impromptu humour maintains rapport in face-to-face social interaction among men and women who are friends. The term *rapport* is defined as a feeling of being connected to and in harmony with one another (Hartley, 2003). One reason there is scant research is due in part to the difficulty in adequately defining humour. There is no single *true* construct of humour. As
Shibles (2006) writes, “we cannot say what causes humor, what it does, or if humor is beneficial if we do not first clearly know what humor is” (p. 5).

Researchers have also experienced difficulty in collecting and identifying humour that occurs spontaneously in real-life interaction in people’s everyday lives. Although more studies are now using qualitative methods such as recording conversations in informal interaction (e.g., Kotthoff, 2006), research on humour has tended to focus on quantitative methods. For instance, using written jokes selected by experimenters or simulated conversations among strangers in formal settings, namely the laboratory, workplace, university or medical environment. Critique of quantitative methods has increasingly come under attack in recent years because this approach reveals little about the role of humour in people’s everyday experiences. An individual’s high rating for a printed joke does not necessarily mean that he or she produces or enjoys humour in their daily social life (Kotthoff, 2000). As Kotthoff (2006) points out, standardised written jokes exclude many verbal and non-verbal behaviours, i.e., laughter, mimicry, exclamations, and repetition.

The scarcity of empirical research into humour and rapport among friends in real-life social interaction is cause for concern for several reasons. In recent years, there has emerged a vast literature of popular self-help texts, and similar publications offering advice on communication skills to men and women (e.g., Gray, 2002, 2003, 2004; Platt, 2000). While these texts provide lists of
communication strategies that individuals can employ to achieve greater understanding of one another, the texts usually mention humour in passing. Moreover, the information provided in these texts often does not represent the complex nature of humour in human interaction, and therefore may not prompt individuals to make permanent changes in their behaviour during interaction. For example, advice for men comprises “make them [women] laugh” (Platt, 2000, p.206). However, this recommendation is likely to put pressure on men to feel they need to be funny or to reel off a succession of jokes to impress women. In addition, although professional counsellors and teachers of communication may be aware of the advantages of humour for maintaining rapport in social interaction, there is an absence of firm theoretical principles on which to develop professional counselling sessions and training in humour skills (Morreall, 1983; Shibles, 2006). Most important, a growing interest in the role of humour in social interaction (Eggins & Slade, 2005; Kotthoff, 2006) motivates the need for close investigation.

For instance, a major concern for interactants is how to enhance and preserve their personal relationships. Scholars note that men and women often experience problems communicating with each other (Glass, 1993; Mulac, Bradac, & Gibbons, 2001). Personal relationships such as relationships between friends, are an essential part of human life and the main organisers of social experience, that is, relationships intertwine with people’s everyday lives, their social behaviour and personal experiences with others (Duck, 1988). When asked the following
question, “what is it that makes your life meaningful?” most people mentioned
the need for close relationships with their friends, family, or life partner (Klinger, 1977, p. 316). Moreover, how people feel about their relationships with others
has a greater impact on their overall satisfaction with their lives than the
influence of their career, income, or material possessions (see Myers & Diener, 1995). Undoubtedly our relationships with friends are sources of great pleasure
and delight, though it is often hard work preserving healthy and positive
connections with other people. Nevertheless, as noted by Norrick (1994),
everyone has an innate capacity for humour, therefore it is possible to use
humour to promote relationships that are more satisfying and meaningful.

Given that the human condition is characterised by the need to establish,
maintain, and enhance personal relations, valuable insights may be gained about
communicative behaviour by studying how men and women use humour as a
vehicle to relate to each other. This knowledge can then be used to promote
smooth and harmonious communication (Frecknall, 1994; Graham, 1995), that
is, rapport. Humour, in the present study is viewed as a “positive communication
attribute” (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991, p. 206) that is
inextricably linked with rapport, and is always intended to amuse. Humour is not
the only way that interactants can keep meaningful connections with their
friends, however it is recognised that humour is a valuable tool for creating
rapport (Holmes & Hay, 1997; Norrick, 1993a). Above all, rapport is especially
significant in the friendship relationship because it demonstrates or reinforces
interactants’ bond with one another, and could help to ensure the continuation of the relationship. Therefore, rapport may be seen as an end goal in itself, and humour may help interactants to achieve this goal. In other words, if interactants’ humour achieves rapport, then humour is directly promoting the realisation of this goal.

The present study is distinguishable from other research because it focuses on men and women who are close friends rather than strangers, work colleagues or students. In addition, current data are gathered from face-to-face everyday interactions in real-life social contexts, not from experimenter selected jokes, cartoons, or stimulated conversations in a laboratory setting. By using real-life settings it is possible for this study to investigate impromptu humour, that is, humorous remarks, comments, and statements that arise extemporaneously from the context, i.e., the conversation, the situation, background information, and the distinct personalities of interactants in the group. Humour is communicative in orientation; it is closely linked to the ongoing interaction, and is deeply embedded in the context and in the way people interact through their verbal and non-verbal messages.

Based on a qualitative approach, the present research investigates communication behaviours of men and women who are friends. Within this study, communication behaviours refers to the range of humorous behaviours that interactants use to maintain rapport in social communication. They are the verbal
and non-verbal actions individuals display when they are interacting with others (Olswang, 2001). Hence, the term verbal behaviour refers to oral language, that is, words or statements spoken aloud. Whereas, the words non-verbal behaviour refers to the way in which people communicate intentionally or unintentionally without words. Non-verbal behaviour encompasses body language and paralanguage. The term body language refers to the following four behaviours: 1) gestures, i.e., use of hands, feet, and other parts of the body; 2) body movements, i.e., leaning forwards, and getting physically close; 3) facial expressions, i.e., changes in the eyes, brows, and mouth; and 4) eye movements, i.e., gazing, and glancing. The term paralanguage refers to the following behaviours: intonation, emphasis, pauses, jokey voice, hyperbole, laughter, laughing voice, and overlap (see Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991; Duck, 1999; Gire, 2003; Eggins & Slade, 2005). Other key terms are defined in Appendix A, and as they emerge throughout the present study.

1.2 Research question

Underpinning the present research is the view that humour plays a crucial role in fostering and maintaining harmonious social relationships. Therefore, this study considers the following research question.
What communication behaviours are employed by friends in mixed-gender groups to convey humour and maintain rapport in everyday face-to-face social interactions?

To address the above proposition, it is demonstrated through four mixed-gender group interactions how verbal and non-verbal behaviours enable interactants to communicate positive humour and maintain rapport with one another.

This study is situated within the fields of human communication research and research on humour and gender. As this is a qualitative investigation, the techniques of conversation analysis (CA) and ethnography are employed to collect and analyse humour as it arises extemporaneously in real-life settings. These techniques involve audio recording and transcribing informal conversations of four mixed-group interactions, non-participant observation and note taking, administering questionnaires, engaging in informal conversations after the recording, and engaging in follow-up sessions to discuss the interpretation of the material. Besides the CA and ethnographic approach, some quantitative analysis of the transcription data is employed to complement the qualitative analysis. A detailed explanation of the process involved in selecting, classifying, and analysing instances of humour is provided in Chapter 3.

Qualitative research suits the analysis of humour in real-life face-to-face social interaction. Rouncefield (2003) argues, for instance, that qualitative research is
fundamentally interpretive because the purpose is to see activities as social actions embedded within the social setting and accomplished in and through the everyday activities of participants. In contrast, it is not easy to simulate impromptu humour in a laboratory setting. Humour is essentially foreign to the experimental situation because it is primarily generated and used in informal social contexts, for example among friends (Kotthoff, 2000; Long & Graesser, 1988). Because of the interpretive nature of the present research, it is essential to document and question one’s own assumptions and biases regularly.

1.3 Scope of the present study

When studying humour in everyday social interaction it is necessary to constrain the current investigation to keep its specific focus. Because impromptu humour can arise in any interaction, a main concern of the study concerns the type of interaction to be analysed. One such interaction in which humour is particularly pertinent is humour that occurs among adults who regard themselves as friends. Hence, this study examines humour that emerges between men and women who meet socially as friends. Social interaction between friends is informal and relaxed and occurs in contexts of their own choosing in natural everyday settings, for instance, in their homes, the local pub, at parties, or while engaged in various fun pastimes or leisure pursuits. Alberts (1992a) suggests that some situational contexts namely informal get-togethers and parties are more likely to influence interactants to interpret a statement as humorous than other gatherings.
such as classroom or business meetings. When friends get together to talk, they
do so “simply for the sake of talking itself” (Eggins & Slade, 2005, p. 6). In this
way, communication between friends is a form of non-goal oriented interaction.

Therefore, friends rather than strangers, students, workplace colleagues, or
family members, are the focus of this study. Friends have a shared interaction
history, and already have a special knowledge of each other’s personal
characteristics on which to draw, whereas strangers have no relational context.
Friendship is a voluntary relationship, which makes friendship different from
relationships in which people are linked by blood or because they are work
colleagues. Hence, this study does not examine family members and work
colleagues because “we choose our friends, but have family and workplace
colleagues thrust upon us”. By contrast, “we choose where we spend our free
time with those friends, and what kinds of activities we undertake with them”
(Eggins & Slade, 2005, p. 169). Friends usually meet because they enjoy each
other’s company.

The type of interaction selected for the present study also helped to delimit at an
early stage the composition of the groups. This study examines face-to-face
interactions of friends in four mixed-gender groups. Each group contains an
equal number of men and women. Therefore, the design of the groups ensures
there is equal representation of men and women. By limiting the sample size, it
was possible to collect with questionnaires biographical and ethnographic
information from each individual. Restricting the sample size also allowed a
detailed analysis of each group interaction through tape recordings and
transcripts, non-participant observation, note taking, informal conversations, and
through follow-up sessions.

This study analyses mixed-gender groups rather than single gender groups
because the focus is on face-to-face humorous interactions between men and
women and the way they communicate and relate to each other through their
verbal and non-verbal actions. In addition, the four group interactions occurred
on different days and locations to enable comparison and to provide insight into
the way men and women display humour in real-life settings. Three interactions
took place in participants’ homes, and one interaction occurred in the group’s
local pub. Each group chose their own location because they felt they could relax
and talk more openly in an environment that was familiar to them all.

To constrain the investigation further, the present research does not generalise to
a greater population and is limited to English language and western culture.
Therefore, all participants were born in England and speak English as a first
language to enable like comparison and to remove major language and cultural
differences as a variable in the study of humour. This study examines adults
rather than adolescents or children because adults have usually developed a
broader perspective of life and the self over time (see Nussbaum, Pechioni,
Robinson & Thompson, 2000). In addition, professional comedy routines as
performed on television or the stage are not analysed, neither are riddles, teasing, cartoons, joke telling, joking, or manufactured printed jokes.

Focusing on humour in real-life situations can provide insight into human modes of thought and social interaction. As noted by Sacks (1984) in his justification of engaging in close up analyses of everyday conversation, “the detailed study of small phenomena may give an enormous understanding of the way humans do things” (p. 18).

The following is an overview of the other chapters in the present research.

1.4 Overview of the study

This study is organised into six more chapters. Chapter 2 provides a literature review of the empirical research. Reviewing the relevant literature builds a theoretical foundation upon which to base the current research about impromptu humour among friends in social interaction. Various conceptions and definitions of humour are reviewed to put forward a new definition of humour that encompasses an understanding of humour among friends. Furthermore, Chapter 2 reviews the literature on humour and gender, humour in group situations, qualitative approaches, and the three main theoretical perspectives to develop a model of communication that is associated with the positive force of humour in everyday face-to-face social interaction.
Chapter 3 outlines the methods used in the present study. This chapter explores the analytic methods of CA and ethnography, pointing out the advantages of these techniques and their relevance to this study. Ethical issues about the research are discussed, followed by a description of the pilot investigations, including the setting, ethnographic details about participants and the tape recordings, questionnaires, and procedures. Based on experience gained from conducting the pilot studies, Chapter 3 describes the main research providing, for instance, details about participants including formation and composition of their groups. Also included is a discussion of the role of the researcher and data collection, which includes a description of the setting and procedure, non-participant observation, note taking, and administration of a questionnaire. Then, Chapter 3 outlines the procedure for: 1) identifying humour through the analysis of verbal and non-verbal behaviours; and 2) classifying humour into five Humour Categories, and outlines the approach for examining and classifying speaker’s humour and hearer or hearer(s) response to humour. The final part of the chapter explains the process for analysing the data in accordance with the humour model using CA and ethnographic techniques.

Chapter 4 presents a quantitative analysis of the transcription data and shows the results of classifying humour into five Humour Categories to illustrate where interactants are focusing humour. Results are given for the categories of speaker’s humour and hearer(s) response, and findings that emerged from an analysis of the model are presented. In addition, results of the questionnaire,
which consists of open and closed questions are provided. The findings in this chapter are presented in table format and are further analysed in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 5, a qualitative analysis of the collected data is presented. Nineteen of the most illustrative excerpts of impromptu humour taken from all four transcripts are analysed in accordance with the model developed in Chapter 2. In addition, findings from the five Humour Categories reported in Chapter 4 are drawn upon to assist with the analysis of communication behaviours.

Chapter 6 discusses and analyses the research question in light of findings of the current research in relation to the literature to show how this study contributes to the body of knowledge. A discussion of the implications of the research relating to humour and rapport is provided. Chapter 6 recommends possible new avenues of research and explores practical applications for using the humour model.

Chapter 7 concludes this study. This chapter stresses that impromptu humour among friends is a positive and unifying event. It is shown that men and women use a range of communication behaviours to express humour and maintain rapport to ensure their personal relationships remain stable and survive. Finally, Chapter 7 explores the impact this research could have on the field of human communication and for society as a whole.
Chapter 2 Literature review

This chapter examines the relevant academic literature in the field of human communication and humour to build a sound theoretical basis for the present research and map out the main issues and thematic patterns of this field of inquiry. The aim of this review is to address the research question: What communication behaviours are employed by friends in mixed-gender groups to convey humour and maintain rapport in everyday face-to-face social interaction? In this study humour is regarded as a positive force in human communication, therefore it is shown how interactants can use humour in their communication with others to achieve rapport.

The term *communication behaviours* in the present research refers to the range of humorous behaviours that interactants use to maintain rapport in their social interactions. These behaviours include *verbal behaviour*, i.e., words or statements spoken aloud, and *non-verbal behaviour*, i.e., the way in which people communicate intentionally or unintentionally without words, and comprises *body language* and *paralanguage*. Scholars in the field of communication studies and gender and humour research have demonstrated that the way individuals use humour to communicate has an effect on the social interaction (Eggins & Slade, 2005; Norrick, 2003; Tannen, 2005). This study expands existing research in this area by examining how rapport is achieved in humorous interactions between men and women who are friends.
The first section of Chapter 2 critically examines existing conceptions and definitions of the term humour. A new definition of humour is then put forward for the purpose of the current study. Since much of the psychological research on humour has focused on gender differences, the second section explores these empirical studies to provide a deeper understanding of men’s and women’s humour. The third section discusses humour within the group setting to better understand the interplay among group members. In the fourth section, qualitative approaches to understanding humour are examined, focusing on research that has used tape recordings of conversation. The fifth section discusses the three theoretical perspectives that have had significant influence on the analysis of humour. The present study pulls together these theoretical approaches and draws on insights gained from the research discussed in this chapter to put forward a model for considering impromptu humour in everyday social interaction among men and women who are friends. The chapter ends with a discussion of the review, and sets out the core issues that motivate this study.

2.1 Defining humour in everyday interaction

Despite the vast literature on humour, there have been many difficulties for those trying to draw conclusions and synthesise reported findings. Over the years, there have been various efforts to try to understand this elusive concept (for an historical outline of humour from various disciplines see Attardo, 1994;
McGhee, 1979). One of the problematic aspects for scholars is defining what, exactly, humour is. For instance, Butland and Ivy’s (1990) examination of the empirical research revealed many contradictions about humour. As Miller (1988, p. 6) comments, humour is an “unclassifiable and unmanageable” concept, and is something that has consistently defeated the attempts of scientists to explain it.

This difficulty in defining humour led Berger (1995, p. 6) to describe it as “a slippery subject” but as it had in recent years become of great interest in academic circles and elsewhere he insisted that humour was far too important a topic to be ignored. American humorist, Dorothy Parker (1958) summed up the frustration many have experienced in trying to explain such a complex phenomenon, “I had thought, on starting this composition that I should define what humor means to me. However, every time I tried to, I had to go and lie down with a cold wet cloth on my head” (pp. xi-xiv).

Moreover, definitions of humour, jokes, joking, laughter, and teasing are often confused; these terms are used interchangeably even though they are not the same. Rather than pay close attention to humour that occurs spontaneously in social interaction (Kotthoff, 2000) much of the research to date has focused on laughter (Greatbatch, 2003; Platow et al., 2005; Provine, 2004; Wilkinson, 2007), manufactured jokes and cartoons, joke telling and joking (Davies, 2006; Mobbs, Hagan, Azim, Menon & Reiss, 2005; Thomas, 2004), and teasing (Bollmer, Harris, Milich & Georgesen, 2003; Ledley et al., 2006). Furthermore,
as noted by Holmes and Hay (1997), even when the focus is limited to conversational humour, few researchers clearly define what they mean by humour, or point out how they select their examples for analysis. Although terminology and assumptions may be different, each of these perspectives has valuable contributions to make. Despite these difficulties, the integration of this diverse body of work provides a more complete understanding of what is meant by humour in everyday interaction.

As Latta (1999) points out, the term *humour* is used in many different ways, both in everyday conversation and in the theoretical literature. For the purposes of this study, the term humour will not be used to refer collectively to jokes, joking, laughter or teasing. Therefore, in the following section a distinction is made between humour, jokes, joking, laughter, and teasing. The distinction between humour and jokes is provided first. A discussion on the differences between humour and teasing is provided later in this chapter.

Humour in friendly social interaction is usually unrehearsed and is often spontaneously woven into the normal flow of conversation. In addition, humour relies on previous conversational context, topic of conversation, shared knowledge between speaker and hearer(s), the situation itself, and aspects of the social situation. Whereas humour usually occurs in the moment and contributes to talk, *jokes* are self-contained stories that may interrupt and distract from the conversation. Jokes are usually memorised or planned by the speaker and are
often unrelated to the lives of the audience (Heisterkamp & Alberts, 2000). Jokes do not therefore wholly reflect the more personal and spontaneous nature of humour in friendly social interaction. For example, jokes have precise opening formulas such as “Have you heard the one about ...” and end in a punchline. These opening formulas negotiate for speaking time or control of the conversation (Long & Graesser, 1988). Telling a joke is a disruptive, competitive, and contrived event and hearers must get a joke, and either laugh or make some kind of response, such as a groan, at the right time (Kuipers, 1999).

In his influential research, Sacks (1973, 1974) examined joke telling and punning in conversation. He focused on the procedure for telling a joke and noted a test function for jokes. That is, joke telling enables speakers to test hearers for shared background knowledge and their ability to get the joke. As Sherzer (1985) points out, laughter or a groan is a conventional way of showing that the hearer has understood the point of the pun or the joke. Following Sacks and Sherzer, Norrick (1993a) asserts that similar to jokes, the test function of humour in interaction provides hearers with an opportunity to affirm common ground and attitudes. Therefore, humour contributes to group rapport, in as much as posing and passing tests counts as bonding behaviour, and encourages shared involvement.

On the other hand, joking arises only when the social structure itself involves a “joke” of some kind (Douglas, 1975, p. 98). Joking works to expose social
differences and conflicts, and depends for its meanings on tension in the social structure (Douglas, 1975; Eggins & Slade, 2005). It seems that joking often occurs in the talk of young males. In their narrative investigation Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003, p. 40) found that the “cool” boys were the ones who were skilled at joking or “giving crap” and getting a laugh from their friends, which became a normal part of the way boys learned to relate to each other. For example, Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli interviewed one boy called Shaun who describes how his peers engage in a joking exchange:

I suppose it’s like a test, like you sit there and see who can come up with the funniest and the quickest joke. A lot of guys will say something funny or do something funny and then go ‘yeah, come on, where’s your comeback? What are you doing?’ … If they can’t do anything then they end up taking it. They just have to be humiliated in front of this big group of guys … it’s all a big joke (p. 40).

Despite appearing critical of such practices, the researchers noted that Shaun gained some enjoyment from taking part in the joking exchange. Kehily and Nayak (1997, p. 84) suggest that these kinds of joking interactions “could define those who belonged (operating as a form of male bonding) and those who did not (operating as a form of ‘othering’).” It would appear therefore that joking is used for strengthening heterosexual masculinities through ritualized verbal and
physical assaults. According to Woods (1990), boys’ joking, e.g., risqué jokes, repartee, and backchat, is about stamina, laughing in the face of misfortune.

Similarly, Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman (2002) found that joking was common in the talk of the boys that they interviewed. In particular, the lads’ mock aggressive joking, which excluded girls, was “central to the construction of masculine identities and hierarchies” (p. 103). Frosh et al concluded “joking seems to be a way of establishing intimacy between men” (p. 232). Therefore, unlike humour in conversational interaction, joking enacts differences and conflicts in the social relations among interactants (Eggins & Slade, 2005).

The difference between laughter and humour is that humour involves various cognitive, perceptive, and emotional processes, whereas laughter is a physiological response to humour (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986). Laughter, like humour to which it is inextricably linked, is a distinguishing feature of our species (Palmer, 1994). Individuals do laugh alone but laugh most often when in the company of others, therefore laughing is fundamentally a social activity. In relaxed and informal settings, it is usually an enjoyable experience enabling one to express personal feelings, and convey personal participation in social situations. For instance, if hearers laugh at the speaker’s humorous remarks, their laughter can imply not only acceptance of the speaker’s humour, but also acceptance of him or her (Provine, 2001).
However, responding positively to humour is only one of laughter’s many functions (Poyatos, 1993). People laugh for many reasons and can laugh at just about anything (Glenn, 1989). Scholars have listed several non-humorous causes of laughter, such as, nervousness, embarrassment, fear, tickling, grief, and contempt (Kotthoff, 2000; Wyer & Collins, 1992). Furthermore, individuals may laugh at something they do not find humorous because they think laughter is the expected response.

Whilst it is true that laughter is the usual response to manufactured materials such as jokes and cartoons, it is not an automatic response to humour and is by no means the only way that participants can support humour. Other humour support strategies, including laughter, are discussed later in this chapter. Nevertheless, there is agreement among many researchers that the most obvious signal that something is funny is that a person laughs, mainly because it is easy for researchers to recognise and observe laughter. To explain, when someone tells a joke “laughter is desired in the response sequence and that it should be done on the recognition of a punchline” (Sacks, 1989, p. 341) regardless of whether the joke is understood or not. As Lefcourt and Martin (1986) point out, “laughter can occur in the absence of humor and humor is not always accompanied by laughter” (pp. 2-3).

Although it is necessary to make a distinction between humour, and the terms jokes, joking and laughter, the present study continues to draw on research
relating to jokes, joking, and laughter because they have provided worthwhile contributions to the body of work in this area.

Having explained the problems of defining humour, next is a discussion of cross-cultural humour.

2.1.1 **Intercultural perspective on humour**

It is useful to consider cultural differences between societies as humour may have varied meanings in different cultures. Therefore, the speaker and hearer may have different contextual assumptions to access during interpretation of the humorous discourse. It could be that cultural differences lead to misinterpretation and misunderstandings of communication and humour. For instance, sociocultural differences in the use of humour have been described by Mulholland (1997, p. 103), who states that “joking, teasing or leg-pulling between Australians in business interactions can make Asians very uncomfortable.” The present study recognises that humour is a subjective notion, which is culturally bound. What interactants regard as humorous in one culture could be perceived differently by interactants in another culture.

The interpretation of humour depends on a shared knowledge between speaker and hearer. Therefore, I ensured that all participants selected for the present study were born and raised in England, as described in Chapter 3. Carlin (2005)
maintains that because culture seems spontaneously inherited it can be difficult to explain and to share with others the reason why something is humorous. She argues that “without shared cultural unconscious between the storyteller and the listener, cultural contextual assumptions are not available to negotiate the meaning or humor” (p. 75).

In the next section it is explained how based on their own conceptions, theorists perceive humour in different ways. Also discussed are the differences between teasing and humour.

2.1.2 Positive and negative perspectives on humour

Some researchers view humour as a positive and co-operative experience (Bethea, 2001; Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991; Holmes, 2006; Wennerstrom, 2000), whereas others consider humour as a negative and aggressive activity (Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998; Ziv & Gadish, 1990). However, many researchers assume that humour can be used for negative as well as positive purposes (Bippus, 2000; Decker & Rotondo, 2001; Honeycutt & Brown, 1998; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). These different viewpoints are now explored.
Positive perspective

Scholars discuss the benefits of humour for our very existence and point out that it has a significant link to many areas of human behaviour. According to Lynch (2002), humorous communication helps to build and maintain social bonds. It is claimed that humour is an index of intimacy, providing evidence to individuals that their relationship is one of closeness and familiarity (Graham, 1995; Hampes, 1992; Warners-Kleverlann, Oppenheimer & Sherman, 1996). Humour is thought to improve communication between interactants, providing them with a richer repertoire by which to build meaning (Graham, 1995). In addition, individuals who are perceived as humorous are rated as more popular or socially attractive by their peers, have higher self-confidence, and find it easier to develop friendships (McGhee, 1989; Wanzer & Booth-Butterfield, 1996).

In both scholarly research and lay perceptions, humour has been cited as an essential part of friends’ interactions in successful relations (Goodwin & Tang, 1991). For instance, in an article on the British Royal family, the *Daily Mail* newspaper reports that for Prince William and a female friend both in their twenties, sharing and engaging in humour is an important ingredient of their relationship.
As reporters, Kay and Moore (2005) write.

This week … in high spirits she and William jokily tried to pull down the boxer shorts of one of Harry's friends, Guy Pelly. Friends say this particular brand of public school humour is one of the traits that binds Kate and William together. "Kate genuinely finds William funny," says one who knows them. (p. 19)

This example shows that these two friends are able to use humour to do much of the communicating that is needed to foster rapport and strengthen their relationship. What the exemplar also demonstrates is that much like the rest of us, even the heir to the throne can take advantage of humour to improve his personal relationships.

The benefits of humour are generally connected with laughter, with happiness, and with feeling good. It can be said that people usually feel better and more relaxed when they have a good laugh, which suggests that humour and laughter are beneficial to people’s health and well-being (Godfrey, 2004; Tugade, Fredrickson & Barrett, 2004). This is borne out by the fact that the medical profession has begun to take an interest in the effect of humour on people’s health (Miracle, 2007). Although medieval doctors reportedly told jokes to their patients (see Russell, 1991), humour was generally not encouraged in medicine and healing until the mid-1970s. During this time, Professor Norman Cousins
(1976, 1979) described how he used laughter to help recover from a degenerative spinal condition, by watching funny films and reading hilarious books. Because of his experience Cousins was later responsible for setting up humour rooms in hospitals and discussed his experience in print and public forums.

More recent medical research offers support for humour’s positive effect on health and well-being. For instance, studies carried out in the School of Medicine at Loma Linda University, California suggest that the experience of laughter in response to a humorous event could lower the body’s level of cortisol, which protects the immune system (Berk, 1989; Berk, Tan, Napier & Evy 1989). Moreover, Berk (1996) suggests that endorphins (the brain's natural chemicals that elevate mood or eliminate pain) are released when a person laughs either with forced or fake laughter, or with spontaneous laughter; as the human body does not know the difference between fake and genuine laughter. As Berk (2001) points out, humorous laughter “improves mental functioning ... [it] exercises and relaxes muscles ... decreases stress hormones ... [and] increases the immune system’s defences” (p. 328).

According to Fry (1992) and Thorson, Powell, Sarmany-Schuller and Hampes (1997), humour increases feelings of optimism and self-esteem. In addition, humour can help people to replace distressing emotions with enjoyable feelings, and keep everyday matters in perspective. People cannot usually feel worried, depressed, or annoyed and experience humour at the same time. Further, there is
research suggesting that humour can reverse the effects of anguish caused by stress (see Lefcourt & Davidson-Katz, 1991). Findings of a study by Nezlek and Derks (2001) on the relationship between laughter and stress indicate that people can use humour to make light of their problems and to help cope with stress. They conclude that employing humor in social situations increases the likelihood of positive social interaction.

**Negative perspective**

Other researchers view humour as a negative event that is based on aggression and hostility or “humorous aggression” (Kotthoff, 2006, p. 13). For instance, Ryan and Kanjorksi’s (1998) study showed a link between humour and hostility in men. Others argue that humour comprises both negative and positive features. On the one hand, humour builds cohesion and inclusion, and on the other hand humour expresses hostile or aggressive messages (see Graham, Papa & Brookes, 1992; Honeycutt & Brown, 1998; Rogerson-Revell, 2007). For instance, Graham et al. (1992) revealed factors concerning both positive and negative affect in their study of humour. They explain that _positive_ humour could be used for positive affect, that is, to make light of a situation and to show friendship. Conversely, _negative_ humour could be employed for negative affect, that is, to degrade others, make hostile remarks, and put others in their place. However, the term _teasing_ not humour is employed by some researchers to explain negative affect
in interaction (e.g., Rogers, 1995; Thompson, Fabian, Moulton, Dunn & Altabe, 1991).

Therefore, in the present research the term *teasing* will be used to signify what Graham et al. (1992) and Ryan and Kanjorski (1998) regard as *negative* humour. The current study differentiates humour from teasing in that humour as it occurs in social interaction is a positive activity, whereas teasing is a negative activity. It is noteworthy that the word tease comes from the Anglo-Saxon word taesan, which is “rooted in actions which involve tearing or pulling to pieces, cutting at something or cutting roughly” as in preparing wool (Pawluck, 1989, p. 146).

Counsellor and psychotherapist Carl Rogers distinguishes between humour and teasing. Rogers (1995) stresses that whereas humour is enjoyable and promotes cohesion, the motivation of most teasing is to hurt, which is harmful to relationships. Similarly, Attardo (1994) observed that teasing differs from humour because of the presence of an element of “criticism” in the interaction (p. 321).

Nevertheless, the distinction in the literature between the terms humour and teasing remains blurred, and the boundaries are neither clear nor mutually exclusive. For instance, some scholars posit that teasing is a double-edged sword that involves both conflict and cohesion. As Driscoll (1993) argues, while teases work as a form of aggression and hostility, they can also promote cohesion.

Other work has combined the qualitative methods of ethnography with analysis
of discourse to examine teasing in social interaction (Addington, 2001; Eisenberg, 1986; Schieffelin, 1986). Much of this research has focused on teasing as a means of socialisation, particularly of children, and has concentrated on its ambiguity as a means of social control. For example, adult teasing directed at children is both a source of amusement and closeness and as a “subtle form of criticism” to display disapproval (Eisenberg, 1986, p. 189). Hence, there is the assumption that teasing performs the dual role of combining conflict and cohesion.

Similarly, in his seminal work, Radcliffe-Brown (1968) discusses the relationship between teasing, conflict, and cohesion. Drawing on earlier ethnographies of preliterate societies, Radcliffe-Brown uses the term “joking relationships” to describe “a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence” (p. 90). In the joking relationship, teasing is a privileged disrespect, in which a combination of friendliness and aggression are part of the interaction. Radcliffe-Brown’s use of the words “custom” and “required” show the kin-based nature of the joking relationship, compared with the non-kin relationship in which both parties agree to take part in joking. The aggressive yet playful teasing that characterises such groups can work as an outlet for the hostile and negative feelings that may arise in kin-based relationships.
However, this seemingly harmless *poking fun* at someone can as Thompson et al. (1991) argue, develop into ridicule and exploiting another person’s presumed weakness for one’s self-importance. For example, studies carried out in western industrial societies focus on the relationship between teasing and conflict, particularly in non-kin relationships, such as the formal environment of the workplace (Alberts, 1992b; Apte, 1985). Most of women interviewed by Alberts (1992b) in a workplace study referred to teasing as a source of sexual harassment and emotional distress on the job. Alberts concluded that teasing is psychologically punishing because it depicts the recipient in a negative way, as someone who is useless, silly, or despicable. Furthermore, teasing hides aggression and is therefore a useful tool through which social control is exerted (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997).

There is a common misconception that teasing is an inoffensive and light-hearted activity. Recent evidence (Kruger, Gordon & Kuban, 2006) shows that despite a *teaser’s* attempt to mitigate the tease by communicating via gestures, facial expression, or tone of voice that they do not intend for their tease to be taken literally, the person being teased interprets teasing as malicious and hurtful. Therefore, the aggressive content of a tease may lead the *victim*, or recipient, to view it as a serious comment, that is, an insult, and to respond negatively (Alberts, 1992b). Even mild teasing can create negativity towards the *teaser* and the interaction, as observed by Bollmer et al. (2003).
Conversational excerpts, one illustrating teasing and negative affect, and one depicting humour and positive affect are presented now to show the differences between these two activities. Using the method of conversation analysis (CA) to examine tape recordings of teasing in naturally occurring conversation, Drew (1987) found that in most cases, recipients gave serious replies to teases. One reason that teases receive a serious response is that the recipient interprets them as true evaluations. Even when recipients’ first response to a tease is to laugh, they then go on seriously to reject and correct the suggestion made in the tease. The following extract from Drew (1987) shows this serious response to being teased. Full explanation of the transcription conventions that appear in the following extracts is provided in Appendix B.

An example of teasing showing negative affect.

1  John and they have a different thing each day so that it doesn’[t get you
2  Ann [is that true? like what like pick your nose? really?
3  Don hmh-hmh [hmh
4  Ann [like what
5  John tch No I, I find I just get very euphoric

(Drew, 1987, p. 227)

In this teasing exchange, John describes a method he has been taught to help him give up smoking. When he wants a cigarette, he engages in another activity instead. For instance, “on Tuesday you scratch your nose and on Wednesday you scratch your left ear.” In response to Ann’s tease in line 2, “Like pick your nose?
Really?” John overtly rejects the tease in line 5 by saying “No” followed by a counter-version of Ann’s teasing trivialization of his story. Even when recipients recognise and display that they recognise they are being teased, they usually also treat the tease seriously and give a serious response. As Drew (1987) concludes, much of the teasing that occurs in social interaction involves putting-down or cutting-down the recipient.

By comparison, the following extract taken from Norrick’s (1993a) analysis of tape recorded conversations shows that unlike teasing, which can result in negative outcomes for interactants, the usual response to humour among friends is amusement and enjoyment. The next extract has been simplified for clarity.

An example of humour showing positive affect.

1 Pat Fred, I really didn’t expect you tonight, Id have made this better if Id have known you were coming but
2 Fred that’s alright [haha
3 Amy [you’d have made gourmet grilled cheese
4 Fred ah hahahahaha [haha
5 Ralph [hahahahahahahaha
6 Pat [hahahahahahahahahahahahaha
          I love haha I love it

(Norrick, 1993a, p. 32)

In this humorous exchange, Pat states she would have improved the quality of the toasted cheese sandwiches if she had known Fred was staying for dinner. Amy focuses humour on Pat with the comment in line 3, “you’d have made gourmet grilled cheese” as if grilled cheese could serve as the basis for a gourmet
food. In response, Pat laughs heartily, and comments positively on Amy’s humorous remark in line 6, “I love it.” Unlike recipients of teasing who nearly always put the record straight (Drew, 1987), Pat seems amused and goes along with the humour, and even compliments Amy for her humorous remark. Thus, the humour is positive and shared among interactants, and displays understanding, appreciation and involvement (Norrick, 1993a).

The two excerpts show differences between teasing and humour in conversation. Hence, humour and teasing have the potential to lead to differing outcomes in a conversational exchange (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997).

Although the present study makes a distinction between teasing and humour, that is, humour is viewed as a positive event in human communication, whereas teasing is considered a negative activity, this study continues to draw on the research on teasing for the following reasons. First, in the literature the term teasing is interchanged frequently with the term humour. Second, studies on teasing often take a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. For instance, CA and ethnography have been used to explore teasing in conversation (Addington, 2001; Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997), and these techniques are of particular relevance to the current research.

For the purposes of the current research, the term humour will not be used to refer collectively to teasing, jokes, joking, or laughter. Next is a discussion of the
role of speaker and hearer(s) and the value of analysing verbal and non-verbal behaviours in everyday interaction. A new definition of humour is then put forward for the purposes of the current research.

2.1.3 Speaker and hearer(s): Verbal and non-verbal communication

Identifying examples of humour in human interaction is complex and seldom objective (Hay, 1996). Scholars tend to rely on definitions based on the sender (speaker) or receiver (hearer) when deciding what counts as an instance of humour. Some researchers consider humour from the point of view of the hearer, others consider it from the speaker’s viewpoint, and a few believe that both speaker and hearer need to be considered.

Those who are interested in what makes people laugh are likely to focus on hearer response. For example, Zelvys (1990) defines humour as “something designed to produce laughter or amusement” (p. 323). Similarly, Duncan and Feisal (1989) define humour as “any type of communication that intentionally creates incongruent meanings and thereby causes laughter” (p. 19). Both of these definitions assume that humour must be met by laughter and that laughter is the most appropriate humour support strategy. Conversely, theorists that consider humour from the speaker’s point of view tend to focus on joke telling rather than humour. Winick (1976) states that a joke is “any structured communication, with a witty or funny intent, which the teller seemed to know in advance of telling it”
Duncan (1984) categorises jokes as instances of humour, while Long and Graesser (1988) consider jokes as a distinct category that is different from humour.

Although less common, some researchers take the view that both speaker and hearer need to be considered when identifying an instance of humour. To Long and Graesser (1988) this means that “humour is anything done or said, purposely or inadvertently, that is found to be comical and amusing” (p. 37). Consistent with this notion, Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) define humour as follows, “Intentional verbal and nonverbal messages which elicit laughter, chuckling, and other forms of spontaneous behaviour taken to mean pleasure, delight and/or surprise in the targeted receiver … humour is typically perceived as a positive communication attribute” (p. 206).

Of relevance to the present study, Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield support a definition of humour that includes verbal and non-verbal behaviours. Chapter 3 discusses in more detail the verbal and non-verbal behaviours that are used to identify humour in the current research.

In Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield’s investigation, participants were given instructions to write down their verbal and non-verbal behaviour during humour. Individuals who perceived themselves as humorous communicators used humour in more situations, and reported eliciting laughter by being witty,
by impersonating someone, or by exaggerating their non-verbal behaviour.

Based on their analysis of participants’ reports, Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield constructed a list of non-verbal behaviours. In Table 2.1, note that non-verbal behaviours comprise body language, for example, eye contact and use of hands and arms, as well as paralanguage, which includes tone of voice and emphasis.

Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-verbal behaviours in the communication of humour</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice pitch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tone of voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal impressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand vocal range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluctuate voice frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound of voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volume: softer, louder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk fluently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk differently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of hands and arms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stand up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different physical moves</td>
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<tr>
<td>More open body language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shrug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get physically close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use more non-verbal cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious look</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change facial expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smile, talk more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk with eyes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991, p. 212)
The list offered by Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield provides a useful conceptualisation of the ways in which interactants employ non-verbal behaviour when communicating humour. Despite the continued emphasis on laughter as the main device for supporting humour, some qualitative researchers have recognised the need to identify additional behaviours. For instance, tape recordings and transcripts have been employed to investigate non-verbal behaviours. In their analysis of humour, Eggins and Slade (2005) examined paralanguage such as jocular tone of voice or jokey voice, pauses and laughter. To distinguish teasing from surrounding talk, Straehle (1993) found it useful to consider Tannen’s (2005) discussion of frames, that is, how speakers mean what they say, and Goffman’s (1981) notion of footing, or alignments among participants, that is, the way interactants relate to one another. Straehle (1993, p. 215) showed how paralinguistic features, such as, exaggerated intonation, emphasis, laughter, overlapping laughter, and repetition “triggered” a teasing frame. Holmes (2000) analysed tone of voice, laughter, and smiling. Similarly, Palmer (1994) identified a light-hearted tone of voice and smiling.

Other significant work has focused on the use of hyperbole in conversation (McCarthy & Carter, 2004; Norrick, 2004). Norrick states that hyperbole is a stylistic or rhetorical device. As noted by McCarthy and Carter (2004), hyperbole is a frequent feature of informal talk and is used to express affective meanings. They define hyperbole as a humorous overstatement or exaggerated remark not meant to be taken literally, for instance, “He’s older than the hills.”
Another behaviour identified by researchers that is relevant to the present study is laughing voice (e.g., Nwokah, Hsu, Davies & Fogel, 1999; Provine, 2001).

While Norrick (1993a) concentrates mainly on laughter in his study of conversational joking, he argues that speakers need to “signal both a desire to communicate and a humorous tone through a set of hints and cues on a whole range of levels” (p. 4). Norrick observes that when people interact, they provide vital clues about themselves, such as their attitudes and beliefs and background knowledge. Most of this exchange of information occurs through social interaction.

Communication researchers have studied verbal and non-verbal behaviours separately as though they were independent rather than coexisting and interrelated phenomena (see Jones & LeBaron, 2002). However, as Tannen (2005) found in her study of conversational interaction, information from non-verbal messages helps to reinforce the messages communicated through language. According to DePaulo and Friedman (1998), even slight movements of the arm or of a facial muscle affect interactants’ perceptions of each other. Verbal and non-verbal behaviours are inextricably linked. Therefore, when analysing humour it is important to consider not only what is said, but also how it is said. It is also vital to take into account the context in which humour occurs. As Duck (1998) points out meanings are not absolute things that exist
simplistically in the words, but meanings happen when interaction happens
between people and within a given context.

Scholars note that when people talk, they also move their bodies, take up various
postures, direct their eyes, and behave in ways that comprise an interactive event
(Jones & LeBaron, 2002). Wyer and Collins (1992) explain that speakers often
provide non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice
to signify that they do not believe what they are saying and that they fully expect
their audience to realise this fact. Thus, speakers’ comments might not be taken
literally if they make a statement with a smile on their face or in a jokey tone of
voice. As observed by communication researchers Bilous and Krauss (1988),
speakers regularly mirror the verbal and non-verbal behaviours of people they
like. Moreover, Giles and Powesland (1997) found that to obtain acceptance,
people accommodate or modify their behaviours so that they become similar to
the behaviours of their audience.

According to Schegloff (1987), hearers may pretend to have misunderstood the
speaker’s remark in order for them to produce a humorous response. In other
words, hearers may choose to joke first before returning to the serious
conversation. In the following example Daniel pretends to misunderstand Ben’s
comment. This exemplar has been simplified for clarity.
Ben: In Tokyo a man gets run over every five hours.
Daniel: Oh, poor thing!

(Chiaro, 1992, p. 43)

As soon as the intentional misunderstanding is recognised as a joke and prompts laughter, the hearer usually returns to a serious approach and gives an apt response. Following Schegloff's (1987) work, Norrick (1993a) shows that through spontaneous humour it is possible to change a topic, get the floor, and to influence the direction of the conversation.

As mentioned earlier in this section, the definition provided by Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) is relevant to the present study because it concentrates on both speaker and hearer. In addition, their definition considers verbal and non-verbal messages and focuses on humour rather than jokes, laughter or teasing.

In particular, their definition recognises there are responses to humour apart from laughter, for instance, “chuckling, and other forms of spontaneous behaviour” (p. 206). However, it is necessary to modify the definition of humour offered by Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield to fit the present research.
Hence, the following broad definition is used to help identify and describe humour in face-to-face social interaction among friends.

Humour identified in the present research is defined as intentional and unintentional verbal and non-verbal messages that elicit laughter, chuckling, and other forms of spontaneous behaviour by any of the interacting parties, and taken to mean pleasure, delight, amusement, and surprise. Humour is further characterised as a positive communication attribute.

Here is an explanation of the amendments made to Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield’s definition.

The word *unintentional* is added to the present study’s definition of humour because many of the amusing things people say are not said with the intention of being funny. Individuals do not always have conscious control over humour (Wyer & Collins, 1992). For instance, an amusing incident can trigger a spontaneous remark that skilfully captures the mood of the moment.

In the present study the words, *the targeted receiver* in Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield’s definition are replaced with the words *any of the interacting parties*. These words have been changed because Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield do not analyse any humorous interaction comprising more than two
people, that is one speaker and one hearer. However, by incorporating the words *any of the interacting parties* it is possible to increase the number of individuals in the interaction and, therefore to include groups of people, which is relevant to the present research. The words, *any of the interacting parties* means that all participants in the interaction, that is, speakers and hearers are free to initiate and respond to humour whenever they wish, even if they interrupt the conversation.

The present definition includes speakers because they occasionally respond to their own humour. For instance, speakers may laugh while being humorous, either because they enjoy their own humour or as a cue to invite others to respond to their humour. If hearers then respond verbally or non-verbally, speakers may respond with yet more humour. For the purposes of this study, non-verbal communication includes body language and paralanguage.

Most important for the present study, Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) consider humour a positive force in human interaction. Similar to Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (p. 206), this study considers humour a positive force that is a “pleasure and delight” in everyday human communication. The definition put forward in the current research also recognises that humour generates amusement among interactants and is an ongoing interactive event that includes a combination of social, psychological, and temporal factors.
The view taken by the current research is that humour is a positive rather than a negative experience for individuals in friendly interactions, and its prime purpose is to maintain positive co-operative relationships. This modified definition is useful because it provides a clear framework for understanding humour as it occurs spontaneously in everyday face-to-face social interaction among friends.

The next section explores the empirical research that has concentrated on humour and gender.

2.2 Quantitative approaches to understanding humour and gender

Much of the early literature discusses humour from a psychological perspective and focuses on differences in the way men and women appreciate humour. A frequent early claim is that men create and enjoy humour more than women do. In particular, men seemed to prefer humour containing sexual and aggressive themes. Moreover, men enjoyed sexual humour that was judged sexist towards women, but did not enjoy sexual humour when the status of men was threatened. In contrast, women are described as more likely to laugh more often than men (see Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1998). For example, in a seminal study of the social functions of humour and laughter in a hospital setting, Coser (1960) maintained that a man who has a good sense of humour is one who tells good jokes. Conversely, a woman who has a good sense of humour is one who laughs at a
man’s jokes. In addition, as noted by Coser, women are expected to be cautious because enjoyment of humour, especially sexual and aggressive humour, is considered inappropriate and undignified.

As Perry et al. (1997) point out gender differences in male and female humour have been attributed to the unequal status of men and women. In the literature on language and gender, this perceived inequality between men and women is known as the dominance and difference approach (see Bortfeld, Leon, Bloom, Schober & Brennan, 2001; Crawford, 1995; 2003; Weatherell, 2002). It has been argued that men are traditionally higher in social status than women are, therefore men are more likely to use humour, especially sexual humour to establish dominance and control. Conversely, women are described as submissive and supportive and therefore more likely to be the recipients of humour produced by men (Haig, 1988; Perry et al., 1997). However, other studies examining men’s and women’s humour have reported inconsistent findings on these issues. For instance, these variations in findings may be explained to some extent by situational factors, changing gender role attitudes, gender identities, and by the various ways that humour has been measured, that is, early humour research relied on laboratory studies of joke and cartoons (Herzog, 1999; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1998).

Much of the early work on men’s and women’s humour supports Freud’s (1905/1960) claim that humour is the domain of men and that women are the
appreciative audience. One of the central themes put forward by Freud is that jokes serve as a socially acceptable vehicle for expressing taboo thoughts of sex or aggression. Freud argues that sexual jokes are attempts to allay people’s fears and anxieties about sex, and as a means of projecting these anxieties and fear onto others. In terms of gender roles, the sexual target or “object” of the joke is usually a woman, while the sexual initiator or “joker” is usually a man (p. 111).

Because of Freud’s theory, an immense body of work on gender and humour studies has emerged that focuses on presenting manufactured jokes and cartoons to male and female students in a laboratory setting. These studies aim to identify gender differences in preferences for humour, and contain typically sexual and aggressive themes. However, little research has examined sexual humour as it occurs spontaneously in everyday life situations. In justifying the use of standardised printed materials to measure humour, it is claimed that people who enjoy humour give cartoons and jokes higher scores than people who do not enjoy humour (Ziv & Gadish, 1990). Nonetheless, laboratory studies depend heavily on materials from male dominated publications that are usually created by men, which depict a male viewpoint often employing sexual or aggressive themes (Van Giffen & Maher, 1995).

Results of these studies have led to speculation as to whether women, similar to men, have a sense a humour. For instance, quantitative researchers (Moore, Griffiths & Payne, 1987; Wilson & Molleston, 1981) have examined gender
differences in humour by instructing men and women to rate the funniness of cartoons drawn from *Playboy* magazine. However, this magazine is designed for men and contains material of a sexually explicit nature. In their study, Wilson and Molleston (1981) found that men rated funniness of risqué cartoons taken from *Playboy* magazine higher than women did. These findings led Wilson and Molleston to conclude that men appreciate sexual humour more than women do. However, it has been suggested that such magazines are likely to reinforce gender stereotypes. According to Powell and Paton (1988), 87% of cartoons depict women in *Playboy* dressed in a sexual manner, which “precludes being taken seriously in any other role they may perform.” In contrast, “over 50% of male cartoon characters were portrayed in conservative or conventional dress which allows them to be seen as fulfilling a wide range of roles” (p. 252).

In another study based on comedy routines in British pub acts, Mulkay (1988) observed how women are represented in men’s sexual humour. Mulkay found that men’s sexual humour objectified women, forbade women to speak, and highlighted their sexual availability, that is, all women always want sex even if they deny it.

More recent investigations on humour have, like older studies, involved presenting jokes or cartoons from books and magazines, or the comedy routines of professional comedians. For example, Perry et al. (1997) lend support for earlier research on gender differences in humour. For instance, the college men
in the study carried out by Perry et al. rated sexual and aggressive jokes in a pre-recorded stand-up comedy routine to be more appealing than did college women. Similarly, the college men in Lundell’s (1993) investigation preferred dirty jokes more than the women in the study did. One explanation for the gender difference in appreciation of aggressive and sexual humour may be that such jokes are often derogatory to women (Nias, 1981).

However, the over reliance on quantitative measures of humour, for instance analysing jokes and cartoons, may lead to false conclusions about humour in everyday interactions. As Kotthoff (2006) and Crawford (1989, 1992) caution, jokes and cartoons are not representative of humour in a real-life context because the typical model used in these studies ignores “its participants’ intentions, its immediate context, and its wider social context” (Crawford, 1989, p. 164). In a “decontextualized” situation (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1998, p. 233) such as the laboratory setting, men and women may create their own context, which is based on personal experience. Hence, the difference in men’s and women’s humour is more complex than whether or not each gender appreciates a particular joke or cartoon. It is necessary therefore to ask why differences might exist and what they may mean (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1998).

Moreover, the formal nature of the laboratory setting and the presence and behaviour of the experimenter may lead individuals to behave differently from how they would behave in an informal social setting among close friends.
Supporting this viewpoint, Craik, Lampert, and Nelson (1996) found that both genders preferred humour that occurs spontaneously in real-life situations rather than manufactured jokes. Men and women also showed that a greater responsiveness to spontaneous humour than to jokes was the main descriptor of their own humorous behaviour.

Some researchers have broadened the way humour is investigated to explore differences in men’s and women’s humour. Instead of using jokes and cartoons, participants are asked to provide details of their own preferences for humour. Using a self-report approach, Johnson (1991) found that contrary to earlier laboratory studies, women were similar to men in their liking for sexual and aggressive humour. For instance, nearly 50% of men’s and women’s jokes seemed to express hostility or insensitivity toward someone, for example, the sick, the disabled, and ethnic minorities. Based on men’s and women’s own preferences for humour, Johnson concluded that aggressive humour is preferred by individuals that have a high need for aggression. Therefore, self-reports can provide insight into participants’ attitudes toward other people.

Meston and O’Sullivan (2007) also used a self-report approach to investigate differences in men’s and women’s sexual teasing. In their study, sexual teasing was defined as a form of provocation characterised by the promise of sexual contact followed by withdrawal. It was found that although sexual teasing was relatively common among both male and female undergraduate students, women
were more likely than men to have engaged in sexual teasing at least once in the past. The student’s self-reports showed that men and women used sexual teasing most often with an acquaintance or friend, but less often with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Consequently, sexual teasing was more common with less intimate partners. According to Meston and O’Sullivan, engaging in sexual teasing with a more intimate partner such as a boyfriend or girlfriend may be considered too risky and more likely to elicit retribution on the part of the victim or receiver. In line with Kruger, Gordon and Kuban (2006), Meston and O’Sullivan found that the outcomes of teasing were perceived to be more positive for the teaser than the person being teased.

Nevertheless, to facilitate a more thorough investigation of sexual teasing, Meston and O’Sullivan (2007) urged researchers to employ in-depth interviews rather than self-reports. As Meston and O’Sullivan did not know if participants in their study communicated in public or private settings, they recommended that research examine more closely the social context within which sexual teasing takes place. It could be that there are important distinctions in meaning, expression, and outcomes between experiences that take place in public contexts, such as a party or a pub, compared with a more intimate or private context, such as the bedroom.

Another study employing a self-report approach (Van Giffen & Maher, 1995), found there to be no differences in men’s and women’s humour. Moreover, their
study showed that the highest proportion of humorous remarks did not concern sex or aggression but related to the foolishness of someone who was present at the time. In other words, what is most often remembered to be humorous in everyday life are stories of the slapstick variety that focus on human awkwardness rather than on harm or hostility. Contrary to previous research (Cantor, 1976), Van Giffen and Maher (1995) concluded that women were not the most common targets in men’s humorous stories. It could be that differences between men and women disappear when people select their own humorous materials rather than judge materials chosen by others. Given that laughing and joking appear to be largely social events for men and women, the investigators suggested paying more attention to social implications for the use of humour.

Once again utilising a self-report approach, Crawford and Gressley (1991) found that women and men were more alike than different in their self-reported use of humour. Men and women agreed that the most important characteristics of a good sense of humour are to be creative, quick-witted, and to use humour in helpful and caring ways. For instance, by expressing positive regard and sharing funny stories from everyday situations. Consistent with this view, Craik, Lampert and Nelson (1996) observed that a good sense of humour signalled someone who was socially warm and competent, who could make witty and clever remarks and use humour in friendly and congenial ways. Crawford and Gressley (1991) concluded that these dimensions, that is, being witty and using humour in a friendly way, have been overlooked in humour research. In the
traditional experiment, a good sense of humour is defined according to ratings of jokes and cartoons, often with a sexual or aggressive content. However, what these studies suggest is that manufactured jokes of a sexual or hostile nature have little to do with having a sense of humour.

Therefore, many studies have led to the claim there are differences in the way men and women experience humour. These investigations tend to involve examining participants separately rather than in a group setting, and most of the studies focus on humour preferences and response to humour rather than live humour production and performance in a real-life environment. Moreover, much of the research on gender differences in humour appreciation has been based on materials taken from publications aimed at men, that is, manufactured jokes or cartoons that are often aggressive or sexual in content and many of these jokes are at the expense of women. As Kotthoff (2006) and Martin and Kuiper (1999) point out, most work on humour has involved either laboratory-based research using printed jokes, cartoons, comedy tapes or films, or studies using self-report measures to assess individual differences in various aspects of humour or laughter.

Conversely, fewer studies have focused on the natural occurrence of humour throughout the course of real-life daily experiences. Stereotypical generalisations made about men and women’s humour may only apply to some individuals within each gender, or within a certain period in time. To analyse the interactive
role of humour in people’s daily lives a more comprehensive examination of all the factors that play a part in men’s and women’s humour may therefore be more valuable.

2.3 Humour in the group setting

In contrast to research analysing differences in appreciating humour by individual men and women, little research has discussed the role of spontaneous humour in creating and maintaining rapport in an informal group setting. Some theorists propose that humour functions to strengthen social bonds (Zijderveld, 1983) and maintain rapport within the group (Holmes & Hay, 1997; Norrick, 1993a). However, the more commonly held view is that humour not only promotes cohesion but also acts as a device for creating conflict and controlling others (Holmes, 2000; Honeycutt and Brown, 1998). As discussed earlier in this chapter there are differences in opinion as to whether humour is a positive force, a negative force, or whether it contains both positive and negative features.

One of the earliest attempts at studying the fostering of social bonds within a group setting was carried out by Middleton and Moland (1959). They remark that interactants use humour to preserve social solidarity and reinforce a sense of cohesion and intimacy within the group. Duncan and Feisel (1989) concur that people need to feel they are accepted members of the groups to which they belong, and humour fulfils this need and creates a feeling of belonging. For
instance, in an informal group situation humour provides interactants with the opportunity to present themselves in a way that they consider positive and that is seen as positive by the group. Therefore, humour could be a way for group members to gain acceptance in a social setting.

Moreover, people reveal much knowledge about what they value, how they view themselves and how they see others through the humour they produce and by revealing what they find amusing. Thus, humour allows individuals to present their view of the world in a non-hostile way and allows them to seek approval of their beliefs and ideas (Norrick, 1993a). Zijderveld (1983) discusses the solidarity function of humour and examines how humour serves to unite group members and create cohesion. In particular, humour and laughter can help to keep members of a group together if it is threatened or in danger. Rather than allow the group to disintegrate into panic, humour can strengthen group members’ morale and provide them with renewed energy.

In addition, Fine (1983, 1990) examined the solidarity function of humour in the small group setting, which is relevant to the present research. He noted that all groups, for example, an informal friendship group, or a formally defined body of members, like a sports team, have an increasing set of humorous remarks that are suitable for public expression in the group. As the group develops, certain elements of its humour will be seen as particularly characteristic, and for outsiders may become a distinguishing feature of the group. For instance,
individuals in a sports team that he studied enjoyed knocking each other’s hats off during a game. These humour themes can reveal how members of a group respond to each other, and to their current situation in the group and to the setting. Humour can provide a “symbolic resource” for establishing the identity of a group (Fine, 1983, p. 169). Hence, it is unlikely that people outside the group will understand humour used within the confines of the group. Furthermore, Pogrebin and Poole (1988) concluded that groups characterised as informal often develop a collection of “joking references” (p. 189) that require insider knowledge to be fully understood and appreciated as humorous.

Similarly, an influential study by Coser (1959) explored the social functions of humour and laughter of hospital patients. She examined the function of humour in the form of jocular griping in the adaptation of people to unfamiliar situations, that is, their new role as sick people in the unknown environment of the hospital ward. She found that jocular griping was based on participants’ shared experiences and that it enabled patients to arrive at consensus and cohesion among themselves. Besides, jocular griping “strengthens the social structure within which the group functions” (p. 180). In identifying humour, it was noted that humorous intent was discernible in participants’ non-verbal messages, such as tone of voice, facial expression, and in the laughter of the hearer. While Coser’s investigation is useful because it discusses real examples of humorous talk, her study is different from the present research, as her study did not include excerpts of conversation from the transcripts.
Although Martineau (1972) acknowledges that humour has a key role to play in strengthening group ties, he argues that humour may act as a device for creating conflict and for controlling others in a group setting. Martineau suggests the function of humour within the group setting is based on how humour is perceived by members of the group. Furthermore, he proposes four variables that need to be considered in most group situations. These variables are the: 1) actor, that is the individual or group that initiates the humour; 2) audience, that is, is the party that experiences or is exposed to the humour; 3) subject, that is, the target of the humour; and 4) judgment, that is, how the humour is actually judged by members of the group, apart from the content of humour or the intentions of the actor.

When humour is perceived as esteeming or valuing the in-group, Martineau (1972) argues that it functions to strengthen social bonds within the group. Humour has a tendency to minimise differences and maximise similarities among group members. When it is judged as disparaging the in-group, either it can serve to solidify the group or it can control group members if they do not conform. When a group takes part in producing humour that is perceived as disparaging humour can serve as an abrasive to threaten the relationship and incite conflict or demoralisation within the group. Furthermore, it may eventually lead to a break-up of the group (Martineau). Nonetheless, while it is always preferable to find out how a person or a group perceives an instance of
humour in order to understand it, this may be a difficult task to carry out in practice (Scogin & Pollio, 1980).

Ehrenberg (1995) and Holmes (2000) agree with Martineau’s (1972) view that humour has both cohesive and disruptive effects in the group. These studies hold that humour controls the group as individuals in the group express what cannot be expressed otherwise. Humour can be used either to esteem or to disparage those within or outside the group. Within the group, as stated by Norrick (1993a), humour can create hostility against outsiders while promoting cohesion among group members, but humour may also be used to introduce conflict into the group as an attempt to change the basis of interaction.

However, as Holmes and Marra (2002) argue, conflict among group members is more likely to occur in the workplace than friendship groups. Workplace exchanges are transactional and have a task-focused purpose, and humour is not usually regarded as a relevant part of such interactions. In asymmetrical exchanges such as the workplace, humour can be used to highlight power relationships or subtly control the behaviour of others in the group (Holmes, 2000). For instance, Rogerson-Revell (2007) found that in business meetings humour was used for both positive and negative effect, that is, to facilitate inclusion of group members on the one hand, and to exclude out-group members on the other hand.
Unlike workplace interaction, humour in social groups can serve to smooth group interaction, share affiliation and promote inclusion. Of relevance to the present study, Fine and de Soucey (2005) observed that over a period of time social groups develop a set of humorous references that are known to members of the group to which members can refer and that serve as the basis of further interaction.

2.3.1 Strangers and friends in the group setting

Besides exploring the social function of humour in groups, some studies have examined the social dynamics of sharing humour in the company of friends and strangers. Few studies, however, examine humour as it occurs spontaneously among adult friends in an informal mixed-group setting. As noted by Frey (1994), the methods employed by humour researchers often involves zero-history groups, that is, groups of strangers studied in a laboratory setting as opposed to existing groups of friends studied in their natural environment.

Although there are some qualitative researchers that have studied conversational humour among adult friends (Holmes & Hay, 1997), much of the research has involved a combination of individuals that may not be acquainted socially, such as strangers, work colleagues, and university students (e.g., Holmes, 2006; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Wennerstrom, 2000). Such groups often have a
short duration, and usually have a clearly described focus, such as a problem to solve or a task to complete (Scogin & Pollio, 1980).

In contrast, groups containing friends have a lasting character, that is, group members already know one another, and there is an expectation the group will continue. Interaction over time can also lead to an increasing awareness of other people’s attitudes on various issues and toward other individuals (Higgins & Rholes, 1992). Conversation among friends can be characterised as a shared and enjoyable endeavour where interactants have an equal right to contribute, and to manage the development of the talk (Wilson, 1989).

In studies that evaluated humour and group cohesion, Murphy and Pollio (1975) and Pollio and Swanson (1995) found that friends support one another with laughter. Conversely, they found that strangers can and often do restrain laughter. The investigators videotaped groups of college friends and groups of strangers while they listened to the audio recordings of performances by two professional comedians. An examination of the videotapes showed that whereas friends laughed and moved a lot and seemed to enjoy the recorded performances, strangers moved very little and did not find the material humorous. Moreover, friends made eye contact with each other during the comedians’ performances while strangers scarcely looked at one another.
According to Bachorowski and Owren (2004), laughter provides “important information about how humans establish and maintain mutually cooperative relationships” (p. 3). When people laugh with others, they signal their willingness to come together as a group. In a study by Platow et al (2005) students listened to tapes of a stand-up comedy routine. It was predicted that students would laugh at pre-recorded or canned laughter if they believed that the audience on the tape consisted of fellow ingroup members, and that the students would laugh less when they thought the taped audience comprised members of a different group. The predictions were correct. Students laughed longer and louder and rated the humorous material more favourably when they heard ingroup laughter rather than outgroup laughter, or no laughter at all.

Extending the research on humour between friends and strangers to include gender differences and humour, Pollio and Swanson (1995) observed that in all male groups, male friends, tended to laugh more than all-female or mixed-gender groups did. Moreover, friends laughed and talked more often than strangers did, and friends focused more on the recorded performances than did strangers. If hearers know and like the speaker, hearers are more likely to laugh at the speaker’s humour. Thus, interactants’ laughter could suggest acceptance of the humorous contribution as well as acceptance of the speaker.

In a similar vein, Bachorowski, Smoski and Owren (2001) analysed a corpus of 1,024 laughs produced by 97 college students as they watched two humorous
film clips. It was found that men produced more laughter and laughed loudly with their friends, especially their male friends. On the other hand, women produced more laughter with men than with other women, and laughed louder with male strangers. In another study, Smoski and Bachorowski (2003) found that friends in single-gender and mixed-gender interactions produced more laughter with friends than strangers. Therefore, affiliative status could affect the degree to which social partners laugh together.

Pollio and Swanson (1995) explain that when laughter is inhibited, namely, being with strangers, communication behaviours that may be necessary for expressing humour, such as body movements, looking at one another, and reacting enthusiastically to humour, are not present. In this situation, being with strangers may serve to depress all communication behaviours that express humour (Scogin & Pollio, 1980). Pollio (1983) argues that people feel more at liberty to laugh among friends than among strangers or superiors, such as in the workplace, because friends do not need to hide their emotions from one another. The present study focuses on verbal and non-verbal behaviours used by friends as they express humour.

2.3.2 Focused and non-focused humour in the group setting

Of relevance to the present study is research that has used tape recordings and transcripts of conversation to examine focused and non-focused humour in the
group setting. Focused humour is directed toward an individual, event, or object that is central to the humour whereas non-focused humour is not focused on anyone or anything, i.e., witty statements. In Coser’s (1960) view, the use of focused and non-focused humour can reveal the implicit structure and thematic content of the group.

Building on Coser’s (1960) observation that humour was most often focused on a specific person, event, or institution, Scogin and Pollio (1980) examined the nature and pattern of focused and non-focused humorous remarks produced by people in different group situations, and their work is of value to the present study. The humorous remarks of groups of friends (e.g., elderly men playing pool in a recreation centre) and groups of strangers (e.g., college students in a task-oriented group) were coded from videotaped data into one of five categories as follows: 1) other-directed (humour directed on another group member); 2) generalized-other (humour directed at institutions or anyone outside the present situation); 3) self (humour focused on the instigator); 4) non-directed (humour based on incongruity or wordplay); and 5) undetermined (humour was noted but where sound quality was poor). As Scogin and Pollio (1980) point out different groups use humour differently and the pattern of targeting alters according to the purpose of the group being studied, e.g., friends versus strangers.

Scogin and Pollio (1980) found that in situations where group members knew one another and where there was an expectation that the group would continue,
humorous remarks were directed at other people in the group. Few humorous remarks were directed on events and people outside the immediate group. According to Scogin and Pollio, this would suggest that friends are more likely to focus on the immediate ongoing activity of the group but have little concern for people or events not present in that situation. In contrast, it was discovered that in groups with a shorter duration and a more clearly delineated focus, i.e., groups of strangers, humorous remarks tended to be undirected or non-focused. Much of this humour related to unexpected words that were produced during the set tasks. Unlike humorous remarks made by the friends, the groups of strangers directed only a few humorous remarks at other members of their group.

One explanation for this finding is that a humorous remark may have a different meaning to a group of friends that have a sense of what Scogin and Pollio (1980, p. 849) call “we-ness” than to a group of strangers taking part in a highly focused activity. In the friendship groups, the humorous targeting of others was predominantly good-natured and seen as strengthening group ties through the common response of laughing together. However, in the groups that contained strangers where there was no shared history among participants, a humorous remark was viewed negatively, that is, it was seen as a direct put down. From a similar position, Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) argue that humour used by strangers in task-oriented discussions, such as in the workplace, is a hierarchy-building mechanism rather than a cohesion-building mechanism. They postulate
that much of the humour in the group was unsuccessful because group members lacked a common culture.

Broadening the focused and non-focused humour approach to include gender, Lampert and colleagues (Ervin-Tripp & Lampert, 1992; Lampert, 1996; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1993, 1998) followed a two step procedure to investigate men’s and women’s use of humour in mixed-gender and single-gender groups. First, all instances of humour were identified from transcripts of tape recorded conversations taken from the university database. Second, the instances of humour were subdivided into four categories based on focused and non-focused humour. These categories are: 1) self-directed humour (remarks focused on oneself); 2) in-group directed humour (remarks focused on another group member); 3) out-group directed humour (remarks focused on people or institutions outside the present group); and 4) socially neutral humour (remarks not focused on anyone). This two step process of identifying instances of humour in tape recordings and then coding the humour into categories, is of relevance to the present study.

In their first study, Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (1989) found that women in mixed-gender groups were more likely to produce humour than men were. Women were also more likely than men to direct humour on someone outside the present group. Moreover, men made more self-directed humorous remarks than women did. These results would suggest that contrary to earlier characterisations of the
humour of men and women (e.g., Hassett & Houlihan, 1979), women were just as likely, if not more so than men, to produce humorous remarks.

In a follow-up study, Ervin-Tripp and Lampert (1992) found that similar to their early study, self-directed humour for men in mixed-gender groups tended to be in the form of unbelievable exaggerations or witticisms. In contrast, self-focused humour for women emerged mainly in same-gender group interactions as part of a self-disclosing narrative. Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (1998) concluded that both men and women use humour to build group solidarity. In a similar vein, and of interest to the present research, Hay (1994) found that for men and women, humour offers a strategy to express group membership, solidarity and rapport while clarifying and maintaining boundaries in mixed-gender groups.

Even though research has been carried out to investigate focus of humour and differences in humour and gender, participants in such studies are not automatically assigned to mixed-gender groups, nor are individuals necessarily acquainted. Of relevance to the current study, research shows that men and women may employ humour differently, depending on whether they are interacting in a single gender group or in a mixed-gender group (Ervin-Tripp & Lampert, 1992; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006). Furthermore, Ervin-Tripp and Lampert (1998) recommend that investigators afford greater attention to the issue of context, including how the relationship between interactants, for
example, whether they are friends or strangers, men or women, can strengthen or hinder the enjoyment of humour.

2.4 Qualitative approaches to understanding humour

Quantitative approaches have dominated social science empirical research, although more researchers are now using qualitative methods to study humour in everyday settings. For example, the interpretive and context-sensitive methods of conversation analysis combined with ethnography enable the researcher to study the dynamics of humour in real-life interaction, away from the laboratory setting (Crawford, 1995, 2003; Kotthoff, 2000). This section has shown that by using a qualitative approach it is possible to study how interactants use and interpret spontaneous humour in everyday interaction.

Real-life interactions were analysed in the current research as the most useful studies for analysing humour are those that are based on conversations that occur in everyday social settings because they are grounded in historically and locally situated speech communities (Hay, 2001; Kotthoff, 2006). Early twentieth-century theorist of humour, Henri Bergson (1911/2005), recognised the interactional nature of humour and laughter. He stressed that to understand humour it needs to be in “its natural environment, which is society” (p. 7). In addition, over 25 years ago, qualitative researcher, Myers (1978) advised that
data needs to be collected from real-life conversation, as natural as possible, to see how humour is used, and by whom, and when.

Kotthoff (2000) urged researchers to concentrate on examining humour as it occurs in real-life settings and to study individual examples as they are created in concrete social interactions. In a similar vein, Graham et al. (1992) comment, “we are lacking a substantial body of research that focuses on the use of humour in conversational settings. Such research is necessary for the development of a single, unified functional model of humour” (p. 177). Accordingly, there is a need for more behavioural assessments of real-life data drawn from genuine human interactions, that is, it is essential to examine people doing humour through the practice of everyday social interaction. The present research addresses this need by studying real-life interactions among friends.

Although real-life situations may lack the control of the laboratory setting, they provide an opportunity to explore in greater depth the interactive nature of humour as it occurs in everyday social situations. The following is an examination of research that has used qualitative methods to study humour, including laughter, joking, and teasing in conversational interaction.

A transcription and notational system developed by Gail Jefferson and now well established in CA (see Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974) has enabled those working with tape recordings and transcripts to produce detailed analyses of
laughter, and more recently humour, in naturally occurring spoken interaction. A key feature of CA is for researchers to study tape recordings and transcripts of naturally occurring conversations away from the laboratory setting. The transcription system reflects the requirements of analysing conversation as a social activity, using conventions that capture features of talk that are interactionally important for participants. The system captures non-verbal behaviours such as length of pauses, laughter, overlapping speech and emphasis. Furthermore, the close attention to and hearing of tape recorded interaction and analysis of transcripts gives the analyst access to previously unnoticed regularities.

As Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff (1976) and Jefferson (1979) were the first to report, laughter is a methodically produced, socially co-ordinated activity and a regular event in everyday conversation. By employing the method of CA, these researchers observed that affiliation and rapport usually occurs when laughter is shared among interactants. Hence, there is a positive social value associated when people interact and laugh with one another in conversation.

In line with the general assumption among scholars that laughter is the main device for supporting humour (e.g., Greatbatch, 2003; Platow et al., 2005; Provine, 2004; Wennerstrom, 2000; Wilkinson, 2007), Norrick (1993a) states that the initial response to conversational joking is laughter. Therefore, Norrick relies on laughter to help identify joking and humour in his study. He claims that
if a participant laughs, or on the rare occasion responds with a snide comment or exclamation, “it seems reasonable to say the speaker was joking, teasing, playing with words, being sarcastic or something similar” (p. 8). Supporting Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff’s (1976) work on laughter in conversation, Norrick points out that speech is co-ordinated with laughter in an orderly way. He then shows how joking may not only elicit laughter from the hearer but it may also produce further joking and laughter with reference to the initial joke.

Likewise, in a study of informal conversations among women, Wennerstrom (2000) discovered that the presence of extended sequences of laughter, in which interactants participated for more than three seconds, was a clear signal that a comment was humorous. Applying the technique of CA to humorous stories about menopause, Wennerstrom focused on how the women’s values and senses of identity were displayed in the talk they used. Relevant to the present study is Wennerstrom’s analysis of the role of humour in small groups. In particular, how the inducement of and involvement in laughter helped to create affiliation and rapport among the women through their humorous stories about experiences of the menopause.

Nevertheless, as discussed earlier in this chapter, laughter does not always indicate that something is humorous and is not always the most suitable support for an attempt at humour. It has been shown there are other humour support strategies or behaviours that may be available or more appropriate. For instance,
humour support behaviours that could be relevant to the present study include contributing more humour, agreement, laughing voice, repetition, smiling, nodding of the head, or a raised eyebrow (Holmes, 2000; Holmes & Hay, 1997; Koffhoff, 2006; Provine, 2001).

According to Hay (1996) the common finding that women laugh more than men reveals only that women laugh more often. However, it does not show that men are less supportive of humour than women are. It could be that men and women prefer different cues for supporting humour, and that these cues may provide different levels of support. Hay concluded that contextual factors such as background knowledge and the relation between the speaker and hearers would, to some extent, determine the most relevant means of humour support, and this would not necessarily be laughter.

Despite its frequency in everyday life, little is known about laughter’s interactional characteristics (O’Donnell-Trujillo & Adams, 1983). Some researchers have built on the work of Jefferson (1985) and Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff (1987) to try to understand the interactional features of laughter in naturally occurring conversation. For instance, Glenn (1995) used CA to study laughter in face-to-face conversations. Glenn observed that laughter is available to participants in interaction as a marker of affiliation and bonding between speakers, namely laughing with, or conversely as a sign of distancing or disparagement, that is, laughing at. Similarly, Makri-Tsilipakou (1994)
employed CA to explore the conversational laughter of men and women as a vehicle for affiliative and disaffiliative functions. Most of her examples comprised tape recorded real-life, casual, same-gender and cross-gender conversations occurring among mature professionals and their friends and families, and between university students and their friends and families. She noted that most laughter in everyday interaction is affiliative and is performed as an act of solidarity.

Concurring with Jefferson (1985), Makri-Tsilipakou notes that affiliative laughter, which ties in with Glenn’s (1995) use of the term laughing with, is achieved when interactants laugh together and is defined as “a token of agreement” (Makri-Tsilipakou, 1994, p. 18). However, in Makri-Tsilipakou’s study there were instances of disaffiliative laughter, which is similar to Glenn’s use of the term, laughing at. According to Makri-Tsilipakou, disaffiliative laughter is a component of hostile interaction and is defined as “a person’s intention to disagree” or “ridicule” (p. 35). In Makri-Tsilipakou’s study, laughing at usually took the form of teasing, as women directed their laughter against men, and men aimed their laughter at women in mixed-gender conversations. The women used laughing at to express their disapproval and to check undesirable social traits, such as bragging, laziness, and self-pity, whereas, men’s disaffiliative laughter was performed as fun at the expense of their co-conversationalists.
Thus, for some researchers, *laughing at*, as a form of teasing, corresponds with the view that teasing is a negative activity in social interaction and is more obvious in de-escalating or problematic relationships (O’Donnell-Trujillo & Adams, 1983), to such an extent, according to Veatch (1998), that many people feel insulted and hurt when they are laughed at.

On the other hand, *laughing with* is a positive and shared activity, and is compatible with humour that occurs in friendly interactions. For example, O’Donnell-Trujillo and Adams (1983) found that laughing with is more likely to achieve affiliation and rapport between participants, and plays a significant role in co-ordinating various conversational activities such as turn-taking, displaying hearership and inviting elaborations. Once again using a conversation analytic approach, Ellis (1997) examined a corpus of naturally occurring conversation to explore some of the interactional tasks carried out by laughter. Similar to O’Donnell-Trujillo and Adams (1983), Ellis’s close analysis of the data revealed how laughing with, or shared laughter, contributed to rapport and a sense of involvement in the conversational exchange. These findings suggest that when engaged in friendly social interactions people are more likely to orient towards affiliation and involvement because they wish to preserve an agreeable and pleasant atmosphere.

Recognising that shared laughter can promote rapport and involvement in conversation some investigators have extended the research using qualitative
methods to study the functions of humour in conversation. According to Davies (2003), collaborative humour in social activity is the supreme locus of conversational involvement, that is, humour allows interactants to “display how finely tuned they are to each other” (p. 1362). In addition, conversational involvement is a key concept in Gumperz’s (1982) theory of conversational inference, which displays the achievement of co-ordinated mutual action among interactants. As Gumperz points out, conversational involvement is an observable state of being in co-ordinated interaction, as distinct from mere co-presence. He notes that, “once involved in conversation, both speaker and hearer must actively respond to what transpires by signalling involvement [to each other], either directly through words or indirectly through gestures or similar nonverbal signals” (1982, p. 1).

Davies (2003) explains how interactants use humour as a tool to promote conversational involvement. Once humour is initiated, interactants display understanding by responding to the humour, and the “joking proceeds according to a matching of selected characteristics (e.g., lexical, syntactic, prosodic, and pragmatic), as well as interactional rhythm” (p. 1368). As soon as this rhythm has been established, it is reasonable for interactants to assume that they have successfully agreed on what activity is being performed and how it is to be carried out. Therefore, in face-to-face interaction, conversational involvement is regularly accomplished and communicated through verbal and non-verbal
behaviours carefully co-ordinated in ways that provide for their mutual performance (Gumperz, 1982).

Following Gumperz (1982), Norrick (1993a) considered the interpersonal aspects of joking exchanges in his examination of conversations between family members, friends, students, and colleagues. When analysing the tape recorded materials, Norrick progressed from single-line statements to larger pieces of conversation. His findings showed that humour occurs often and spontaneously in conversation and serves many functions in social situations, such as amusing others and creating solidarity, as well as producing laughter. A detailed analysis of the transcripts revealed that participants employed various humour strategies or behaviours to achieve conversational involvement. Of interest to the present research, these humour strategies include repetition, jointly producing humour, testing others for similar experiences and attitudes, and entertaining others. Hence, the common view that conversation is serious and undertaken chiefly for communicating information was not supported by Norrick’s (1993a) study.

Likewise, Holmes and Hay (1997) concentrated on solidarity functions of humour in social groups. Twenty single gender conversations were tape recorded by participants themselves, which consisted of conversations between young people of the same gender, age, and ethnicity. Findings showed that participants placed much emphasis on affiliation in interaction. Close examination of the transcripts revealed that participants used various humour strategies to promote
involvement in the conversation, thus building rapport. These features included highlighting similarities such as expressing shared interests, experiences, and ideas, as well as repetition or echoing the humour.

Holmes and Hay’s (1997) study also showed that employing boundary-marking humour enabled the groups to highlight boundaries between them. Research shows that humour enables interactants to express group solidarity, while clarifying and maintaining gender boundaries (Hay, 1994; Holmes & Hay, 1997), and this is relevant to the present study. For instance, Hay (1994) observed that on some occasions cross-gender humour, in which the men focused humour on the women, was of a mildly sexual nature. This use of moderate sexual humour allowed interactants to create solidarity and to underline gender boundaries. In Parkin’s (1979) ethnographic study of friends in Giriama, however, the joking between men and women included sexual obscenities, which she argued presupposed the possibility of marriage or was an attempted prelude to a sexual encounter. Although Tholander’s (2002) CA and ethnographic study focused on male and female adolescents rather than adults, he found that romantic teasing, that is, teasing about love and sexuality, allowed both genders to clarify and maintain gender divisions.

A study by Gibbs (2000) examining irony in talk among college students showed that the most notable difference was that men spoke more sarcastically than women did, as opposed to women using hyperbole more than did men. These
differences in ironic talk enabled the men and women to highlight gender boundaries. Further, Gibbs noted that group members used irony in the ongoing conversation to affirm their solidarity by directing comments at people who were not group members and not considered worthy of membership.

To gain a deeper understanding of conversational involvement and humour, Tannen (2005) stressed that researchers need to consider contextual factors, such as the conversational setting, background knowledge and personality characteristics of interactants. Combining ethnographic techniques with analysis of discourse, Tannen observed that the men and women at a dinner party employed various ironic or humorous strategies to achieve conversational involvement. These behaviours included revelation or self-disclosure, collaborative construction of humour, returned humour, laughter, intonation and mimicry.

Consistent with other qualitative researchers (e.g., Holmes & Hay, 1997; Norrick, 1993a), Tannen (2005) noted that a sense of involvement in the conversation shows that interactants understand and value each other. Moreover, close analysis of the tape recordings and transcripts revealed that on some occasions, participants’ communication was unique, and on others, their communication resembled that of other people present. For instance, one participant, Peter, shared many humorous behaviours with another man called Steve. However, Peter’s use of humour was entirely different in that he
maintained a serious demeanour and delivered humorous remarks in mock serious tones. On the other hand, Steve used exaggerated intonation when he delivered humour and laughed more than Peter. Similar to Peter, another man called David exercised humour that resembled Steve’s humour in many ways. This finding led Tannen to conclude that the humour employed by interactants in a group on one occasion is not necessarily the only way they express humour.

In support of this view, Pizzini (1991), whose research was based in a formal medical environment, noted that participants employed different humorous behaviours on different occasions. Conversation analysis and ethnographic techniques were used to examine humour between hospital staff and patients in hospital setting. Pizzini observed that power relationships shift as gender and institutional roles intersect. For instance, she reported that the women patients varied their use of humour depending on whether they were interacting with nurses, midwives or doctors, and whether the hospital staff were men or women. Participants’ use of humour represented the behaviour they considered suitable for the occasion. It seems that what is humorous in one context, for one group of people, may not be so in another context for the same or a different group of people (Eggins and Slade, 2005). Therefore, qualitative methods illustrate that context is a significant variable in discovering what people find humorous.

Next is a discussion about three theories that are thought to have had the most influence on the study of humour.
2.5 Theoretical perspectives of humour

Many scholars have tried to classify theories of humour. Adelswärd and Öberg (1998), Attardo (1994), Endlich (1993), Meyer (2000), Miller (1988), and Morreall (1987) are among those who have classified the theories into one of three broad perspectives as follows: 1) superiority; 2) incongruity; and 3) relief or release. These writers argue that the three schools of thought represent most humour research, which has been used as a basis to try to explain and understand humour. Each of these perspectives has a separate foundation and underlines different concerns about humour and laughter. Given that they have had a significant influence on the perception of humour in western societies over the years, each theory is considered now for its usefulness to the present research.

This review of each of the three theories, though necessarily selective, provides insight into the way the present study draws on these perspectives to help develop a model for considering humour among men and women who are friends in informal group interactions.

The first theory to be discussed is the superiority theory, next is the incongruity theory, followed by the relief theory.
2.5.1 Superiority theory

The superiority theory focuses on the emotional side of humour, having as its basic premise the assumption that humour involves a feeling of superiority over other people. It is the notion that humour originates from the observations of others’ weaknesses (Foot, 1991; Meyer, 2000). For instance, we laugh at someone who trips over because we, who have not lost our balance, momentarily feel superior to that person.

The concept of superiority as an essential element of humour has ancient roots. This theory has had the longest period of support compared to the other two theories, dating back at least to Plato who is considered the first theorist of humour (Provine 2001). According to Plato (trans. 1993), laughter is equated with laughing at (see discussion earlier in this chapter), although he believed that laughing at others was to be avoided because people lose rational control of themselves. Similarly, for Aristotle (trans. 1977) laughter is an expression of perceived superiority over others but too much laughter makes people non-serious about serious matters.

The superiority theory proposed by Plato and Aristotle remained unchanged until the early modern period when Hobbes (1651/1974) argued more strongly than the classical theorists that laughter was “a sudden glory” (p. 52). In other words, Hobbes claimed that laughter was a way of displaying both power over other
people and a demonstration of one’s superiority. His assertion that laughter is associated with "glorification" (p. 52) of the self, which is usually at the expense of someone else, suggests that humour plays a part in establishing identity and fending off possible threats to that identity.

Nowadays the person who is laughed at is usually referred to as the *butt of the joke*, thus the superiority theory of Plato and Aristotle is still popular in present times (Morreall, 1987). Like Hobbes, the social foundations of humour were also recognised by Bergson (1911/2005), who pointed out that laughter serves as a social corrective and is the way in which society identifies inappropriate behaviour. In a group situation, for instance, people whose behaviour differs from the norm are laughed at and ridiculed. The consequent humiliation of being laughed at leads individuals to change their behaviour and to conform to the ideals of the group.

The development of the superiority theory that attempts to understand laughter in an evolutionary way was provided by Rapp (1949) followed some years later by Gruner (1997). These writers claim that humour is an aggressive expression, and is connected with the physical aggression of primitive people, whereby victors would laugh at their opponent’s obvious injuries. As humans evolved, physical battles were replaced with intellectual battles in which words were used instead of blows. Laughter equals victory, winning, and getting what one wants, which is
similar to the disparagement theory introduced in the early 1970s (Graesser, Long & Mio, 1989; Zillman & Cantor, 1976).

Disparagement emphasises the superiority that people feel when favourably comparing themselves to the inadequacies of the target or victim. It usually involves techniques such as humiliation and put downs and shows the speaker as superior to the victim (Mio & Graesser, 1991; Wicker, Barron & Willis, 1980). Disparagement may also include self-disparagement because people may laugh at or ridicule themselves (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006). Zillman and Cantor (1976) discovered disparagement in jokes concerning social, ethnic, and religious groups. However, as argued by Naranjo-Huebl (1995), not all individuals that share an ethnic identity regard jokes that are directed at them as put downs.

As Foot (1991) explains, the less amicably disposed that people are towards someone or a particular group, the more humorous they find jokes or humorous stories in which that person or group is the target or victim. A recent study by Eamon, Dent, Pleva, and Nelson-Rowe (2006) supports Zillman and Cantor’s (1976) research, suggesting that amusement increases when hostility is directed towards a disliked target, whereas amusement decreases when hostility is directed at a liked target. Eamon et al. (2006) found that ingroup members responded favourably to disparaging remarks directed at outgroup members.
Conversely, ingroup members responded unfavourably when disparaging remarks were directed towards ingroup members.

In their empirical study, Graesser, Long and Mio (1989) asked students to produce punchlines and then to answer questions about the punchlines. Their findings support the superiority theory because the funniest jokes had clearly disparaged targets. In addition, Duncan’s (1985) workplace investigation provides support for the superiority theory. He found that “First, high-status members of a group joke more than low-status members. Second, high-status initiators most often direct jokes toward low-status foci. Third, when other (high-status) members are present, high-status members refrain from self-disparaging humor (p. 559). Therefore, Duncan concluded that individuals often use humour to feel superior over others or to control them.

In another workplace study, Rogerson-Revell (2007) tape recorded four business meetings between high-ranking Asian and western participants. She noted that the native English speakers used humour to signal hierarchical superiority and dominance and to exclude outgroup members. However, ingroup members were likely to perceive that the humour was used in a positive sense, as a means of marking group solidarity. Rogerson-Revell concluded that humour could evoke feelings of superiority on the one hand, and feelings of cohesion on the other hand. In agreement, Gruner (1997) and Norrick (1993a) point out that in the context of the group, a humorous remark or laughter directed towards an
outgroup member could indicate superiority by excluding or lowering the out-group person’s status and by reinforcing the status, cohesiveness, or unity of ingroup members.

Not all instances of humour or laughter invoke feelings of superiority. For instance, laughing with others (as discussed earlier in this chapter), being tickled, giggling, recounting a rhyme or telling a humorous story. To illustrate, observing my overweight black and white cat trying to give chase to any cats that should dare to stray into her garden could be seen as humorous because she never manages to catch them, but it would not produce a feeling of superiority.

In addition, not all advocates of the superiority theory view it as disparaging, despite the commonly held belief that “much of the research that examines humor from a superiority perspective deals with disparagement humor that evaluates a person above the target of humor” (Graham et al., 1992, p. 161). Of interest to the present study, some early scholars assert that empathy, friendliness, and sympathy may be combined with the laughter of superiority (Keith-Spiegel, 1972; Mead, 1962). Mead explains the reason we laugh when someone trips is that we imagine ourselves in that person’s place and laughter signals our pleasure at not having to suffer their pain and embarrassment. In other words, laughter results from the ability to show empathy with the person in the humorous situation.
2.5.2 Incongruity theory

The current dominant approach to the study of humour is incongruity theory, which focuses on the cognitive processes involved in recognising humour and reacting to incongruities in the humorous event (Morreall, 1983). The theory includes any juxtaposition of ideas or situations that is surprising, unexpected, nonsensical, or absurd in some way. Where there is an incongruity, hearers simultaneously have in mind a view of the normal situation together with another view that violates the expected or natural order. Therefore, humour occurs when it seems that the situation is normal, yet something is amiss (Meyer, 2000; Veatch, 1998).

James Beattie (1778/2006) is credited by some scholars to have put forward the first theory stressing incongruity (Oring, 1989). However, according to Morreall (1983), the main proponents to conceptualise fully the incongruity theory to explain humour were Kant (trans. 1790/1972) and Schopenhauer (trans. 1819/1964). For Beattie (1778/2006) humorous laughter arises “from the view of things incongruous united in the same assemblage” (p. 318). Unlike Kant and Schopenhauer, Beattie recognised the limitations of the theory and pointed out that some types of non-humorous laughter, such as the laugh of tickling, cannot be explained by incongruity. On the other hand, Kant (trans. 1790/1972, p. 177) took the view that humour hinged on noticing “anything out of the ordinary” when accompanied by a sense of danger. Kant’s notion of incongruity had a
central role in his account of laughter, and humorous laughter was defined as “an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” (p. 177).

Nevertheless, Schopenhauer’s (trans. 1819/1964) view of incongruity conflicts with Kant’s (trans. 1790/1972) claim that our expectations in laughter situations turn into “nothing” (p. 177). More precisely, we get something we are not expecting, it simply does not fit in the expected or usual way; it is a surprise. Thus for Schopenhauer, laughter arises from the sudden perception of an incongruity between an object and an abstract concept under which the object has been subsumed.

The seminal research of Suls (1972, 1977) provides further evidence for the incongruity theory. He proposes that not only is it necessary for an incongruity to be perceived for humour to be experienced but the incongruity also has to be resolved or explained. Suls devised the incongruity resolution model and propounded the theory in which humour exists in two stages. The first stage involves recognising an incongruity and the second involves resolving this incongruity. Thus, humour results from the perception of an initial incongruity, which is then made congruous in an unexpected way. If there is no resolution or no surprise then there is no humour. The two-stage model developed by Suls, however, does not explain why we might find the same thing humorous more than once, or why hearers laugh or use another means of humour support before
the punchline is delivered. In addition, the model does not consider ambiguity, nor is there any distinction between who is speaking and who is responding.

Moreover, there are conflicting findings in studies that examine incongruity. For instance, it is argued that for a joke to be perceived as funny it must be neither too difficult nor too easy (Wyer & Collins, 1992). Conversely, no relationship between funniness and difficulty has been found, although funniness has been shown to correlate significantly with surprise (Wicker, Thorelli, Baron & Ponder, 1981).

To test that incongruity alone was enough to elicit humour, Nerhardt (1996) asked participants to lift several weights. He observed that participants laughed when they were provided with weights that deviated by different amounts from what they expected. Nerhardt’s findings show that the more dissimilar the stimuli are from what is expected, the more surprising the effect. Although his research focuses on laughter rather than humour, findings suggest that laughter could be produced by incongruity alone. Other studies using this weight judging paradigm support Nerhardt’s findings. For instance, Ruch, Köhler and van Thriel (1999) showed the degree of incongruity affected the perceived surprise, funniness, and humorous amusement, in addition to non-verbal behaviours, namely, the facial signs of humorous enjoyment.
Similarly, Deckers (1993) found a direct relationship between the intensity of laughter and surprise, suggesting that laughter was an indication of humorous amusement. Deckers (1993) proposed that an incongruity itself was enough to evoke humour as long as it was perceived in a humorous or light-hearted context.

Nevertheless, not all surprises or absurdities are humorous and not all humour involves surprise or absurdity. Hence, an incongruity is not a critical feature of humour or laughter. So while incongruity need not be an essential feature of humour, it may be present often, and it has an important role. For instance, concerning group interactions incongruity theory may be useful for explaining the reaction to a humorous remark that is surprising or absurd in some way.

2.5.3 Relief or release theory

Relief or release theory is the belief that humour affords relief from stress or constraint, or releasing excess tension (Meyer, 2000; Morreall, 1983). Relief might fit into humour situations in two ways. The person may have come into the situation with the nervous energy that is to be released, or the humorous event itself may cause the build-up of the nervous energy, as well as its release. One of the earliest texts that mention this theory is Descartes’ (trans. 1649/1989) \textit{Les passions de l\'ame} [\textit{The passions of the soul}]. Descartes proposed that laughter results from the extreme gladness that comes when we are troubled by some evil and realise that it can do us no harm. A century later, in a similar vein, Hartley
(1749/1967) wrote that laughter was an expression of pleasure at erasing something painful or alarming, and he included surprise and tickling in this formula.

A more physiological approach was proposed by Spencer (1860/1911), who explained that the purpose of mirthful laughter was to release surplus nervous or psychic energy, in particular as the result of a “descending incongruity” (p. 307). The release of this excess energy was achieved when feelings built up but then were not needed. This resulted in laughter being discharged firstly through the muscles and then through other channels associated with respiration to produce loud laughter. Several scholars were influenced by Spencer’s theories, including Dewey (1894) who defined laughter as “the sudden relaxation of strain” (p. 559).

Nevertheless, the most influential and best-known relief theory was developed by Freud (1905/1960). Freud extended Spencer’s (1860/1911) theory by proposing three humorous situations, namely, the comic, humour and wit. In all three situations a certain amount of psychic energy is saved for some purpose but is not always needed, therefore the excess energy results in laughter. Thus, Freud notes that in reacting to the comic we save an expenditure of energy in thought, in humour we save an expenditure of energy in emotion, and in wit the energy we save suppresses forbidden thoughts and feelings.
Freud (1905/1960) related humour to sexual drive and believed that the repression of sexual and aggressive drives leads to laughter. These repressed sexual and aggressive wishes are pushed into the unconscious because society forbids their expression. Humour thus provides a socially acceptable and pleasurable form of release of this repressed psychic energy. According to Freud, dirty jokes are a substitute for sexual aggression. Many people do not find it easy to talk about certain subjects such as sex, impotence, homosexuality, violence, and racism. Hence, humour is a socially acceptable way of releasing tension about these sensitive topics. In a similar vein, Rothbart (1996) contends that relief-stimulated laughter can occur when adults discuss sensitive subject matter such as sex or aggression. Of particular concern in the present research is Freud’s recognition of the interactional dimension of joking, that is, Freud argues that humour not only produces personal catharsis, but that it can also serve to create rapport between interactants.

Nevertheless, it is argued that not all laughter involves the release of emotional nervous energy (Morreall, 1987). Moreover, the explanation that laughter is a way of restoring balance after tension does not distinguish between experiences that are humorous and those that are serious. Although relief theories attempt to explain what happens during a humorous situation, they do not account for exactly what each individual finds humorous and why there are such discrepancies in what different people find humorous.
There is early empirical support for the relief theory. A study by Langevin and Day (1972) measured physiological changes in participants who were exposed to cartoon humour. Findings suggest that the experience of humour was associated with excitation of certain physiological processes. In a later study Kelner and Bonanno (1997) identified laughter as an adaptive response to stress. Relief theories might also explain the significance of humour and laughter in promoting healing. For instance, in the United States some hospitals and health care establishments now use humorous videos and books, clown visits, and other comedy techniques to create humour and laughter to relieve tension and stress and to heighten the healing process (McGhee, 1999).

Further, as noted by Meyer (2000), humour is an important mechanism for managing tension in social relationships. Even mild laughter during conversations has been found to relieve tension and promote further communication between interactants (O’Donnell-Trujillo & Adams, 1983). Besides, in some situations such as group interactions, it could be that a person’s jovial reaction to a humorous remark is due to a physiological release of tension. Bales and Slater’s (1955) seminal study related the tension reduction role of humour to the process of decision-making in groups. It was found that humour produced in these groups reduced participants’ stress. A humorous remark made by a group member brought laughter and relief to the other members and enabled the group to go back to the task refreshed and focused.
More recently, Dienstbier’s (1995) research of groups supports the findings of Bales and Slater, reporting that the experience of humour decreases tension and increases energy, which leads to more positive evaluation of activities. Therefore, humour and laughter can be used to defuse tensions that may arise in intergroup relations.

To summarise, this review of the three theoretical perspectives shows that even though each approach provides the basis for much humour research, none of them can provide a comprehensive theory of humour. Proponents of each theory have argued that each theory can be used to explain all instances of humour (Gruner, 1997). Such explanations are however only effective in accounting for specific aspects of humour while ignoring others. The three perspectives focus on different facets of the humorous activity. First, superiority theory and incongruity theory concentrate on the object of humour, whereas relief theory focuses on the response to humour. Second, incongruity theory offers detailed descriptions of the humour, whereas superiority theory provides vague generalisations. Third, coding of individual humour instances can be problematic because some theories are more complete than others. For instance, Freud’s theory could be viewed as both an incongruity theory because of its description to joke techniques, and a relief theory because of its description of the effects of humour (see Norrick, 1993a). Hence, each theory is suitable for a particular situation; superiority for assessing others or for unifying an in-group, incongruity
for portraying new or unexpected perspectives or points of view, and relief theory for releasing or relieving physiological tension.

Moreover, these theoretical perspectives often ignore gender-based aspects of humour. For instance, in the past, women have been written out of humour (Barreca, 1992). Theorists were inclined not to specify women in their compositions in order that men's view of humour would predominate. The feminists’ explanation is that historically “males have dominated society and society thinking for so long” and that inherent social factors hindered women’s ability to feel equal to men (Sheppard 1991, p. 35). Crawford (1992) argues that many experiments have used humorous stimuli, such as jokes that reflect masculinist and androcentric values with the results being used to prove that men are more humorous than women are.

While there has existed a universalised human model in which most humorous situations were measured by maleness, researchers are now starting to take an interest in the female perspective (see Sheppard, 1991). Because these theoretical perspectives have tended to overlook aspects relating to women's humour, weaknesses and inaccuracies in previous theories of men’s and women’s use of humour can be expected (Barreca, 1992; Sheppard, 1991). Despite their limitations, superiority, incongruity, and relief theories have provided valuable insights into understanding humour. Therefore, the present study draws on these theoretical perspectives, and considers the research presented in this chapter to
develop a model for considering humour in everyday social interactions among friends.

### 2.6 A model for considering impromptu humour in everyday interaction among friends

To provide a greater understanding of humour, it can be said that there is a need for not only refinement or recombination of the theories and research discussed in this chapter but also a fresh way of looking at humour that occurs spontaneously in its natural environment, that is, in face-to-face everyday social interaction.

For this reason, the present research puts forward a model that views humour as an interactive and unifying activity in human communication. The model provides a framework for analysing impromptu humour, and contains two analytical categories: 1) Facilitating conversational involvement, i.e., using humour to attain a heightened sense of involvement in the interaction; and 2) Clarifying and maintaining gender boundaries, i.e., using humour to highlight differences and affirm social boundaries. Each of these categories comprises various humour strategies based on solidarity functions of humour, as identified by humour researchers to date (e.g., Hay, 1994; Holmes & Hay, 1997; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1993, 1998; Norrick, 1993a, 1994; Tannen, 2005). These
solidarity functions of humour in the small group setting were discussed earlier in this chapter.

In the context of the group, solidarity functions of humour include all occasions in which humour is used as a device to promote in-group interaction, and strengthen in-group bonding. The humour strategies that interactants use in their communication with one another to facilitate conversational involvement and to clarify and maintain boundaries is presented for analysis in Chapters 4 and 5. In addition, the model takes account of superiority, incongruity, and relief theories rather than relying on one theory to try to explain humour in everyday interaction.

The analytical categories, humour strategies, and three theoretical perspectives are outlined in Table 2.2 as follows.
Table 2.2

The humour model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical category</th>
<th>Humour strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Facilitating conversational involvement</td>
<td>Collaborative construction of humour</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Repetition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mimicking</td>
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<td>Self-disclosure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Expressing common ground</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Clarifying and maintaining boundaries</td>
<td>Sexual humour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual innuendo</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Light-hearted flirting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ribaldry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Talking humorously about gender</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gender differences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Physical appearance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three theories of humour</th>
<th>Application of the theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Superiority theory</td>
<td>Assessing others or unifying an in-group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Incongruity theory</td>
<td>Portraying new or unexpected perspectives or points of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Relief theory</td>
<td>Relieving or releasing physiological tension.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering the definition of humour proposed earlier in this chapter, the present model concentrates on men and women doing humour in their everyday social interaction. In other words, the model analyses how men and women friends employ humour in their verbal and non-verbal behaviour as a positive communicative mechanism to promote and maintain rapport, and to ensure that their social interactions continue in the future.
The present model identifies all parties in the interaction that is speaker, hearer(s), and recipient, and considers focused and non-focused humour in mixed-gender groups. Gender is examined to shed light on men’s and women’s use of humour and to help explain some of the inconsistencies noted by humour researchers about the way in which each gender uses humour. To operationalise and explicate the framework for the model, relevant conversational excerpts that relate to the actual dataset are reported further in Chapter 5.

2.7 Conclusion

This study has adopted a definition of humour that recognises the contribution of verbal and non-verbal communication to express humour in friendly everyday face-to-face social interactions. The use of such a definition helps to ensure the whole interaction, that is, from beginning to end, is considered when studying impromptu humour in everyday interactions.

Much work has been carried out on humour, however there is a general lack of consensus on the approach taken to analysing this phenomenon and little agreement on how humour should be defined. Many of the theoretical and applied definitions of the term humour relate only to manufactured jokes and cartoons, or telling jokes, laughter, or teasing. Unlike impromptu humour in friendly social interaction, jokes and cartoons are usually prepared in advance
and laughter is the expected response. Research carried out on naturally occurring conversation has concentrated either on identifying joking, laughter, or teasing in discourse, or on how these features are organised in a conversational exchange.

Therefore, limited research has been conducted on the complex interaction of humour, background information and social and contextual factors that may influence the way friends experience humour. Although hearer laughter is the most obvious way people can identify whether verbal communication is humorous or not, it cannot always be assumed that laughter is the usual and most suitable support for an attempt at humour. Nevertheless, most literature on humour focuses on laughter as the typical response to humour, while ignoring other humour support strategies.

In addition, theorists perceive humour in different ways. Some view humour as a positive activity, others view it as a negative experience however, most view it as incorporating both positive and negative features. Several scholars use the term teasing rather than humour as teasing often contains both positive and negative features. It is argued, for example, that teasing serves the dual function of cohesion and conflict in the joking relationship and is therefore a relatively harmless activity.
Conversely, other researchers make a distinction between humour and teasing. For instance, teasing is viewed as a negative and hostile event that should not be taken lightly, while humour is regarded as an enjoyable and a positive activity. Subscription to one or other view depends on the purpose of the research project. Nevertheless, few researchers have paid attention to the positive force of humour in informal social interaction.

Few theorists consider humour both from the perspective of the speaker and of the hearer. Scholars that view humour from the hearer’s point of view tend to concentrate on the production of laughter. Conversely, scholars that focus on humour from the speaker’s viewpoint are inclined to focus on joke telling rather than instances of humour. However, focusing on all parties in the exchange provides a more thorough understanding of the way individuals interact and express humour in their everyday interactions. The neglect of this approach may account for the lack of discussion in the extant literature on the humorous expression of verbal and non-verbal behaviours in face-to-face interaction.

Those that have studied humour in group situations maintain that while humour may promote cohesion it also works as a device to create conflict and to control others in the group. Many of these studies focus on formal settings in for example, the workplace, medical settings, or the college environment. Unlike formal work meetings or team encounters, however, informal social interactions among friends are of a voluntary nature and are not organised around specific
problems or tasks. Thus, when humour is studied in environments that are more formal it may not be perceived in the same way as humour that arises in informal social gatherings.

Current psychological views of men’s and women’s humour propose that each gender experiences humour differently. Scholars hold that men create and enjoy humour, especially sexual and aggressive themes, whereas women are the appreciative audience and laugh more than men do. However, research has mostly favoured materials drawn from publications aimed at men, namely planned jokes that usually contain sexual or aggressive themes.

Moreover, gender and humour research often examines participants individually, usually in laboratory settings rather than as they communicate with each other in real-life social groups. Furthermore, studies that have evaluated gender and humour in groups have concentrated on single gender rather than mixed-gender groups. Frequently, when mixed-gender groups are investigated, the number of men and women in the groups is unequal and participants are unacquainted socially.

Therefore, the review of the literature has thrown light on several areas that require further investigation by the present study and will be addressed by the following research question: What communication behaviours are employed by
friends in mixed-gender groups to convey humour and maintain rapport in everyday face-to-face social interactions?

It is clear that humour needs to be examined in connection with its immediate situational, conversational, and group context. Hence, the current research will: 1) focus on instances of humour that occur extemporaneously in real-life settings as opposed to examining jokes, joking, or teasing in a laboratory environment; 2) examine not only laughter but also other humour support strategies, as discussed earlier in this chapter; 3) concentrate on all parties in the interaction and analyse communication behaviours, i.e., the range of verbal and non-verbal behaviours that are used in social interaction to express humour and maintain rapport; 4) use a combination of CA and ethnographic methods to examine humorous interactions between men and women friends in mixed-gender groups; and 5) use a model that focuses on the positive force of humour amongst men and women to maintain rapport in their everyday social interactions.

The present model proposes a framework for analysing impromptu humour that contains two analytical categories based on solidarity functions of humour, and considers superiority, relief, and incongruity theories rather than relying on one theoretical perspective to explain all humour in every situation. Broadening methods beyond quantitative approaches may provide a deeper understanding of the diverse nature of humour and rapport in everyday face-to-face interaction.
From this explanation of the literature, it has been possible to provide a definition of humour, and to consider approaches to men’s and women’s humour, group processes, qualitative approaches, and theoretical perspectives. In addition, a model for analysing impromptu humour in friendly mixed-gender social interaction was put forward.

The next chapter describes the methods that will be used in the present research. Ethical issues, pilot studies, participants, settings and tape recording, and the role of the researcher will be explained. Also included are data collection and the procedure for identifying, classifying, and analysing impromptu humour.
Chapter 3  Methodology

This chapter describes the methods employed by the present study to examine the communication behaviours that men and women use for maintaining rapport through humour in everyday face-to-face social interaction. Studying impromptu humour among friends in real-life social interaction, as opposed to humour in simulated settings is an ideal research approach because it enables the researcher to capture the complexities of “naturally-occurring human behaviour,” which is acquired by “first-hand contact with people and not by inferences from what people do in artificial settings as in experiments” (Hammersley, 1990, p. 7).

The conversational interactions that form the basis of the present research share the following features: 1) they provide at least some enjoyment to their interactants; 2) they are voluntary get-togethers and not motivated by any clear interactional goals; 3) interactants are adult friends of equal status; and 4) interactants talk for the sake of talk itself (see Eggins & Slade, 2005).

This study is positioned within the fields of human communication research and research on humour and gender (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991; Holmes & Hay, 1997; Koffhoff, 2006; Lynch, 2002). As discussed later in this chapter, data in the present research were identified, collected and analysed using the qualitative methods of conversation analysis (CA) and ethnography as part of the broad method of CA, which is a central component of this research. In
addition, some quantitative analysis of the transcription data is used to complement the qualitative analysis. Because of the interpretive nature of the current research, an attempt is made to present clearly the methods used and reasons why specific techniques were suitable. In addition, strengths and limitations of the methods are acknowledged and discussed throughout this chapter.

Data collection and analysis in qualitative research comprises a process of self-monitoring or disciplined activity in which the researcher continuously questions and re-evaluates information and challenges his or her own opinions and biases. In the current study, the deliberate use of the first person voice, that is, *I* or *me* is necessary as it enables a dialogue to be constructed and it focuses the reader on the interpretive character of the research (see Aigen, 2005; Atkinson, 1990).

The plan for this chapter is as follows. First, the rationale for the qualitative approach is presented followed by a discussion on how personal bias was minimised in this study. Second, an explanation is provided for the research design and methods used, namely CA and ethnographic techniques. Third, is a discussion of ethical considerations for the research. Fourth, is a description of the pilot studies. The fifth part is a description of the present study, which includes details about participants, size and composition of the groups, formation of the groups, and the role of the researcher. Next is a discussion of data collection including the setting and tape recording, non-participant observation,
note taking, and administration of a questionnaire. The sixth part explains the procedure for identifying and classifying humour into categories using a two step process, and the procedure for classifying speaker’s humour and hearer response to humour. The final part describes the process for analysing the data in accordance with the present model using CA and ethnographic techniques.

3.1 Explanation and rationale for the qualitative approach

Although quantitative methods have dominated social science research an increasing number of qualitative studies on humour are now being reported (e.g., Holmes, 2006; Koffhoff, 2006). While it is recognised that quantitative designs have contributed much to understanding the processes involved in humour as well as providing useful insights into the effects that others have on the appreciation of humour, results of quantitative research may not generalise to humour in people’s everyday lives (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Kotthoff, 2000).

Research using quantitative methods has typically examined humour by showing standardised written materials such as cartoons and jokes to university students in a laboratory setting (e.g., Herzog, 1999; Mobbs et al., 2005; Thomas, 2004). However, as participants are then provided with a set number of responses from which to choose the humour that emerges spontaneously in conversation is ignored. Problems can therefore arise with this kind of analysis. For instance,
O’Neill (2006) argues that pre-set answers provided in experimental studies may not reflect how people feel about a subject and in some cases might simply be the closest match. It is possible that an individual will rate different types of cartoons or jokes as equally funny. Moreover, Long and Grasser (1988) caution that participants may laugh at a cartoon or joke because they think this is what the researcher wants them to do. In addition, qualitative researcher Kotthoff (2006) explains that printed jokes exclude much verbal and non-verbal behaviour.

Furthermore, simulating conversations among strangers in formal settings, such as the laboratory, workplace, university, or medical environment is not the same as humour that occurs spontaneously in real-life social interaction (Kotthoff, 2000; Van Giffen & Maher, 1995). As explained by Long and Graesser (1988), humour loses the power to amuse when subjected to repetition and experimental manipulation. Noting this issue, Graham et al. (1992, p. 178) assert that it is difficult to find a conversational task that provides plenty of opportunity for participants to employ spontaneous humour. They state that instructing participants to “joke with one another” or “talk with one another” would result only in an artificial attempt to comply with the researcher’s request.

Some quantitative researchers recognise the benefits of employing qualitative methods such as CA to examine humour in social interaction. For example, although quantitative researchers Booth-Butterfield and Booth Butterfield’s
(1991) Humor Orientation Scale (HO) assesses how individuals differ in their use of humour in the laboratory setting, it does not measure the specific use of humour in naturally occurring conversation. Therefore, Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield suggest that qualitative methods such as CA might be helpful for analysing humour in everyday interaction.

Similarly, quantitative researchers, Graham et al (1992) admit there is a need for further investigation to improve the reliability of their self-report measure called the Uses of Humor Index (UHI), which focuses on the function of humour in interaction. Although it was found that humour serves various functions in interpersonal interaction (Derks & Berkowitz, 1989), Graham et al point out “scientific measurement has not matured at the same rate as conceptual treatments of the humour construct” (p. 178). Therefore, Graham et al note the value of employing CA techniques to study humour. They cite two studies that have used CA to increase awareness of: 1) how humour functions in social interaction (Glenn, 1989); and 2) how humour influences the perception of communication competence (Sacks, 1978).

As O’Neill (2006) points out, although quantitative methods are ideally suited for finding out who, what, when, and where, they are not usually suitable for collecting behavioural data. In contrast, the aim of qualitative research is to capture a person’s meanings and definitions of events and to understand the meaning of phenomena in context. A detailed account of the phenomena under
study is therefore possible (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995). In the words of Kruger (2003, p. 18) “one may have a better understanding of a community member’s situation by reading a descriptive passage than just looking at demographic statistics.”

Because of the complexity of human nature and the necessarily interpretive nature of this study, a qualitative approach enabled me to consider the way impromptu humour is introduced and developed in real-life face-to-face everyday interaction, and how interactants use humour to maintain rapport. This approach allowed me to analyse not only the verbal behaviour of participants, but also their non-verbal behaviours, that is, body language and paralanguage, and contextual features, i.e., background information, the situation, the attitudes and personality characteristics of interactants, the relationship between interactants, and their gender. I was able to collaborate with participants throughout the research to consider their suggestions and preferences, as discussed in more detail later in this chapter. O’Neill (2006) suggests that in qualitative research, participants can be involved in the research and can clarify ambiguities or confusion over concepts.

Although they are useful methods, it was not relevant in the present study to analyse printed materials such as jokes and cartoons, or to examine simulated conversations in formal settings, such as the laboratory, workplace or university environment. Nor was it appropriate to rely solely on a quantitative approach. It
has been argued there should be a balance between quantitative and qualitative methods. As Stubbe (1992) has noted, “the use of quantitative methods alone often fails to capture the complexities inherent in any analysis of interactional data” (p. 61). For instance, quantitative methods present a generalised understanding of a given case, whereas qualitative methods present a full description of a given case (Kotre, 1996). Research that uses both qualitative and quantitative methods could be productive because a mixed methods approach rejects narrow analytical paradigms in preference to the breadth of information that a combination of methods provides (Nau, 1995; Schmied, 1993).

Researchers use quantitative and qualitative methods to explain “more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and/or using a variety of methods” (Burns, 2000, p.325).

Therefore, in the present study, primarily qualitative methods were used complemented by some quantitative analysis of the transcription data. The techniques employed are similar to those used by researchers who have analysed humour that arises in tape recorded conversation. For instance, scholars have employed CA and ethnographic techniques such as audio recordings and transcripts, non-participant observation, note taking, informal discussions, and survey questionnaires (e.g., Addington, 2001; Holmes & Hay, 1997; Kotthoff, 2006; Norrick, 1994, 2003; Tannen, 2005), and have identified and classified instances of humour into categories (e.g., Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991; Lampert, 1996; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1998; Scogin & Pollio, 1980).
In this study the data contains tape recordings of four mixed-gender group interactions referred throughout as Interaction one, Interaction two, Interaction three, and Interaction four. Transcripts of the entire conversations, from beginning to end, were produced from the four tape recordings. Selected portions from each of the four transcripts are located in Appendix C. These portions provide clear examples showing how participants’ humour was widely distributed among the five Humour Categories. The categories of humour are explained later in this chapter. Due to space constraints, it was not possible to include the four complete transcripts in the Appendices, therefore the four transcripts have been saved onto a disk, which has been placed in an envelope and attached to this thesis.

Data were then analysed by reading and marking the transcripts while listening to the recordings. Non-participant observation allowed me to collect data on interactants’ non-verbal behaviours, i.e., body language and paralanguage, and further data were gathered through informal conversations with participants in their respective groups after the interactions had been conducted and in follow-up sessions. Questionnaires were used to collect demographic information and to discover how participants felt about their own use of humour and their views and perceptions about the group interaction.
After identifying all instances of humour across the four transcripts, the next stage was to employ quantitative methods to classify the humour into a range of categories. The main purpose of coding humour is to organise the data in a way that aids further analysis and interpretation (Catterall & MacLaren, 1997). The result of coding the data into categories is presented in Chapter 4. The data were analysed further in Chapter 5 employing CA and ethnographic techniques to address the research question: What communication behaviours are employed by friends in mixed-gender groups to convey humour and maintain rapport in informal social interactions?

As reducing bias is a major consideration in this study, the following is a discussion of the procedures that may have helped to minimise bias.

### 3.2 Minimising bias

It was imperative in this study to recognise and to minimise personal bias as far as possible. Qualitative research is interpretive and influenced by many variables, for example personal preferences, and different personalities and experiences. Therefore, it is essential that qualitative researchers show that their research is credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996). According to Hyde (1994) identifying sources of potential researcher bias strengthens the credibility of qualitative research.
Drisko (1997) explains there is always a possibility the personal bias of a researcher could influence interpretation of his or her findings. Bias refers to influences that weaken accurate sampling, data collection, data interpretation, and reporting. Thus, Drisko advises qualitative researchers to engage in substantial self-reflection and self-analysis to perceive and interpret participants’ views, and to clarify unique events. Le Compte (2000) argues that even though researchers can never remove selectivity, they need to be aware of the ways in which selectivity and bias affect the usefulness and credibility of research findings.

It was crucial, therefore, in the current research to identify and minimise personal bias as far as possible. To strengthen credibility of the findings I followed the advice of qualitative researchers Hertz (1997) and Patton (1980) as follows.

1. I acknowledged any biases, taking into account that my own beliefs, preferences and experiences could prevent me from remaining objective.

2. I constantly reflected on any biases throughout the research process.

3. I repeatedly returned to the data to ensure that all the “constructs, categories, explanations, and interpretations” (Hertz, 1997, p. 339) used in the present research made sense.
Several processes motivated me to question my insights and arrive at a more objective analysis, which may have led to more accurate data interpretation. For instance, I collaborated with participants throughout the research to take into account their ideas and preferences. Participants were empowered to form their own mixed-gender groups and to arrange the time, location and duration of their interaction, to select the method and length of recording, and to talk freely about any topic. Furthermore, they were invited to inspect at any time the audio recordings, transcripts, questionnaires, written notes, and the research relevant to their own group interaction.

In addition, informal conversations with participants throughout the research process helped to verify my own impression of events. During these discussions, I gained much valuable data about each participant’s beliefs, feelings, motivations, and their character. I also sought clarity from each participant in the follow-up sessions about how they interpreted their group interaction. Participants helped to develop and label categories for coding humour and to confirm that the data were coded into the correct categories. The way in which personal bias was minimised is discussed in more detail throughout this chapter.

The following section explains why conversation analysis and ethnography as part of the broader method of CA were essential for identifying, collecting and analysing data in this study.
3.3 Research methods: Conversation analysis (CA) and ethnography

There is a growing interest in the use of interpretive and context-sensitive research strategies such as CA and ethnography as tools for understanding the dynamics of humour in interaction (Addington, 2001; Kotthoff, 2000; Norrick, 1993a, 2003). An interpretive approach to understanding conversational interaction is shared by various scholars of discourse (e.g., Alberts, 1992a; Gumperz, 1982; Hopper, 1983; Tannen, 2005). Such an approach is crucial to understanding the production and interpretation of messages in context (Gumperz, 1982). In the words of Hopper (1983), “interpretation constitutes communication” (p. 98). He argues that it is necessary to focus on the role of interpretation in conversation because such a focus involves concentrating on the hearer(s) response and the role of background knowledge, which is brought to the context.

The qualitative methods of CA and ethnography suited the present research because these techniques enable the researcher to intricately trace the development of humour as it arises in complex, ongoing interactions (Kotthoff, 2000).
Through CA and ethnography it is possible to analyse interactants *doing* humour in their everyday social interaction. As Scarborough Voss (1997) notes:

Humour is situated and contextual; not only does it require firsthand knowledge of the situation on the part of the researcher, but it also depends on the situated understanding of the participants … (it is) a form of interaction that requires local knowledge (p. 3).

Therefore, to achieve a greater awareness of humour, it is necessary to understand not only isolated instances of humour, but also their place and effect within a broader interactional framework (Hay, 1996). It could be that statistical procedures overlook or conceal these phenomena. By closely examining instances of humour in naturally occurring conversations “we are obliged to make sense of them as lay conversationalists do: by reference to the activities which they are recognisably used to accomplish” (Schenkein, 1972, p. 345).

To show the value of using these methods, the distinction between CA and ethnography needs to be made. CA is examined first followed by an explanation of ethnography. In addition, these techniques are discussed further throughout this chapter.
3.3.1 Conversation analysis (CA)

Drawing on the work of Harvey Sacks (1984, 1992), CA is an ethnomethodological approach that focuses on the sequential analysis of conversation or “talk-in-interaction” (Have, 1990, p. 1). By examining people doing the business of talk-in-interaction CA seeks to understand how people make sense out of their everyday lives. The assumption in CA research studies is that order exists in talk, that the order can be observed and described and that it informs interaction in face-to-face experiences. Within this order, interaction is organised in sequential structures that conversationalists produce and orient to in the evolving social interaction. In CA these sequential structures of social interaction are the focus of study (Heritage 1995; Heritage & Atkinson, 1984).

Many examples of the use of a CA approach are available, with some pertaining to humour and laughter in conversation. For instance, following Jefferson (1979, 1984), Soilevuo Grønnerød (2004) tape recorded and transcribed conversations to study laughter. Other CA research includes a study on shared laughter (Glenn, 1989), the affiliative and disaffiliative functions of laughter in men's and women's conversations (Makri-Tsiliipakou, 1994), laughter in humorous stories about menopause experiences (Wennerstrom, 2000), irony and joking (Tannen, 2005), teasing (Alberts, 1992a, 1992b), and humour in the workplace (Holmes, 2000).
The current research employed CA to analyse the way in which participants organise their talk, with attention to the way humour is introduced and developed in social interaction, and how it is present in the conversation. This approach makes it possible to examine how interactants incorporate humour into their ongoing conversation to maintain rapport, and how hearers respond to humour.

Through CA it is possible to identify conversational structures in unconstrained conversation as it happens in casual conversations among friends. Participants in the present study already knew one another and were part of a group of friends that met up regularly, in their homes, at parties, and at the local pub. Furthermore, they took part in joint activities, such as dancing, cycling, and amateur dramatics. The source for data collection in CA is usually interactions that would have occurred regardless of whether the researcher had recorded them. Interaction is studied using tape recordings and transcripts of naturally occurring conversation, away from the laboratory setting (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990; Have, 1999, 2004; Have & Psathas, 1995).

In the current research, mixed-gender group conversations were tape recorded and transcribed into a word-processed hard copy. I transcribed each recording in its entirety, which allowed analysis of the whole social interaction from beginning to end. Transcription conventions used in this study are explained in Appendix B. These conventions are based on a system devised by Gail Jefferson.
(see Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974) for representing speech in writing, although some modifications were made to reflect the particular nature of the present data.

It is essential that the researcher approach transcription of recordings without any preconceived ideas about what they think is going on or how they expect people to behave (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 1996), and I was mindful of this. The advantage of tape recordings is that they provide an account of what was said, how it was said, and the recordings can be listened to many times. Furthermore, the transcripts and recordings provide permanent records of the conversations. Therefore, it is possible to assess more rigorously the ways in which participants respond to and display an understanding of each other's actions rather than rely on recollections of the interaction. Analysis of data involves repeated listening to recordings and close attention to the transcripts, which often reveal previously unnoted recurring features of talk (Psathas & Anderson, 1990; Wrobbel, 1998).

Thus, tape recordings and transcripts were useful tools in the present study. They allow other researchers to inspect the evidence for analytical claims by examining the data directly, “thus making analysis subject to detailed public scrutiny and helping to minimise the influence of personal preconceptions or analytical biases” (Heritage, 1984, p. 238). Allowing others to examine the original data and draw their own conclusions provides a more accurate and empirical social science (Jones & LeBaron, 2002).
Nevertheless, there are some conditions in conversation research under which CA may not be useful, for example, where acoustics are limited, where the number of participants is large, or the rate of talk is extremely fast or slow (Atkinson, 1984). A further criticism of CA is that a recorded conversation is not the same as the conversation that took place. Similarly, transforming audio recordings into transcripts is another step from the interaction itself (Atkinson, 1984; Tannen, 2005). However, it does allow an examination of people’s talk, and often provides a good indication about what participants usually do outside a research setting. As noted by Moerman (1988), “just as the score for a symphony does not fully represent a performance of that music, the transcript of a course of interaction does not fully represent that interaction itself” (pp. 13-14).

Another concern about CA is that if participants are aware of the presence of the tape recorder, their talk is not spontaneous. Sometimes people play to an audience or avoid talking about personal topics in front of certain individuals (Goodwin, 1981). Even if some people do show self-consciousness, after a while they become used to the tape recorder. In particular, the tape recorder is quickly forgotten for those who have ongoing social relationships and especially if the setting is informal and relaxed (Goodwin 1981; Hopper, Koch & Mandelbaum, 1986; Tannen, 2005), as in the present research.
In the follow-up sessions I asked participants if they were aware of the tape recorder. Most agreed that after an early period of self-consciousness they soon relaxed because they were concentrating on the conversation with their friends. They also reported on playback that the tape recordings were representative of their usual interactions. Moreover, no one asked me to edit any of the materials, despite my assurances that I would do this any time without consequence if individuals felt their talk was too personal.

Therefore, this study recognises that the act of tape recording may potentially influence interaction, although there are ways of mitigating this problem, and I discuss this in more detail later in the chapter.

An advantage of using tape recordings and transcripts is that it puts the researcher in the most useful position to carry out holistic analyses capable of producing arguments and conclusions that are deeply insightful (see Jones & LeBaron, 2002).

The next section explains the qualitative method of ethnography, which complemented CA in this study.
3.3.2 Ethnography

For the present research it was valuable to integrate CA with ethnography. Whereas CA provides much insight into the structure of conversation, ethnography considers the behaviour of an individual or group and the context that surrounds any interaction, aspects that researchers need to consider when analysing social interaction (Moerman, 1988; Spencer, 1994).

Ethnography, which originates from social anthropology, is an investigative process that involves the direct observation of human activity and interaction in an ongoing and naturalistic way. Ethnographers depend on their participants for friendships or access to more participants, rather than rely on the formal laboratory setting (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Ethnography was employed in the current research because it helps to explain human communication within a group setting. For example, ethnographic techniques are used to show how participants interact, what they believe, and how they behave, including “knowledge of when to speak or be silent; how to speak on each occasion; how to communicate and interpret meanings of respect, seriousness, humour, politeness or intimacy” (Milroy, 1980, p. 85).
Following Hammersley (1990, p. 1), here are the main characteristics of ethnography that are relevant to the present study.

1. The focus is on small-scale environments and small numbers of participants.

2. Human behaviour is studied in real-life situations, as opposed to experimental settings developed by the researcher.

3. Analysis is carried out through verbal descriptions and explanations and involves interpretation of the meanings and functions of human activity.

4. Data are gathered from various sources, with the focus chiefly on observation, audio recordings, personal discussions, and questionnaires.

5. Data are collected in as raw a form, and on as wide a front as possible.

By integrating ethnography with CA in the present study it is possible to address the limitations of CA. The precedent for doing so is found in research that has employed CA and ethnography to examine conversational data of a humorous nature. For instance, in her PhD study, Addington (2001), used ethnography and CA to explore playful language, which included teasing, in the friendship talk of nine pre-adolescent girls. Addington refers to the work of Goffman (1967, 1974) and Hymes (1974), who argue that whereas CA provides insights into the kind of
work that talk performs in interaction, ethnography offers approaches to talk, which include knowledge of how to engage in everyday interaction. Likewise, Pizzini (1991) used CA and ethnographic techniques such as non-participant observation and recordings of verbal and non-verbal communication, to examine the meaning and use of humorous remarks between a few women patients and doctors in a medical setting. Similarly, integrating these methods allowed Hay (1994) to examine context and jocular abuse in the interactions of a small group of men and women. According to Moerman (1982), it is essential to integrate the methods of CA and ethnography because “we never merely exchange turns of talk. In all conversation, people are living their lives, performing their roles, enacting their culture” (p. 22).

Moreover, CA assumes that context is relevant only through what is said whereas ethnography considers context as an essential part of human social life. Based on his experiences conducting naturalistic research and his role as Director of the University of Michigan’s Center for the Ethnography of Everyday life (CEEF), Fricke (1998) recommends that analysis of contextual factors is best accomplished through ethnographic methods. He argues that such methods pay close attention to people’s daily lives and can provide a better understanding of human interaction. Ethnographers recognise that what people say and do needs to be explained in accordance with the context in which they occur (Hammersley, 1990), therefore it was crucial to examine context in the present study.
Contextual factors that are relevant to the present research include participants’ history, background information, relationship between interactants, the attitudes and personality characteristics of the individuals taking part, their gender, and details about the social setting (see Mandelbaum, 1991; Moerman, 1988). The current study examines these contextual factors through observation, note taking, audio recordings, questionnaires, and informal conversations.

Moreover, Burns (2000, p. 397) suggests that to gain a more complete picture of a social group, it is necessary to be aware of “the surrounding vicinity, the milieu of the beliefs and the larger social environment.” Being known in the community therefore allowed me to gain a better understanding of participants’ attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. This knowledge is important to understanding and explaining the ways in which participants produce and interpret humour in their interactions, and to gain insight into the nature of the possible relationship and degree of rapport between the participants.

Although the original concern of ethnography was to study entire cultures, it has broadened to include studies of small groups of people that do not live in one location. For instance, the main setting may be in the home, a social meeting place, a religious centre, in the workplace, or in cyberspace such as a chat room. Multi-sited settings, which allow the investigator to engage in research in more
than one location for comparative purposes, are also possible (Hammersley, 1990; Tardy, 2000).

Therefore, in the present study I tape recorded the four mixed-gender group interactions in more than one location; three interactions were held in group members’ homes, and the fourth interaction was held in the group’s local pub. Participants chose these settings because they felt they could relax and talk more openly in an environment that was familiar to them.

Multiple settings were also used by Tardy (2000) to study the interactions of a group of women at playgroup meetings and on their night-out gatherings. By employing ethnographic methods, such as participant observation, note taking, personal interviews, and questionnaires, she discovered that the site where the women shared information and stories was not the setting she expected. The women disclosed information about themselves not in the playgroup setting but during their night-out gatherings. Through ethnographic techniques, Tardy discovered the night-out gatherings allowed the women to relax and share what might otherwise be inappropriate information, as well as exchanging humour about their experiences.

There are, however, drawbacks to using ethnographic techniques. For instance, in his ethnographic study Sullivan (1982) found that more time was needed to complete the investigation than was first anticipated. He also experienced
problems in scheduling interviews with participants, and his hand-written records of interviews and observations imposed limitations on the amount and quality of the recorded material. In the present study, I took steps to counteract this problem by keeping in frequent contact with participants and allowing sufficient time to meet with them before, during and after the research. The hand-written notes I made during observation of the interactions were useful later when listening to the tape recordings because they reminded me of the thoughts and feelings I experienced while observing the interactions.

The methods of CA and ethnography were selected in this study to investigate the communication behaviours that men and women use for maintaining rapport through humour in friendly face-to-face social interaction. This process involved non-participant observation and note taking, tape recordings and their associated transcripts, questionnaires, and informal conversations, which are discussed later in this chapter.

Due to the sensitive nature of this study of social group interactions it was essential to be mindful of ethical factors at all stages, and now I explain how this was achieved.
3.4 Ethical issues

Researchers have an ethical responsibility to ensure the welfare and confidentiality of their participants and to treat them with dignity and respect. Before undertaking the current research, it was necessary to secure the consent of all parties to protect individuals’ rights to privacy (see Hopper, Koch, & Mandelbaum, 1986; National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), 1999). Therefore, an ethical approach was developed in the present study through actions that supported participants' privacy, informed participation and free consent. For instance, I provided each participant with an information statement and a consent form, which had been approved by the University of Western Sydney’s (UWS) Human Ethics Review Committee (2000). The purpose of the information statement was to ensure that participants were properly informed about what they were being asked to do, and what the likely consequences were for them should they choose to take part.

I made it clear to individuals that participation was voluntary, that they were free to withdraw consent at any time, and that there would be no disadvantages or adverse effects if they did not take part. Signed consent was obtained after everyone had an opportunity to read the information statement. In addition, I secured participants’ agreement to take part in the study at each stage of the research.
When conducting research it is essential to respect the privacy of participants by disguising their identities. Hence, all participants were advised that they would be assigned fictitious names and place names would be changed to preserve anonymity. Everyone was informed before the interaction took place, both verbally and in the information statement, that the entire conversation would be tape recorded and that I would be present as non-participant observer and would make notes during the interaction. I assured everyone that all materials relating to the research would be secured in a locked cabinet.

It was also explained that after the recording had finished participants would be invited to complete a confidential questionnaire (Appendix D) requesting background information and their perception of the experience. I assured participants that they were under no duty to complete a questionnaire or answer every question, and need provide no reason or justification for their decision.

As described in my University evidence application, the exact purpose of the research was not revealed to participants until after they had completed the questionnaire on the day of recording. Participants were informed that the general intention of the research was to examine “communication between men and women and how they interact in informal group settings.” By ensuring that the wording was general rather than specific, this reduced the possibility that participants’ interaction would be biased by my observation of their behaviour.
Although everyone knew that I was examining human communication, participants were unaware of my interest in humour and rapport until after the recording. My concern was that people would unintentionally alter their behaviour and deliberately laugh or try to think of funny things to say, or tell jokes, in the mistaken belief that this was what I wanted. This technique, in which participants are told some but not all purposes of the research until later, is relatively common to address an issue or question (see Bachorowski & Owren, 2004; Feagin, 1979, 2001; Scogin & Pollio, 1980).

For example, Feagin (1979, 2001), in her ethnographic study of the white community in Alabama, did not initially reveal the exact purpose of her research to participants. Rather than telling participants she was interested in their grammar, Feagin told them she wanted to discover what it was like growing up in the town, and she needed to record speech for accuracy to ensure that the dialogue was correct.

Moreover, Scogin and Pollio (1980) report that during the periods in which they observed and recorded group interactions of men playing pool, the men were not specifically aware that humour was being studied, although they knew they were being observed. The men’s reactions ranged from curiosity to indifference when they were told of the real purpose of the study. Before recording the interaction, I again explained to participants that I was exploring communication between men and women and how they interact in informal group settings.
Ethnographic research should not only empower the researcher with new understandings, but it should also empower those who are taking part (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Accordingly, I collaborated with participants throughout the research to consider their suggestions and preferences. Furthermore, the men and women in this study were invited to form their own mixed-gender groups and organise the time and location of their interactions.

The method of recording was also discussed with participants and 14 out of 16 of them stated a preference for audio recording rather than videotaping. Participants told me that they would feel self-conscious if a video camera was in the room. With regard to duration of the interactions, each group told me that when they met for a chat their conversations usually lasted from one to two hours. I advised participants that if they wished to continue their conversation beyond two hours then this was acceptable, as I would bring several blank audio tapes with me on the day of recording.

Participants were invited to inspect the audio recordings, transcripts, questionnaires, written notes, and the research relevant to their own interaction whenever they wished. As noted by Feagin (2001), researchers should regard these materials as confidential, irrespective of the participant’s attitude toward them at the time. I sought participants’ consent to contact them after recording the interactions, to allow each of them to give their own views and interpretations about their discourse, and to help classify the data according to a
range of categories. Individuals have a right to understand what is involved in the research, and there is a responsibility to share the findings with them to discover their reactions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Consequently, the empowering trend in ethnographic research allows individuals not only to take part in but to have a say and some degree of control over the information they provide. Collaboration allows participants to have some involvement in shaping their own participation, and is an acknowledgment of their contribution and sharing of their time (Bresler, 1996). Moreover, the men and women in the current study may benefit from the findings by learning how humour can contribute to their communication and relationships with others.

I provided everyone with my contact details and told them that they could get in touch with me whenever they wished if they had any questions or concerns about the research.

The next section describes the pilot studies and how information was gathered prior to the final research.
3.5 Pilot studies

I carried out several pilot studies to uncover unexpected problems concerning the tape recording of group interactions in the final research. These pilot studies were useful for determining the sample size, the number of participants in each group, and the setting. In addition, the pilot studies allowed me to test the equipment and familiarise myself with the tape recorder, to observe participants, to develop and test the questionnaire, and to increase awareness of any biases I might have.

To conduct the pilot studies an audio recorder was taken to social gatherings. The first of these events was a barbecue attended by eight men and women and three children, the second occasion was a party attended by eleven men and women. The third occasion was another barbecue at which there were nine men and women and five children.

The voluntary consent of all participants had already been gained before recording. Participants were informed by the information sheet and verbally by me before the recording began. On each occasion everyone consented to take part, knowing that they could withdraw their participation without adverse consequences.
Later when listening to the tapes I found that parallel conversations were taking place, that is, several conversations were occurring at the same time. This tendency for the co-occurrence of several conversations was also noted by Tannen (2005). It was possible for me to make sense of some parts of the talk but overall there were too many overlapping conversations, therefore each interaction produced fragments of different conversations. In addition, it was not easy to know which individual was talking due to background noise, for example, music playing, children playing games, people walking about and going to and from the house.

Because of the problems experienced with tape recording at these social gatherings, I sought the co-operation and the consent of seven students at my university who experimented with recording conversations of different sized groups in a quiet room on campus. I did not join in but observed the interactions and made notes of participants’ body language. Tape recording conversation at the university confirmed that transcription and analysis would be more fruitful if recording occurred at a fixed location and in a reasonably quiet place with few distractions. In addition, after listening to the tapes I decided that each group interaction should contain a maximum of four individuals to enable a dominant conversation to develop in which everyone participates, rather than parallel conversations. However, I acknowledge the possibility that in any interaction parallel conversations may occur.
The pilot work was also useful for developing a questionnaire and improving question wording and order. For instance, a questionnaire (Appendix D) was designed, and subjected to a field test to identify redundant and ambiguous questions and obvious gaps. The purpose of the questionnaire was to discover background information about participants, and their feelings about the interaction. The university students who had consented to take part in the pilot audio recordings were also asked to complete the questionnaire, and to provide feedback to identify ambiguities and difficult questions. Conducting a pilot study enabled refinement of the wording, ordering and layout of the questionnaire and helped keep it concise and manageable.

After completing the pilot studies, I returned all the questionnaires to the individuals who had completed them. In addition, notes that were made during observation were destroyed and all audio recordings of conversation pertaining to the pilot work were erased, thus no transcripts of the tape recordings were produced. Individuals that had taken part in the pilot studies were not included in the final research.

While it is acknowledged that conducting pilot work is not a guarantee of the success of the final research, pilot studies can help address the research question by providing useful information about the most suitable research process and about likely outcomes.
I now discuss the present research and provide details about the participants and how they were selected.

### 3.6 Participants in the study

Sixteen individuals (eight men and eight women) took part in the present research. The following background information was obtained from participants through informal conversations and via a questionnaire (Appendix D).

Participants were adult men and women. The mean age for men was 35.9 (SD=10.3) and the mean age for women was 34.9 years (SD=10.8). All participants were in full-time employment and in a variety of occupations such as administration, welfare, legal, hospitality, sales and the trades. All the men reported enjoying their job whereas two of the women said they would prefer to do other work. All participants identified themselves as heterosexual. Half the men and women stated that they were single and had never married. Three people were divorced and five individuals were either married or living with a partner.

For this study, I chose to ensure that participants spoke English as a first language to enable like comparison and to remove major language and cultural differences as a variable in the study of humour. All participants were born and raised in England. Although one female participant lived abroad for three years
During her childhood, she had attended an English-speaking school and interacted with other English expatriate families before returning to live in England. All of the participants had two parents who were born in Great Britain except for three participants who each had a parent born in Italy, one participant who had a parent born in Austria, another participant having a parent born in South Africa, and one other person with a parent born in Southern Ireland.

Participants were asked how long they had known one another and the nature of the relationship with their co-participants. The average time participants had known one another was six years; the longest period being 10 years and the shortest period two and a half years. All participants reported knowing one another socially as friends.

Here is an account of how participants were selected and how the groups in the current study were formed.

3.6.1 Size and composition of groups

This study analysed four mixed-gender group interactions. Each of the four groups contained four people comprising two men and two women who regarded themselves as close friends and knew each other socially. Each person took part in one group interaction, conversing only with the people he or she knew. None of the participants were university students or associated with my university. The
design of the groups facilitated the representation of men and women, and there were enough people within each group to allow comparison of results. Therefore, the composition of the groups was the same, and men and women were represented equally.

The small sample size of 16 individuals used in this study is common in ethnography, and the research setting is usually confined to small-scale environments and small numbers of participants (e.g., Easton, 1994; Heath & Luff, 1994; Wennerstrom, 2000). For instance, Easton (1994) tape recorded eight people to study gender differences in laughter in mixed-gender and single-gender groups. The four mixed-gender groups consisted of two participants of each gender. Easton remarked that she chose groups of four because it allowed her to balance the number of men and women in each group. In addition, Easton remarked that the small sample size in her study provided her with a group that was manageable in terms of accurately transcribing the conversations.

Similarly, ethnographer, Feagin (1979, 2001) concentrated on a few participants drawn from the local community of her former home town. Feagin argues that concentrating on a small sample size and keeping the numbers of men and women in the groups the same, enabled her to examine the data more closely and thus achieve a greater depth of understanding.
As I discovered when conducting the pilot studies a group size of four allowed each individual enough opportunity to speak, and later when I listened to the recordings it was easier for me to identify who was speaking. The pilot studies also revealed that a small group permits a dominant conversation to develop in which everyone joins in, rather than parallel, that is, simultaneous conversations. Moreover, it has been observed that if there are more than four people in the group, there is a greater possibility of two or more conversations occurring simultaneously (Schiffrin, 1994). The advantage of a small group is that everyone receives an opportunity to talk whereas a large group can become difficult to control and may split into sub-groups (Hoinville & Jowell, 1978).

3.6.2 Formation of mixed-gender groups: Friends interacting

I tape recorded the four mixed-gender group interactions over a seven-month period in a busy market town in East Anglia, England. I enlisted the help of my network of friends to organise their own groups of people that knew one another socially. A criticism of the researcher being known to participants is that individuals may grant consent without fully considering the implications of the research (Feagin, 1979, 2001).

Therefore, a special effort was made to ensure that individuals were given the opportunity to exercise free choice in consenting to take part. For instance, I casually mentioned the research to people I knew socially, thus allowing them to
pursue the topic if they were interested. If someone then expressed more than usual interest and a desire for further information, I asked if they would be willing to invite three friends that already knew one another to take part in a social gathering. By briefing this first or key person who invited others to take part in the recording, I ensured that no coercion or undue persuasion was used. Except for the key individual, all participants were approached by someone else and not by me. In this way, potential participants were allowed to make an informed and non-coercive choice of whether to take part in the research. Hence, arrangements for the social gatherings were made by the participants themselves rather than by me, which demonstrates that the groups were self-recruited. Subsequent conversations with the men and women in each of the four groups revealed that because they already knew one another they felt more relaxed about the research than they would if they were among people they had never met before.

Other researchers have also analysed conversational opportunities that are created by involving a key person who invites others. As noted by Barrett (1991), these key individuals are members who actively collaborate with the researcher. For instance, Easton (1994) enlisted the help of her friends to form groups to enable her to tape conversations, with permission sought before recording began. Based on her experiences as an ethnographic researcher, Feagin (1979, 2001) recommends that researchers employ common sense to select participants according to the existing conditions of the setting in which they are
working. In a study that took place in her former home town, Feagin (2001) selected participants who were a friend of a friend, using the resources of her family and their acquaintances.

For her research, Soilevuo Grønnerød (2004) used her social networks to enable her to tape record men who played rock music in non-professional bands. To enable them to record conversations for their research, Blom and Gumperz (1972) asked acquaintances whom they knew to be part of a network of local relationships to arrange a friendly gathering. In studies focusing on women's conversations, Coates (1989) gained consent to record several conversations of an established group of women friends, of which she was a member. Similarly, Pilkington's (1992) recordings of groups consisted of the women with whom she was sharing a flat and their friends. None of these researchers mention any problems or difficulties associated with gaining the help of their friends to form groups for their research projects.

According to some researchers (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Wolfson, 1988), using friends rather than strangers in natural or real-life settings is a significant variable because interaction style is affected by how well individuals know one another. For instance, a “special language” is created between people who know each other, and this language is used and developed each time they interact (Tannen, 1991, p. 33). It was crucial to the present study to analyse the interactions of people who knew each other well.
Conversely, humour research often involves people who do not know one
another well. To illustrate, researchers analysing humour suggest that all their
participants are friends, who know each other socially. However, on closer
examination, participants in these studies often include a mix of individuals, such
as strangers, work colleagues, university students, family members, friends and
acquaintances (e.g., Makri-Tsilpakou, 1994; Straehle, 1993; Tannen, 2005;
Wennerstrom, 2000). However, some individuals, such as those in the workplace
or university may not know one another well enough to predict how their
colleagues or classmates will react to humour (Alberts, Keller-Guenther &
Corman, 1996). Other researchers have found that it is necessary to sample more
widely than the university student population. They argue that whilst they are
university students, young men and women are more alike than they are at any
other time in the life span (see Turner, Dindia & Pearson, 1995).

In the next part, I discuss my relationship with participants and my role as
researcher in the current study.
3.7 **Role of the researcher**

In ethnographic research, personal acceptance of the researcher by the participants, especially from the outset, is essential to the success of the study (Feagin, 2001). Personal acceptance allowed me to gain entrée to the setting and provided me with a sense of being a trusted insider.

To familiarise myself with participants’ particular values, attitudes and behaviours, and to help establish rapport, I met everyone informally before conducting the study, and kept in close contact with them throughout the duration of the research, for instance, by telephone, text messaging, e-mail, post, and informal face-to-face meetings. According to Coupal (2003), “these shared experiences can result in greater levels of trust and more opportunities for shared construction of meanings, while still respecting differences” (p. 4). As Sarangi (2002) notes, achieving an insider perspective might include a gradual socialisation of the researcher into the community, and the collaborative interpretation of data. One advantage of knowing the participants was that I could draw on this background knowledge when analysing their communication activity later in the study. My role as non-participant observer made it possible to watch and listen to individuals interacting with one another, and to understand and interpret social meanings within real-life settings.
Nonetheless, conducting research in any community carries with it certain responsibilities for ensuring that the privacy and values of the local people are respected. This can be difficult if researchers are strangers because even if they do gain entry into the setting, this does not automatically ensure acceptance or co-operation from participants. As noted by Feagin (1979, 2001) who studied a small group of friends, it is usually less of a problem if participants know the researcher. The local community accepted Feagin because she carried out her research in her former home town. During this time, Feagin stayed with her grandparents and tried to fit in by visiting friends and attending church with her family. On the other hand, Harvey (1992) was a stranger to the community in which she conducted her ethnographic study. Despite being an outsider, acceptance by a local family provided Harvey with a place in the community, which allowed her to observe both language and everyday life.

Even if participants know the researcher, it is never possible to fit in completely, nor is it necessary (Feagin 2001; Liebow, 1967). In his ethnographic research among black and white working-class men, Liebow reports that he was able to lower the barriers between his participants and himself but could not remove them totally. Liebow explains that fieldwork is like a chain link fence, because the fence remains a barrier even though you can see through it.

The section below discusses the procedure I followed to collect data for the present research.
3.8 Data collection procedures

CA and ethnographic techniques were used to gather and analyse the data for the present research. This procedure involved the following different approaches, tape recording and transcribing four mixed-gender group conversations, non-participant observation, taking notes, and administering questionnaires to participants after the recording. In addition, everyone agreed to chat with me in their respective groups immediately after they had completed their questionnaires. These informal group chats helped to preserve the relaxed atmosphere that had developed during the conversation participants had just shared, and provided further insight into their general views about the interactions. Participants also took part in follow-up sessions to allow them to express their views and contribute to the interpretation of data.

At the beginning of each group interaction, the purpose of the present research was explained and questions about procedures were answered. All participants completed a university ethics consent form and their agreement to take part was secured at each stage of the research. Instructions about how to interact were not issued because participants were close friends, who had socialised regularly on previous occasions. To encourage frank discussion, an effort was made to put participants at ease and to make them feel that all their views and beliefs were acceptable and interesting. The group conversations therefore emerged
spontaneously in the context of participants’ daily lives. Hence, these groups of friends were asked to choose their own conversational material and to speak freely about anything.

Next is a discussion of the various approaches, i.e., tape recording, non-participant observation, taking notes, and questionnaires that were used to collect data. I also point out the limitations of these techniques and explain how harm was minimised.

3.8.1 Settings and tape recording

As this study examines spontaneous humour in naturally occurring face-to-face encounters, it was appropriate that the four mixed-group interactions were held in environments that were familiar to and chosen by the participants. Thus, three group interactions were held in the homes of the participants, and the fourth group interaction took place in a local pub where participants often met and talked.

My methods correspond by those used by qualitative researchers Hoinville and Jowell (1978) who recommend that researchers recruit people from an area within easy access of participants’ homes so they do not have too far to travel. In addition, they suggest holding the interaction at a location that is familiar and informal. Moreover, in the experience of Easton (1994), a casual pleasant
atmosphere allows participants to feel comfortable and at ease, and promotes spontaneous talk.

I made a preliminary visit to all four locations a few days before each interaction occurred. The purpose of my visit was to examine the physical characteristics of the setting, such as the layout, and to determine where to conduct the tape recording. For each interaction, data was recorded on a powerful stereo microphone, which allowed me to place the recording equipment out of sight of the participants. The discreet location of the tape recorder enabled me to turn over the first tape when it was full or to replace a full tape with a new blank tape without drawing too much attention to myself.

The four mixed-gender group interactions are summarised now to show what happened on the day of recording. In addition, the first or key participant who invited his or her friends to take part in the interaction is identified. Each group decided when their interaction would take place, i.e., at times and places that were convenient to them. Therefore, the four interactions were tape recorded in the following order.
Interaction one

The first group of four friends were:

Two women: Lucy (key participant) and Nora. Two men: Malc, and Steve

Lucy hosted the first interaction by arranging a gathering for her friends at her flat one Sunday afternoon. I arrived first, and with Lucy’s help prepared refreshments and rearranged the furniture to enable participants to sit next to each other. We arranged the food on a square-shaped table and I placed the tape recorder on a shelf in the corner of the room and out of sight of participants. Malc, Nora and Steve arrived within a few minutes of one another, and we chatted and had something to eat for about 30 minutes.

The friends decided to sit at the table for their chat; the men sat next to each other with Malc facing Nora, and Steve facing Lucy. When participants were ready, I switched on the tape recorder and sat on the settee with my notebook and pencil. I sat away from the group but near enough to listen and observe. The conversation began with participants discussing films they had watched recently.
Interaction two

The second group of four friends were:

Two men: Grant (key participant) and Stan. Two women: Lisa and Jill

Participants agreed unanimously to hold the second interaction one Tuesday evening at a local pub where they frequently met and talked in the evening. Grant already knew the manager of the pub, who allowed them to have exclusive use of one of the lounges in the pub. Grant and I arranged to meet first at the pub to prepare the room so that he and his friends could sit together and to arrange the refreshments on the table. I placed the tape recorder on a small table out of sight of participants. Lisa, Stan and Jill arrived approximately 15 minutes later.

I chatted and ate with participants about 30 minutes before the recording started. The friends then moved to the table and sat down. The men sat next to each other with Grant facing Lisa, and Stan facing Jill. When participants were ready, I switched on the tape recorder and sat on an easy chair away from the group with my notebook and pencil. Then participants began the conversation by discussing what they did at the weekend.
Interaction three

The third group of four friends were:

Two men: Hank (key participant) and Ron. Two women: Sue and Deb

Hank volunteered to hold the third interaction at his house on a Thursday evening. When I arrived, Hank had already prepared the refreshments and he helped me to prepare the room so that participants could sit next to one another. I placed the tape recorder on the bookcase amid books, magazines and ornaments so that it was out of sight of participants. When everyone was present we ate and chatted for about 45 minutes before the recording commenced.

When they were ready, the friends sat around the table with Hank sitting next to Deb and opposite Sue, and Ron sitting next to Sue and opposite Deb. I switched the tape recorder on when participants were ready. I sat on the sofa away from the group with my notebook and pencil and they began chatting soon after that.
Interaction four

The fourth group of four friends were:

Two men: Dan (key participant) and Ted. Two women: Jen and Mel

The last interaction took place at Dan’s house one Saturday evening. Dan had previously told me that he wished to catch up with his friends by inviting them over to dinner at his house and that this would be a good opportunity to tape record the conversation. I arrived before the other participants and placed the tape recorder on a shelf in the far corner of the room and out of sight of participants.

The men sat next to each other with Dan facing Jen and Ted facing Mel. I declined Dan’s invitation to join them for dinner and instead sat in an easy chair with my notebook and pencil, and switched on the tape recorder when participants were ready. Hence, I sat away from the dining table but near enough to observe and listen to the conversation.

Here it is necessary to explain how non-participant observation was carried out in the current study.
3.8.2 Non-participant observation and note taking

During audio taping of the group interactions my role was that of non-participant observer. Research on communication in social interaction indicates that the inclusion of an observer is not unusual. With consent, Tannen (2005) tape recorded and observed a group of friends at a dinner party. In a study of laughter, Soilevuo Grønnerød (2004) recorded and observed men who played rock music in non-professional bands. Taking the role of non-participant observer enabled me to operate the tape recorder and handle the audiotapes, which helped to minimise disruption to the interactions and ensure security and confidentiality of the tapes. As I discovered when carrying out the pilot studies, observation was useful because it supplemented the information gathered from the tape recordings and questionnaires. The written notes I made were invaluable later when listening to the recordings because they reminded me of the feelings and thoughts I experienced while observing the interactions. According to Silverman (1993) written notes are an essential part of the observational methods of the investigation.

An advantage of non-participant observation is that it provided me with a detailed knowledge of communication processes in context (see Poole & McPhee, 1985). As observer it was possible to collect a rich data set. For instance, I documented the informal interactions before, during, and after the tape recordings. In addition, I was able to simultaneously observe, listen and
make notes about participants’ body language and the meaning attached to language choices. I also noted the way in which participants behaved toward one another and the degree of rapport among interactants. To record body language during the interactions I used a checklist of features of body language. Findings were recorded by placing a tick alongside these features when they occurred, and by making brief written notes.

I found observation useful for gaining new insights, for cross-checking information and possible discrepancies between what participants did and what they said they did. In addition, observation was helpful for discovering issues that people were not asked about in the questionnaires and may not have thought of mentioning, and for getting a better understanding of the context (Adler & Adler, 1994; Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994).

As some of the emotional context of the interactions is not captured in audio recordings, my role as non-participant observer enabled me to listen and watch in order to gain insight into the mood or the special atmosphere of the situation, especially concerning any emotions that were evoked. Observation also provides depth because it helps the researcher identify the most salient characteristics of the situation and problem being pursued (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is important, however, for observers to pay close attention to the practical reasoning behind their interpretations, and to consider likely alternative explanations. By so doing,
they can specify “their points more definitely and tighten them considerably”
(Poole & McPhee, 1985, p. 129).

Despite its advantages, non-participant observation has been criticised
(LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). For instance, observation does not provide insight
into what people may be thinking or what might motivate a particular comment
or behaviour. Such information can only be obtained by asking people (Lofland
& Lofland, 1984; Sadler, 1981). Therefore, the informal chats I held immediately
after the recordings and the follow-up sessions that occurred after transcription
of the tapes, were useful for ascertaining participants’ views and beliefs.

With the consent of all participants, the tape recorder was left switched on
throughout the post-session chats and during the follow-up meetings. Later I was
able to listen repeatedly to participants’ recorded comments. This feedback
allowed me to reflect more thoroughly on events and to check my own
interpretation of them. Nevertheless, there may have been differences in the way
participants perceived their group interaction and bias was always a possibility. It
was unknown to what extent each participant in the present study was influenced
by his or her beliefs, preferences and past experiences.

A second criticism of observation is that researchers are often subjective when
selecting what to write about their observations. Researchers may experience
problems dealing with all the information to which they are exposed, and
therefore write down only events that are familiar or interesting. Thus, it was essential that I carefully documented and repeatedly questioned my own opinions and assumptions. Although it was physically impossible to make detailed notes about everything that participants said and did, I tried to write down as much information about the interactions as possible, even though some information did not seem important at the time. There is a danger that if researchers select which information to include or exclude, they may not recognise unanticipated relationships or patterns of interaction (Lofland & Lofland, 1984; Sadler, 1981).

Nevertheless, I followed Denzin’s (1978) advice, namely that, “observers should not try to present themselves as something they are not” (p. 162). Accordingly, I was constantly aware of my own behaviour and the impressions that I might make on those being studied. I aimed to be non-judgemental and to write down what happened in the interactions rather than assume I knew what was going on. Similarly, in the post-session chats and later in the follow-up sessions I gave everyone a chance to contribute and put across their viewpoint rather than rely on one person’s perspective to minimise distortion of the research.

Another criticism of non-participant observation is that the presence of the observer will have an effect on participants and is most likely to influence events in some way (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). I therefore ensured that everyone was fully aware of my plans and although participants invited me to join in, I deliberately avoided engaging in any of the group interactions as there is the
potential for researcher participation to change the social situation. I was aware that my involvement could ultimately influence the behaviour of participants (Goodwin, 1981).

The current study recognises that simply having the researcher in the setting changes it in some way. Although none of the participants objected to my presence, I followed procedures used by ethnographic researchers (e.g., Cox, 1980; Goodwin, 1981; Tardy, 2000). For instance, my separation from participants was similar to strategies used by Tardy who minimised intrusiveness by sitting away from the group, making no eye contact and remaining silent throughout the interaction.

I accounted for my presence but lack of involvement by explaining to participants that I wished to gain a general awareness of the atmosphere of the interaction, and if they glanced at me, they would see me writing notes. To ensure co-operation and reduce participants’ anxiety about being observed, Tardy (2000) explained the nature of her research and gained consent with an approved university form. She observed participants and took notes and tried to sit as unobtrusively as possible near conversations. With a notebook on her lap, she wrote comments on how participants gathered, who gathered with whom most often, and the tone and content of their conversation. Further, Tardy displayed her notes so that anyone could read them, thereby lessening any reservations about what she was doing.
In her PhD study, Cox (1980) sat in a corner of the room writing notes while observing, thus ensuring that she did not interact with participants. Metz (1978) sat at the back of a classroom when observing students. She ignored students’ attempts to get her attention, accordingly the students ignored her. Similarly, Goodwin (1981) strove to limit as much as possible his interaction with participants and justified his lack of engagement by displaying involvement in the technical details of recording. Despite these precautions it is necessary for observers to be aware of and consider that they will “unintentionally become a stimulus to incite or inhibit certain behaviours or change others” (Soskin & John, 1963, p. 230).

Having gathered data by tape recording, observation, and making notes, the next stage was to collect information by asking participants to complete a two page questionnaire.

### 3.8.3 Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix D) that I developed earlier in the pilot studies was administered to participants to enrich and support the information collected from non-participant observation and from the tape recordings. Therefore, this study follows researchers that have administered questionnaires to strengthen data collected by other methods such as tape recordings, transcripts, and observation (see Tardy, 2000; Willing, 1992).
When interpreting conversation, especially about humour in everyday interaction, it was necessary for this study to find out the history and the culture of the groups to determine the part this played in the conversations (Oring, 1994; Sykes, 1983). Therefore, biographical and ethnographic information was collected from participants. Other researchers have administered questionnaires to a small number of participants to elicit personal details and to gain a greater understanding of the interaction (see Roberts, Davies & Jupp, 1992; Tannen, 2005; Tardy, 2000; Willing, 1992).

Information gathered from the questionnaires was helpful when analysing the present data because it provided an opportunity to gain a more thorough understanding of the four mixed-group interactions and to obtain further insights about participants and their communication behaviours. The reason I asked participants to complete a questionnaire was to discover each individual’s general opinions and perceptions about their group interactions and to elicit a sense of their view of humour throughout the interaction. I found this information helped to explain participants' perceived roles of others in creating, developing, and maintaining humour and rapport during the interaction.

The questionnaire completed by the 16 participants in this study consisted mainly of closed or fact-based questions in which they were asked to select alternatives from a list. For example, one question asked: Are you single, married, divorced, or separated? The closed questions were followed by opinion-
based questions (see Tardy, 2000; Willing, 1992). For instance, participants were asked to provide demographic information and then proceed to answer questions about their opinions and perspectives. The questions on page one of the questionnaire aim to build a picture of participants’ background, i.e., age, marital status, birthplace, parents’ birthplace, and how long participants had lived in the area. Other questions on page one asked participants whether they had any siblings and children, their education and qualifications, their occupation, whether they enjoyed their job, and if not, what job they would prefer, their relationship with their co-conversationalists, and how long they had known one another.

The questions on page two of the questionnaire explore participants’ general perceptions about their group interaction and their overall view of humour. For instance, participants in the current study were asked how they felt before the interaction, whether they enjoyed the conversation, whether their co-participants allowed them to engage fully in the conversation and whether or not they felt they had an affinity with one another. Participants were also asked to name who they thought was the most humorous person and who was the least humorous person in their group interaction. Other questions sought to identify whether each participant believed they had a sense of humour, whether others had told them they had a sense of humour, and how important they thought it was for a romantic partner to have a sense of humour.
In addition, questions explored the different uses of humour in everyday situations. For example, whether participants used humour to amuse others, for friendly purposes, for non-friendly purposes, in difficult situations, to hide anger, to hide embarrassment, to hide disappointment, to persuade others to do things for them, and to discuss difficult or embarrassing subjects.

I invited participants to complete the questionnaire following the tape recording of their group interaction. They were reassured the questionnaire related only to the single taped interaction in which they had taken part, and that they were under no duty to complete a questionnaire or answer every question. To uphold privacy, individuals were asked to complete their questionnaire in private without discussing or showing it to their co-conversationalists. Envelopes were given to all participants and they were told to place their questionnaire in an envelope immediately on completion. The envelopes were then collected by me and the contents were not discussed or shown to any of the participants.

The benefit of using a questionnaire is that it can be a convenient method of obtaining information about respondents. Furthermore, it allows for standardisation and uniformity both in the questions asked and in the method of approaching topics, making it far easier to compare and contrast answers by respondent groups (Joppe, 2005).
However, a criticism of using a questionnaire, Joppe argues, is that the information provided by respondents may not necessarily be accurate. This is because respondents know that they are being studied but may wish to impress or please the researcher by providing the kind of response they believe the researcher is looking for. In addition, current moods and attitudes of each participant may have influenced their reporting. Because of their own time constraints people may be unwilling to spend a long time completing a questionnaire. Given more opportunity for reflection their conclusions might well differ from their spontaneous reactions (Hoinville & Jowell, 1978). Another drawback is a high refusal rate because individuals may regard the questions as inappropriate or intrusive, or questions may be too specific and the respondent is unable to answer (Joppe, 2002).

To help overcome these limitations I paid careful attention to the wording of the questions, and the questionnaire was subjected to a pilot study to test for redundant and ambiguous questions. Besides, throughout the present research I made a special effort to put participants at ease and make them feel that all of their views were acceptable and interesting. Hence, all 16 participants completed the questionnaire.

After the four group interactions had taken place each recording was transcribed in its entirety from beginning to end. The two step process that I employed for identifying and coding humour into categories is now described.
3.9 Procedure for identifying and classifying humour into categories

This section explains the procedure for identifying and coding humour for the purpose of examining impromptu humour in interaction, the results of which are reported in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, conversation analysis and ethnographic techniques are used to analyse the data to provide a thorough analysis of the communication behaviours that men and women use to convey humour and maintain rapport.

To differentiate humour from surrounding talk and to enable a close analysis of communication behaviours, the present study focuses on verbal behaviours and also non-verbal behaviours, as described later, including contextual features such as communication context, knowledge about the participants, and background information (see Alberts, 1992a; Norrick, 1993a; Palmer, 1994). Such features as these are relevant to identifying instances of humour because they can be used by the speaker to signal humour, and they can be employed by hearers to signal that something is understood to be humorous. As Tannen (2005) points out, determining the true intent of what someone says cannot be established by examining talk alone.

In addition to focusing on verbal, non-verbal and contextual features to identify humour in interaction, this study considers the definition of humour that I put
forward in Chapter 2. Therefore, humour in this study is defined as intentional and unintentional verbal and non-verbal messages that elicit laughter, chuckling, and other forms of spontaneous behaviour by any of the interacting parties, and taken to mean pleasure, delight, amusement, and surprise. In addition, humour is characterised as a positive communication attribute.

Before examining the data with CA and ethnographic techniques a two step procedure was established to identify and classify humour. I drew on and modified the work of researchers that have used the two step process to identify and code humour in tape recorded conversation to examine how men and women employ humour in a group situation (e.g., Ervin-Tripp & Lampert, 1992; Lampert, 1996; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1998; Scogin & Pollio, 1980). First, these researchers identified remarks that were prefaced either by a statement that what was said was intended to be funny, or contextually marked by the accompaniment of laughter. Second, all the instances of humour identified during the first stage were then classified into various humour categories to evaluate focused and non-focused humour. The first step is described as follows.
3.9.1 Step one: Identifying humour - the humorous instance (HI)

The first step in coding humour involved examining the four tape recordings and transcripts in their entirety and locating each occurrence of humour, hereafter called a *humorous instance* (HI). Hence, the unit of analysis in this study was the HI.

To determine the beginning and end of an HI, it was useful to follow Heisterkamp and Alberts’ (2000) procedure for locating the beginning and the end of an episode of teasing. Therefore, I identified the beginning of an HI by reading backwards through the transcript to find the starting point of the speaker’s humorous comment. The end of that HI was determined by reading forward through the transcript and finding the point at which that comment had elicited a humorous response from a recipient and or any added comments from hearer(s) or from the original speaker.

In addition, I identified the *total* number of HIs rather than try to establish the *length* of each HI, because establishing length may not give an accurate explanation of the total humour produced (see Hay, 1994, 1996; Heisterkamp & Alberts, 2000). A single humorous comment can interject just as much humour into a conversation as a series of humorous comments, therefore, both can be considered equal contributors of humour. For example, a speaker laughs then makes several funny comments about another person’s behaviour. Consequently,
in the present research, repeated humour by the same person, on the same topic, and within the limits of the same conversation was counted as one HI.

To illustrate, in the following excerpt from Tholander’s (2002) study, Nadi humorously comments twice on the behaviour of her friend Johan (lines 1 and 4). However, rather than count each comment as a separate HI, both comments that Nadi makes are counted as one HI. This excerpt has been simplified for greater clarity.

1. Nadi: Johan misses her so very much then, like ya know
2. Lisa: haha
3. Jas: [hahaha
3. Tea: [yes
4. Nadi: Johan hasn’t worked well, he just sat like this and cried the whole day!
5. Lisa: hahaha

(Tholander, 2002, p. 130)

Because of the potential for researcher bias, I sought clarity from participants during follow-up sessions about how to interpret their group interaction, especially if there was doubt about an HI. Any differences were discussed and resolved through discussion and an HI was discarded if neither the participants nor I could reach consensus. Collaborating with participants and reaching agreement in sorting data is considered an essential part of the research process (see Alberts, Keller-Guenther & Corman, 1996; Nevo, Nevo, & Siew Yin, 2001). The present study recognises that evaluation is influenced by many variables, for example personal preferences and experiences. However, Myers (1978, 1981)
argues that even though it is not easy for the researcher to interpret conversation, ultimately interactants have to make these decisions all the time.

When identifying an HI in the present research it was necessary to consider a range of non-verbal behaviours as described below.

**Non-verbal behaviour**

Non-verbal behaviour is defined as the way in which people communicate intentionally or unintentionally without words and may be used to transport emotion, attitudes, interest, and to help or vary verbal communication (Gire, 2003). According to Mehrabian (1972, 1981), around 93% of the information exchanged during face-to-face communication is non-verbal. Of this percentage, 55% is based on an individual’s body language, 38% is based on paralanguage, and 7% is based on verbal communication.

The present research expands the range of non-verbal behaviours that can be used to identify humour in interaction by drawing on work that has examined humour and laughter (e.g., Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield, 1991; Eggins & Slade, 2005; Holmes, 2000; Norrick, 2004; Nwokah, Hsu, Davies & Fogel, 1999; Provine, 2001; Straehle, 1993; Tannen, 2005).
The non-verbal behaviours that were used to identify instances of humour (HIs) in the present research are presented in Table 3.1.

### Table 3.1

**Non-verbal behaviours for identifying humour in this study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-verbal behaviour</th>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Body language</td>
<td>Gestures, i.e., use of hands, feet, and other parts of the body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Body movements, i.e., leaning forward, getting physically close, nodding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facial expressions, i.e., changes in the eyes, brows, mouth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eye movements, i.e., gazing, glancing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Paralanguage</td>
<td>Jokey voice (jocular voice or light-hearted tone), intonation, pauses, emphasis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laughter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laughing voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overlap.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Body language and paralanguage are now explained in more depth.

1. **Body language**

As shown in Table 3.1, body language is a feature of non-verbal communication and includes gestures, body movements, facial expressions, and eye movements (Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991; Duck, 1999; Eggins & Slade, 2005).

Body language reinforces the messages communicated through language. Speakers may use body language, for instance, a wink, a smile, a nod, or lively
expression to signal humour. A humorous comment may also elicit similar responses from hearer(s), such as a smile or grin, leaning forward, nodding of the head, or a raised eyebrow (Holmes, 2000; Tannen, 2005). A detailed analysis of body language was not conducted in the current study because the majority of participants chose to be audio taped rather than videotaped.

2. **Paralanguage**

Paralanguage is a component of non-verbal communication and refers to the elements in communication that are ancillary to language proper such as jokey voice (jocular voice or light-hearted tone of voice), intonation, pauses, emphasis, laughter, laughing voice, and overlap. Participants may use paralanguage to signal humour, to communicate emotions or feelings about another person, and add to and complete the meaning of what is being said. Usually it is a combination of the elements of paralanguage that informs others what emotion is being expressed (Straehle, 1993; Tannen, 2005).

Each element of paralanguage analysed in the present study and shown in Table 3.1 is discussed as follows.
Jokey voice (jocular voice or light-hearted tone of voice), intonation, pauses, emphasis

Features of paralanguage that participants may use to signal humour are jokey voice, intonation, pauses, and emphasis. Jokey voice may be used to indicate that a comment is not to be taken seriously (Egging & Slade, 2005; Wyer & Collins, 1992). A person relating a humorous story may employ jokey voice, insert pauses, place heavy emphasis on certain words and use rising and falling intonation as they speak.

Laughter

Laughter is another feature of paralanguage. Researchers often consider laughter as the main strategy for supporting humour (e.g., Greatbatch, 2003; Platow et al., 2005; Provine, 2004; Wilkinson, 2007). I identified laughter by noting where it occurred in the conversation. Laughter can be produced by hearer(s) and by the speaker to signal that something is humorous, and speakers may also use laughter as a cue to invite others to respond to their humour (Jefferson, 1979).

Laughing voice

Laughing voice, like laughter, is a feature of paralanguage. Laughing voice is when laughter co-occurs with speech to signal humour. Provine (2001) defines it as a form of blended laughing speech that communicates emotional tone.
Overlap

Overlap is also a feature of paralanguage. Overlap occurs when one person’s speech or laughter overlaps with the speech or laughter made by another person. It is often a collaborative phenomenon that can be used to express amusement, rapport, enthusiasm, and interest in the talk of others (Coates, 1989; Ervin-Tripp & Lampert, 1992; Holmes, 2000; Hopper & Glenn, 1994; Norrick, 1994; Straehle, 1993; Tannen, 2005).

The next section describes the procedure used in the present study for coding the HIs into various categories of humour.

3.9.2 Step two: Classifying the HIs into categories

After locating all the HIs across the four transcripts, I then counted how many HIs were produced by the men and how many were produced by the women. I followed and modified the work of researchers that have coded instances of humour into categories (e.g., Ervin-Tripp & Lampert, 1992; Lampert, 1996; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1998; Scogin & Pollio, 1980). Shortly, I will discuss the work of these researchers to show how their categories of humour were adapted to suit the current study.
Hence, in the present research the second step in coding humour was to classify each HI into one of five Humour Categories labelled: 1) Ingroup (male); 2) Ingroup (female); 3) Outgroup; 4) Self; and 5) General. To provide a greater degree of reliability about the findings I met participants after the interactions to check the classification procedure. I asked participants to confirm that the HIs had been placed in the appropriate category of humour and any disagreements were resolved through discussion. The purpose of these discussions was to ensure that my interpretations matched participants’ interpretations. Thus, both researcher and participants collaborated and reached consensus on the placement of HIs into the categories of humour (see Alberts, Keller-Guenther & Corman, 1996; Nevo, Nevo, & Siew Yin, 2001).

By classifying the HIs into these five Humour Categories it was possible to evaluate focused and non-focused humour to examine face-to-face communication behaviours that men and women use to relate to one another. Focused humour is directed toward an individual or object that is central to the humour, whereas non-focused humour is not focused on anyone or anything.

The five Humour Categories are shown in Table 3.2. Also explained are the key roles in which each participant was involved, according to whether the male or female participant was a speaker, recipient or member of the audience, and how many participants assumed that role. Note that each of the four group interactions contained two men and two women.
Table 3.2

Five Humour Categories into which the HIs were coded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humour Categories</th>
<th>Explanation of men’s and women’s key roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ingroup (male)</td>
<td>A male or female participant (speaker) focuses humour on a male (recipient) in the present group. If the speaker is male, the audience will contain two female participants. If the speaker is female, the audience will contain one male and one female participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ingroup (female)</td>
<td>A male or female participant (speaker) focuses humour on a female (recipient) in the present group. If the speaker is male, the audience will consist of one male and one female. If the speaker is female, the audience will contain two male participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Outgroup</td>
<td>A male or female participant (speaker) focuses humour on someone (a person or persons) or something (e.g., an animal or institution) outside the present group. If the speaker is male, the audience will contain one male and two females. If the speaker is female, the audience will consist of one female and two male participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self</td>
<td>A participant focuses humour on him or herself. In the self category the speaker and focus of humour are one and the same, and the speaker initiates humour. If the speaker is male, the audience will contain one male and two females. If the speaker is female, the audience will consist of one female and two male participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. General</td>
<td>A participant’s humour is not focused on anyone or anything, that is, non-focused humour. The speaker makes humorous comments, e.g., witty statements. A witty statement is humour that an individual makes up “on the spot” (Crawford &amp; Gressley, 1991, p. 224). If the speaker is male, the audience will contain one male and two females. If the speaker is female, the audience will consist of one female and two male participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To develop the five Humour Categories I drew on and expanded the work of humour researchers Ervin-Tripp and Lampert (1992), Lampert (1996), Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (1998), and Scogin and Pollio (1980). For instance, Scogin and
Pollio (1980) coded humour into one of the five categories to examine the nature and pattern of focused and non-focused humour. These categories are labelled:

1) other-directed (humour directed on another group member); 2) generalized other (humour directed at institutions or people outside the present situation); 3) self (humour focused on instigator); 4) nondirected (humour based on incongruity or word play); and 5) undetermined (humour was noted but where sound quality was poor).

Similarly, in a series of studies (Ervin-Tripp & Lampert, 1992; Lampert, 1996; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1998) instances of humour were coded into four categories to explore gender differences in the use of different functions of humour in interaction. These categories are labelled: 1) ingroup-directed; 2) outgroup-directed; 3) self-directed; and 4) socially neutral humour.

However, it was necessary to adapt these researchers’ categories of humour to suit the present research. For example, researchers tend to code humour that is focused on a male or a female group member into one category rather than separate the humour into two categories. This category is labelled ingroup-directed by Ervin-Tripp and Lampert (1992) and Lampert (1996), and labelled other-directed by Scogin and Pollio (1980).

As Table 3.2 demonstrates, I separated HIs that were focused on a group member into two categories. Therefore, an HI focused on a male group member was
coded into the category labelled: 1) Ingroup (male), whereas an HI focused on a female group member was classified into the category labelled: 2) Ingroup (female). Then I divided the categories Ingroup (male) and Ingroup (female) further according to whether the speaker was i) a man or ii) a woman. The other three categories of humour in the present study, which are labelled 3) Outgroup, 4) Self, and 5) General, are similar to Scogin and Pollio’s (1980) categories namely, generalised other, self, and non-directed, respectively.

According to Holmes and Hay (1997) “successful humour is a joint construction involving a complex interaction between the person intending a humorous remark and those with the potential of responding” (p. 131). In other words, humour needs the co-operation of the speaker and hearer(s). Therefore, the current study coded speaker’s humour and hearer(s) response, into the categories that follow. Speaker’s humour is discussed first.

3.9.3 Speaker’s humour

For the purposes of this study, the speaker is a person that initiates humour. Identifying speaker’s humour involved examining all the HIs that had been coded into the five Humour Categories and locating all initial humorous comments, as explained earlier in this chapter. An initial humorous comment is located at the beginning of an HI and is the first humorous remark uttered by an individual. Speaker’s humour was separated into male or female speakers, and
then coded into one of four categories as follows: 1) Discourse and laughter; 2) Laughter and laughing voice; 3) Laughing voice; and 4) Other. The categories for speaker’s humorous talk are presented in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Speaker’s humour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Discourse and laughter</td>
<td>Laughter is placed before or after talk or at some point in the utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Laughter and laughing voice</td>
<td>Laughter and laughing voice are used simultaneously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Laughing voice</td>
<td>Laughing voice is used throughout the comment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Other</td>
<td>Talk is accompanied by the non-verbal behaviours listed in Table 3.1, except for laughter and laughing voice, which are coded into separate categories in this table.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To develop the four speaker categories I drew on Easton’s (1994) research on gender and laughter. For instance, Easton observed speaker’s laughter and laughing voice and combinations of the two in her investigation that compared each gender’s laughter. To remain objective, speaker’s categories were further developed and labelled in consultation with participants who were asked to confirm that their own humour was coded into the appropriate category. Any differences about labelling of a category or coding speakers’ humour into a category were discussed with participants and resolved by consensus (see Alberts, Keller-Guenther & Corman, 1996; Nevo, Nevo, & Siew Yin, 2001).
Next, I discuss how HIs were coded into three categories relating to hearer(s) response to humour.

### 3.9.4 Hearer(s) response to humour

For the purposes of this study *hearer(s)*, that is the hearer or hearers, include the *recipient*, that is, the person toward whom the humour is focused, and excludes the speaker.

Hearer(s) response, namely, how hearer(s) respond to humour, is considered in the current study because it has a powerful effect on how an interaction will develop (Alberts, 1990). For instance, hearer(s) need to find out quickly whether a speaker is being humorous or not for the conversation to continue unimpaired. Hearer(s) response not only shows that the speaker is being understood but that hearer(s) are willing to accept their role within the conversation (Schiffrin, 1994).

Although some work has been carried out on recipient response to teasing (Alberts, 1990; Straehle, 1993), prior research has expended little effort on detailed analyses of hearer(s) response to humour. As noted earlier in this chapter, hearer(s) response to humour is influenced by various verbal and non-verbal behaviours, as well as ethnographic elements such as communication.
context, background information and knowledge about participants (Holmes, 2000; Norrick, 1994; Palmer, 1994).

Identifying hearer response involved examining all the HIs that had been coded into the five Humour Categories and locating all initial hearer responses to humour. An initial response is the first reaction that an individual gives in response to speaker’s humour. Responses to humour were separated into male or female hearers and classified according to whether the hearer was a recipient of humour or a member of the audience. These responses were then coded into one of three categories: 1) Returned Humour; 2) Laughter; and 3) No response/responding only with body language. These categories are explained further in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Explanation of hearer(s) response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Returned Humour</td>
<td>Hearer responds as follows: 1) by making a humorous comment that may or may not include non-verbal behaviours, or 2) by using non-verbal behaviours, i.e., body language and paralanguage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Laughter</td>
<td>Hearer responds only with laughter and no speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. No response or responding only with body language</td>
<td>Hearer provides no response (i.e., no words are spoken) or uses body language only, such as smiling, raised eyebrows, gestures, and head nods.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To develop the three categories and to enable a thorough analysis of communication behaviours, I drew on the work of Alberts (1990) and Hay
(1996). To remain objective, these hearer response categories were further developed and labelled in consultation with participants who were also asked to verify that their own responses were coded into the appropriate category. Any differences were discussed and resolved by consensus (see Alberts, Keller-Guenther & Corman, 1996; Nevo, Nevo, & Siew Yin, 2001).

As shown in Table 3.2, the key roles that participants are involved in during the interaction vary according to whether the speaker is a man or a woman and where the humour is being focused. For example in the Ingroup (male) category, the speaker is either a male or a female. If the speaker is a male, humour is focused on another male in the group (recipient), and the audience comprises two females.

When analysing audiences containing two individuals of the same gender, the total audience response for that category included all responses produced by both individuals in each of the four interactions. It was not possible to further separate the responses because they were coded according to whether the audience was male or female.

Here it is explained how the combined methods of CA and ethnographic techniques were employed to examine the humorous data.
3.10 Analysis of data excerpts using CA and ethnographic techniques

After coding the men’s and women’s HIs into the various categories I then analysed each HI in accordance with the model that was put forward in Chapter 2. The model contains two analytical categories: 1) Facilitating conversational involvement; and 2) Clarifying and maintaining gender boundaries. Each of these analytical categories comprises various humour strategies. In addition, the model considers superiority, incongruity and relief theories. Therefore, I focused on data excerpts that deal with these distinct themes, which is reflected in the way the data analytic chapters are organised. For example, Chapter 4 shows how frequently the humour strategies and theoretical perspectives occurred and Chapter 5 provides a qualitative examination of this data using CA and ethnographic techniques.

To demonstrate how the methods of CA and ethnography were conducted, I provide an example of humour taken from Interaction one in the present research. This extract shows humour being introduced into a serious discussion of a film about which Nora wishes to find out more. The film entitled ‘Eyes Wide Shut’ concerns a doctor called Bill, played by actor Tom Cruise, and his wife Alice, played by actress Nicole Kidman. Bill and Alice’s marriage seems perfect but Alice admits to having had sexual fantasies about another man.
Interaction one

1. Malc its really quite EERIE and scary actually, and Tom Cruise is wicked in it.
2. Nora they have an orgy though don’t they?
3. Malc no, no orgy in it that’s just an elaboration
4. Steve can we go?
5. Lucy ha[haha
6. Steve [hahaha
7. Malc haha Nicole would kind of jig in it

In line 3, Malc uses low voice and moves his head from side to side as he strenuously denies Nora’s claim that the film contains scenes of a sexually explicit nature. Nevertheless, at this point, Steve effectively introduces humour into the conversation by suggesting that they should all go to an orgy (line 4). The unexpectedness of his comment with its implied sexual theme and jocular tone, leads to heightened conversational involvement displayed as group members join in. In addition, Steve relies on the use of address forms, for instance, the pronoun “we”, as a means for expressing solidarity and closeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). As noted by Straehle (1993) the use of “we” concentrates on the equitable nature of the humorous event in which all participants are included in the humorous exchange.

When Lucy responds with laughter (line 5), Steve mirrors her response and continues the humour by using overlapping laughter. Although Nora does not reply verbally, she acknowledges the humour with a smile and slight nodding of the head. Malc, on the other hand, responds verbally and non-verbally. He supports Steve’s contribution with an initial episode of laughter, which is followed by a sexually suggestive comment about the way Nicole Kidman
dances, “haha Nicole would kind of jig in it” (line 7). Malc uses jocular tone and laughing voice. He also leans forwards, smiles and makes eye contact with his female friends, which suggests an attempt to establish a closer relationship with the women. In this extract Steve initiated humour, and the other group members showed their co-operative moves and heightened sense of involvement by laughing, joining in and extending the humour.

Again to illustrate how qualitative methods were employed in the current research, I provide an example of humorous conversation from Tannen (1991). For her research, Tannen combined ethnographic techniques with analysis of discourse to examine context and the organisation of talk among friends. Besides administering questionnaires to elicit personal details of participants, Tannen provided ethnographic details of participants and the context of the interaction before the analysis of each example of conversation. Here, a group of six friends are sitting down to eat in the dining room of Steve’s home in California. In this humorous exchange reference is made to a disagreement that had arisen between Steve and David some time ago. The following excerpt has been simplified for clarity.

1. David we had this big ++ we had ++ Steve and I had our FIRST FALLing out=/
2. Steve /=first?
3. David no It was ++ not our f- our third ++ haha the second one was [haha and you remember the
4. Deb [haha
5. Steve and what about the time beFORE the first one
6. David that was that was kindergarten

(Tannen, 1991, p. 141)
In the excerpt David starts to explain to the rest of the group about this past dispute and he uses a serious tone of voice, but before he reaches the end of the sentence he adopts an exaggerated mocking tone. In response, Steve interrupts David and mimics his mocking tone and they pretend to have an argument. Both men use a distinctive mocking tone of voice. Steve’s tone is nasal and rasping, and he preserves it throughout his entire remark. Conversely, David builds up to a mocking tone during his utterance. Whereas, David laughs in between phrases (line 3), Steve maintains the point of view of his mock persona throughout.

What this excerpt of conversation shows is not only that the shared humour in the exchange re-establishes the relational identity between the two men, that is, one of familiarity and understanding of each other, it also exemplifies how each person uses a unique mix of conversational devices to express humour in interaction. Although the men appear to be in disagreement the overall function of this extract is to create a heightened sense of involvement between interactants. As Tannen (1991) concludes “the use of humour played a significant role in the impact that each had on the group” (p. 143). Moreover, using qualitative methods enabled Tannen to provide details about the setting, participants, purpose of the interaction, and most importantly, the socially significant functions served by humour.
The present study expands Tannen’s (1991, 2005) research by providing a more detailed analysis of context, and by examining a range of communication behaviours, namely, language, paralanguage and body language. To enable a thorough understanding of interactants’ communication, a microanalysis of conversation is accompanied by a macro description of the wider social context within which each group interaction occurred.

In addition, face-to-face follow-up sessions were held with participants to discuss the data examples and summaries. Researchers use this procedure to provide a different perspective on the interpretation of data and to ensure that interpretation is as accurate as possible (e.g., Holmes 2000; Straehle, 1993; Thimm, Rademacher & Kruse, 1995; Willing, 1992). Crucially, in the present research the follow-up sessions allowed the men and women the opportunity to comment freely on what they perceived could be happening in the interaction.

### 3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the research design, methods and techniques used in this study. It was explained why a qualitative approach, in particular the combined methods of CA and ethnography were considered necessary for the analysis of communication behaviours employed by friends to maintain rapport through humour in everyday social interaction.
Integrating CA and ethnography makes it possible to analyse not only the structure of conversation, but also to examine behaviours and context that contribute to the meaning of the interaction.

Pilot studies were performed to discover any potential difficulties with recording and observing the group interactions, and to pre-test the questionnaire and collect feedback from participants about the questionnaire. Data in the present study were gathered from four real-life group interactions by tape recording, non-participant observation, note taking, questionnaires, and from informal conversations with participants in their respective groups and in follow-up sessions. The process employed for identifying and coding humour into various categories, that is, to examine focus and non-focused humour, speaker’s humour, and hearer(s) response to humour, was then discussed. In addition, it was explained that the humorous data was analysed with CA and ethnographic techniques.

Having shown the procedures used for collecting, identifying and categorising data in this research it is now possible to continue to the next chapter. A quantitative analysis of the transcription data showing the results of coding the data into the various categories is provided in Chapter 4. Furthermore, Chapter 4 will now present findings of humour analysed using the model proposed in Chapter 2 and results of the questionnaire.
Chapter 5 will then explain the process used for selecting and examining extracts of transcription data for analysis. CA and ethnographic techniques were employed to analyse the data in accordance with the model. The model provides the foundation for analysing impromptu humour in everyday social interaction among men and women. As will be seen in Chapter 5, participants’ comments and observations played an essential role in the analysis of data, allowing me to compare my thoughts with those of the interactants, and making it possible for me to strive for accuracy concerning the findings.
Chapter 4  Quantitative analysis of humorous interaction

Chapter 4 presents a quantitative analysis of four transcripts of real-life, mixed-gender group interactions that I tape recorded and observed. In addition, qualitative analysis of the transcription data is provided in Chapter 5. Therefore, Chapters 4 and 5 show what can be learned from analysing humour that occurs spontaneously in everyday interaction among men and women who are friends. Findings of data analysis in Chapters 4 and 5 will be discussed and conclusions drawn in Chapter 6.

This chapter is organised into three sections. The first part presents the overall amount of humour produced by each gender. Also shown are the results of classifying the humorous instances (HIs) into five Humour Categories according to focus of humour, followed by the results of coding the HIs into speaker’s humour, and hearer(s) response to humour. The second part presents findings resulting from humour analysed in accordance with the model that was put forward in Chapter 2. The final section provides findings of the questionnaire shown in Appendix D that each participant completed following the tape recording of their group interaction.

I followed other researchers that have administered questionnaires to a small number of participants (Tardy, 2000; Willing 1992). The purpose of inviting participants to complete a questionnaire was to discover their general perceptions
about the group interactions, to elicit their view of humour throughout the interaction and their feelings about humour in general. To allow participants the chance to communicate how they felt about humour some open-ended questions were included. Face-to-face follow-up sessions further strengthened the analysis because participants had the opportunity to provide their views and ideas on what they felt could be happening in the interaction.

In this study, the number of instances of humour (HIs) was counted as an approximate estimate of frequency. Because of the small data set, significance tests were performed only on selected conversational data, as shown in Tables 4.1 and 4.2. Therefore, I followed Easton (1994) and Tholander (2002) who limited their use of tests of statistical significance on tape recorded conversational data of a humorous nature. For example, in his PhD research, Tholander performed a single t-test to determine if there was a significant difference between male and female teasing. Easton (1994) employed a two-tailed t-test to find out if there was a significant difference between men’s and women’s laughter. Nevertheless, Easton relied mainly on raw counts and percentages to analyse differences in the talk and laughter of eight men and women.

Other qualitative humour researchers who have studied tape recorded data have based their findings on raw counts, percentages, and means without performing tests of statistical significance (e.g., Hay, 1994; Holmes & Hay, 1997; Myers,
1978; 1981; Tannen, 2005). For instance, Hay (1994) compared raw counts and percentages of men’s and women’s jocular talk in small groups to explore the relationship between gender, solidarity, and group membership. Similarly, in her PhD on irony in conversation, Myers (1978) based her findings on percentages, means and standard deviations without tests of statistical significance because, Myers argued, there were so few cases.

4.1 Men’s and women’s humour

Out of 307 HIs, the men in the present study produced 202 (65%), and the women contributed 105 (35%). Table 4.1 shows the comparison of the average number of HIs in each of the four mixed-gender group interactions.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Interaction</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total by gender   | 25.20        | 4.95           | 13.40        | 5.04     | 4.75  | 0.000  |

Note. df = 14.
Overall, the men ($M = 25.2, SD = 4.95$) produced nearly twice the amount of humour than the women did ($M = 13.4, SD = 5.04$). To find out if there was a significant difference between men’s and women’s humour in the four group interactions, a t-test procedure was performed. The t-test is the most commonly used method to evaluate the differences in means between two groups, and can be used even if the sample sizes are very small (see Hays, 1988; Moore 1995).

The results of the t-test suggests there was a significant difference between men’s and women’s humour at the 95% confidence level, $t(13) = 4.75, p = 0.000$ (two-tailed). It is noteworthy that the men tended to produce more humour than the women did in each of the four group interactions. It was also obvious when studying the transcripts and listening to the tape recordings that the men produced more humour than the women did, and this finding was confirmed in follow-up sessions with male and female participants.

Statistical differences between means were found for each of the mixed-gender group interactions as follows: Interaction one, $t(13), = 11.4, p = 0.000$ (two-tailed). Interaction two, $t(13), = 2.55, p = 0.023$ (two-tailed). Interaction three, $t(13), = 10.3, p = 0.000$ (two-tailed). Interaction four, $t(13), = 2.94, p = 0.011$ (two-tailed).
All 307 of the HIs were classified into one of five Humour Categories according to focus of humour. Table 4.2 shows the comparison of the average number of men’s and women’s humour for the five Humour Categories.

### Table 4.2

Mean number of total HIs for men and women in each Humour Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humour Category</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (m)</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (f)</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgroup</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. df = 14. (m) = male. (f) = female.*

The result of the t-test suggests there was a significant difference between genders in two of the five Humour Categories. A statistical difference between the means of the Ingroup (female) category was found, \( t(5.77), p = 0.000 \) (two-tailed). An explanation for this result is that the women did not focus any humour on another woman in the group, whereas men did focus humour on the women. The other significant difference between means was found in the General category, \( t(3.94), p = 0.001 \) (two-tailed). Humour in the General category consists of witty statements that occur spontaneously within the conversation. Conversely, there was no significant difference in the
Outgroup category, $t(2.00), p = 0.065$ (two-tailed), the Self category, $t(1.84), p = 0.088$ (two-tailed), or the Ingroup (male) category, $t(156), p = 0.142$ (two-tailed).

In addition to the finding that men (65%) contributed more humour than women (35%), there were differences in the order in which each gender focused humour in the five Humour Categories, as outlined in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humour Categories</th>
<th>Humour Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Outgroup</td>
<td>1. Ingroup (male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. General</td>
<td>2. Outgroup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ingroup (female)</td>
<td>3. General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self</td>
<td>4. Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ingroup (male)</td>
<td>5. Ingroup (female)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As displayed in Tables 4.2 and 4.3, the men tended to focus most of their humour on someone or something outside the present group (Outgroup category). Conversely, the women focused most of their humour on a member of the opposite gender in the Ingroup (male) category. After that, women tended to focus humour on someone or something outside the present group (Outgroup). This category was followed by humour containing witty statements in the General category, then humour focused on themselves in the Self category, and
finally the Ingroup (female) category. However, as explained earlier, women did not focus humour on another woman in the group.

On the other hand, while the highest scores for men tended to be in the Outgroup category, this was followed closely by humour consisting of witty statements in the General category, and then humour focused on a member of the opposite gender in the Ingroup (female) category. Similar to the women, men focused the least amount of humour on themselves in the Self category, followed by humour focused on someone of the same gender in the Ingroup (male) category. Of note, men tended to focus almost an equal amount of humour as did women on a member of the opposite gender. With regard to self focused humour, men rather than women were more likely to focus humour on themselves.

In total, the Outgroup category contained the most contributions from both men and women together, followed by the General category. This result is consistent with the finding that men in this study focused the most humour in the Outgroup category and then the General category. When men and women focused humour on an outgroup, the object was usually a family member, someone they knew, a famous person, an organisation or a domestic animal. Men and women together focused the least amount of humour on a woman, followed by humour focused on themselves (Self), then humour focused on a man in the present group.
4.1.1 Speaker’s humour

In this study, a speaker is a person that initiates humour. An explanation of the four categories for speaker’s humour is provided in Chapter 3 (Table 3.3). The percentage breakdown of the men’s and women’s total humorous discourse by type is shown in Table 4.4.

Figures presented in the “total by gender” column correspond with the total number of HIs produced by the men (202) and the women (105) in the five Humour Categories for the four group interactions.

**Table 4.4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker’s humour</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discourse and laughter</td>
<td>33 (16%)</td>
<td>22 (21.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughter and laughing voice</td>
<td>49 (24%)</td>
<td>35 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughing voice</td>
<td>50 (25%)</td>
<td>25 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>70 (35%)</td>
<td>23 (21.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total by gender</strong></td>
<td><strong>202</strong></td>
<td><strong>105</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although men and women produced humour in each of the four categories, they did so in a different order as shown in Table 4.4. Men (35%) tended to use the Other category to deliver humour. The Other category means that speaker’s talk may be accompanied by any of the non-verbal behaviours listed in Chapter 3,
that is, body language and paralanguage, excluding laughter and laughing voice, which are coded into separate categories.

In contrast, the women were least likely to use the Other and the Discourse and Laughter categories to deliver their humour. Women (33%) seemed to prefer to use Laughter and laughing voice when delivering their humour. Men were least likely to use the Discourse and laughter category in which laughter is placed before or after speech or at some point during speech. Similar to the men, women reduced their use of Discourse and laughter when delivering humour.

4.1.2 Recipient response to humour

In the present study, a recipient is a person towards whom humour is focused. Participants were recipients of humour in the Ingroup (male) and Ingroup (female) categories only, because it is not possible for an individual to be a recipient in any of the other categories. The three categories relating to hearer(s) response to humour are discussed in Chapter 3 (Table 3.4).

Results of male and female recipient response to speaker’s humour are presented in Table 4.5.
Table 4.5

Number of instances of male and female recipient responses to humour by type for the Ingroup (male) and Ingroup (female) categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipient response</th>
<th>Male response to male</th>
<th>Male response to female</th>
<th>Female response to male</th>
<th>Female response to female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Returned Humour</td>
<td>27 (100%)</td>
<td>37 (90%)</td>
<td>35 (87.5%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughter</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5 (12.5%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR or BLO</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total by gender</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. NR or BLO = no response or response involves body language only. (m) = male. (f) = female.

The men (90%) and the women (87.5%) in this study tended to use Returned Humour rather than Laughter in response to humour delivered by speakers of the opposite gender. In addition, a man was more likely to use Returned Humour in response to humour delivered by another man. Returned Humour means that a person responds to humour by: 1) making a humorous comment that may or may not include non-verbal behaviours; or 2) using non-verbal behaviours, i.e., body language and paralanguage.

When a man focused humour on another man in the group, the man (100%) always responded to the humour. However, when a woman focused humour on a
man, the man (10%) occasionally chose not to respond verbally. Instead, the man
made No response (NR) or his response involved Body language only (BLO),
such as raised eyebrows, eye glances, leaning forwards and head nods. Of note,
the men did not use Laughter on its own in response to humour delivered by
speakers of both gender. Unlike the men, the women did not use NR or BLO but
responded instead with Returned Humour (87.5%) and to a lesser extent
Laughter (12.5%) in response to humour delivered by the men. As women did
not focus humour on their own gender there are no results in the Ingroup
(female) category in which a woman focuses humour on another woman.

4.1.3 Audience response to humour (one male or one female in audience)

For the purposes of this study, the audience includes all members of the present
group, excluding the recipient and the speaker. The results of audience response
to speaker’s humour, in which there is one male or one female in the audience,
are shown in Table 4.6. The Humour Categories in which there is one male or
one female member of the audience are based on whether the speaker is male or
female. These roles were explained in Chapter 3 (Table 3.2).
Table 4.6
Number of instances of male and female audience response to humour by type (one male or one female in the audience)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience response</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Returned Humour</td>
<td>137 (63%)</td>
<td>62 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughter</td>
<td>56 (26%)</td>
<td>59 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR or BLO</td>
<td>23 (11%)</td>
<td>26 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total by gender</strong></td>
<td><strong>216</strong></td>
<td><strong>147</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. NR or BLO = no response or response involves body language only.*

Similar to male recipients, male (63%) audience members were more likely to respond to speaker’s humour with Returned Humour. The response they were least likely to use was NR or BLO, in which they either did not respond at all (verbally or non-verbally) or responded with head nods, raised eyebrows or smiling. Although men (11%) did respond on some occasions with Laughter, they tended to use laughter sparingly.

Similar to the men, the women were more likely to use Returned Humour (42%) than Laughter (40%). However, unlike the men, women’s use of laughter was only slightly less than their use of Returned Humour. Rather than make no response, women (18%) tended to use a combination of smiling and head nods (BLO).
4.1.4 Audience response to humour (two males or two females in audience)

The results of audience response to speaker’s humour, in which there are two men or two women in the audience, are shown in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7
Number of instances of male and female audience response to humour by type (two males or two females in the audience)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience response</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Returned Humour</td>
<td>97 (73%)</td>
<td>175 (54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughter</td>
<td>9 (7%)</td>
<td>108 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR or BLO</td>
<td>26 (20%)</td>
<td>43 (13%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total by gender 132 324

Note. NR or BLO = no response or response involves body language only.

Similar to results of male recipients (Table 4.5) and male audience members (Table 4.6), the most likely response was Returned Humour when the audience consisted of two men (73%). There was also some use of NR or BLO, in which the men (20%) did not respond or their response involved body language only, for instance, smiling, head nods and raised eyebrows. The least likely response for the men (7%) was Laughter on its own. The women (54%), like the men, tended to use Returned Humour as their response to humour. Although to a lesser extent than Returned Humour, the women (33%) were also more likely to employ Laughter on its own. The least likely response for the women (13%) was
NR or BLO, whereby the women employed similar non-verbal behaviours as the men, such as smiling, head nods and raised eyebrows.

It appears that Returned Humour is the most likely response given by both male and female recipients and by audiences that contain either one or two men or one or two women. Both genders also employed Laughter but to a lesser extent than previous research would suggest (e.g., Vinton, 1989; Wennerstrom, 2000).

Although jokes were not the focus of this study, it is useful to note that none of the interactants told jokes in any of the four tape recorded interactions.

4.2 Findings of the humour model

The model proposed in Chapter 2 served as a basis for analysing humour in this study. The humour model contains two analytical categories, namely, 1) Facilitating conversational involvement; and 2) Clarifying and maintaining gender boundaries. Each of these categories contains various humour strategies based on solidarity functions of humour, as identified by humour researchers to date (e.g., Hay, 1994, 2001; Holmes & Hay, 1997; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1998; Norrick, 1993a; 2003; Tannen, 1991, 2005).

To remain objective, I asked participants in the follow-up sessions to confirm that the humour relating to their interaction had been coded into the correct
categories. Any differences were discussed and resolved by consensus (see Alberts, Keller-Guenther & Corman, 1996; Nevo, Nevo & Siew Yin, 2001). The humour model is analysed further in Chapter 5 using conversation analysis and ethnographic techniques.

4.2.1 Facilitating conversational involvement

The first analytical category of the humour model is facilitating conversational involvement, i.e., using humour to attain a heightened sense of involvement in the interaction. This category contains the following humour strategies: collaborative construction of humour, repetition, mimicry, self-disclosure, common ground, and entertainment. In Table 4.8 it is shown how often the men and women used the humour strategies to facilitate conversational involvement in each of the five Humour Categories. Note, however, there are no entries in the Ingroup (female) category because none of the women in the four mixed-gender groups focused humour on another woman.
Table 4.8
Facilitating conversational involvement: Number of times humour strategies contributed by men and women in each Humour Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humour strategies</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Collaborative construction of humour</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (male)</td>
<td>12 (23%)</td>
<td>17 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (female)</td>
<td>11 (21%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgroup</td>
<td>10 (19.5%)</td>
<td>7 (20.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>7 (13.5%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>12 (23%)</td>
<td>8 (23.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total by gender</strong></td>
<td><strong>52 (60%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>34 (40%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Repetition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (male)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
<td>5 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (female)</td>
<td>7 (35%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgroup</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>3 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>1 (09%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
<td>2 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total by gender</strong></td>
<td><strong>20 (64.5%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>11 (35.5%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Mimicry</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (male)</td>
<td>3 (17.5%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (female)</td>
<td>2 (12%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgroup</td>
<td>12 (70.5%)</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total by gender</strong></td>
<td><strong>17 (95%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 (5%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Self-disclosure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (male)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (female)</td>
<td>5 (24%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgroup</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
<td>5 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>8 (38%)</td>
<td>8 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>6 (29%)</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total by gender</strong></td>
<td><strong>21 (50%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>21 (50%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Expressing common ground</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (male)</td>
<td>10 (22%)</td>
<td>13 (46.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (female)</td>
<td>9 (20%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgroup</td>
<td>10 (22%)</td>
<td>7 (25.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>6 (14%)</td>
<td>4 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>10 (22%)</td>
<td>4 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total by gender</strong></td>
<td><strong>44 (61%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>28 (39%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Entertainment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (male)</td>
<td>5 (10.5%)</td>
<td>2 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (female)</td>
<td>10 (21%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgroup</td>
<td>14 (29%)</td>
<td>5 (41.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>5 (10.5%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>14 (29%)</td>
<td>5 (41.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total by gender</strong></td>
<td><strong>48 (80%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>12 (20%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As revealed in Table 4.8, the men’s total use of the strategies ranged from 95% at the highest end (mimicry) to 50% at the lowest end (self-disclosure). In contrast, the women’s total use of the strategies ranged from 50% at the highest end (self-disclosure) to 5% at the lowest end (mimicry). As shown in Table 4.8, for the men the least likely strategy to be employed was the use of humour to self-disclose, whereas for women it was the strategy that they were most likely to use.

Worthy of note is that the women and the men contributed the same total percentage of humour (50%) to self-disclose. In particular, both genders used a higher percentage of humour for self-disclosure when it was self-focused (38%). Both the men and the women employed the same percentage of humour to self-disclose when focusing on an opposite member of gender (24%). However, neither gender contributed humour to self-disclose when focusing on someone of their own gender.

The men (95%) appeared to use a much higher percentage of mimicry than the women did (5%). In particular, all the men in each of the four group interactions produced mimicking, whereas only one woman used mimicry. Consistent with the results shown in focus of humour in Table 4.2, men were more likely to contribute mimicking in the Outgroup category, in which they mimicked men and women, for example, people they knew, famous personalities, or family members.
The one instance of mimicry produced by a woman was focused on a well-known male actor. The men also mimicked other group members, and their mimicking, like most of the men’s HIs in the Outgroup humour category was almost equally dispensed on the other men and women in the present group.

In addition, men (80%) used a higher percentage of humour for entertainment purposes than the women (20%) did. All the men in the four group interactions used humour in each of the Humour Categories to entertain others. Conversely, the women used humour for entertainment purposes in three of the five Humour Categories. For example, women used humour in the General category, that is, to make witty statements, to focus on someone outside the group, and to a lesser extent, to focus on a man in the present group.

Although the men tended to use more humour to communicate common ground (61%) and to collaboratively construct humour (60%), the women were more likely to use humour for these two purposes when focusing on a man in the group. In addition, men (64.5%) used a higher percentage of repetition than women (33.5%) did, and this repetition was more likely to be focused on a woman (30%) or a man (35%) in the present group.
4.2.2 Clarifying and maintaining boundaries

The second analytical category of the model is clarifying and maintaining gender boundaries, i.e., using humour to highlight differences and affirm social boundaries. This analytical category contains the following humour strategies: sexual humour, that is, sexual innuendo, flirtatious behaviour, and ribaldry. In addition, talking humorously about gender, i.e., differences, physical appearance, and relationships.

Table 4.9 displays how often the men and women employed the humour strategies within the five Humour Categories to clarify and maintain gender boundaries. Note however, that women did not employ humour in the Ingroup (female) category, that is, none of the women focused humour on a female member of the present group.
Table 4.9

Clarifying and maintaining boundaries: Number of times humour strategies contributed by men and women in each Humour Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humour strategies</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Sexual humour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.e., sexual innuendo, flirting, and ribaldry</td>
<td>7 (29%)</td>
<td>16 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (male)</td>
<td>7 (29%)</td>
<td>16 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (female)</td>
<td>6 (25%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgroup</td>
<td>8 (33.5%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>3 (12.5%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total by gender</strong></td>
<td><strong>23 (59%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>16 (41%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Talking humorously about gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.e., differences, physical appearance, and relationships</td>
<td>3 (11%)</td>
<td>9 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (male)</td>
<td>3 (11%)</td>
<td>9 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup (female)</td>
<td>7 (27%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgroup</td>
<td>9 (35%)</td>
<td>9 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>2 (8%)</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>5 (19%)</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total by gender</strong></td>
<td><strong>26 (54%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>22 (46%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The men and the women were contributors of sexual humour in the group interactions, however, not all participants in those groups produced sexual humour. The women tended to focus all their sexual humour on the men in the present group, whereas the men focused sexual humour on men and women both inside and outside the present group. Men (12.5%) also produced sexual humour in the General category, incorporating sexual humour in their witty remarks. However, the men did not use sexual humour to focus humour on themselves. Rather than focus humour in one category like the women did, the percentages show that the men’s use of sexual humour was spread over four of the five categories. Although the men and the women produced sexual humour in the
form of innuendo and light-hearted flirting behaviour, one male participant in one group interaction made several ribald sexual comments.

Similar to the sexual humour category, the men (54%) produced a slightly higher percentage when talking humorously about gender than the women (46%) did. Talking humorously about gender means that participants’ humorous talk comprised gender as the main topic of conversation. For instance, the talk centred on issues relating to men and women, such as perceived differences between men and women, reference to relationships between men and women, and the physical appearance of the same and opposite gender.

The women were more likely to focus most of their humour about gender either on a man in the group (41%) or on a non-present male character (41%), for instance, a male acquaintance or famous actor. Conversely, when men talked humorously about gender they spread their humour across the five Humour Categories. Although the women were more likely to focus humour about gender on an outgroup male character, the men tended to focus humour on an outgroup female character. Moreover, the men (35%) delivered the highest percentage of humour in the Outgroup category.
4.2.3 Theoretical perspectives

The humour model also considers the three theoretical perspectives, namely, superiority, incongruity, and relief. Findings show that each of these theories can be used independently to help explain humour in this study. Table 4.10 shows how often each theory appeared in the humour throughout the four mixed-gender group interactions.

Table 4.10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humour theory</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incongruity</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superiority</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relief or release</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost half (49%) the humour across the four group interactions contained the incongruity theory. This result is consistent with research (Meyer, 2000; Veatch, 1998) showing that incongruity theory is the leading approach to the study of humour, and can be used to explain humour that includes an element of surprise and absurdity. Next is the superiority theory, which was displayed in 30% of the humour. This theory suggests that humour involves a feeling of superiority over others. Lastly, the relief theory accounts for 21% of humour in the four interactions. Relief theory describes humour similar to a tension-release model, that is, humour involves a release of tension or energy.
Each perspective focuses on different concerns about humour as well as revealing aspects necessary to understanding humour. A more detailed analysis of the three theories is provided in Chapter 5.

4.3 Questionnaire

All participants agreed to complete a questionnaire immediately following their group interaction (Appendix D). As mentioned in Chapter 3, there was no obligation for participants to complete the questionnaire or to answer all the questions. Moreover, I informed participants that the questionnaire related only to the single taped interaction in which they had taken part. The questionnaire, which was developed and tested during several pilot studies, was used when analysing data gathered through the tape recordings. In addition, the questionnaire provided an indication of how each individual felt about their own humour and their views on the interaction with their male and female friends. Given the small data set, tests of statistical significance were not carried out on the data in the questionnaire (see Easton, 1994; Tholander, 2002).

Responses to the closed questions are presented first, followed by tables that show participants’ views about the interactions on the day of recording. Open-ended questions, which enabled participants to describe how they felt about humour, are included at the end of this chapter. Findings of the questionnaire are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.
4.3.1 Closed questions

Results in the following tables show the total number of responses and percentage breakdown for the men’s and women’s responses in four groups.

The most humorous person in the present interaction

Participants were asked to nominate who they felt was the most humorous person in the interaction in which they had just taken part. The results are shown for each gender.

Table 4.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most humorous person</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A man</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oneself</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seven out of the eight women considered someone of the opposite gender, rather than their own gender as the most humorous person in the group. This result is consistent with the finding that men (65%) in this study contributed more humour than women (35%) did. Conversely, the men’s nominations for the most humorous person were more widely spread than the women’s nominations.
For instance, an equal number of men either chose another man (37%) or did not nominate anyone as the most humorous person (37%). One man regarded himself as the most humorous person in the group, although none of the women selected themselves or another woman as the most humorous person. Of note, one man selected a woman rather than a man as the most humorous person.

Least humorous person in the present interaction

The men and women were asked to nominate who they thought was the least humorous person in the interaction that had just taken place. The results are shown for each gender.

Table 4.12
Number of men and women reporting the least humorous person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Least humorous person</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A man</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oneself</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that most participants of both genders did not choose a woman as the most humorous group member (see Table 4.11), it was unlikely they would nominate a man as the least humorous person in their group. As revealed in Table 4.12, men (62.5%) nominated a woman as the least humorous member of the present group.
Although women did select other women (25%), they were more likely not to nominate anyone as the least humorous (50%). In contrast to the men, two of the women (25%) selected themselves as being the least humorous in the group, whereas none of the men chose themselves.

**Sense of humour**

Participants were asked if they believed they had a sense of humour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of humour</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the men regarded themselves as having a sense of humour because their responses were in either the Always (50%) or the Yes (50%) categories. Like the men, an equal number of women (50%) considered that they had a sense of humour as they responded to the Yes category. Nevertheless, only one woman considered herself to have a sense of humour all the time (Always), and three women (37.5%) believed that they occasionally (Sometimes) had a sense of
humour. Neither the men nor the women admitted to being uncertain (Not sure) that they had a sense of humour, or to not having a sense of humour (No).

**Sense of humour - as reported by other people**

Table 4.14 displays how many men and women were told on previous occasions that they had a sense of humour.

**Table 4.14**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of humour</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the men reported that other people had told them they had a sense of humour. This result is perhaps not surprising as all the men considered themselves as possessing a sense of humour (see Table 4.13). This result could also suggest that men regard having a sense of humour as an important attribute.
Conversely, three of the women (37.5%) reported that other people had never told them that they had a sense of humour, whereas two of the women (25%) reported that they had only occasionally been told they had a sense of humour.

**Sense of humour in a romantic partner**

Participants were asked to state the importance of a sense of humour in a romantic partner.

**Table 4.15**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of humour</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 4.15 the men and the women regarded a sense of humour in a romantic partner as either very important or important. Women (62.5%) seemed to regard it as slightly more important for a partner to have a sense of humour than did men (37.5%).
This result is consistent with the finding that men contributed more humour than women and, as shown in Table 4.11, most of the women nominated a man as the most humorous person in their group.

**Humour in social settings**

Table 4.16 shows how men and women reported using humour when interacting in a social setting. These everyday occurrences of humour use have been observed by various humour researchers to date (e.g., Bippus, 2000; Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield, 1991; Graham et al, 1992; Hay, 1994; Holmes, 1998; Norrick, 1993a; Tannen, 2005).

In the present questionnaire, participants were asked the following question “Do you ever use humour in the following everyday situations?”
Table 4.16

Number of men and women reporting how they used humour in social situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humour use</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To amuse others</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For friendly purposes</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For non friendly purposes</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In difficult situations</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To hide anger</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To hide embarrassment</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To hide disappointment</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get others to do things for me</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To discuss difficult or embarrassing topics</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The men (87.5%) and the women (75%) reported that they were more likely to use humour for friendly rather than for non-friendly purposes. In follow-up sessions, participants agreed that using humour for friendly purposes often involved being polite and remaining on amicable terms with other people. On the other hand, using humour for non-friendly purposes tended to involve teasing or
making fun of another person. Although both genders reported employing humour to amuse others, men (100%) were more likely than women (62.5%) to use humour for this purpose. Nonetheless, three of the women (37.5%) stated that they occasionally used humour to amuse others.

It was found that men were more likely than women to use humour to extract themselves from a difficult situation, as five men (62.5%) and no women answered “Yes.” However, three women (37.5%) did report that they occasionally (Sometimes) used humour for this purpose. In follow-up sessions, most participants agreed that getting out of a difficult situation might involve employing humour to help resolve a misunderstanding or an argument.

The men (62.5%) were more likely than the women (37.5%) to use humour to convince others to do things for them. In follow-up sessions, participants agreed that they had used humour to persuade others to do things for them because they regarded humour as a device that was less threatening than if they asked in a more direct manner. On the other hand, women (62.5%) were more likely than men (37.5%) to employ humour to hide disappointment. Of note, both genders reported using humour to hide embarrassment, however two men and one woman stated that they never used humour for this purpose. Nonetheless, 62.5% of women and 37.5% of men reported using humour to talk about difficult or embarrassing subjects. Although most of the women (75%) and half the men
reported that they did not use humour to hide anger, three men (37.5%) admitted that they had occasionally employed this behaviour.

Perceptions about the group interaction

Participants’ general views on how they felt before the tape recording of their mixed-gender group interaction are presented in Table 4.17.

Table 4.17

How the men and women reported feeling before the group interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very relaxed</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxed</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly nervous</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very nervous</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most participants reported that they felt either very relaxed or relaxed just before the group interaction took place, as shown in Table 4.17. Only one woman reported feeling nervous. In follow-up sessions and with no prompting from me, the two participants who reported feeling slightly nervous and the woman who reported feeling nervous explained that they quickly relaxed as the conversation progressed. They said it was easy to relax because they were with their friends and were concentrating on the conversation.
Here it is shown how participants were feeling immediately following their group interaction, as seen in Table 4.18.

Table 4.18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
<th>Males (N = 8)</th>
<th>Females (N = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>A little</td>
<td>A little</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment of the conversation</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in the conversation</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinity with others</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures in Table 4.18 show that all the men and women appeared to enjoy the conversation with their male and female friends. Furthermore, each individual felt that their friends not only understood their feelings but also allowed them to engage fully in the interaction and to put their ideas and points of view across.

Moreover, both genders appeared to believe that they had an affinity with their co-participants and said that there was “excellent rapport” throughout the course of the interaction, especially concerning humour. For instance, in follow-up sessions, one man remarked, “We have a lot in common and seem to find the same things funny – I invariably come away with a smile on my face.” Men and women in the current study were friends, therefore it is not surprising that they
provided a unanimous response regarding their enjoyment of the conversation and feelings of rapport (see Eggins and Slade, 2005)

Responses to the open questions requested in the next part of the questionnaire are provided as follows.

4.3.2 Open questions

The open questions provided individuals with the opportunity to describe what they thought were the positive and negative aspects of being humorous. This study considers that humour is a positive rather than a negative event, therefore by asking these two open questions it was intended to discover if participants shared the same view as that of the present research.

Much can be learned about the way in which humour is conceptualised by analysing an individual’s personal account of specific humorous experiences. Seven women and five men provided answers to the open questions, and all of the following responses are presented in participants’ own words.

Positive aspects of humour

In answer to the first open question, participants were asked to write down what they believed were the positive aspects of humour. Some interactants, especially
the women, mentioned that humour could help themselves and others in situations that may be stressful or to minimise conflict, as follows.

Interaction four - Jen: “humour alleviates tense situations. It promotes a positive image of oneself to others.”

Interaction four - Mel: “stress relief! Enjoyable atmosphere.”

Interaction two - Lisa: “humour relaxes people.”

Interaction three - Hank: “the ability to diffuse tense situations.”

Participants made specific reference to the pleasurable aspects of humour. For instance, its addictive nature, the value of preserving amicable relations with others, being liked particularly by the opposite gender, and the importance of humour for breaking down barriers, that is, gender barriers or boundaries that might exist between men and women. Other individuals drew attention to the positive features of engaging in humorous laughter and the ability to laugh at oneself. Here are their comments.

Interaction four - Jen: “It’s like a drug, when we’re all talking, it’s addictive, but in a good way haha we’re all hooked on humour!”

Interaction three - Deb: “humour lightens people up, breaks down barriers.”

Interaction three - Sue: “it makes you less boring if you don’t do it too much. It can give you a one-upmanship if you are good at it.”
Interaction one - Male:  “people often spend the time to listen to you.”

Interaction two - Grant:  “humour makes it easy to talk to people. It breaks barriers. Girls talk to me! Life is too serious to not use humour.”

Interaction two - Stan:  “everybody loves you!”

Interaction four - Dan:  “it makes life more interesting.”

Interaction one - Nora:  “laughing a lot.”

Interaction two - Jill:  “it makes everyone laugh. Keeps moods light-hearted. It’s important to see the funny side of things. It’s good to laugh at yourself sometimes.”

Negative aspects of humour

In answer to the second open question participants were asked to describe what they regarded as the negative aspects of humour. The same individuals that had responded to the first open question also answered the second question. Most participants noted that humour could be perceived as “trivial” or unimportant and for that reason other people might not take them seriously.
Participants also mentioned that the “inappropriate” use of humour might put their relationships with others at risk, especially if they did not know the other person very well. In addition, participants suggested that some individuals might use humour to hide their “real” character.

Interaction one - Malc: “people don’t take you awfully seriously.”

Interaction two - Stan: “being taken seriously.”

Interaction two - Grant: “people may not be on same wavelength and understand you. Girls laugh at me! You may be perceived as not being serious.”

Interaction two - Jill: “if in a non-friendly way, people can get hurt. If humorous all the time you would never get taken seriously and people think you don’t have any feelings that can get hurt.”

Interaction four - Jen: “one could be perceived as frivolous or even weak in a serious situation.”

Interaction three - Sue: “people learn not to take you seriously if you do it a lot. It can become boring for others especially when they want or need to be serious about something.”

Interaction three - Deb: “perhaps hides a person’s deeper nature. Can be annoying if inappropriate or out of place.”

Interaction three - Sue: “it can hide the real you, so people don’t know who you are.”

Interaction one - Nora: “when other people don’t use humour.”
Interaction two - Lisa: “it can be misinterpreted.”

Interaction four - Mel: “others may not always appreciate it or be on the same wavelength.”

Interaction four - Dan: “you can lose your friends.”

Interaction three - Hank: “the inability to have an opportunity for humour when more appropriate to do so.”

The responses of the men and women to these open questions provided insights into the way in which humour was expressed and experienced in their relationships with other people. Of interest to this study, participant’s responses indicate that despite acknowledging that humour is a positive event, they also believed that it could be a negative activity.

4.4 Conclusion

Present findings show there were differences but also similarities in the men’s and women’s humour. In general, men contributed more humour than women did, and there were differences in the order in which each gender focused humour within the five Humour Categories. Whereas the men focused humour on both men and women in the group, none of the women focused humour on another woman, however, women did focus humour on a member of the opposite gender. In terms of speaker’s humour, men and women employed various behaviours to deliver their humour. In particular, recipients and audiences of
both genders were more likely to employ Returned Humour, rather than laughter, in their responses to humour.

Findings resulting from analysis of the humour model show that the men and women used various humour strategies to facilitate conversational involvement and to clarify and maintain gender boundaries. In terms of facilitating conversational involvement, men tended to use most of the humour strategies for mimicking, followed by entertainment, repetition, expressing common ground, and to collaboratively construct humour. Men also used humour least of all to self-disclose. In contrast, women were more likely to use most of their humour strategies to self-disclose, followed by collaboratively constructing humour, expressing common ground, repetition, entertainment, and least of all for mimicking.

With respect to using humour to maintain gender boundaries, men used most of the humour strategies for sexual humour, followed by talking humorously about gender. In contrast, women used most of their humour strategies to talk humorously about gender, followed by sexual humour. Other findings from the model concerning the three theoretical perspectives show that incongruity theory appears most often in the data and accounts for the majority of the humour. Incongruity theory is followed by superiority theory, then the relief or release theory.
A questionnaire consisting of closed and open questions showed differences as well as similarities in the men’s and women’s responses. For example, women were more likely to choose someone of the opposite gender as the most humorous person in the group, whereas men nominated another man, or did not select anyone. Concerning similarities in responses, both genders reported that they were more inclined to use humour for friendly rather than for non-friendly purposes. Finally, participants’ responses to the open questions provides the reader with a rare opportunity to view for themselves the particular way in which the men and women in this study experienced and expressed humour in their everyday lives.

Now Chapter 5 will provide a detailed qualitative examination of the current data using the combined method of conversation analysis and ethnographic techniques. This method allowed a fuller and wider investigation of the communication behaviours that men and women use to convey humour and maintain rapport.
Chapter 5  Qualitative analysis of humorous interaction

Chapter 5 presents a qualitative analysis of the collected data following the quantitative analysis that occurred in Chapter 4. In this way, qualitative and quantitative analyses are combined to provide a richer picture of the humour of adult friends in mixed-gender group interactions. Here, the qualitative methods of conversation analysis (CA) and ethnography permitted a thorough examination of the communication behaviours that men and women use to maintain rapport through humour in everyday social interaction.

In this chapter, selected extracts of humour are presented from transcripts of four mixed-gender group interactions. Nineteen of the most illustrative excerpts have been chosen. Selected portions from each of the four transcripts can be found in Appendix C. These portions are included because they provide clear examples of the way in which participants’ humour was widely distributed among the five Humour Categories. As it was not feasible to include the four complete transcripts in the Appendices, the transcripts have been saved onto a disk, which has been placed in an envelope and attached to this thesis.

All analyses of humour presented in this chapter were checked for accuracy and discussed with the individuals that were involved in the relevant group interaction. Although participants confirmed that the data extracts included in this chapter were humorous, it is possible that not all of the extracts will appear
amusing to the reader, which highlights the point that humour is subjective.

Moreover, humour is situational and requires a shared history of interaction. It is acknowledged that each example of humour shown here may have several different meanings. Therefore, the following analysis “highlights particular aspects of the many potential meanings” of a humorous instance (Holmes, 2000, p. 2). In other words, “it is necessary to consider what was done by what was said, and to consider the stream of behaviour rather than isolating parts” (Tannen, 1991, p. 42).

To strive for a deeper understanding of participants’ communication behaviours, the microanalyses of conversations presented here are accompanied by macro descriptions of the broader social contexts within which each interaction took place. Ethnographic details are included. For instance, the communication context, background information, and the topic being discussed. The topic of conversation is taken from the sequence or flow of topics presented in Appendix E. At the beginning of each data excerpt it is shown from which of the four group interactions each humorous instance (HI) has been extracted and into which of the five Humour Categories the HI has been coded according to focus of humour, as described in Chapter 3. Bold typeface is used to show the speaker, i.e., the person that initiated the humour. The transcription conventions for transcribing conversation are explained in Appendix B.
The framework for analysis of the current data is based on the model that was proposed in Chapter 2. Therefore, Chapter 5 is divided into two parts: 1) Facilitating conversational involvement; and 2) Clarifying and maintaining gender boundaries. The first part analyses the various humour strategies that interactants used to facilitate conversational involvement in their communication with one another. The second part analyses the humour strategies that interactants employed to clarify and maintain gender boundaries as they interacted with one another.

Furthermore, as the model considers superiority, relief, and incongruity theories rather than relying on one theoretical perspective to explain all humour in every situation, the three theories appear throughout the 19 extracts of humorous discourse presented in Chapter 5. In addition, the relevant theory is listed at the beginning of each extract. Consistent with findings reported in Chapter 4, incongruity theory occurred most often in the data, and it was found in nine of the 19 extracts of humour. The superiority theory occurred in six of the extracts, and the relief theory appeared in four of the humorous extracts.

Facilitating conversational involvement is the first analytical category to be examined as follows.
5.1 Facilitating conversational involvement

As discussed in Chapter 2, a heightened sense of involvement, that is, conversational involvement can be achieved in social activity by using various humour strategies. The work of some researchers has shown that conversational involvement is carried out in rhythm (Erickson & Shultz, 1982; Scollon, 1982). In other words, the verbal and non-verbal behaviours of speakers and hearers who share the same cultural background are rhythmically synchronised and carried out on the beat. For instance, this occurs when one speaker finishes another speaker’s utterance, or when the movements or gestures of one person are echoed or reflected by the other (Tannen, 1991).

Scollon (1982) equates conversation to a musical performance of a string quartet. “Ensemble” is the term he uses to refer to the coming together of the performers. Scollon writes, “It is not just the being together, but the doing together” that allows performers, or interactants, to achieve “one mind” (p. 342). Examples of this doing together, “which holds participants together in a mutual attention to the ongoing situation” (p. 345), are displayed throughout the extracts in Chapter 5. As this chapter shows, there is a pervasive use of how the interactants do humour in each of the conversational extracts that follow.
In this study, conversational involvement is achieved through a range of humour strategies namely.

5.1.1 Collaborative construction of humour
5.1.2 Repetition
5.1.3 Mimicking
5.1.4 Self-disclosure
5.1.5 Expressing common ground
5.1.6 Entertainment

Interactants employed these six humour strategies to express or “put the signalling load on” involvement (Tannen, 1991, p. 30). The next section analyses each humour strategy.

5.1.1 Collaborative construction of humour

The collaborative construction of humour allows participants to work together to produce shared meanings “… where the group takes precedence over the individual” (Coates, 1989, p. 118). Collaborative strategies suggest a predisposition for agreement and mutual understanding evidenced in the ability to speak as one voice (Griffiths, 1995; Nilan, 1992). The joint production of humour aligns individuals, that is, it draws them together and signals close involvement with a focus on maintaining the connection between oneself and others in intimate groups (Tannen, 1991). As there is much collaborative
construction of humour in the present study, it could be argued that the following extracts demonstrate excellent interactional rapport.

The first example of humour taken from a dinner party at Dan’s house suggests conversational rapport and solidarity between two women in their collaborative recollection of a humorous television commercial. The talk centres on interactants’ preference for adding sugar to different foods during which Jen mentions that she prefers to add sugar to her cornflakes for breakfast. The discussion prompts Mel to recall the television advertisement about the breakfast cereal, Kellogg’s Cornflakes. The advertisement, which is entitled ‘645 BC’ not only represents the year 645 BC but also indicates that the time is 6.45 in the morning. Further, in the commercial the letters BC refer to a time in history, that is, Before Christ however, BC also signifies before cornflakes.

Extract 1 shows the two women’s amusement and delight as they recollect the behaviour and appearance of a caveman-like character portrayed in the television commercial. They are amused because he has big bushy eyebrows and he walks and grunts like an ape. In particular, the women find it humorous that the man is wearing his underpants back to front. The commercial starts as the man is jolted out of bed by his alarm clock at 6.45 am. This yawning dishevelled character stumbles downstairs to the kitchen and manages to find a box of Kellogg’s cornflakes. He is still sleepy as he pours cold milk on the crispy, golden cornflakes. Then, after consuming only a few mouthfuls of cornflakes the man is
wide awake and miraculously transformed into a well-groomed executive, eager to start his day at the office. Mel initiates humour as follows in Extract 1.

**Extract 1: Collaborative construction of humour**

Interaction four  
Topic: Television advertisements  
Theory: superiority  
Humour Category: Outgroup (woman focuses humour on non-present man)

1 Mel I think the cornflakes advert is very good actually, the B.C. + Before Cornflakes haha
2 Jen oh [yeah! the the um the Neanderthal man=/
3 Mel [hahaha /=I don’t-
4 Jen =who comes out of the [um
5 Mel [yeah that’s right, he’s really good isn’t he?
6 Jen he’s excellent [isn’t it? excellent
7 Mel [yeah, what’s his name?
8 Jen yeah
9 Mel what’s the name of that chap that does that advert?
10 Jen and he [has really [bushy eyebrows
11 Dan [I’ve seen [it
12 Mel [hahahaha and you see him with his underpants on
13 Ted UGH ((mimics actor))
14 ALL LAUGHTER
15 Jen yeah he has them on back to front, have you seen them?
16 Mel that’s right isn’t it? He’s got his Y-fronts on the wrong way round
17 Jen he’s like a little- haha[hahahaha
18 Mel [hahaha

Humour is signalled by the jocular tone and laughter at the end of Mel’s comment in line 1. The women collaborate, that is, they duet in creating humour (Ervin-Tripp & Lampert, 1992). Both women display a high degree of involvement as they recollect the advertisement. Involvement is displayed in their use of overlapping speech, repetition, agreement such as “yeah” and “that’s right” (lines 5, 7, 8, 15 and 16), laughing together, and laughing through their talk. Heightened involvement is also signalled in the employment of similar non-
verbal behaviours, such as facial expressions and head nods, and the women’s frequent use of interrogatives. For instance, in line 5 Mel overlaps, agrees and seeks confirmation from Jen in her interrogative “yeah that’s right, he’s really good isn’t he?” Jen replies in a similar way “he’s excellent isn’t it? Excellent.”

Jen and Mel carry on with their joint recollection of the commercial in which they direct humour on the outgroup character. For example, in line 12 Mel laughs at length and pronounces, “hahahaha and you see him with his underpants on.” The comic image that Mel’s remark conjured by Mel’s remark results in a vociferous grunting response from Ted (line 13), followed by a rumbustious episode of group laughter, in which all interactants take part (line 14).

Although Ted’s verbal contribution is minimal, his non-verbal impersonation of a caveman, for example, protruding mouth, wide eyes, and silly expression, seems to suggest heightened involvement in the conversation. Similarly, Dan’s input is small yet he displays agreement and alignment with the two women by leaning forwards and raising his eyebrows and by asserting in a jocular tone of voice, “I’ve seen it” (line 11). The same humorous pattern continues in lines 15 and 16, and Jen and Mel laugh in unison in lines 17 and 18.

Humour expressed in this exchange agrees with the superiority theory, which holds that people laugh at others because they “feel superior in some way to them.” For instance, “adults often laugh at the sayings or doings of children”
Similarly, interactants in this conversational extract laughed at and made humorous remarks at the doings of a non-present character.

On playback of the recording, both Jen and Mel mentioned how much they enjoyed their joint recollection of the television commercial. In addition, Ted confirmed that he found this conversation “hilarious” even though he had never seen the advertisement. As noted by Norrick (1994), mutual production of humour aligns the interactants. Therefore, this conversational extract could be said to demonstrate interactional rapport through the collaborative construction of humour. Jen and Mel talk enthusiastically about an advertisement they have both seen, although they did not watch it together. Their rapid-fire turn exchanges and overlaps would appear to illustrate conversational involvement and interactional synchrony.

In Extract 1, the women seem to employ more laughter, laughing voice, and raised intonation than the men do. In contrast, as shown in Extract 2, which is from an interaction that took place at Hank’s home, there is minimal laughter from the women. Furthermore, Extract 2 displays another example of the collaborative construction of humour. Here, Ron hyperbolically accuses Hank of drinking excessively despite knowing that they both used to enjoy a drink. This excerpt shows how there is recognition of shared background between interactants. Besides, the two men support each other’s humour by developing a theme and by contributing more humour.
Extract 2: Collaborative construction of humour
Interaction three
Topic: Alcohol
Theory: Superiority
Humour Category: Ingroup (male) (man focuses humour on a present man)

1 Ron so much easier + but drinking habits have changed, I mean ours have, and probably yours have, I mean it’s still- you still drink too much
2 Hank yes {yes ((chuckles))}
3 Deb [haha
4 Ron [but you don’t probably sup the gin back like you used to probably do you?
5 Hank no, I- Sunday lunch time I like one
6 Ron yes right, I drink very little of that sort now
7 Hank a bottle of gin will last me WEEKS and weeks
8 Ron yes that’s right
9 Hank but at one time=/
10 Ron /=in the old days about a week I should think
11 Hank yah that’s right yah
12 Ron he used to dive in grab his
13 Hank [we both used to drink insidiously
14 Ron =large couple of- large ones you know hahaha

Ron initiates humour in line 1 by commenting that Hank’s consumption of alcohol is far greater than his own consumption. Ron’s remark “you still drink too much” could be considered aggressive. For instance, Ron delivers his statement with deadpan face and voice, in which there is a lack of expression and paralinguistic features. However, Hank is unperturbed and does not seem to take Ron seriously. Instead, Hank nods his head in agreement, smiles and repeats “yes” twice, and then chuckles, signalling agreement and amusement, as shown in line 2.

The two men continue a routine of building on each other’s humour. There is minimal laughter yet humour is maintained throughout the exchange, which is
indicated with verbal and non-verbal behaviours such as jocular tone, agreement (lines 2, 6, 8, and 11), and overlap (lines 4 and 13). Although this exchange involves disagreement in form, as Straehle (1993) argues, these verbal and non-verbal behaviours identify it as non-serious talk, and this was confirmed by participants in the follow-up sessions. To illustrate, in line 12 Ron refers to Hank by using the third person “he” instead of switching to “you” by saying “he used to dive in grab his bottle, a couple of.” According to Straehle (1993), such reference to “he” ignores or denies an individual’s presence, which one might otherwise indicate with the pronoun “you.” Keeping the third person in the presence of other hearers allows Ron to align himself against Hank, making Ron feel compelled to explain his view. At the same time, Ron’s retention of the third person pronoun could be a strategic way of encouraging hearers to take his side, as noted by Norrick (1993a).

However, Hank manages to put the record straight and he does this by overlapping Ron and declaring in jocular tone that in the past Ron also enjoyed a drink (line 13). For instance, Hank’s use of the inclusive “we” highlights the equitable nature of the humorous activity (Straehle, 1993) in which all interactants can be nominated as part of the humour, that is, everyone is included.

Superiority theory is demonstrated in this extract because there is a sense that the two men are using humour to try to outdo each other, and display some authority
over one another. According to Pilkington (1992), men’s humorous sparring signals their solidarity and their camaraderie. By reminiscing about the past and building on each other’s humour, the two men in the current study seek to strengthen their long association and friendship.

There is, however, minimal contribution from the women in the group. For instance, the only verbal offering is at the beginning of the exchange when Deb shows support with a short episode of laughter in line 3. Nevertheless, both women display involvement through their use of non-verbal behaviours, namely head nodding, smiling, raised eyebrows, and body movements.

This exchange helps to create bonding because, according to Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997), interactants demonstrate shared knowledge and a shared history. Moreover, this extract illustrates the collaborative construction or joint accomplishment of humour in which interactants progressively build on each other’s humour as a means of showing involvement and signalling solidarity.

The next two extracts show how the men and women use the humorous strategy, repetition to demonstrate conversational involvement in their group interaction.
5.1.2 Repetition

Repetition can be perceived as a sign of seeking to gain attention from the audience, and it works as a means of showing involvement in the conversation (Tannen, 1989). In addition, conversationalists can use repetition to point out something humorous in the foregoing statement (Holmes, 2000; Norrick, 1986; 1994). Tannen (1989, p. 96) observes that repetition “not only ties parts of discourse to other parts, but it bonds participants to the discourse and to each other, linking individual speakers in a conversation and in relationships.” Further Tannen (1989, p. 52) explains “the pattern of repeated and varied sounds, words, phrases, sentences, and longer discourse sequences gives the impression, indeed the reality, of a shared universe of discourse.”

In the following example from the current research a man focuses humour on a woman in his group by using repetition. Here, repetition is used to help unite interactants in the construction of a shared group voice. The four friends are having dinner at Dan’s house. During the early part of the meal, Jen has declined Ted’s offer to refill her glass with wine because she does not want to drink any more alcohol. She excuses herself by exclaiming hyperbolically that the drink would “go straight to her head” because of her small stature. Although Dan knows that Jen does not want much wine when she asks for “just a fraction” he creates humour by pretending that he does not know the size of a fraction.
Extract 3: Repetition
Interaction four
Topic: wine
Theory: Incongruity
Humour Category: Ingroup (female) (man focuses humour on a present woman)

1. Dan  Jen? More wine?
2. Jen  oh just a fraction Dan
3. Dan  *just a fraction? How big’s a fraction?*
4. Jen  I can’t drink any more, I’m-
5. Mel  Jen [*says “just a fraction” every time* hahahaha
6. Ted  *[she’s only got five foot’s worth to go*
7. Jen  that’s right, there’s only five foot of me not + haha
* six foot hahaha*
8. ALL  LAUGHING

On this occasion, when Dan asks Jen if she would like more wine she accepts his offer but only if he pours a tiny amount. Dan focuses humour on Jen by repeating her words “just a fraction” and then laughingly reworks her words into a hyperbolic challenge “how big’s a fraction?” in line 3. Moreover, he employs a cluster of paralinguistic behaviours, such as raised intonation, jocular tone and laughing voice. Therefore, as researchers have noted (Eder, 1991, 1993; Heath, 1998), the humorous activity is performed through speaker’s mirroring of speech.

Incongruity theory explains the humour in this exchange because it contains an element of surprise and absurdity. There is disjunction with context (Norrick, 1984), because everyone knows that Dan is deliberately misinterpreting Jen’s statement for humorous effect. According to the principle of incongruity, humour arises from ill-suited, disjointed pairings of ideas or situations, and it involves an
“instantaneous breaking up of the routine course of thought or action” (Keith-Spiegel, 1972, p. 7-9).

Through the humorous strategy of repetition, Dan effectively points out the humorous potential of Jen’s statement, thus inviting collaboration from the other interactants. For instance, like Dan, Mel repeats Jen’s statement word for word, and refers to Jen’s earlier refusal for more wine “Jen says just a fraction every time hahahaha” in line 5. Mel uses laughing voice with jocular tone that ends in a lengthy episode of laughter. She also leans forwards, smiles and makes eye contact with Jen. Thus, Mel’s contribution appears non-threatening and suggests an attempt to establish a closer relationship with her female counterpart.

Moreover, stating Jen’s name is seen as a co-operative move, as noted by Brown and Levinson (1987). That is, the use of in-group identity markers to address other interlocutors “implicitly shows that interactants belong to the same group” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 107).

Although Mel softens her comment with laughter, neither men laugh after making their remarks. Instead, Ted moves closer to Jen and extends the humour by reiterating and exaggerating Jen’s explanation for not accepting his offer of wine earlier in the interaction when he says, “she’s only got five foot’s worth to go” (line 6). In response, Jen agrees with Ted about her height, hyperbolically reasoning that if she were six foot tall the extra height would enable her to consume a far greater quantity of alcohol (line 7). Nevertheless, Jen is
outnumbered and with a resigned look on her face, goes along with the humour by using laughing voice and jocular tone as she tries to justify her refusal for more wine, “that’s right, there’s only five foot of me not + haha six foot hahaha.” To signal humour Jen inserts a pause followed by laughter within her utterance. Incorporating laughter within speech is one of the techniques speakers may employ to invite laughter from hearers, as observed by Jefferson (1979). Everyone then joins in with the collaborative action of group laughter, which marks the end of this humorous episode.

The conversational segment in Extract 3 shows how “repetition spawns repetition; laughter leads to more repetition, and more laughter” (Hopper & Glenn, 1994, p. 35), thus signalling enjoyment and positive involvement (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Tannen, 1989). In the words of Goodwin (1998, p. 44) “positions are highlighted not merely through words, but through intensified intonation contours and embodied performances.”

The next extract, taken from an interaction that occurred at Lucy’s home, also shows interactants skilfully manipulating repetition for humorous effect. Extract 4 shows how humour can achieve conversational involvement and interactional synchrony. In this example, interactants display a close monitoring of prior talk to signal conversational involvement and to exploit the humorous potential of the exchange (Tannen, 1987, 2005). On a more structural level this extract illustrates that repetition helps to maintain the dialogical flow and thus leads to
collaborative turn taking (lines 3 to 5) (see Sacks, 1989). Here, Malc talks about a play that highlights the serious topic of drugs, in which he is one of the actors. Malc experiences difficulty in finding the right words to explain that the leading actor’s main task is to portray the effect of someone taking drugs. However, Lucy prompts humour by implying that to depict someone taking drugs warrants little acting talent as it is necessary only to “dance around,” that is, to behave in a trivial manner.

**Extract 4: Repetition**
Interaction one.
Topic: Acting ability.
Theory: Incongruity
Humour Category: Ingroup (male) (a woman focuses humour on a present man)

1 Nora she is actually the drug?
2 Malc no the NAME, her name is what the drug can be known as and she’s interpreting what the feeling is like being on drugs
3 Lucy yeah so you dance around
++
4 Nora hah hahaha dancing [hahahahahahahaha
5 Malc [dancing around?
6 Lucy yeah ha|haha
7 Steve [haha

In this discussion, Lucy does not seem to take Malc’s comment seriously, and seize on his difficulty of clarification as an opportunity for initiating humour in her hyperbolic comment in line 3, “yeah so you dance around.” Then, her use of “dance” is dramatically extended (Heath, 1998) to “dancing” in the next turn by Nora. There is a noticeable pause before Nora responds with simultaneous verbal and non-verbal behaviours, such as raised eyebrows, laughter and laughing voice, which suggests that she is surprised and amused. Repetition used here
displays Nora’s recognition of the humorous quality of the preceding turn and her willingness to return equivalent humour. Her positive evaluation and shared amusement is reinforced in the laughter that precedes and follows in line 4.

In this conversation, both women use a variety of verbal and non-verbal features, such as raised eyebrows, smiling, pauses, laughing voice, jocular tone, and hearty laughter. Coates (1996, p. 230-231) highlights the significance of repetition, arguing that repetition was obvious across speakers in the women’s conversations that she analysed, “repetition is just the most marked phenomenon of textual coherence that typifies successful communication.”

Furthermore, one of the men uses repetition to identify an apparent error in usage and to add emphasis to his response. For example, Male pulls a silly face to display mock surprise and disagreement with Lucy’s evaluation while he delivers the interrogative, “dancing around?” in a jocular tone with rising intonation (line 5). These behaviours mark his contribution as humorous, for example, Lucy does not take Male’s comment seriously because she does not retract her claim. Instead, in line 6 she extends the humour by repeating her earlier use of “yeah,” which is followed immediately by her laughter, thus inviting support from other group members. Steve accepts the invitation in a display of overlapping laughter and hand gestures (line 7).
It would seem therefore that Lucy uses repetition to align herself with Nora.

Interactants’ “connectedness” (Heath, 1998, p. 229) is demonstrated in their collaborative practice in aligning actions of repetition, agreement, laughter, and overlap. Interactants build returns from a preceding remark, “although speakership changes, the underlying patterns used to construct the utterance of the moment is preserved” (Goodwin, 1990, p. 179).

Incongruity theory explains the humour in Extract 4 as the extract contains an element of surprise and absurdity. According to Pomerantz (1984) there is disjunction with the general context because humour was initiated during a serious topic, i.e., a play that focused on the effects of drugs. For instance, Lucy’s hyperbolic assertion, “yeah so you dance around” is expressed in extreme terms, and hearers receive the statement with surprise, which is performed through various verbal and non-verbal supportive behaviours (Pomerantz, 1984). Participants agreed in follow-up sessions that repetition enabled interactants to involve themselves in the conversation in a non-threatening way.

I now illustrate how participants used the humorous strategy, mimicking to attain conversational involvement.
5.1.3 Mimicking

Mimicking can be used as a device to amuse and entertain and to signal involvement in the conversation. In this action, the speaker talks and acts with the intonation, facial expression, and gestures of another person to produce humour (Morreall, 1983). The speaker can also decide to take on a different accent, which marks the interaction in a more playful manner. For example, Heath (1998, p. 232) explains that mimicking is when speakers “take on the role of someone else, and speak as that person,” that is, they take on the characterisation of another. Heath points out that similarities in speech can indicate affiliation and can highlight positive humour between participants in mimicking. Furthermore, mimicking an absent party serves to unite present participants against the absent party while also providing a source of humour in talk (see Eder, 1991).

The next excerpt from a conversation in Hank’s home shows interactants mimicking an absent party. Ron initiates humour by mimicking, that is, he takes on the voice of an absent party, his wife. The topic is the weekly shopping for groceries at the supermarket. Both Ron and Hank have previously admitted that they prefer not to take with them a prepared grocery list when they go shopping as they prefer to buy whatever takes their fancy. However, as shown in Extract 5, the men are often reprimanded by their wives for not adhering to the grocery list.
**Extract 5: Mimicking**

Interaction three

Topic: The supermarket

Theory: Superiority

Humour Category: Outgroup (a man focuses humour on a non-present woman)

1 Ron "there’s nothing on-- [what IS this stuff]"? ((mimics his wife))
2 Deb [you’ve got a bit of leeway]
3 Sue hmm ((chuckles))
4 Ron “what are we going to do? when are we going to eat that”? ((mimics his wife))
5 Hank yes
6 Ron “well I thought tomorrow” ((himself)), “no you know VERY well that we’ve got something else” ((mimics his wife))
7 Hank haha
8 ALL LAUGHING
9 Ron marvellous isn’t it ((exhaled laugh))

Ron initiates humour by acting out a situation in which his wife rebukes him for buying the wrong groceries and he does this by mimicking the voice of his wife. Humour is indicated through his intonation pattern and exaggerated voice to copy that of a woman (lines 1, 4 and 6). In addition, Ron mimics his wife’s body language, for instance, he uses exaggerated facial expressions, eye movements, and gestures.

Extract 5 shows the superiority theory of humour. For instance, mimicking an absent party could be a way of displaying the superiority of one’s own reference group and thus strengthening one’s self-esteem, as discussed by Foot (1991). In Extract 5, the characterisation is encapsulated in mimicking another person’s voice and behaviour. Ron’s mimicking is acknowledged and supported by Sue’s
agreement and chuckling in line 3, followed by Hank’s agreeing action, “yes,” which is accompanied by a nodding of the head and raised eyebrows (line 5).

Ron’s humorous portrayal of himself and his non-present wife ends in group laughter in which all the interactants participate (line 8). Laughter from the group encourages Ron to extend the humour in line 9 in an act of mock annoyance at being chastised by his wife for not keeping to the grocery list and he adds, “marvellous isn’t it.” Although his remarks in this exchange may appear hostile in form, non-verbal behaviours identify the turns as humorous or “non-serious play” (Straehle, 1993, p. 216).

It is noteworthy that hearers immediately recognise Ron’s dramatisation as a portrayal of himself and of his wife, therefore signifying how a dramatised performance can come to identify shared interpretation and highlight the bonds between interactants (Bauman, 1992). Such humour, as noted by Holmes (2000), serves to display conversational involvement and strengthen collegiality.

Mimicking is revealed again in Extract 6. The men and women are having dinner and eating swordfish as their main course. The discussion centres on zander, a hybrid river fish that Dan and Ted sampled for the first time on a recent trip to France. Zander is regarded as predatory in England because it is known to eat locally grown river fish. Although zander is not a fish that is considered edible in England, it is eaten in some parts of continental Europe, especially France.
The humour in Extract 6 centres on misunderstanding and Dan’s mimicking of the accent of a waitress in a restaurant in France.

**Extract 6: Mimicking**  
**Interaction four**  
**Topic: Eating fish**  
**Theory: Superiority**  
**Humour Category: Outgroup (a man focuses humour on a non-present woman)**

1. Dan and so I said to this woman, I said um “what’s zander like?” she said “ah it is a- it’s a RIVER fish” ha[ha][ha] ((mimics French accent))
2. Jen [hahaha]
3. Dan I I I said “I know it’s a river fish but what’s it like?”
4. Jen haha[ha]
5. Mel haha[ha]
6. Dan [y’know it was gorgeous y’know hahaha]
7. Jen river fish ha[ha][ha] ((mimics French accent))
8. Ted [not like- not like the one we had in America, [what was that dan?]
9. Jen [hahaha]
10. Dan catfish + scum sucker

Dan recalls that he had never tried zander until he visited a restaurant in France. Seeing this fish is on the menu, he calls the waitress to his table and asks her what it tastes like. However, the waitress misunderstands Dan, thinking that he wants to know what kind of fish it is. Dan introduces humour by mimicking the absent waitress’s broad French accent (line 1). His simultaneous non-verbal behaviours include raised eyebrows, head movements and gestures. Heath (1998) notes that the adoption of a distinctive accent has the effect of ridiculing and distancing the speaker from these norms. Dan then proceeds to laugh at the end of his statement, and this signals a request for support from the other members of the group, which is provided by Jen’s overlapping laughter (line 2).
The laughter from other members of the group encourages Dan to extend the humour. For example, he simultaneously uses jocular tone, exaggerated intonation and exaggerated non-verbal gestures and head movements in a re-enactment of his attempt at trying to make the waitress understand him (line 3). Another bout of laughter from Jen (line 4) and then Mel (line 5) encourages Dan further because he then progresses to laughing voice in his demonstration of surprise and delight as he finally samples the zander (line 6). Jen shows alignment and appreciation by repeating the way Dan has said “river fish” when she uses a similar broad French accent and matches Dan’s non-verbal behaviours. In addition, Ted’s overlap (line 8) suggests an eagerness to join in and demonstrate background knowledge and to remind Dan of their shared history because the two men had recently travelled together to America.

This episode suggests the superiority theory of humour, in which humour “derives from the fleeting sense of superiority” (Foot, 1991, p. 4). At the same time, the use of humour to mimic an absent party, namely the French waitress, serves to bond the men and women in this group interaction.

The next two extracts demonstrate how conversational involvement can be achieved through self-disclosure.
5.1.4 Self-disclosure

Through humour, friends may disclose personal information to one another to promote a sense of trust, which subsequently helps to preserve relational stability (Duck, 1988). Self-disclosure, that is, revealing private personal experiences and strongly held thoughts and beliefs exposes areas of personal vulnerability, and this requires an existing basis of trust. Some scholars are reluctant to classify a relationship as a friendship without evidence that the individuals are close or intimate with one another (Asher, Parker, & Walker, 1996). The use of self-disclosure is part of a high-involvement style, as argued by Tannen (1991). “The rapport function, that is, the notion that because of our interpersonal connection we are interested in each other’s revelations, is assumed” (p. 80).

In the following excerpts, participants disclose personal information through employing self-focused humour. In the first example, they are discussing features on their mobile telephones, such as voicemail and text messaging. Deb discloses that she does not know how to send a text message from her mobile telephone, which produces amusement and encouragement from her friends.

**Extract 7: Self-Disclosure**

Interaction three
Topic: Mobile telephones
Theory: Relief
Humour Category: Self (a woman focuses humour on herself)

1  Hank  have you?
2  Deb  hmm?
3  Hank  text [messaging?]
With support from Ron (line 4), Hank (lines 1 and 3) on two occasions asks Deb if she knows how to use the text messaging feature on her mobile telephone to send and receive text messages. Eventually, Deb responds by disclosing that she does not know how to use text messaging, however she quickly adjusts her statement by saying that she has not yet had a chance to work out how to do it (line 5), “no I probably can’t- I haven’t worked out how to use it hahaha.” Here, Deb effectively anticipates embarrassment and responds by turning the source of her embarrassment into humour. Thus, as Holmes (1998) argues, humour serves as a positive device, oriented to participants’ need to be appreciated.

Extract 7 displays the relief or release theory of humour. According to this view, humour stems from the relief experienced when tensions are engendered and removed from an individual (Meyer, 2000). By self-disclosing and admitting fallibility, it is possible that Deb expresses trust in her co-conversationalists, which produces a sympathetic response in the form of a positive reply to the humour. Therefore, humour releases tensions in ways that are seen as amusing by interactants (Adelman, 1991).
Deb laughs at the end of her self-focused statement, and this invites support from the audience. Hank accepts her invitation and laughs in support of Deb, which suggests that he finds the event humorous rather than shameful (Norrick, 1993a). Likewise, Sue accepts the invitation to support Deb, though she does not laugh but signals her support and alignment by overlapping Hank and by revealing in jocular tone, “no I’m not very good at it either” (line 7). Hence, it appears that Deb’s self-disclosure encourages Sue to admit that she does not know how to use text messaging.

In addition, there is support for Deb from Ron. However, rather than admit that he does not know how to send text messages, he feigns disinterest in texting and places the blame on his out-of-date mobile telephone (lines 8 and 10), which prompts agreement from Hank who says “no” in line 9. As in Excerpt 2, there is little laughter yet humour is maintained through interactants’ employment of verbal and non-verbal behaviours, such as jocular tone, overlap, and agreement. The group share a common reaction to the notion, and this is an example of “doing collegiality” through humour (Holmes, Stubbe & Vine, 1999, p. 362). Therefore, it can be said that this extract shows the way in which humour functions to build solidarity between participants.

The next excerpt also displays self-disclosure through self-focused humour. In Extract 8, interactants are discussing people they know who have lost weight. Similar to the previous extract, the speaker successfully turns the cause of the
embarrassment into a topic of humour. Here, Malc suspects that Steve has recently lost some body weight and is curious to find out if this is the case. However, talking about another person’s weight can be a sensitive subject because some individuals may feel embarrassed or self-conscious about their body shape. The following extract shows how Steve creates humour first by his initial reluctance to disclose information, and then with his revelation that he has lost half a stone in body weight.

**Extract 8: Self-Disclosure**

Interaction one  
Topic: Body weight  
Theory: Relief  
Humour Category: Self (a man focuses humour on himself)

1. Malc you haven’t you?  
2. Steve I’m not gonna tell ya  
3. Malc how much have you lost?  
4. **Steve not much half a stone something like that**
5. Nora [that’s a lot haha  
6. Lucy [I could lose half a stone + love to lose it  
7. Malc yeah when I had my appendix out I lost a stone and a half  
8. Steve I’m all muscle there now apart from my midriff  
9. Nora haha [muscle madcap  
10. Lucy haha  
11. Malc [more muscle, you’re all muscle apart from the fat  
12. ALL LAUGHING  
13. Steve you’re not meant to say that hahaha  
14. ALL LAUGHING  
15. Lucy yeah everyone’s got muscles it’s just how far down you can [find it! haha  
16. Nora [hahaha

As shown in Extract 8, Steve is reluctant to provide an immediate answer to Malc’s question about his weight loss. Nevertheless, Steve effectively converts his embarrassment into humour through self-disclosure (line 4). In this excerpt, Steve gains sympathy and understanding through self-disclosure, through being
modest and by downplaying his weight loss. With his use of the adverb “not much,” Steve effectively mitigates “the force of his evaluation” (Eggin's and Slade, 2005, p. 136). In addition, the use of laughing voice throughout his disclosure could show that Steve is experiencing embarrassment but hopes his co-participants will understand (Norrick, 1993a). This was confirmed by Steve in feedback he provided to me in the follow-up sessions.

Relief theory is illustrated here because humour relieves the tension caused by the potentially sensitive topic of body weight. From the perspective of the relief theory, people experience humour because they sense that stress has been reduced in a certain way (Meyer, 2000).

The solidarity reinforcing effect of this humorous episode is highlighted when the women reassure Steve that in their view, his weight loss is significant. For instance, Nora says, “that’s a lot haha” (line 5), followed by Lucy’s agreement (line 6), “I could lose half a stone + love to lose it.” Hence, humour can be an effective tool in getting people to respond sympathetically (Nilsen, 1993). In addition, Malc’s use of agreement signals his eagerness to be included in the conversation. Nevertheless, there is perhaps a degree of competitiveness in Malc’s declaration that at one time he managed to lose more body weight than Steve did, “yeah when I had my appendix out I lost a stone and a half.” Studies of mixed-gender groups have shown that males often use humour in a competitive way (Fine, 1990; Labov, 1972).
Even though Steve seems encouraged by the women’s praise and does not mind talking about his weight, he again focuses humour on himself, using what could be regarded as a self-deprecatory statement “I’m all muscle there now apart from my midriff” (line 8). According to Pomerantz (1978), responding to praise or a compliment can be problematic for the recipient. On the one hand, norms of agreement (Sacks, 1987) involve the recipient agreeing with the compliment of the speaker. Conversely, if recipients are more competent in some way than their friends are, then this tends to be played down and signalled in actions that try to reduce the differences. Herbert (1990, p. 210) notes, “one confirms solidarity with the previous speaker by agreeing with that speaker’s assertion and by avoiding or negating self-directed praise, which would attribute a higher status to the complimented speaker.”

Extract 8 also shows that in response to Steve’s humour, Nora laughs and continues the humour through her use of wordplay in line 9 “haha muscle madcap,” with supporting laughter from Lucy. Malc also responds with a hyperbolic remark, “more muscle, you’re all muscle apart from the fat,” and he appears to show heightened involvement through his use of overlap, jocular tone and laughing voice (line 11), and this leads into an episode of group laughter as all interactants respond (line 12).
Although Malc’s comment could be interpreted as aggressive, Steve does not seem to take offence (Makri-Tsilipakou, 1994). For instance, in line 13 Steve joins in with the group laughter then responds with jocular tone and laughing voice in his mock rebuke, which culminates in hearty laughter, “you’re not meant to say that hahaha.” His response signals humour and this segues into a second bout of group laughter, in which everyone takes part. The group laughter is quickly followed by Lucy’s use of agreement and her hyperbolic statement in line 15 “yeah everyone’s got muscles it’s just how far down you can find it! haha.”

Most of the episode in Extract 8 is enacted through exaggerated facial expressions, jocular tone, laughter, laughing voice, and group laughter. A notable aspect of the humour exhibited could be the co-operative alignment of the speaker and hearers. For instance, in the current example Steve, the speaker initiated humour clearly, and hearers, that is, the rest of the group, showed their co-operative moves by laughing and joining in and providing more humour and laughter.

Therefore, in Extracts 7 and 8, speakers appear to use self-disclosure as a display of rapport. Tannen (1991) argues that the group action of revealing personal information about themselves underlines group members’ intimacy, mutual trust and loyalty to one another. According to Tannen (1991) employing the strategy of self-disclosure, “the speaker expects his or her statement of personal
experience to elicit a similar comment from a hearer. Thematic cohesion is established by the metamessage: we are intimate; we both tell about ourselves; we are both interested in hearing about the other’s experience” (p. 79).

5.1.5 Expressing common ground

Humour can be employed to build on shared background knowledge and highlight in-group similarities. Interactants express commonality by signalling with verbal and non-verbal communication that they “belong to some set of persons who share the specific wants, including goals and values” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 103).

Moreover, shared background knowledge is “acquired in mutual interaction through previous verbal interactions and joint activities and experiences” (Kreckel, 1981, p. 51). Researchers have noted that before the group accepts a person’s remark as humorous, he or she must belong to the group and hold views that are consistent with it (Brown & Keegan, 1999; Dwyer, 1991). Common ground makes it possible for a speaker and a hearer to reach agreement on what the speaker means and what the hearer understands the speaker to mean. Ziv (1984) defines one of the functions of humour as “sharing similarities between self and others.” The following extracts reveal how common ground could strengthen the bond between interactants.
In the following conversational exchanges, shared humour centres on commonality and co-operation of participants. The invitation to take part in humour demonstrates participant recognition of a shared background of beliefs and experiences. The occurrence of humour relies on the way in which interactants communicate their shared experiences. For example, they discuss how cold it is in England during the winter months, as displayed in Extract 9.

Deb recalls the time during her childhood when she lived abroad in countries such as Egypt, Singapore, and Malaya. She tells the group that the family moved back to England when her father ended his job as a foreign correspondent for the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation). Ron reacts to her comment by hyperbolically pointing out that expatriates have a propensity to return to England during the height of winter, rather than returning in the warmer summer months. The other interactants contribute to the humour through their collaborative verbal and non-verbal behaviour.

**Extract 9: Expressing common ground**

Interaction three
Topic: Returning to live in England
Theory: Superiority
Humour Category: Outgroup (a man focuses humour outside the group)

1 Ron people always seem to come back from these trips in sort of January and February don’t they when=/
2 Deb /=exactly, [that’s exactly right
3 Hank [haha
4 ALL LAUGHING
5 Sue ice on the car haha
6 ALL LAUGHING
7 Ron [yes
8 Sue [in the middle of January
In Extract 9, Ron employs jocular tone and raised intonation as a signal for initiating humour (line 1). His humorous observation that expatriates return to England midwinter rather than in the summer months illustrates the superiority theory because humour is directed at the “ignorant” actions of others (Meyer, 2000, p. 314). Moreover, Deb supports this presumption with interruption and agreement in line 2, and Hank’s laughter in line 3 signals amusement and encourages group laughter (line 4). Following Sue’s comment about “ice on the car,” the group laugh together again in line 6, which could suggest heightened involvement in the conversation. As soon as one remark is interpreted as humorous, as indicated by the group’s laughter in line 4, it provides an environment in which subsequent remarks are likely to be interpreted as humorous (line 6), as indicated by another episode of group laughter (see Alberts, 1992a).

By using shared background information, interactants collaborate to expand the viewpoint that the winter months are not the best time to return to England after living in a hot country. Their collaborative non-verbal behaviours, such as agreement (lines 7, 9, 11, 12 and 15), overlapping speech (lines 3, 8, and 13), exaggerated expression (line 10), laughing voice, jocular tone and laughter,
suggest that the group understand each other’s viewpoint. It could be said therefore that humour produces a shared, mutually constructed definition of the situation. Solidarity is promoted by interactants’ gross over-exaggeration in this sequence (lines 11, 12, and 14), in particular Ron’s hyperbolic statement “yes nothing works, and there’s- there’s a bus strike” (line 12).

Unity is achieved because interactants hold in common a belief that, in their experience, everything goes wrong or malfunctions in the winter months. In this conversational segment it could be said that close involvement is constructed through the joint activity of narrative development in building a potential scenario (Tannen, 1991).

In Extract 10 taken from a social gathering at their local pub, interactants are discussing blood donation for the National Blood Service. Here, humour centres on the commonly held cultural belief that although giving blood is an admirable activity that could potentially save the life of another human being, most people consider donating blood an unpleasant experience. However, Jill creates humour by suggesting the reason Grant donates blood is because he enjoys the attention of the nurses who work at the blood bank.

**Extract 10: Expressing common ground**  
Interaction two  
Topic: Donating blood  
Theory: Incongruity  
Humour Category: Ingrouph (male) (a woman focuses humour on a present man)

> 1  Jill you go a lot [though for somebody- if I fainted
2 Grant              [I go yeah I do go
3 Jill I don’t think I would ever go again
4 Stan really?
5 Grant oh yeah well I didn’t [go for MANY years
6 Jill                       [whether you just like the
7 nurses doing this over you hahaha
8 ALL LAUGHING
9 Jill you’re always there
10 Grant I didn’t go- I didn’t go for a lot of years when that
    first happened
11 Jill yeah I can imagine I don’t think I’d ever go back
12 lisa I don’t enjoy it but um=/
13 Grant             /=no no
14 Stan [no
15 Jill [nobody does
16 Grant nobody likes to

It could be argued that Jill’s comments in Extract 10 facilitate bonding because
they show that she knows something about Grant, thus her comments display
insider knowledge and a past history share with Grant (Boxer & Cortés-Conde,
1997). Further, Jill relies on the use of address forms, for instance, the personal
pronoun “you,” as a vehicle for expressing solidarity and closeness (Brown &
Levinson, 1987).

Grant’s initial agreement in line 2 is followed by partial agreement “oh yeah
well,” and an attempt at explanation in line 5, “oh yeah well I didn’t go for
MANY years.” However, Jill does not wait for Grant to finish talking. Instead,
she overlaps him with her hyperbolic statement that the most likely reason he
continues to give blood is that he enjoys the attention he receives from the nurses
(line 6). The unexpectedness of her hyperbolic comment with its implied sexual
theme, jocular tone, and laughing voice, which ends in hearty laughter, leads to
heightened conversational involvement displayed as all interactants laugh
together in line 7.

262
Therefore, the surprising nature of the humour and its duality of meaning resulting in shared laughter fits in with the incongruity theory of humour. Jill’s contribution is effective in that, as noted by Toolan (1988), strategically delaying elements of the orientation can surprise or shock the audience.

Having gained the audience’s support and encouragement, Jill prolongs the humorous exchange with another hyperbolic comment in line 8 “you’re always there.” Although Grant is the focus of Jill’s humour he does not appear to take offence, and he provides no counter-challenge. Instead, he chooses to ignore the “attack” with its veiled sexual undertones, and responds with initial laughing voice in a near repetition of his earlier denial (line 9). This move by Grant incites a sympathetic response from Jill, corroborating Grant’s view that giving blood is not a pleasant task (line 10). Her comment again encourages support from all the interactants. For instance, Lisa’s admission (line 11) supports Jill’s contribution, as does Grant’s agreement and interruption, “no no,” which is stated in laughing voice while assuming a pained expression (line 12).

In the next turn, Stan seals group solidarity by repeating Grant’s “no,” which is spoken with laughing voice (line 13). At the same time, Jill takes the floor and expands her earlier use of “I” to the more inclusive “nobody does” (line 14). On receiving Jill’s comment, Grant in reciprocal action builds on preceding talk in
his repeated use of “nobody,” while adding specific detailed intensity with “nobody likes to.”

The episode in Extract 10 allows collaborative construction, as all interactants agree that they dislike donating blood, yet they are also united in their belief that this activity is an important social duty because it can help save other people’s lives. In this conversation, interactants effortlessly manage to establish a common theme. This is an example of how shared attitudes can work in practice, creating involvement and cohesion between interactants. In feedback obtained later the participants confirmed that their group interaction was cohesive.

5.1.6. Entertainment

Present data shows that interactants used humour to amuse and entertain others with their performance. According to Norrick (1993a, p. 131) humour “(offers) us a chance to play … and create rapport in entertaining fashion.” Furthermore, Norrick notes the prevalence of spontaneous humour in everyday discourse stating “conversation often tends more toward performance and entertainment than to the expeditious exchange of information” (p.131).

Similarly, in her study of women friends’ conversations, Coates (1997) notes that humour or “talk as play is inevitably structured differently from talk as serious business.” The main goals of playful talk or humour are “the construction and
maintenance of good relations, not the exchange of information” and that “participants should enjoy themselves” (p. 295). This observation about the goals of humour can be said to apply to the present data, which revealed that goals may apply not only to women but also to men in mixed-gender interactions. The following empirical evidence in Extract 11 is provided to support this claim.

Before the start of the following segment of conversation, interactants are talking positively about their enjoyment of alcohol, especially red wine. This discussion prompts Dan to launch into a humorous personal story about his first encounter with alcohol. He amuses his friends with his hyperbolic statement that the first time he became drunk was at the age of two.

**Extract 11: Entertainment**
Interaction four
Topic: Alcohol
Theory: Incongruity
Humour Category: Self (a man focuses humour on himself)

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<td>Dan</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Jen</td>
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| 14 | Dan | [for a sherry party and they got sort of these tables about this high ((demonstrates height of table)) and apparently what I
Dan elicits laughter near the beginning of the excerpt as he briefly states the point of the story (see Norrick, 1993a). Humour is signalled through a combination of verbal and non-verbal behaviours, such as the use of exaggeration, deadpan face, and marked emphasis and loudness placed on the word “two.” It is clear from Mel’s reaction that she does not believe that Dan got drunk at such a young age.

Nevertheless, instead of responding directly to Mel, Dan proceeds to elaborate on this theme, to the continued amusement and disbelief of the audience. Thus, Incongruity theory is demonstrated in Extract 11 because hearers react to the humour with surprise, disbelief, and amusement.

Moreover, this surprise effect seems to contribute to the overall impact of the story, thus leading to heightened conversational involvement. Cohesion is expressed because hearers join the talk, each trying to concoct and add some humorous remark (lines 8 and 9). For instance, in line 8 Ted contributes to the dramatisation with his jocular overlap “we’d better not listen hahaha.” Thus he pretends to be apprehensive about the tellability of the presumed story, since it may be too risqué in the current configuration of participants (Norrick, 1993a). Further, Ted’s use of the pronoun “we” works to align him with the other
hearers, therefore expressing solidarity and rapport, as Holmes (2000) argues. In response, Jen laughingly agrees and goes along with Ted by stating “not for human consumption this bit” but then quickly shifts her support and encourages Dan with her aligning statement “it could be interesting actually,” as shown in line 9. Non-verbal behaviours expressed by hearers include raised eyebrows, shaking the head from side to side, jocular tone, and laughing voice. In addition, Norrick (1993a) notes that evaluative comments from hearers are intended to elicit further laughter, and usually emerge any time after the initial statement of the theme.

In line 14 of Extract 11, Dan builds on the humour by acting out a lively and animated account of his early childhood indiscretion. He adds drama to this performance by using his hands to show the height of the table. He then mimics himself as a two year old child in a drunken state “so I was going around swigging everyone’s sherry haha.” Laughter at the end of his statement could display Dan’s ability to laugh at himself and could be an invitation of support from the audience. For instance, Jen shows alignment by building on Dan’s humour as she over exaggerates her surprise at the thought of a drunken two year old child. She uses jocular tone of voice accompanied by raised eyebrows and a grin, “oh that’s nasty eh?” in line 15. Ted follows in line 16 with a challenge to Dan “he hasn’t changed has he?” Similar to Extract 2, this is an example of a man using the third person pronoun “he” rather than “you” to comment on another man in his presence (Straehle, 1993). This action allows Ted to align
himself against Dan so that Dan feels obliged to defend his viewpoint, and to enable Ted to gain support from the two women (Norrick, 1993a).

However, Dan does not appear threatened by Ted’s statement, which reveals that Ted and Dan have a shared history, that is, they have known each other since childhood. Support is offered from Jen by way of laughter in line 17. However, Dan offers no further explanation and does not defend his view possibly because he achieved his goal, that is, he told his story. What this could demonstrate is the power an individual may exercise over the final interpretation of a story (see Goodwin, 1986; Spielman, 1987).

As shown in Extract 11, telling humorous personal stories allows interactants to express conversational involvement (Tannen, 1989). Humorous stories are, according to Sacks (1978), ways of packaging and sharing experiences. Sacks further argues that stories portray an experience in which the speaker figures as the hero of the story. This does not mean the speaker has performed a heroic deed, but that the speaker is involved in the story, and it is organised around the speaker’s circumstances.

People often recount humorous events from their childhood. Whilst adolescents may feel embarrassed by their childhood silliness, adults are likely to consider past mistakes and excesses as cause for amusement rather than ridicule (Norrick, 1993a). Further, Vinton (1989) observed that stories of humorous events from
childhood are often a form of entertainment for interactants. The successful performance of a humorous personal story is an effective way of amusing and entertaining others and maintaining rapport. Telling personal stories also enables interactants to convey that they do not take themselves too seriously, which reinforces a feeling of equality between interlocutors (Norrick, 1993a).

Interactants’ use of humour to amuse and entertain their friends is demonstrated again in the following conversational segment. Extract 12 can be seen as a co-operative attempt to amuse, to keep the tone light and preserve good collegial relations (Holmes, 2000). In the next conversation, it seems that Steve deliberately focuses humour on himself to amuse and entertain his co-participants. He initiates humour by hyperbolically claiming a naivety about drugs and the group are amused by his apparent naivety.

In contrast, his friends appear keen to portray themselves as extremely knowledgeable about drugs. For instance, interactants discuss at some length different kinds of drugs, their effects, mutual acquaintances that take drugs, and participants’ own experiences of drug use, either personally or through their association with others. The four friends are aware that Malc is the only member of the group that has experimented with different kinds of drugs. Moreover, in the past, both women had been romantically involved with men that had experimented with soft drugs such as marijuana.
Extract 12: Entertainment
Interaction one
Topic: Drugs
Theory: Incongruity
Humour Category: Self (a man focuses humour on himself)

1 Lucy everybody nearly everybody here does it
2 Steve (exhaled breath)) phew tut it weren’t like that in my day
3 Malc how old are you steve?
4 Steve I’m twenty five next month
5 Lucy hahaha makes him sound really really old haha
   [ha I didn’t do that in [MY day=
6 Nora  [hahaha
7 Malc [grandad
8 Nora  [hahaha
9 Lucy when I were a lad
10 Malc did you do O’levels or GCSEs?
11 Nora  [hahahaha
12 Steve [GCSEs, back in MY [day, um butane gas not all this junk business=
13 ALL LAUGHING
14 Nora  [hahaha we’re gonna snort some glue
15 Lucy  [hahaha
16 Steve yeah

Various verbal and non-verbal behaviours are crucial to enable Steve to amuse his friends (line 2). For instance, he uses the slang expression “phew tut” before commenting in a melodramatic tone “it weren’t like that in my day” as a response to Lucy’s evaluative statement (line 1). A loud and contrived exhalation, a slow shaking of the head from side to side, and a wry smile mark his tone as humorous. Moreover, Steve’s use of slang “indicates the general informality of the interaction” and “enables interactants to create and signal solidarity and inclusion” (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 155).

Incongruity theory is displayed here because the humour results from a contrast between what is logically expected and what is actually said (Keith-Spiegal,
1972). That is, everyone in the group knows that Steve is pretending that he is naïve about drugs and does not intend to be taken literally. For instance, Malc laughingly asks Steve to confirm his age, even though Malc already knows that Steve is two years older (line 3). Malc’s question is marked by emphatic tone, which mocks Steve’s hyperbolic condemnation of drugs. Further, in line 4, Steve responds in a low voice with steady pitch, in a way that seems deliberately serious. Only the knowledge that the question was not serious makes it clear the answer is not meant seriously either (Tannen, 1991).

Then Lucy gains the floor with an initial bout of laughter and exaggeration of Steve’s age by laughingly commenting “makes him sound really really old haha” (line 5). Her use of the third person “him” allows Lucy to align herself against Steve, pressuring him to endorse his view. Moreover, using the third person pronoun enables Lucy to garner support from the other interactants so that they take her side (see Norrick, 1993a). Employing this strategy is similar to the men’s use of “he” rather than “you,” as shown in Extracts 2 and 11. Further, Lucy enriches her description with laughter and then proceeds to rework Steve’s words in mimicking the voice of an elderly man. In her reuse of Steve’s prior talk (Goodwin, 1990), Lucy switches from the third person to the first person. As she exaggerates Steve’s words in an emphatic tone of voice she gives the impression that Steve sounds like an elderly man (line 5), “I didn’t do that in MY day.” Volsinov (1973) has observed that a speaker never simply reports the talk
of another, but rather in the process of animating that talk, comments on it or shows their alignment to it.

Support for Lucy’s humour is realised in Nora’s overlapping laughter in line 6 and Malc’s playful name-calling action (line 7), “grandad.” Here, Malc builds on the good-natured humorous theme by adopting a “mocking style” (Tannen, 1991, p. 134) to exaggerate Steve’s age. Malc’s remark is not intended to offend (Tannen). Instead, it serves to preserve solidarity, as the two men confirmed to me in the follow-up session. Malc’s one-liner is delivered utterly seriously with no laughter and deadpan face and voice. Tannen observes that when interactants use deadpan it tends to be delivered deliberately seriously “… in rather standard tones, without exaggerated paralinguistic features” (p. 141). Nora again shows her support by laughing, as seen in line 8. Similarly, in line 9 Lucy aligns herself with Malc in her second portrayal of Steve as an old man as she mimics the voice of an elderly man reminiscing about his youth and says, “when I were a lad.”

As before, in line 3, Malc extends the humour by asking Steve a question to which he and the rest of the group already know the answer, “did you do O’levels or GCSEs?” (line 10). In the late 1980s, the General Certificate of Secondary School Education (GCSE) replaced the Ordinary Level Certificate (O’level) for 16 year olds in secondary schools throughout England. By asking this question, Malc yet again draws attention to Steve’s age; he knows that his friend did not take O’level examinations because he would have been too young.
Here, Malc displays shared history and background knowledge because group members were all educated in the same county in England and they sat the same examinations. Nora then laughs in recognition of the humour in the preceding turn in line 11.

Rather than take offence, Steve seems to enjoy the attention from his co-participants and actively encourages and joins in with the banter (line 12). This is demonstrated in his continued self-focused remarks and the exact repetition of the way in which Lucy (line 5) repeats and emphasises his earlier words (line 2), “in MY day.” This repetition of a foregoing speech to point out its humorous possibilities demonstrates a calling attention to the phrase in a noncommittal way to exploit the possible humour, and to show solidarity (Norrick, 1994). In jocular tone, Steve continues the banter by commenting that, in the past, it was the trend to abuse butane gas, and he compares this to the current preference for hard drugs or “junk,” such as heroin and cocaine. His comment results in a loud episode of group laughter with all interactants taking part, which encourages Nora to extend the humour theme (line 14).

Earlier in the conversation Nora admits that she has never taken drugs, therefore, her statement “hahaha we’re gonna snort some glue” is made deliberately to exaggerate Steve’s age, and she confirmed this to me in the follow-up sessions. According to Nora, sniffing glue and inhaling butane gas are nowadays regarded as “old-fashioned methods of substance abuse.” As well as inflating Steve’s age,
Nora’s use of the pronoun “we,” and her use of the informal “gonna” instead of “going to,” could work to express a sense of equality and involvement among interactants by suggesting that they can all engage in the same activity. Once again, Steve seems to interpret the action as humorous and responds with a humorous response, which is signalled by his agreement and laughing voice, “yeah” (line 16), therefore, he uses this response to effectively mark the end of the humorous exchange.

The humour provided by Steve in this exchange seems to be appreciated for the entertainment that it provides. In particular, his use of self-focused humour serves to reiterate group opinion, and what remains is the entertainment value for others and their empathy (Norrick, 1993a). The rapid exchange of humorous lines in the present conversation displays interactants’ orientation toward a common theme aimed primarily at entertainment (Norrick, 1993a). Further, the conversation appears to confirm the suggestion that humour is useful in promoting good feelings (Brown & Keegan, 1999) and it can be seen that interactants closely monitor prior talk and exploit the humorous potential of talk. As noted by Castro (1982, p. 289), “humour is important because it is entertaining and brings group members together.”

Extract 13 provides another example of interactants using humour as a resource to amuse and entertain one another. The following segment provides evidence of co-operation realised in the negotiation of affiliative and supportive behaviours
among interactants, as noted by Holmes (2000). The conversation concerns the old days when people listened to the wireless, before television was invented.

The discussion triggers Deb’s recollection of listening to the BBC World Service on the radio during her childhood when she lived abroad. Other group members were amused by her emotional reaction to the broadcast, which she displayed through an exaggerated upper-class English accent.

**Extract 13: Entertainment**

Interaction three.

**Topic:** Radio (BBC World Service).

**Theory:** Relief

**Humour Category:** General (a woman uses non-focused humour)

1 Deb I remember religiously listening to the World Service when we lived abroad + the World Service [from the BBC=] /
2 Ron [yes /=PROPER news
3 Hank the [BBC World Service yes
4 Deb [yes
5 Hank what’s what’s- was it Bolero the theme tune isn’t it?
6 Ron is it? I don’t know
7 Hank yah
8 Deb the BBC doo do da do dun ha[haha
9 Sue [hahaha
10 Deb [doo doo doo dooo
11 Hank [da da da da da da haha daa
12 Sue [hahahaha
13 Ron [da da ha
14 ALL LAUGHING
15 Hank preceding the broadcasting [yes yah=]
16 Deb [yes
17 Sue hmm ((chuckles))
18 Hank yah
19 Deb hmm haha yes, it’s quite emotive- quite emotive [that tune for people living abroad=]

Deb signals humour by using an exaggerated upper-class or posh English accent, in which she laughingly utters the name of the radio service (line 1). Ron’s close
alignment and agreement is signalled immediately in overlap and then consolidated in reciprocal action in the form of an over exaggerated posh English accent and interwoven laughter. Tannen (1991) notes that interactants’ use of similar voice and interwoven laughter often suggests similar attitudes and beliefs. As shown in lines 2 to 7, interactants show close alignment through the display of verbal and non-verbal behaviours, such as the frequent use of “yes,” asking questions, overlapping speech, facial expression, body posture, and employment of laughing voice.

In her next statement (line 8), Deb laughingly repeats her earlier use of “the BBC,” which again is spoken in an exaggerated upper-class English accent, followed by singing or hummed modality (Goodwin, 1990). Sue’s overlapping laughter shows support and alignment, and with Deb’s laughter, encourages hearers to engage in a further episode of singing. For instance, Deb is joined in overlapping singing and laughter by both Hank and Ron, and overlapping laughter by Sue (lines 10-13). The singing and interwoven laughter leads into a loud episode of group laughter, which is followed by more agreeing action expressed with behaviours such as “yes,” “hmm,” chuckling, and laughter.

According to Goffman (1974), singing releases tension in the body and shows that interactants are willing to engage in joint activity. Therefore, the present extract represents the relief theory because humour can relieve physiological tension and help further communication between interactants (O’Donnell-
Trujillo & Adams, 1983). Interactants are employing the channel of singing interwoven with laughter to reflect their shared knowledge, involvement, and simultaneous speaker alignment, thus displaying perfect interactional synchrony (Goffman, 1974).

The extracts in this section indicate that solidarity may be achieved through various verbal and non-verbal behaviours. For example, overlaps, laughter, chuckling, agreement, interrogatives, tone of voice, pauses, personal pronouns, singing, ingroup identity markers, as well as hyperbole, facial movements, head nodding and gestures. It can be argued that the men and the women employed these communication behaviours to accomplish conversational involvement or “a high involvement style” (Tannen, 1991, p. 80).

The second analytical category is now analysed and this comprises a range of humorous strategies that the men and women used to clarify and maintain boundaries in their communication with one another.
5.2 Clarifying and maintaining boundaries

Humour can be employed to mark, clarify or affirm social boundaries. In addition, solidarity is increased if the humour supports boundaries that are already clearly established (Holmes & Hay, 1997). The following extracts show that humour allows intergroup differences to be identified and discussed in a non-confrontational way.

Here, the men and women focus humour on differences between their gender thus enabling them to highlight these differences and to reinforce a bond of shared difference between them. Although differences could potentially cause problems, they could also be used to create and improve understanding.

A study by Hopper and LeBaron (1998) showed that interactants regularly make gender an explicit focus for interaction. Their findings led them to conclude that gender creeps gradually into talk as a relevant part of the context through such activities as flirtatious behaviour and courtship, sexual innuendo, references to sexuality, references to physical appearance, and invocation of male and female differences.
Men and women in the present research clarified and maintained gender boundaries through the following humour strategies.

5.2.1. Sexual humour
5.2.2. Talking humorously about gender.

These strategies are examined separately in the next section.

5.2.1. Sexual humour

Sexual humour usually grows out of everyday life situations and appears to have an interactional basis. Thus, the manifestation of such humour is an index of relaxed, unguarded, spontaneous, and intimate conversation (Castro, 1982; Jefferson, Sacks, & Schegloff, 1987). Humour about sex is a matter of occasion, defined by the relationships between the participants and by the setting (Palmer, 1994). According to Legman (1968) sharing dirty jokes and laughing together not only promotes intimacy and involvement, but enables interactants to test one another for a “guilty complicity” that is present in the sexual humour (Norrick, 2001, p. 204). Further, sexual humour provides interactants with an opportunity to exchange information about sexuality (Sanford & Eder, 1984). In her ethnographic study, Castro (1982) found that interactants’ sexual jokes focused on the sexual impulses and sexual organs of the men and the women in her investigation. Nevertheless, Legman (1968) agrees with Freud (1905/1960) that
men’s enjoyment of sexually explicit jokes indicates repressed fears and anxieties about sex. He states, people “joke only about what frightens or disturbs them.” Therefore, sexual humour plays an important part in safeguarding an individual’s emotional balance (p. 24).

In the current study, sexual humour was in the main expressed through sexual innuendo, light-hearted flirting, and to a lesser extent, ribaldry, all of which are discussed as follows.

**Sexual innuendo**

Sexual innuendo is a remark or question with a double meaning, which is usually suggestive. The heart of innuendo is the insinuation or what is actually left unsaid (Dolitsky, 1992). The two men in the following conversation in Extract 14 employ sexual innuendo relating to the shared background topic of sexuality. Here, interactants are in the local pub discussing the annual carnival that was recently held in the town centre. Jill is the only member of the group that attended the carnival this year and she enthusiastically describes the various events of the day. Grant initiates humour by suggesting that the only reason Stan would go the carnival would be to watch the majorettes.
Extract 14: Sexual innuendo
Interaction two
Topic: The local carnival
Theory: Incongruity
Humour Category: Ingroup (male) (a man focuses humour on a present man)

1 Jill yeah it was REALLY good ++ and it, they [left
2 Stan [was there a
band?
3 Jill yeah there [was a majorette band as [well
4 Grant [yeah there were lots of bands
5 lisa [yeah
6 Jill yeah there was three majorettes, sets of majorettes
through y’know one in the beginning one in the middle
one near the end
7 Stan yeah haha
8 Jill yeah it was really=/
9 Grant /=haha that’s why you’d have gone
[was it? {(to stan)}
10 Jill [the best float, haha [the best float was from the
Crown pub
11 lisa [haha
12 Stan [I probably missed out
actually {(to grant)}
13 Grant REALLY?
14 Jill it was brilliant, yeah + it was really good, it was
all like um like the Notting Hill Carnival you’d
imagine where they had all the things around em and
dancing in- on the street and, it was REALLY good

It is evident that Stan displays heightened interest when Jill starts to describe the
majorettes. For instance, in line 7 he responds in what could be interpreted as
sexual innuendo, that is, Stan leans forward and employs a deep-toned, low-
pitched, slow, drawn-out ”yeah,” with a slight rising intonation at the end, as
though asking a question. In addition, he raises his eyebrows and grins widely.
Laughter at the end of line 7 marks Stan’s utterance as humorous. Grant
unexpectedly interjects interrupting Jill with loud laughter, and then focuses
humour on Stan with the remark, “haha that’s why you’d have gone was it?”
(line 9). What Grant seems to be suggesting here is that Stan would probably

281
only attend the carnival to see the majorettes, who were attractive young women. Grant’s humour is signalled by his initial laughter, a jocular tone, laughing voice, and head nodding.

Stan aligns himself with Grant by returning the head nods and then laughingly admits that he was disappointed at losing an opportunity to see the majorettes as shown by his assertion in line 12, “I probably missed out actually.” Both men’s remarks can be interpreted as sexual innuendo, and the men confirmed this in the follow-up sessions.

Incongruity theory explains this episode because of the surprising nature of the humour. Here, humour about a sexual theme is unexpectedly inserted into a conversation about a local carnival, therefore there is a distinction between what is expected, and what is said.

However, Jill does not appear to be aware of the sexual nature of the discourse until later in the exchange. Her realisation comes in the form of laughter halfway through her utterance in line 10. Although Jill appears to have the floor because she is the one who is relating the story, the men dominate the exchange, and do not include her in the sexual innuendo. For instance, Grant uses laughter to interrupt her in line 9, and Stan employs overlap in line 12. Despite the men’s sexually suggestive exchange Jill is unperturbed and continues talking.

Moreover, Jill laughs in support of the men’s sexual banter. Despite remaining
silent, Lisa shows involvement through her non-verbal behaviour, namely, laughter, smiling, facial expressions, and gestures.

**Light-hearted flirting**

According to Poyatos (1985) humorous flirtation is clearly a bond-seeking behaviour and a powerful tool in man to woman interaction. Extract 15 shows how a woman focuses humour on a man in a light-hearted sexually flirtatious way. In a follow-up session, Grant mentioned that Stan had recently told him that he was attracted to Lisa. However, Stan said that he would not make his feelings known because Lisa had a boyfriend. Therefore, it could be assumed that neither Lisa or Stan know of each other’s feelings. Nevertheless, the following extract could suggest that Lisa was also attracted to Stan.

Verbally expressing feelings may involve a high risk of embarrassment or possible rejection. Thus, non-verbal behaviour becomes the main channel of communication. Unlike the spoken word, non-verbal behaviour can signal invitation, acceptance or refusal without being too obvious, without causing offence or making binding commitments (Fox, 2005). Extract 15 shows how interactants used non-verbal behaviour to display light-hearted flirting.

The friends in Interaction two have been discussing a pub that Grant visits occasionally when he works in Sweden. After a pause in the conversation, Stan
rises to his feet and announces that he is going to fetch more drinks for the group. Then Lisa appears to flirt with Stan and this creates amusement among members of the group.

**Extract 15: Light-hearted flirting**  
Interaction two  
Topic: Pubs  
Theory: Relief  
Humour Category: Ingroup (male) (a woman focuses humour on a present man)

+++  
1. Stan okay I shall be back in a moment  
2. Lisa don’t be too long!  
3. Stan I won’t  
4. Lisa [haha]ha  
5. Jill [haha]ha  
6. Stan [just talk amongst yourselves  
7. Lisa [hahaha  
8. Jill [hahaha

As Stan begins to move away from the table Lisa introduces humour by urging him to hurry back in what appears to be a sexually enticing manner “don’t be too long!” For instance, she tilts her head, smiles and fixes her gaze on Stan and her comment in line 2 is delivered in soft, low voice with rising intonation. Stan is quick to react in an equally flirtatious way. He matches Lisa’s verbal and non-verbal behaviours by using similar soft, low voice, eye contact, smiling, and head tilts “I won’t” (line 3). Eye contact, or looking directly into the eyes of another person, is a powerful, emotionally loaded act of communication and may suggest flirtatious behaviour (Fox, 2005).

In response to Stan’s utterance, Lisa and Jill turn to each other and in unison burst out laughing, that is, their laughter starts and finishes at the same time.
These women appear to enjoy the joint action of laughing together and in the process a clear gender boundary line is drawn between Stan and themselves. In response, Stan also seems to underline gender boundaries because he gives the women permission to carry on chatting while he is away from the interaction (line 6), “just talk amongst yourselves.” Stan signals humour through his use of overlap, jocular tone, smiling, and direct eye contact with Lisa. The women seem to interpret his instruction as humorous because they look at each other for a second time and then burst out laughing in unison. The women’s similar reactions appear to reinforce their solidarity and yet again highlights gender boundaries in a light-hearted way (lines 7 and 8).

Relief theory explains the use of humour in Extract 15. It would appear that the humorous situation has caused a build-up of energy, as well as its physical release through laughter (Morreall, 1983). As noted by Foot (1991), the build-up of the humour can be a thrill and interactants may become more attentive. It is additionally stimulating by virtue of having a sexual theme, and the build-up and subsequent dissipation of arousal produce pleasure and amusement.

Ribaldry

Ribald remarks are usually humorously indecent or coarse and often feature in social interaction (Whitehead, 1976). In contrast to interactants’ expression of
mild sexual humour in the previous extracts, the next exchange shows a male speaker’s use of more explicit sexual humour, that is, ribaldry.

After an episode of group laughter resulting from a comment made by Steve about his cycling adventures, Nora takes the opportunity to change the subject by asking Steve about his taste in music. Here, Nora uses laughing voice to help carry the humorous atmosphere created by the previous subject into the next topic of conversation. During this discussion about music, Malc repeatedly inserts ribaldry into the conversation and Lucy seems compelled to respond. Most of the time the interactants formed a single conversational group, however, in Extract 16 the talk divided into two discussions or “parallel conversations,” as noted by Tannen (1991, p.49).

**Extract 16: Ribaldry**
Interaction one
Topic: Music
Theory: Incongruity
Humour Category: General (a man uses non-focused humour)

1. ALL LAUGHING
2. Nora what music are you into Steve?
3. **Malc** hop shit cunt haha
4. Steve I like=/
5. Malc /=cunt=/
6. Steve /=everything
7. Malc hahaha
8. Lucy hahaha you don’t say that word
   [that word’s banned ((silly voice to Malc))]
9. Nora [like what? ((to Steve))
10. Malc [what cunt? ((to Lucy))
11. Steve I like [all like the um Italian [theme like-
   12. Lucy [shush! ((to Malc))
13. Malc [do you=/ ((to Lucy))
14. Lucy /=NO NO no
   [nasty word nasty word, NASTY WORD ((to Malc))]
15. Nora [do you like Dean Martin? ((to Steve))
16. Steve yeah Tony Bennett Frank Sinatra I like all um
I like [um=  
17 Malc [cunt=/  
18 Lucy /=NO  
19 Malc ((exhaled laugh)) haha  
20 Steve =the Gags Club I like all the old stuff like  
   Public Enemy [Puff Daddy=  
21 Nora [oh yeah  
22 Steve =none of their new stuff I think  
   it’s terrible ((to Nora))  
23 Malc [Steve say that word beginning with C  
24 Nora [Puff Daddy ((to Steve))  
25 Lucy NO ((to Malc))  
++  
26 Steve what cats?  
27 Lucy ohhh haha  
28 Malc yeah cats +  
29 Steve oh you mean cunt?  
30 Lucy ohhh  
31 ALL LAUGHING  
32 Lucy owwhhh[hh  
33 Malc [why don’t you like that word?=/  
34 Lucy /=owh that is the worst word  
    [you can say ANY ANY other swear word any dirty=  
35 Nora [that’s horrible that is  
36 Lucy =disgusting word other than [THAT word, it’s horrible  
37 Steve [that is offensive innit?  
38 Malc other than what[words?  
39 Lucy [it’s DISGUSTING hahahahaha  
40 Nora [more disgusting?  
41 Steve did you watch um the eleven o’clock show last night?  
42 Malc oh that stupid cunt on there [hahaha  
43 Lucy [OH  
44 Nora Ally G is his name

As shown in Extract 16, the exchange begins as Nora asks Steve what sort of music he enjoys. By directly addressing Steve, that is, by calling out Steve’s name, Nora draws him in as a participant in the activity (Eggnins & Slade, 2005). However, before Steve has a chance to reply Malc jumps in with his ribald remark in line 3. Here, Male incorporates coarse slang expressions “shit” and “cunt” in his reference to “hip hop,” which is a style of popular music featuring rap with an electronic backing. Initial laughter and then laughing throughout his talk underscores the non-seriousness of Male’s remark (Straehle, 1993).
Incongruity theory explains the humour in Interaction one’s exchange because it is unexpected, absurd, and out of context (Foot, 1991). For instance, Steve and Nora carry on their conversation despite Malc’s repeated attempts at interrupting them in lines 4 to 22. As if on cue, whenever Steve says the words, “I like,” Malc interrupts with the word “cunt.” Lucy responds with initial laughter and then uses a silly voice to impress on Malc that this word is forbidden and should, therefore, not be spoken, “hahaha you don’t say that word that word’s banned.” According to Meyer (2000) “From the perspective of incongruity theory, people laugh at what surprises them, is unexpected, or odd in a non-threatening way” (p. 313). However, Malc pretends to misunderstand and continues to playfully taunt Lucy throughout the exchange.

Under other circumstances, such as in a real dispute, the repeated use of ribaldry as shown in Extract 16 would be most likely to suggest hostility, for instance, “cunt,” strong disagreement “no,” the call for silence “shush!” the command to “shut up,” strong revulsion “horrible” and “disgusting,” and ignoring behaviour. In the current exchange, however, various non-verbal behaviours, such as use of jocular tone throughout the discussion, laughter, exaggeration, smiling, head nods, and leaning forward by interactants underscores the playful nature of the exchange, as observed by Straehle (1993). In follow-up sessions participants in the present study confirmed that non-verbal behaviours such as these helped promote light-hearted humour in their interactions.
In line 23, Malc eventually commands Steve’s attention by calling out Steve’s name and then orders him to repeat the ribald remark. His command, “Steve say that word beginning with C” could be an attempt to align himself with Steve by diverting his friend’s attention away from his conversation with Nora. In this way, Malc’s use of ribald sexual humour may serve to mark boundaries between the men and women in this group. As noted by Eggins and Slade (2005), speakers often use vocatives, that is, an addressee’s name, to get attention, and to target an utterance. The work of a “targeting vocative” is to indicate the choice of preferred next speaker in situations where it is not obvious that the nominated addressee is most probably the next speaker. While a vocative may offer a speaker a way of attempting to control and manipulate the other interactants, its use suggests that Malc is marking Steve as an appropriate next speaker, and that he is indicating a “special bond” between male friends (Eggins & Slade, pp. 145-146).

Lucy, however, tries to prevent Steve from answering by shouting “NO” (line 25). In response, Steve pretends to misunderstand “C” as it relates to the current topic to comply with Lucy’s request and to humorously resist Malc’s instruction. To show humorous alignment with Lucy, Steve employs various non-verbal behaviours namely, prolonged pause before speaking, a deadpan face and voice, and eye contact (line 26). Steve’s reply is unexpected, perhaps because interactants believed that Steve would align himself with another man rather than
with a woman. For instance, Steve’s comment produces exaggerated surprise and amusement from Lucy and Malc, and Lucy gives a high-pitched response cry (Goffman, 1974) “ooh haha” (line 27).

In addition, in line 28 Malc produces mock incredulity and disbelief, which is realised hyperbolically in a flat, low tone, “yeah cats.” However, now that Steve has the floor, he seems keen to create further suspense and drama by pausing before responding in jocular tone “oh you mean cunt?” While this comment preserves the humorous atmosphere, it also allows Steve to align himself with Malc, thereby Steve attempts solidarity with his male co-participant and draws attention to gender boundaries (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997). Nevertheless, Steve’s unexpected response and Lucy’s cry of surprise (line 30) produces a loud episode of group laughter (line 31) involving all participants, and which appears to unite the group (Seckman & Couch, 1989).

Even though group laughter encourages Malc to extend the sexual theme (lines 33, 38, and 42), at this point Lucy is now supported by the other interactants. For instance, Nora’s reply in line 35, “that’s horrible that is” followed closely by Steve’s questioning agreement, “that is offensive innit?” (line 37). In a heartfelt declaration, Lucy acknowledges Nora’s support by repeating her words in jocular tone, “it’s horrible” (line 36). As shown previously in Extracts 3 and 4, repetition connects interactants to the discourse and to each other (Tannen, 1987). In line 39 Lucy displays mock exasperation and through laughter and
exaggerated non-verbal actions, such as raised eyebrows and grinning, pretends to rebuke Malc by telling him to “shut up.” She then sings and laughs at the same time as if to block Malc from making any further remarks.

Steve now tries to change the topic (line 41) but Malc sees this as another opportunity to repeat the ribald remark and continue the sexual theme. However, this time, Malc’s use of the word takes on a different meaning and it is employed in the form of a pejorative person descriptor (Goodwin, 1990). Therefore, Malc’s use of this word refers to his dislike of a male actor “oh that stupid cunt on there hahaha” (line 42). Although Lucy expresses surprise “OH” (line 43), Nora ignores Malc. By continuing her conversation with Steve, Nora successfully manages to stop the ribaldry while simultaneously displaying her support for Lucy (line 44).

A notable feature of the exchange is that Steve aligns himself more with the two women than with his male co-participant. First, Steve seems to ignore Malc by continuing his conversation with Nora, then he humorously discounts Malc’s request to repeat the ribald remark by uttering a non-offensive, non-sexual word “what cats?” Next, Steve continues to support Nora and especially Lucy by verifying that Malc’s use of the word is “offensive,” and finally he tries to change the topic of conversation. In addition, Steve’s contributions appear to serve the purpose of entertaining the audience, which is evidenced through a rumbustious outburst of group laughter.
It can be argued that expressing ribald humour enables speakers to preserve and reinforce boundaries within their peer group. Malc’s word choice displays a sense of mischievousness and boldness that teeters on the taboo. He takes advantage of the interactional situation to test the boundaries and check his co-participants’ reactions (Farber, 1964). Expressing humour in the present conversation allows interactants to exchange views on the acceptability of certain words and phrases, as noted by Norrick (1993a). While the expression of ribald humour may be considered taboo in many contexts and in many interactions, such humour may be demonstrative of interactants’ degree of comfort with each other (Bippus, 2000). In addition, present interactants may have used ribald humour to negotiate a shared sense of solidarity and amusement. The friends later confirmed to me that they were relaxed in each other’s company.

5.2.2 Talking humorously about gender

The men and women in this study provided various examples of talking humorously about gender, that is, interactants’ humorous talk focused on gender as the central subject matter or topic of a spate of talk. According to Hopper and LeBaron (1998) in everyday social interaction speakers employ various kinds of gendering practices, such as gendered references to absent people and gender-inclusive language. As shown in the conversational examples that follow, interactants’ talk typically manifested in a humorous discussion of issues about
men and women. For example, the conversations centred on perceived differences between men and women, the physical appearance of the same and opposite gender, and reference to relationships. In particular, the extracts display interactants’ use of humour to signal their awareness of the existence of boundaries between men and women.

The discussions provided in Extracts 17, 18, and 19 can be said to provide the catalyst for interactants’ mutual co-operation or collaborative practice. Furthermore, such conversation enables individuals to gain more knowledge about the opposite gender.

**Gender differences**

The following extract provides an example of interactants’ use of humour to talk about male and female differences. The discussion centres on the topic of dancing, which provides these interactants with a common activity, one in which they all participate and enjoy.

Dan boasts about the “fancy moves” that he and a female dance partner performed at a recent dance. This prompts Jen to recount a humorous story that highlights the differences between men and women. Interactants are amused when Jen describes how her male dance partner unexpectedly turned her upside-down during a dance routine.
Extract 17: Gender differences
Interaction four
Topic: Dancing
Theory: Superiority
Humour Category: Outgroup (a woman focuses humour on a non-present man)

1 Jen I'll never forget, I was dancing with one bloke and he dropped me on my HEAD, well nearly on my head, literally I missed the floor by about that much ((demonstrates with hands))

2 Dan did he ask you, I bet he didn’t- I bet he didn’t ask you- I bet he didn’t ask you if you were alright did he?

3 Jen no you get some real twits haha

4 Mel haha yeah I can imagine

5 Jen we were just dancing- we were dancing normally and it was totally unexpected, and all of a sudden I was shuwp, because I’m little they think they can just whip me over, and I literally was upside down and like that much from the ground

6 Ted well you see those moves you do

7 Dan I mean, you are basically- you are basically the ideal ceroc partner [basically being light

8 Jen [well I’m- they take one look at me and they think “yeah we’ll just do this with [her]” hahaha

9 Dan [when you get these moves though you drop the girl-

10 Mel [hahahaha

11 Jen [hahahaha

12 Dan there’s a- there’s a move for- for the guys, and he drops her [back into his arms,

13 Jen [it’s terrible

14 Mel hahaha

15 Dan and when you’ve got a heavy girl there oh God the strain on [your back

16 Jen [they- they do all sort of things- I tell you what- I tell you once I was upside down like that hahaha ((demonstrates with hands))

17 Mel hahahaha

Jen introduces humour with hyperbole in a grossly inflated statement of the point of the story (see Norrick, 1993a). Her performance of the incident features exaggerated body movements, such as animated hand actions, raised eyebrows, head nodding, and smiling. There is also the use of the extreme intensifier, “literally,” a repeated marker of figurative intent when speakers offer
unbelievable information (McCarthy & Carter, 2004). Further, Extract 17 demonstrates the superiority theory because humour is focused on the “ignorant” actions on the part of others (Meyer, 2000, p. 314). As noted by Foot (1991), humour derives from the momentary sense of superiority experienced in comparison with the other party. The humour in this segment serves the purpose of underscoring gender boundaries with an outgroup.

Dan’s question in line 2 displays understanding and concern for Jen’s welfare, and could signal alignment and support. In her response, “no you get some real twits haha,” Jen not only shows inclusion and alignment as she agrees with her male friend, but also displays exclusion and non-alignment in a critical character descriptor of a non-present party, that is, the dance partner (outgroup), in which additional male characters are included in this pejorative person assessment (Goodwin, 1990). Therefore, this could show how a female participant employs humour to strengthen gender bonds on the one hand and simultaneously reinforces gender boundaries on the other hand. The jocular use of the colloquial referent “twits” seems patronising and derogatory to the nominated outgroup (Goodwin, 1990), yet it simultaneously indicates solidarity and inclusion with ingroup members (Eggins & Slade, 1997).

Moreover, laughter at the end of Jen’s statement signals humour and an invitation of support from hearers. Mel responds with alignment and cooperative action, which is expressed in initial laughter, agreement, and by
showing empathy, “haha yeah I can imagine” (line 4). As noted by Brown and Levinson (1987), interactants may display understanding of the conversational partner’s point of view by expressing sympathy and care.

The pattern of agreement from hearers encourages Jen to further elaborate on this theme, to the amusement of her hearers (Norrick, 1993a). She employs a wide range of verbal and non-verbal cues such as repetition, jocular tone, laughing voice, gestures, head nods, smiling, and hyperbole (line 4). Hearers join the exchange, each trying to concoct and add some humorous comment (Norrick, 1993a). Furthermore, Ted contributes to the cumulative picture in voice impersonation (Bakhtin, 1981) with his comment “well those moves you do,” as if he were playing the part of Jen’s dance partner. In other words, and as explained by Ted in a follow-up session, “No doubt Jen’s partner thinks he’s a much better dancer than he really is.”

In the next turn (line 7), Dan aligns himself with Jen in his complimenting action (Holmes, 1998; Lewandowska-Tomaszczzyk, 1989). His use of jocular tone, facial expression, eye contact, and open posture signal light-hearted flirtatious behaviour. Given that compliments are almost universally welcomed, they can be an effective way of displaying flirtatious behaviour (Fox, 2005). Complimenting actions are positive affect speech activities “intended to make others feel good” (Weirzbicka, 1987, p. 201). Moreover, the social work of compliments is to preserve rapport with the hearer (Wolfson & Manes, 1985). According to
Holmes (1998, p. 100), compliments “notice and attend to the hearer’s interests, wants, needs, goods,” and they often refer to personal matters or directly focus on aspects of a person’s character. Nevertheless, people are often embarrassed when someone pays them a compliment. In Extract 8 in the present study the response to a compliment from the opposite gender takes the form of a self-deprecation. That is, the hearer first acknowledges the compliment and then in same utterance avoids self-praise. For example, Jen says “well I’m- they take one look at me and they think yeah we’ll just do this with her.” Here, she minimises the compliment by using self-deprecation while simultaneously developing humour in her voice impersonation (Bakhtin, 1981) as characterisation of an imaginary dance partner.

In lines 9, 12 and 15, Dan shows a sense of shared understanding by building on the preceding talk (Davies, 1998). He marks gender as a relevant part of the context (Hopper & LeBaron, 1998) by calling attention to the difficulty in performing certain dance moves if a woman is too “heavy.” Humour is maintained through cues such as jocular tone, overlap, exaggerated facial expressions, gestures, and hyperbole, and the exclamative, “oh God” displays a light-hearted affective context (McCarthy & Carter, 2004). According to Norrick (2004, p. 1737), “the use of this extreme formulation in everyday discourse suggests that speakers naturally have recourse to gross overstatement in the expression of strong feelings.” Jen displays her shared view in overlap and then hyperbolically retells her story in line 16.
Collaborative interactive practice, that is, presenting a group view (Coates, 1996) is visible in this conversation through interactants’ overlapping behaviours as they hyperbolically build on immediately preceding turns at talk. Norrick (1994) notes that story swapping nurtures rapport through sharing experiences and sharing humour. The present conversation shows the use of humour to highlight gender boundaries with an outgroup. Interactants engage in a process of building on negative assessments about the dancing ability of non-present parties. Therefore, the expression and appreciation of humour in this extract appears to depend on interactants’ shared attitudes about differences in gender.

**Physical appearance**

Preceding the following conversation in Extract 18 interactants are discussing the physical appearance of various female actors and film stars. This prompts Nora to ask which famous male actors Malc and Steve consider to be “good looking” as shown next. The men find Nora’s statement humorous because they regard the expression “good looking” more appropriate for describing women rather than men, who in their opinion, should be described as “handsome.”
Extract 18: Physical appearance
Interaction one
Topic: Physical attractiveness
Theory: Incongruity
Humour Category: General (a woman uses non-focused humour)

1 Nora Ah haha now what men do you think are good looking?
2 Malc ah [hahahaha
3 Steve [brrrrrr
4 Lucy [NO, we can [say that men are attractive
5 Nora [we- no-
6 Steve HANDSOME you should say [and distinguished
7 Nora [okay but you wouldn’t- you wouldn’t [mind looking like
8 Steve [hahaha
9 Malc it’s gotta be Bruce Willis

It can be said that Nora’s information-seeking question in line 1 works as a prompt for the two men. Neil (1996) describes how information-seeking questions “can become the scaffolding of dialogue; introducing and developing topics and maintaining the flow of talk” (p. 170). Line 1 shows how such a question can take the conversation forward by gaining further details. Nora’s question introduces gender explicitly as a relevant part of the context, as suggested by Hopper and LeBaron (1998).

Various cues signal Nora’s comment in line 1 as humorous, namely the loud interjection, followed by initial laughter, jocular tone, smiling, and exaggerated facial expression. This humorous episode is explained by the incongruity theory because in the following turns the men display linking expressions of initial surprise and amusement (lines 2 and 3) followed by disagreement (line 6), which is realised through laughter and laughing voice. Other non-verbal behaviours
include raised eyebrows, a wide-eyed look, and a wry smile, all of which could demonstrate that the men have understood but do not necessarily agree with Nora.

When consulted about their reactions in the follow-up sessions, both men pointed out that their responses were justified because Nora’s question “what men do you think are good looking?” seemed to suggest that Steve and Malc were sexually attracted to other men, which was not the case. However, both men admitted they were aware that this was not Nora’s intention. They reported that their over-exaggerated responses demonstrated that her comment was not taken seriously.

In another follow-up session, Nora explained that she asked this question because she was interested in finding out if there were similarities in men’s and women’s perceptions of physical appearance.

In line 4 Lucy immediately notices the men’s mock disapproval of Nora’s question, and aligns herself with Nora as she contributes, “NO, we can say that men are attractive.” In her selection of the inclusive pronoun, “we,” Lucy and Nora are grouped as equal agents (Goodwin, 1990, p. 112), and emphasis on the word, “NO” displays a counter viewpoint with the men, therefore, signalling an awareness of gender divisions. In reciprocal action and as an offer of support, Nora uses overlap and laughing agreement (line 5). Further, she shows shared view and alignment by cutting off her own contribution “we- no-“ to allow Lucy to carry on speaking. In follow-up sessions, both women agreed that they were
offering support to each other whilst remaining on friendly terms with the two men.

In the next turn (line 6), Steve overtly signals his oppositional stance by matching the loudness of Lucy’s “NO” with increased volume and stress on his initial word “HANDSOME. He continues in jocular tone and laughing voice with his preferred construction, “HANDSOME you should say and distinguished.” Nora immediately admits her error in line 7 with “okay.” This reaction could show that at least she acknowledges Steve’s correction as an objection to her choice of terminology in her initial question (Norrick, 1993a). However, Malc is amused by Nora’s attempt at trying to justify and explain the situation as humorous, and shows his appreciation with overlapping laughter. Now that Steve has made his point, he states the name of a famous actor that he considers “handsome” and “distinguished” (line 9). In aligning action, Malc appears to follow Steve’s lead by making reference to another famous actor, “it’s gotta be Bruce Willis.”

In summary, Extract 18 illustrates that humour may be used to mark boundaries between men and women. At the same time, interactants display collaborative practice in negotiating a shared perspective. Nora begins the exchange by humorously asserting the relevance of gender to the point that gender becomes a central focus of the encounter (Hopper & LeBaron, 1998). In supporting action, Lucy aligns herself with Nora and speaks as though extending Nora’s line of
thinking, suggesting that men may not only be referred to as good-looking but also attractive. Hence, these women jointly signal their awareness of gender divisions. Similarly, the men seem to enjoy the humour of identifying alternative, and perhaps more complimentary words to describe men in general, that is, handsome and distinguished. Therefore, it could be argued that the men and women in the present conversation “display their awareness not only of the existence but also of the importance of gender boundaries” (Holmes & Hay, 1997).

**Relationships**

Extract 19 is an example of interactants discussing relationships between men and women. The conversation centres on participants’ home life, which prompts Ron to comment hyperbolically that because his two daughters have now left home to go to university, he and his wife will no longer have anything to discuss. This produces amusement among the friends in Interaction three.

**Extract 19: Relationships**

Interaction three

Topic: Children leaving home

Theory: Incongruity

Humour Category: Outgroup (a man focuses humour on a non-present woman)

1. Ron *we’ll have to find something to talk about now*
2. ALL LAUGHING
3. Hank *well you could talk about the things you like DOING, if you can remember what they were*
4. Ron *what they were haha*
5. Sue [hahaha
6. Deb [hahaha
7. Ron *what am I allowed to do my dear? hahaha*
It is clear from the episode of group laughter that interactants find Ron’s remark in line 1 to be highly amusing. For instance, a cluster of non-verbal behaviours mark his comment as humorous, namely his use of jocular tone, a resigned expression on his face, and head nodding. Interactants also share the knowledge that Ron’s statement is clearly not true. Incongruity theory explains this humorous episode as everyone in the group knows that Ron’s remark is absurd because he has been happily married for over 30 years.

In line 3, Hank extends the humour by using a “mock-taunting tone, like a boy razzing his brother” (Tannen, 1991, p. 116). In next turn, Ron quickly picks up Hank’s game and shows his appreciation by repeating the end of Hank’s comment (Norrick, 1993b). This action is followed by laughter, which succeeds in producing joint laughter from the two women (lines 3 and 4), thus signalling appreciation and affiliation (Ellis, 1997; Holmes & Hay, 1997). In line 7, Ron continues the playful exchange in a humorous portrayal of himself, which is similar to the routine that he acted out in Extract 5. Moreover, Ron laughs after the imaginary question to his wife, which confirms a playful stance, as noted by Coates (1997), and invites support from hearers. Therefore, mutual appreciation is realised through a second episode of joint laughter from all participants (line 8). Hank prolongs the banter and aligns himself with Ron by laughingly warning
him that it is “dangerous” to ask one’s wife for advice (line 9). Then Ron displays close alignment with Hank in a shared point of view, first in sudden realisation followed by agreement and mirroring of Hank’s laughing voice “ah yes yes,” which produces shared laughter from the two women.

The humorous exchange in Extract 19 could be said to allow collaborative construction of humour, with Ron elaborating for humorous effect, Hank providing suggestions, and the two women laughing in support. Ron appears to use humour to make gender relevant. For example, there is incongruity because on the one hand Ron portrays himself as a henpecked husband, and on the other hand, he claims that he is blissfully married.

The extracts in Section 5.2 demonstrate that the men and the women employed humour to focus on gender as the central topic of conversation, thereby enabling them to clarify and affirm gender boundaries in a friendly and non-threatening way.

5.3 Conclusion

The intent of this chapter was to examine the communication behaviours that men and women use to express humour and maintain rapport in everyday face-to-face social interactions. The framework for analysis of the data was based on the model initially introduced in Chapter 2.
Present findings reveal that the men and the women used a range of communication behaviours to convey humour. Therefore, findings suggest that maintaining rapport is not accomplished with only one behaviour, but through a combination of behaviours. For example, focused and non-focused humour, overlapping speech, laughter, chuckling, agreement, interrogatives, tone of voice, pauses, hyperbole, personal pronoun use, alignment, singing, and ingroup identity markers. Interactants also used facial expressions, head and eye movements and gestures to convey humour. Even though interactants did not always react verbally to the humour, they signalled understanding and appreciation through various non-verbal behaviours, such as chuckling, exclamations, smiling, head nodding, and facial movements. Harmonising verbal and non-verbal behaviours made it possible for interactants to achieve synchrony in their interactions with one another. Identification of communication behaviours such as those found in this study could indicate the “interactional synchronization, the multimodality and the temporal organization of the communicative sequences” (Lacoste, 1996, p. 14).

The communication behaviours that participants used to express humour in the present study allowed them to display their beliefs, attitudes and personality towards each another. In addition, they were able to demonstrate affiliation and solidarity through such actions as expressing sympathy and understanding, giving compliments, displaying mild embarrassment, storytelling, recounting
personal experience, providing agreement, signalling familiarity, monitoring prior talk, completing each other’s sentences, and underscoring gender.

The data also suggests that conversational involvement and marking boundaries were not mutually exclusive but can coexist in interactions between the men and women. When differences of opinion arose in their conversation, interactants sought to make light of these differences through the tactical use of humorous verbal and non-verbal behaviours, thus ensuring the exchange served to unite rather than to separate these friends. Above all, humour appeared to be used as a tool to minimise differences, promoting the smooth running of the interaction. In addition, humorous communication behaviours provided a channel through which interactants could test the boundaries of gender, and to discover more about the opposite gender. For instance, participants asked questions, used focused and non-focused humour, and introduced new topics. In addition, they employed sexual humour, hyperbole, and body language, such as eye glances, and exaggerated facial and body movements.

Other features that were clearly visible throughout the interactions of the mixed-gender groups were the three theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter 2. It was found that each of the theories could be appropriate for a particular situation. For example, incongruity theory was frequently displayed in exchanges in which interactants showed surprise, disbelief, or incredulity at speaker’s humorous comments. Superiority theory was often expressed in light-hearted laughing at or
through humorous comments focused on an outgroup character. Relief or release theory was usually shown through release of tension and was expressed in singing or humming interwoven with laughter, or through the release of built-up energy caused by the humorous situation itself.

The current analysis suggests that the successful introduction and development of humour in this context relies on a close degree of intimacy between all interactants. Moreover, analysis of the data indicates that communication behaviours used to express humour were deeply embedded in the communication context, background knowledge, and relationships between interactants.

Chapter 6 will now discuss the findings of Chapters 4 and 5. Implications of this study for theory and contributions to knowledge are also explored, and recommendations a made for further research.
Chapter 6  Achieving rapport through humour

In Chapter 5 it was shown how the conversation analysis (CA) and ethnographic approach enabled this study to focus on naturally occurring humour in real-life face-to-face social interactions. These methods made it possible to identify and analyse complex communication behaviours, that is, verbal and non-verbal behaviours that are used to express humour. In addition, contextual features were analysed, such as details about the social setting, interactants’ history, the attitudes and personality characteristics of individuals, background information, the relationship between interactants, and gender. Through this combined approach, analysis of the data revealed that the men and women repeatedly employed humour in their communication with one another.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the research question in light of the findings reported in Chapters 4 and 5, and these findings are compared with those of the extant academic literature. In addition, the implications of this study for theory and practice in relation to humour and communication are discussed. Finally, limitations of the study are acknowledged, and recommendations are made for future research.

Based on findings from this study of face-to-face interactions of adult men and women who are friends, the research question is now addressed as follows.
6.1 Research question: What communication behaviours are employed by friends in mixed-gender groups to convey humour and maintain rapport in informal social interactions?

There was strong evidence in the four mixed-gender group interactions to support the claim that humour contributes to maintaining rapport in everyday face-to-face social interactions between men and women who are friends.

Findings show that there are similarities as well as differences in the communication behaviours used by men and women when expressing humour in mixed-gender groups. There was similarity in the way both genders practised humour and there was no communication behaviour that was used solely by men or by women. For instance, both genders drew on a range of communication behaviours, as follows: focused and non-focused humour, overlapping speech, agreement, hyperbole, repetition, compliments, interrogatives, jokey tone, pauses, personal pronoun use, ingroup identity markers, laughter, overlapping laughter, laughing voice, singing interwoven with laughter and chuckling.

Furthermore, both genders used facial expressions, deadpan face and voice, smiling, body movements, head and eye movements and gestures. On some occasions interactants employed non-verbal rather than verbal behaviours to signal understanding and appreciation of humour. These non-verbal behaviours
included chuckling, exclamations, smiling, head nodding, facial movements and gestures. Far from inhibiting the interaction, it was shown that non-verbal behaviours added a richness and intensity to the face-to-face communication of humour. For instance, a wink, a smile, or a silly expression was often all it took to encourage others to extend or prolong the humorous interaction. Therefore, it can be said that non-verbal behaviours help to shape and maintain social relationships.

Concerning differences, men in this study contributed more humour than women did, a result that is consistent with experimental research (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001). The present study also showed differences in the order in which each gender used focused and non-focused humour with respect to the five Humour Categories shown in Chapter 4. In addition, differences were found in male and female speakers’ humour. Although both genders used laughter to deliver humour, women were more likely than men to use laughter and laughing voice. However, men were more inclined to employ non-verbal behaviours, that is, body language and paralanguage, excluding laughter and laughing voice, which were coded separately.

Findings resulting from analysis of hearer(s) response showed similarities rather than differences in men’s and women’s responses to humour. Within this study the term, hearer(s) signifies all members of the group including the recipient but excluding the speaker. The term, recipient is the person toward whom the
humour is focused. The term, *audience* includes all members of the present group, excluding the recipient and the speaker.

An unexpected finding was that recipients and audiences of both gender used Returned Humour more than laughter when responding to humour. Laughter means that the hearer simply laughs without speaking at the same time. On the other hand, Returned Humour means that the hearer actively uses verbal and non-verbal behaviours to take part in the exchange of humour. Therefore, it could be argued that Returned Humour rather than laughter is the main demonstration of support for humour. It would seem that by using Returned Humour the hearer is making an extra effort to think of an apt or suitable humorous response to the speaker’s humour. Results showed that various non-verbal behaviours such as, jocular tone of voice, laughter, laughing voice, emphasis, pauses, intonation, overlap, and repetition usually accompanied Returned Humour. It could be that the hearer uses Returned Humour to serve as a powerful reward and to promote a sense of involvement in the exchange, that is, to signal conversational involvement. By using Returned Humour, the hearer is demonstrating acknowledgement and appreciation of the speaker’s attempt at humour. It is also possible that Returned Humour helps to maintain rapport because it extends the humorous exchange and therefore adds value to the interaction.
Analysis of the conversation segments revealed more similarities than
differences as most of the laughter performed by the men and women appeared
to serve the same purpose. For instance, both genders employed laughing with in
response to humour. An explanation for this finding is that men and women are
keen to display consensus and bonding. It appears therefore that men and women
in the present study employed laughter as a form of encouragement and support
or as a signal to respond with affiliative laughter. Conversely, studies on laughter
(Provine, 2001; Smoski & Bachorowski, 2003) have found that women rather
than men are more likely to use laughter to support others.

With regard to the placement of laughter in speech, results showed that most
speaker and hearer laughter occurred immediately after uttering complete
statements, and laughter interrupted speech to a lesser extent. Unexpectedly,
findings showed that laughter was a frequent event before speech. This result is
surprising because Provine (1993), following Jefferson (1979), focused on
laughter occurring during or after speech.

In contrast, present findings demonstrate that speakers not only placed laughter
at the end of speech but that they also placed laughter before speech, which
suggests an invitation to hearers to listen and respond. It could be that speakers
were keen to ensure that their attempt at humour did not fail and this could be a
way of preparing themselves and their hearers to receive maximum enjoyment
from the humour. By prefacing their speech with laughter, it is possible that
interactants were signalling to others that they were about to say something humorous or that interactants themselves appreciated the humour.

Further analysis of the conversational data revealed that participants engaged in group laughter. Group laughter has been noted but not analysed in depth (Pogrebin & Poole, 1988; Wennerstrom, 2000). Findings revealed that jovially laughing together at the same time and finding the same thing humorous helped to build unity and conversational involvement. In follow-up sessions participants agreed that group laughter had a significant influence in maintaining rapport and future social meetings of the group. Hence, findings lend support to Pogrebin and Poole’s suggestion that laughing together “reflects a social benchmark of the group’s common perspective” (p. 184).

Next is a discussion of the results reported in Chapters 4 and 5 in relation to the analysis of the five Humour Categories that were used to evaluate focused and non-focused humour to examine communication behaviours. To assist this discussion I make specific reference to the extracts of humour presented in Chapter 5.

6.1.1 Focusing humour outside the group

In this study, men focused most of their humour on someone or something outside the group. Although to a lesser extent, women also focused humour on
an outgroup and this is consistent with Robinson and Smith-Lovin’s (2001) study in which women in mixed-gender groups produced outsider-directed humour. It is possible that in the current study directing humour at someone outside the group increased group solidarity.

Outgroup humour that I found is explained by either the superiority theory or the relief theory, both of which are discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Relief theories suggest that participants experience a sense of relief that the humour is focused on someone else and not on themselves. Therefore, the humorous response could be a release of tension or energy. On the other hand, superiority theories propose that the speaker makes a humorous comment about someone or something outside the group and the audience shows involvement through laughter or by using Returned Humour, and joining in the humorous exchange. Momentarily ingroup members may feel superior to the outgroup character. At times, present interactants’ humorous remarks were accompanied by laughter. As Chapter 2 has shown, superiority theories help to explain laughing at, in which the speaker laughs at the absent object.

I found, for example, that men and women focused outgroup humour on family members, people they knew, famous people, organisations and domestic pets. There was similarity in that men and women directed their humour on similar objects and felt comfortable enough to make humorous remarks about people and objects outside the group. By focusing humour away from the group, it could
be that participants tried to create a sense of belonging and cohesion among themselves. For instance, in Extract 17 in Chapter 5, Jen related how she almost hit her head on the floor when her dance partner turned her upside-down. In response, Dan expressed concern and then paid Jen a compliment about her dancing, in a humorous way. Common ground was highlighted through the use of similar verbal and non-verbal behaviours. This finding provides support for the suggestion that focusing humour at an absent party who is not a member of the present group improves cohesion, thus uniting speakers and hearers (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997). In this way, members of the group highlight their similarities, claiming a common identity and experience.

Findings suggest that a humorous remark focused on someone outside the present group can be an attempt at creating involvement and maintaining rapport within the group, which ensures that future social interactions are likely to take place. For instance, in Extract 5 Ron focused humour on his wife who was not present. His wife was unlikely to suffer an adverse effect because she was not there to experience the humour. Ron sought support from members of the group who responded through their Returned Humour and laughter, and this mutual behaviour helped to promote and maintain rapport within the group.

On some occasions, participants mimicked outgroup members and this behaviour produced much amusement among interactants. In particular, men rather than women were more likely to use this communication behaviour. Only one woman
used mimicking, which she focused on a male television personality. On the other hand, all the men in all four group interactions used mimicking. The men focused most of their mimicking on men and women who were outside the present group, possibly as a way of showing superiority over the outgroup and strengthening solidarity among ingroup members. Perhaps the use of mimicry allowed a man to be the centre of attention and look good in the eyes of the women. For example, mimicry enabled men to display their skill and cleverness by mimicking the foreign accent, dialect or speech pattern of another person.

In feedback from the questionnaires, Grant stated that he used humour because “Girls talk to me!” which suggests that he was eager to impress the women in his group. Further, the men used mimicking when they were telling a story in which they imitated someone else. For example, an acquaintance, a family member, a person they had met while on holiday or a famous person or celebrity.

Moreover, results show that mimicry for humorous effect appeared to serve the purpose of entertainment because hearers responded humorously to the odd or different speech patterns of the speaker. Also, most of the mimicking was met with group laughter, in which all the participants came together in a united response. It could be said therefore that group laughter shows evidence of the entertainment value of mimicry.
6.1.2 Focusing humour on a person in the present group

Findings demonstrate that men and women focused humour on a member of the opposite gender more than they focused humour on someone of their own gender. This finding ties in with Hay’s (1994) observation that when interacting in mixed-gender groups, men and women focused less humour on members of their own gender. Relief theory explains why the men and women in the present study focused humour on other group members. The idea of release through laughter or Returned Humour involves the appreciation of humour that serves to reduce any nervousness or nervous energy experienced by individuals or the group.

In this study, male and female recipients alike joined in and extended these humorous exchanges by using Returned Humour. Therefore, there was evidence that recipients accepted intergroup humour and regularly contributed to it. Nevertheless, results demonstrate that men, rather than women, were the main objects of humour. Although men and women focused humour on a man in the group, women did not focus any humour on members of their own gender. Hence, findings are contrary to previous research (Shirley & Gruner, 1989) showing men and women considered a joke more amusing when the target of the joke was a woman.
Another finding of the current research is that most of the humour produced by the women was focused on a man in the group. This finding contrasts with research (Futch & Edwards, 1999) showing that women do not make or enjoy jokes about men when in the company of men. However, in all-women groups women readily joke about men, especially their appearance, their sexual behaviour and any specifically male activities (see Jenkins, 1985).

In each of the four groups in the present study, the two women jointly focused humour on a man in the group. The women supported each other’s attempt at humour through behaviours such as repetition, agreement, laughter, and non-verbal behaviours (see Extracts 4 and 15). The male recipients encouraged the women’s behaviour and joined in, possibly because it allowed the men to be the centre of attention and look good in the eyes of the women. It could be that by focusing their humour on the men and not on someone of their own gender, the women were able to foster solidarity and rapport between themselves, creating an *us and them* situation. Therefore, findings suggest that the women’s joint humorous communication behaviours allowed them to clarify and maintain gender boundaries. As the men willingly joined in with the women’s humour, this could show that male recipients were reinforcing such gender divisions. Furthermore, the data suggests that collaboratively constructing humour in this way allowed the two women in the group to achieve greater involvement and interactional synchrony. In discussions held with participants directly after the tape recording and in follow-up sessions, the women and the men agreed that
these episodes of ingroup humour enabled them to simultaneously preserve rapport and maintain gender boundaries.

Similar to their female co-conversationalists, the men focused the least humour on a member of the same gender. A possible explanation is that in all male groups, men are likely to use abusive banter and this behaviour would be inappropriate in mixed-gender groups because it might offend the women. This finding fits well with Mitchell’s (1985) research on jokes, in which men in all-male groups openly focused aggressive jokes on one another, although when in mixed company men told their least openly hostile and aggressive jokes.

Nevertheless, in follow-up sessions during this study, the men confirmed that they gained much pleasure from another man’s abusive humorous behaviour. For instance, data showed that male recipients usually agreed and went along with the speaker’s abusive humour. In addition, recipient and speaker collaboratively built on each other’s humour and this usually led into good-natured banter. This finding is consistent with research on laughter and gender (Makri-Tsilipakou, 1994; Pilkington, 1992), which suggests that men mutually enjoy abusive banter and that they perform laughter purely for fun, and that this strengthens the men’s relationships rather than weakening them. It could be that men jokingly abuse other men to display their own bravery and courage. They may enjoy taking the risk of other men humorously abusing them, a risk that could be present in many pastimes engaged in by men.
Furthermore, when a male speaker focused humour on a female in the present study, female recipients appeared to respond favourably with Returned Humour, and women never ignored the humorous comment. In addition, a man often sought support from the other man in the group and this usually led into good-natured banter. This finding agrees with Norrick’s (1993a) observation that humour within a social group is “not really aggressive at all” (p. 145).

Close analysis of the present interactions revealed that men and women focused sexual humour on one other. Sexual humour was delivered mainly in the form of sexual innuendo, light-hearted flirting, and to a lesser extent, ribaldry. In follow-up sessions, both genders agreed that the sexual humour was “amusing and a bit of fun” but nobody regarded this behaviour as offensive or insulting. Findings could suggest that the men and women used sexual humour to clarify and maintain boundaries in a friendly and congenial way. Hence, they displayed an awareness not only of the existence of gender boundaries but also of the depth and importance of these boundaries, as suggested by Holmes and Hay (1997).

The current data illustrate that women and men focused sexual humour on a member of the opposite gender. This finding is contrary to research (Perry et al, 1997) showing that men prefer sexual humour more than women do. In the present study, interactants usually expressed sexual innuendo as an ambiguous remark, which they delivered in a light-hearted jovial manner. When used in speech sexual innuendo may go unnoticed by someone who is unfamiliar with
the hidden implication, and he or she would be unaware of the innuendo. For instance, in Extract 14, Jill seemed oblivious to the sexual content of the discourse until later in the conversation.

In this study, men and women alike took part in light-hearted flirting behaviour. Women in particular used laughing voice, eye contact, head tilts and smiling. It could be that flirting with a man in the group allowed a woman to construct herself as sexually attractive and charming (see Extract 15). Moreover, data showed that hearers of both sexes never ignored sexual humour, and they responded with Returned Humour or with laughter, accompanied by an array of non-verbal behaviours.

One of the men made several ribald comments during the conversation. For instance, Male in Interaction 1 (Extract 16) repeatedly said the word “cunt”. Therefore, the current finding that explicit sexual reference to a part of the female anatomy supports Kuiper’s (1991) finding that interactants’ sexual jokes focused on sexual impulses and sexual organs of others. An explanation for men’s use of ribald humour is consistent with the dominance and difference explanation mentioned in Chapter 2, which suggests that sexual remarks reveal the hostile attitude of men toward women, and their need to control women.
Another explanation for men’s use of ribald humour is that a speaker may intentionally introduce ribaldry to initiate intimacy. In addition, the relief theory explains ribald humour. Some people may find it difficult to talk about certain topics, however, humour could be a socially acceptable way of relieving tension about these sensitive issues. By using ribaldry, the speaker can avoid suppression of sexual impulses, communicate sexual interest, or suggest a sexual topic for discussion.

In follow up sessions, Malc revealed that making ribald remarks might have been his way of getting the others to notice him and to integrate himself into the conversation. The other interactants in the group mentioned that they thought his ribald comments were “amusing and a bit over-the-top” but that they did not take offence. In particular, most women felt that the men used ribaldry as “a kind of exhibitionism” and as a way of becoming the “centre of attention.” Besides, the two women in Interaction 1 confirmed that Malc’s ribaldry did not have any harmful effect on their conversation.

The use of strong sexual humour is shown to be a socially risky affair, as suggested by Derks and Berkowitz (1989) in their study of dirty jokes. Further evidence to support this claim is that some of the male participants in the present study did not use ribaldry in the company of women. It is possible that the men’s abstinence from this behaviour suggests that they did not want to offend the
women and therefore were keen to maintain rapport with their female co-conversationalists.

Cross-gender use of sexual humour, which was evident in this study, suggests that men and women are aware of sexuality and differences in gender and this could be the reason why they used this behaviour. It could be that men and women are accustomed to interacting in this way. One explanation for the use of cross-gender sexual humour is that, historically, there have been sexual undercurrents in communication between men and women. Interactions have been mainly through romantic involvement and marriage, which is why men and women see one another chiefly as sexual or marriage partners and their communication is heavily influenced by sexuality or sexual interest (see Alberts, 1992a, 1992b). This explanation fits well with Freud’s (1905/1960) proposition that sexual humour springs from a social reality in which men have been the sexual initiators and women frequently sexual objects and sexual recipients.

It is possible that the sexual humour expressed in this study was a reflection of interactants’ fears and concerns about sex and sexuality. Findings also suggest that humour focused on a member of the opposite gender may offer a strategy to both clarify and maintain gender divisions, to promote greater intimacy, and to heighten rapport in mixed-gender interactions.
6.1.3 Self-focused humour

Although participants focused humour on themselves, they tended to employ self-focused humour less often than they used the other Humour Categories. Of note, women occasionally laughed at the end of a self-focused statement. Their laughter appeared to serve the purpose of inviting support from hearers through such behaviours as Returned Humour or laughter. Perhaps these women avoided using self-focused humour to maintain symmetrical social relationships with the men. This explanation supports the suggestion that if women disclose personal and intimate experiences and information with men, as researchers have observed in all-female groups, it could make women appear socially vulnerable (see Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 1998). Nevertheless, women’s self-focused humour could help to maintain rapport among interactants in mixed-gender groups. For instance, in the feedback obtained from the open questions in the questionnaire, one woman specifically mentioned the positive aspect of using self-focused humour stating “it’s good to laugh at yourself sometimes.”

Results suggest that men used self-focused humour to draw attention to themselves and to entertain and amuse others. For instance, Extract 8 showed that Steve used self-focused humour to attract attention from his co-participants in the form of sympathy, understanding, and compliments. In addition, the men and women occasionally used self-focused humour to disclose personal information. It could be argued that by using self-disclosure, interactants
displayed a sense of closeness with one another. Furthermore, in follow-up sessions, participants confirmed that one reason they used self-focused humour to self-disclose was to gain involvement in the group interaction.

Data suggests that men and women were more likely to self-disclose when they were in the company of women, which may have led to more self-focused humour among men in the present mixed-gender groups. Findings support Robinson and Smith-Lovin’s (2001) conclusion that self-focused humour is a quality that is valued by group members, and humour may be used to share experiences and build togetherness.

Self-focused humorous behaviour is explained by the relief theory because individuals may feel a sense of relief when focusing humour on themselves. For instance, there could be a release of nervousness or tension for the speaker. It is possible that if speakers appear self-effacing this allows hearers to perceive them as approachable and therefore more likeable. The use of self-focused humour to present a positive self-image was evident in the present data. For instance, findings showed that when speakers focused humour on themselves hearers perceived them favourably.

By using self-focused humour, speakers gave the impression that they had a sense of humour, which many people in western society consider an asset (see Wickberg, 2000). If people can laugh at their problems and overcome them, this
is usually seen as an admirable character trait. As one woman remarked in the questionnaire, “It’s important to see the funny side of things.”

Results showed that self-focused humour contributed to rapport and positive face for the speaker in several ways at once. Hearers may have viewed speakers favourably for not taking themselves too seriously and for being able to overcome misfortune. Moreover, self-focused humour amused and entertained other people in the group. There might have been several reasons for the expression of this communication behaviour. For example, people may focus humour on themselves to gain audience support, to entertain, and to display a sense of humour.

Feedback from the questionnaires confirmed that the men and women used self-focused humour to hide embarrassment or to help them talk about difficult or embarrassing topics. For instance, in Extracts 7 and 8, speakers effectively used self-disclosure to convert their embarrassment into a topic of humour. By letting down their guard, the men and women showed that they trusted others in the group who then responded with a sensitive and positive response to humour, and this may have intensified the communication and led to increased involvement in the interaction.
6.1.4 Non-focused humour

The men and women in this study used non-focused humour such as witty statements or quips. From analysis of the present data, witty remarks emerged spontaneously from the conversation and participants used the remarks as an interlude; a temporary amusement or entertaining episode that kept the interaction light and not too serious. Using wit may have subtly communicated that people were of equal status. In agreement with Norrick (1993a), interactants in this study may have used witty statements to find out what they had in common with other group members, such as similar values, attitudes, and knowledge.

Either relief theory or incongruity theory explain witty remarks that occurred in the present research. An incongruity occurs when people laugh at what surprises them, or at that which is odd or unexpected in a non-threatening way. Humorous comments made in the mixed-gender group interactions were often odd or unexpected in a non-threatening or unconfrontational way and this represents incongruity theory. For example, in Extract 18, Nora’s question to Steve and Malc in which she enquired what men they considered to be “good-looking,” could be interpreted to mean that there was a sexual attraction between the two men. As this was clearly not the case, Malc and Steve’s initial reaction was a
mixture of surprise, amusement and mock protest, which they expressed through various verbal and non-verbal behaviours.

Moreover, non-focused humour seemed to allow a release of tension, which suggests relief theory. For instance, in Extract 13, Deb followed her humorous remark with singing, which was interwoven with laughter. Deb’s co-participants subsequently joined in with her singing, which resulted in an episode of group laughter. Such action as singing interspersed with laughter could display shared involvement and a physiological release of tension from the body.

Speakers incorporated their humorous comments into the flow of the conversation and hearers signalled appreciation through overlap and reciprocal humour. Making humorous statements allowed interactants to integrate themselves into the conversation while enabling them to amuse other people in the group. In follow-up sessions, the men and women confirmed that non-focused humour provided a source of entertainment and strengthened rapport within the group. Participants reported that by sharing background knowledge and laughing together they stimulated group involvement and increased their enjoyment of the interaction.
6.1.5  Humour and gender: Similarities and differences

This study showed that men and women used various communication behaviours, sometimes similarly and sometimes differently to express humour and maintain rapport. There was no communication behaviour used solely by the men or by the women.

To account for the finding that the men produced more humour than the women did, two explanations are possible. First, according to the dominance and difference approach discussed in Chapter 2, men are traditionally higher in social status than women, therefore men are more likely to use humour to establish dominance and control. Conversely, the dominance and difference perspective holds that women are traditionally submissive hence they are reluctant to engage in what others could consider an aggressive masculine activity while in the presence of men. The second explanation is that when men produce more humour than women, they do so with the complicity of women.

There is evidence that the second explanation, namely that men produce humour with the complicity of women, is the most likely of these two possibilities. For instance, analysis of the data has shown that all the women in this study were free to express humour and they actively contributed to the conversation. In particular, the questionnaires showed that most of the women nominated a man as more humorous than someone of their own gender, which could indicate that
women actively encouraged and supported the men’s humour. Therefore, it could
be argued that the women expected men to produce and use more humour than
was always the boys’ job” (p.33). It is possible, however, that the men did not
have the same expectation because the questionnaires revealed that not all the
men nominated a man as the most humorous person. Some men did not select
anyone and one man nominated a woman as the most humorous person in the
group.

Moreover, everyone had plenty of opportunity to contribute to the conversation.
There was evidence of this as participants confirmed in the questionnaires and
follow-up sessions that the other men and women in the group allowed them to
join in and to take part in the conversation. Individuals also reported that they
enjoyed the interactions and felt they were “on the same wavelength” as one
another, and that humour “breaks down barriers.” All parties confirmed they
were able to contribute fully and unreservedly to the conversation. Moreover,
they were unconcerned that the men produced more humour than the women did.
It would seem therefore that when men generate more humour than women they
assume women are as free as they are to contribute to the conversation. Findings
support Tannen’s (1991) research, which suggests that men’s apparent
domination of the conversation does not necessarily suggest that they intend to
prevent women from joining in.
In any mixed-gender interaction there may be elements of dominance and submission, therefore it is unlikely that the dominance and difference approach can be used to account for the finding that men produced more humour than women did. Instead, it seems that in the context of friendly social gatherings men and women are doing their best to communicate and relate to one another. The follow-up sessions with participants and the questionnaires corroborate this finding. Furthermore, results are consistent with the wider literature on language and gender (see Bortfeld, Leon, Bloom, Schober & Brennan, 2001; Crawford, 1995; 2003). This body of work suggests that just as the speech of women has been overly stereotyped as submissive and unassertive, so too the verbal style of men has been over generalised as dominating and controlling. Current data indicates that similar generalisations about dominance and submission in speech could be made about men’s and women’s humour.

Chapter 5 showed how both genders used various communication behaviours, sometimes similarly and sometimes differently, to do humour and maintain positive rapport. Interactants demonstrated doing humour through the practice of communicating in everyday interaction. To explain, the men’s and women’s behaviours were similar in that both genders used Returned Humour in preference to laughter. Other similar behaviours of men and women included focusing outgroup humour on the same objects, and the use of sexual humour. However, the communication behaviours of men and women were different in
that men contributed more humour than women did, and women did not focus humour on a person of their own gender.

In addition, data revealed that, to some extent, the men and women accommodated to one another’s humour, which helped to promote and maintain rapport throughout the interaction. It could be that to gain approval or to fit in, speakers accommodated or adjusted their verbal and non-verbal behaviour so that it became similar to that of their audience. Therefore, accommodation could be a way for the speaker to make him or herself more acceptable to the hearer. For instance, men focused the least humour on another man when in the company of women. A possible explanation is that men did not want to offend the women with the more abusive kind of humour that they engage in when in single gender groups (see Mitchell, 1985). It could be argued therefore that participants in the present research wished to communicate in a manner that allowed them to portray themselves most favourably, and hearers in turn responded in a manner that maintained or heightened their self-presentation.

The men and women often mirrored the verbal and non-verbal behaviours of the person with whom they were interacting, which may have created a harmonious atmosphere and helped to maintain rapport. For example, participants sometimes repeated another person’s humorous remark or mirrored someone else’s laughter or body language. Findings therefore support Capella’s (1983) research showing that non-verbal response matching such as smiling, pauses, simultaneous speech,
gestures and vocalisations, could have a positive effect on human interaction because these behaviours signal interpersonal involvement with, and liking of co-participants. It could be that as participants in the present study knew one other well and had similar values, they were able to accommodate to each other. Shared values and beliefs may be helpful if one wishes to communicate something by humour and receive a positive response.

Moreover, findings showed that the men and women used communicative practices such as sexual innuendo, light-hearted flirting and ribaldry in their interactions with one another. This focus on sexual humour as a shared humorous event suggests that participants are members of a community of practice (see Eckert, 2000; Meyerhoff, 2003 following Wenger, 1998). A community of practice concentrates on what group members do, the way they talk, their activities, beliefs, values, and the extent to which they fit in (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999). Belonging to a community of practice typically involves mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire, that is, members of a group regularly get together to engage in their shared practices.

In the present study, men and women engaged in the shared practice of sexual humour, which they focused on a member of the opposite gender. Participants’ use of sexual innuendo, light-hearted flirting, and ribaldry was accompanied by a range of non-verbal behaviours. Findings suggest that sexual humour enabled
participants to achieve their shared goal of a sense of belonging and involvement.

The men and women appeared to display concern for one another and seemed interested in each other’s humour, and they used various communication behaviours to express humour and maintain rapport. At the same time, these friends were aware of sexuality and differences in gender and appeared to employ humour as a strategy for clarifying and maintaining gender boundaries. This finding supports Coates’ (1997) suggestion that one of the objectives of mixed-gender interaction is to maintain gender divisions. In the current research, talking humorously about gender allowed interactants to focus on gender as the central point of discussion.

As shown in Chapter 5, interactants’ conversations often veered towards humorous discussions of issues about men and women, such as perceived differences, personal relationships, and physical appearance. Findings suggest therefore that cross-gender humour, especially focusing of sexual humour on the opposite gender not only clarifies and maintains gender boundaries but also plays a chief role in strengthening and maintaining rapport through a shared sense of amusement. Making gender relevant in conversation allowed collaborative interactive practice between both genders.
6.2 Implications of the study for theory and contributions to knowledge

In this study, light was thrown on several issues that have received little attention in the humour and communication literature to date. First, findings confirm the humour model proposed in Chapter 2. As this study involved real-life face-to-face interactions among friends, the data reflects what is currently happening in everyday social interactions. Second, findings reveal that the men and women employed various communication behaviours, sometimes similarly and sometimes differently to promote and maintain rapport. Consequently, present findings make it possible to revise the definition of humour in face-to-face interaction among friends.

Third, the definition of rapport is expanded because findings show that maintaining rapport through humour occurs not only between men and women, but also between individuals of the same gender. Finally, results show that each of the three theoretical perspectives, namely, incongruity, relief, and superiority are used to explain humour, depending on the particular instance of humour and the situation involved. In addition, the superiority theory is expanded based on the results of this study. These issues are now discussed further.
6.2.1 Confirming the humour model

Findings confirm the model for considering impromptu humour in everyday social interaction. The model provides a foundation for analysing humour based on the solidarity functions of humour, which contain two analytical categories, namely: 1) Facilitating conversational involvement; and 2) Clarifying and maintaining gender boundaries. Within this framework, humour is considered a dynamic and interactive event involving all parties, that is, speaker, hearer(s), and recipients.

The model takes into account gender and considers superiority, relief and incongruity theories, rather than relying on one theory to try to explain humour. In particular, humour is viewed as a positive and pleasurable event that occurs extemporaneously in its natural setting, that is, in everyday face-to-face interaction. Therefore, humour becomes a communicative vehicle, which can be employed by men and women to promote and maintain rapport throughout the interaction.
6.2.2 New definition of humour

Applied to real-life social interaction among friends, findings of this study demonstrate that humour is a positive and enjoyable experience that promotes and strengthens communication. Thus, the term humour, as it occurs extemporaneously among friends in informal interaction, now needs to be revised to define humour as a positive rather than a negative event. For instance, humour has been described as a negative activity that promotes conflict and hostility, thus making someone the object of ridicule or the victim. Contrary to this notion, the present research has revealed that humour as it occurs in friendly social interaction is a pleasurable experience and one in which people are enjoying themselves and having a good time. Within this new definition, humour is not to be confused with teasing, which unlike humour, is a negative event. Neither is humour to be confused with laughter, telling jokes, joking, or comedic performance as on television or the stage.

The literature review highlighted a need for more behavioural assessments of real-life face-to-face informal interaction among men and women. By addressing this gap, this study has shown how men and women who are friends collaboratively interact and do humour through the practice of day-to-day social interaction. Of particular note, none of the men or women told any jokes. This finding confirms the view of the present study that in real-life face-to-face
interactions, friends are more likely to use impromptu humour rather than tell jokes. Studies involving jokes, cartoons, and simulated conversations in the laboratory setting have produced valuable findings, however, such research does not involve detailed in situ, real-life informal interaction among established friends. The use of real-time, real-life interactions as opposed to jokes, cartoons, and simulated conversations is therefore a positive contribution to the field of humour as this reflects more accurately what is happening in social interaction.

The men and women in this study are friends whose social gatherings would have occurred anyway because these friends enjoy one another’s company and regularly meet just for a chat. Work colleagues, university students, and strangers were not investigated because, as present findings show, individuals need enough background knowledge about one another to recognise when someone is being humorous. When strangers meet they have no shared knowledge about one another. Similarly, students or work colleagues may not know one another well enough to predict other students or co-workers’ attitudes towards humour.

Through the combined methods of CA and ethnographic techniques, this study shows that people are more likely to employ impromptu humour with those they know well and whom they like. The groups of friends often highlighted their similarities, focused on shared experiences, and jointly performed humour,
which suggests that they had close personal relationships with one another, and explains why it is essential to have friends as participants in humour research.

### 6.2.3 Expanding the definition of rapport in humorous interaction

Not only does this study support the seminal work of Holmes and Hay (1997) and Norrick (1993a), as described in Chapter 2, but it can be said also to expand their research. Hence, current data can expand the existing explanation of how to maintain rapport in humorous interactions between men and women who are friends. In this study it was possible to investigate a different type of data. I analysed a range of behaviours and found that individuals in social interactions employ humour to maintain rapport, as Holmes and Hay and Norrick did. However, the present research analysed communication behaviours more extensively than was possible in Holmes and Hay’s and Norrick’s research. For example, with the analytic methods of CA and ethnography, I discovered that humour had facilitated rapport not only between men and women but also among individuals of the same gender. Therefore, findings demonstrate that in mixed-gender social interaction rapport is maintained through humour in three ways, namely: 1) between men and women; 2) between men and men; and 3) between women and women.

Findings show that women used humour to maintain rapport with their female co-participants and with the men in their group. Despite focusing most of their
humour on the men, the women avoided focusing humour on their women friends. It is possible that engaging in this communication behaviour enabled a woman to maintain rapport with her female co-conversationalist. By focusing humour on the opposite gender rather than on their own gender, it could be argued that the women were trying to show empathy and promote rapport among themselves. In return, female hearers responded favourably by encouraging and supporting the female speakers’ humorous contributions. By focusing most of their humour on the men, it can be said that women were not only maintaining gender boundaries but were also trying to maintain rapport with the men.

For their part, the men responded to female speakers’ humour by actively joining in and prolonging the humour. The men seemed flattered by the attention, especially when they believed that a woman was flirting with them. Therefore, the men also used humour to highlight and affirm gender boundaries to maintain rapport with the women. In contrast to the women, however, findings show that the men focused humour on one another. Although they used this communication behaviour sparingly, men appeared to gain mutual enjoyment and pleasure from humorous banter with their male friends. When men focused humour on their own gender they built on each other’s comments through humorous repartee, which suggests that the men were trying to maintain rapport with one another. In addition, keeping their humorous banter to a minimum could suggest that the men were eager to maintain rapport with the women because they did not wish to
offend women with the more *abusive* humour that men may use in all-male groups.

Findings showed that the men and women employed various communication behaviours in their humour to maintain rapport with their own gender and with members of the opposite gender. The men and women accommodated to each other by mirroring the verbal and non-verbal behaviours of the person with whom they were interacting. Increasing similarity in verbal and non-verbal behaviours, as Fox (2005) argues, is likely to increase a speaker’s attractiveness and interpersonal involvement in the eyes of the recipient. As discussed earlier, findings suggest that the men and women were mindful of sexuality and differences in gender, demonstrated by their use of cross-gender humour. In particular, the men and women focused sexual humour on members of the opposite gender in the form of sexual innuendo, light-hearted flirtatious behaviour, and ribaldry. This behaviour could indicate a close and familiar relationship and point to an underlying sexual awareness in the communication between these men and women.

### 6.2.4 Expanding the humour theories in everyday interaction

This study has thrown light on the three theoretical perspectives of humour, namely, superiority, incongruity, and relief. As explained in Chapter 2, the humour model considers all three theoretical perspectives rather than relying on
one theory because it was argued that no theory alone could explain all humour in every situation. Findings illustrate that each of the three theories is suitable for a specific situation. For instance, data excerpts in Chapter 5 show that incongruity theory explains self-focused humour, non-focused humour and witty statements because amusement among the men and women came from the unexpectedness or absurdity of the speaker’s humorous comment. In Extract 11, Dan’s hyperbolic comment about getting drunk at the age of two was met with surprise, disbelief, and amusement from hearers. They were aware that Dan was exaggerating and that he did not expect them to interpret what he said in a literal sense, and participants confirmed this in follow-up sessions.

With regard to the relief or release theory, the data excerpts show that this theoretical perspective explains humour focused on an outgroup object, humour focused on someone in the present group, and self-focused humour. Excerpts also illustrate that in each of these situations participants’ use of humour or laughter seemed to provide a release from nervousness, embarrassment or tension. In Chapter 2 it was explained that the relief theory focuses on the idea that humour is a socially acceptable way to release pent-up nervous energy and to relieve stress. Furthermore, in feedback from the questionnaires Mel wrote that a positive feature of humour was that it could provide “stress relief”. In addition, Excerpt 7 provides an example of employing humour as a release from embarrassment. Here, Deb successfully used self-disclosure to convert into
humour her embarrassment at being unable to use all the features on her mobile telephone.

Although there was evidence of some laughter, participants chiefly maintained humour through their use of similar verbal and non-verbal behaviours, such as jokey tone, overlap, smiling, and agreement. The relief, or release, displayed by interactants stemmed from awareness that by employing similar communication behaviours as their co-conversationalists to express humour they were showing that they held similar beliefs and may have had similar experiences.

A particular contribution made by this study is to expand the superiority theory. Present data shows that the following modification was essential when analysing informal social interaction among friends. Thus, superiority theory is modified within the context of friendly mixed-gender social interactions to signify humour that strengthens solidarity among individuals and leads to rapport. The superiority theory holds that humour can create a feeling of superiority over other people, which could explain why individuals sometimes laugh at others. In contrast, present findings show that a humorous remark focused on a character outside the present group could be an attempt at maintaining rapport within the group. A humorous remark and the resulting response, such as laughter or Returned Humour are not perceived as negative or unkind because the humour is contained within the group. Furthermore, the outgroup character does not know about and does not experience the humour or laughter.
In addition, present findings demonstrate that humour focused on individuals or objects outside the group affirms the group’s social boundaries. Such humour serves to strengthen feelings of *groupness* and at the same time provides a source of entertainment to group members. This sharing of humorous experiences can lead to rapport among group members, ensuring future social interactions and maintenance of their friendships. In follow up sessions the men and women confirmed that when they focused humour on others it did not fuel any feelings of superiority. Participants also confirmed that outgroup humour did serve the purpose of bonding them with their friends. Thus, results support Keith-Spiegel’s (1972) seminal study showing that the superiority theory is used to express congeniality and empathy among members of an informal group.

Findings therefore suggest that when employing humour, individuals drew on superiority, relief, and incongruity theories during the interaction to help maintain rapport in face-to-face interaction.

### 6.3 Limitations of the research

Participants in the present research are not a statistically representative sample of adult male and female friends. This study does not claim to be able to generalise from the participants to wider populations of adult men and women, and the small sample size necessarily limits the claims that may be offered. However, the aim of this qualitative study was not generalisability. The small sample size and
the particular nature of data collected allowed a detailed and thorough qualitative analysis, which provided an opportunity to develop a more complex understanding of men’s and women’s humour in real-life face-to-face social interactions.

Scholars note the advantages and disadvantages of controlled studies and natural field research. In the first, researchers control the stimuli but lose the meaning of context, in the latter they locate personal meanings and context but lose the universality of findings (see Nevo, Nevo, & Siew Yin, 2001). The men and women in the current study were friends, and conclusions are based on close analysis of their informal interactions and their own perceptions and not on experimental manipulation of humour use. Similar to other investigations concerning human interaction and humorous discourse (Addington, 2001; Kotthoff, 2006), this discussion is interpretive rather than definitive.

Findings show how some men and women behave in a certain social interaction at a certain point in time. It is acknowledged that the communication behaviours used by participants during the interactions were not necessarily their sole way of communicating humour. People may vary their communication behaviours according to their current moods, different friendships and different social contexts. The same individuals might behave differently under different circumstances (Tannen, 2005).
A more detailed study of body language may have been possible with a video recorder. However, it was not essential to capture body language with a video recorder because I observed body language during the interactions and noted the behaviours in a notebook. Besides, using a video recorder may have inhibited the way some participants behaved and affected their interaction outcomes. Most importantly, participants stated a definite preference for audio recording as opposed to video recording.

As discussed in the methodology chapter, a concern at the beginning of the study was the extent to which participants might change their behaviour if a researcher was present. As far as it was possible to assess, the strategies that were implemented to reduce that possibility were effective. It is acknowledged that the presence of the researcher does influence participants’ behaviour in some way. In addition, there was some awareness of the tape recorder because one or two individuals occasionally referred to it during the interactions. Nevertheless, participants confirmed in follow up sessions that after an early period of self-consciousness they soon relaxed because they enjoyed being with their friends and wanted to concentrate on the conversation. Participants also verified that the tape recordings were representative of their usual interactions with one another. Overall, participants seemed unperturbed by the research situation, especially about the topics of conversation. It is possible that participants would have withheld sensitive topics if they were concerned about being observed or recorded. In addition, there was no request for editing of the materials, despite
repeated assurance that this would be done immediately without penalty if individuals felt the discourse was too personal or too sensitive.

Lastly, under ideal research conditions it would have been possible to analyse a larger number of group interactions in various social settings on an ongoing basis. This may have revealed further insights about the communication behaviours that men and women use in humour, and shown whether rapport was maintained over a period of time, and how men and women interact in different social settings.

### 6.4 Recommendations for further research

More research is required to examine the issues that have emerged from the findings of this study. Methods used in the present research could facilitate further investigation of the communication behaviours used to express humour and maintain rapport in real-life naturally occurring situations. As findings show, it is becoming increasingly important that future research examines the surrounding social and physical environment, analysing how this may influence interaction, and how participants use their surroundings and shared background as communicative resources (see Jones & LeBaron, 2002).

Specifically, there is a need to shift the emphasis away from generalisations about widespread differences in male and female humour. Results show that
future explanations need to consider not only dominance and difference models, but also take into account how men and women do humour in their everyday interactions. It is recommended that the behaviours of men and women be examined together rather than in isolation. Therefore, the finding that men and women employed a range of communication behaviours, sometimes similarly and sometimes differently to express humour and maintain rapport should be developed further.

More attention, for example, needs to be placed on exploring participants’ use of cross-gender humour as a means of promoting rapport and for maintaining gender boundaries in mixed-gender groups. In particular, this study found that rapport is maintained through humour not only between men and women but also between individuals of the same gender. For instance, women focused humour on men but not on other women, and men focused more humour on women than on other men. Hence, research could investigate if there are any differences in the way friends in mixed gender groups maintain rapport through humour with their own gender.

It would be worthwhile for future studies to explore gender-based aspects of humour concerning the three theoretical perspectives. These theories lack a perspective on gender differences, which should be supplied by research on humour to examine the role of spontaneous humour in clarifying and maintaining gender boundaries.
In addition, sexual humour, which was expressed in the current study in the form of flirtatious behaviour and ribald remarks, requires further examination. Results suggest that sexual humour focused on the opposite gender can simultaneously serve two purposes. First, it acts as a rapport-building device. Second, it allows interactants to display an awareness of sexuality and differences in gender. Data exemplars in Chapter 5, for instance, showed how cross-gender humour enabled individuals to talk light-heartedly about male and female differences and communicate their beliefs about the opposite gender. Besides, non-verbal behaviours, such as drawing near to each other, warm smiles, gestures and maintaining a gaze were employed by interactants to help communicate sexual humour. Studying cross-gender humour, especially sexual humour might ensure a deeper understanding of humour, rapport and sexuality in human behaviour.

Moreover, findings illustrate that it would be worth analysing participants’ use of accommodation to gain a more complete understanding of the verbal and non-verbal behaviours that men and women use to communicate with one another. Returned Humour also needs further examination because results show that Returned Humour is a more likely response to humour than laughter is. Analysis of Returned Humour would entail a more thorough study of the non-verbal behaviours that were considered in the present research. By focusing on laughter as the main response rather than Returned Humour, researchers are limiting the investigation of humour because they are omitting a fundamental communication...
behaviour in male and female interaction, which has been identified by this study.

Therefore, a fresh approach to studying laughter is now required. This could be achieved by examining the purpose and placement of laughter in naturally occurring social interaction. For instance, the finding that men and women employed laughter for the same purpose, that is, to offer support and encouragement, could be explored in various settings such as interactions between acquaintances, colleagues, and strangers. Studies like these would provide more information on humour and gender issues.

Data show that group laughter also needs further investigation because it is an obvious signal of affiliation and can communicate unity, as confirmed by the participants. It would also be worthwhile to examine laughing with as findings revealed how it contributed to rapport and a sense of involvement among interactants. In particular, there is a need for research that examines hearer(s) laughter. For instance, the assumption that hearer(s) laughter is expected at the end of a humorous comment fails to consider laughter that may occur before or during the humorous comment by its speaker, recipient, or audience.

Additionally requiring further analysis is the present finding that laughter often occurs before speech, specifically taking into account laughter expressed by all individuals in the interaction. Identifying where speakers place laughter in their
talk enables hearers to be more sensitive and alert to humour when it happens, and subsequently to prepare their humorous response.

Valuable comparative data could be obtained through an analysis of verbal and non-verbal data that examines speaker, recipient, and audience humour and rapport in a variety of settings and contexts. A wider range of conversational interactions could be considered, including single gender groups, single gender dyads, i.e., interactions consisting of two people of the same gender, and mixed-gender dyads. It could be that humour in such interactions is different from humour in small group interactions. If mixed-gender groups are examined it is recommended that the groups contain no more than four individuals. The pilot studies and the main study, for example, revealed that in groups of four individuals each person was provided with many opportunities to speak. In addition, this small group size enabled intensive analysis of communication behaviours, and allowed thorough insights to be formed about participants, and how humour occurred between friends.

There is a need for more research that examines larger numbers of groups of men and women in different social contexts over a period of time. Longitudinal studies would be of value for discovering how rapport is maintained through humour over a greater time-span. This could provide deeper insights about how men and women maintain their friendships over time, and the nature and dynamics of humour in these relationships. It might also be worthwhile exploring
whether humour can create and maintain rapport and lead to ongoing interactions among strangers, and this could include interactions in the workplace. The aim would be to discover what role humour plays in creating rapport when people meet for the first time. For instance, in the job interview setting between interviewer and applicant (see Candita, 2006), and other interactions in the workplace in which individuals are obliged to communicate with work colleagues that know them only in that environment. Recently acquainted individuals and work colleagues could be analysed to trace the use of humour and the growth of rapport over time, especially towards investigating the development of friendships.

6.4.1 Practical applications for using the humour model

Findings suggest that because humour plays such a fundamental role in maintaining rapport between interactants, there could be many benefits for human communication if humour is given prominence. In addition, the humour model stimulates individuals to think differently about humour in social interaction. The model encourages the belief that humour is a dynamic and positive force that men and women employ to encourage and maintain rapport in their continuing interactions.

Through ideas promoted within the humour model, first it is necessary to inform men and women of the benefits of humour in social interaction. Next, they would
be invited to examine objectively how they interact with one another, and to challenge the perceptions each may now have about their own communication. The possible advantages arising from communication that promotes positive humour could be discussed among the men and women. For example, the humour model encourages men and women to learn to understand and appreciate each other’s way of communicating humour, while providing guidance that could help them in their personal relationships.

A research-based approach that promotes understanding of the positive force of humour will help men and women to gain a more thorough understanding of human communication and personal relationships. The humour model could be put into practice through face-to-face instruction. For example, greater awareness of humour and rapport could be incorporated into counselling, life coaching, teaching, community and healthy lifestyle initiatives, social inclusion programmes, textbooks, popular self-help texts, and the media. These applications are discussed as follows.

Professional counsellors may not necessarily be aware that many of the men and women they are counselling do not understand the advantages of using humour to maintain rapport in their relationships. Feedback from the questionnaires showed that although most participants were aware that humour was a positive event, they also believed it could be a negative experience. For instance, one of the men stated that “you can lose your friends” by using “negative” humour.
Moreover, some of the participants regarded humour as trivial, as three men and three women gave the response that humour could make a person appear frivolous. To explain, one man said, “People don’t take you awfully seriously”. Similarly, one of the women remarked, “People learn not to take you seriously if you do it a lot”. As discussed in the literature review, some individuals believe there is a time and a place for humour, and that if something is funny it is not important.

Hence, it is recommended that counsellors use the humour model during counselling sessions to explain that humour is a positive activity and therefore should not be confused with teasing, sarcasm or jokes, which can be negative and therefore damaging to a relationship. Counsellors could make it clear that humour is not necessarily an indicator that someone is foolish or concerned only with trivial matters. They could also explain that humour is a crucial part of personal relationships and that it can help to create harmony and preserve rapport. Although people usually recognise that humour when it occurs in social interaction is pleasurable, it could be that some individuals do not recognise the value of humour to create a bond with others and maintain rapport.

Data suggest that counsellors could employ the humour model in their counselling sessions to promote rapport between themselves and their clients. However, any attempt at telling jokes or trying to make the client laugh would not be advisable. In the context of counselling, humour needs to be based on the
counsellor’s understanding of the client and the client’s ability to relate to humour. Therefore, the counsellor’s humour should be genuine and arise spontaneously as a reaction to the client’s disclosures. It may be possible, through humour, for counsellors to help clients to change how they think, feel and act. Besides, humour can make the client aware that the counsellor has empathy with the client’s feelings.

For those men and women who are unlikely to seek help through counselling, it is suggested that government initiatives about services that deal with relationships and emotional issues could be expanded into the local community, away from the counselling environment. Therefore, the provision of professional services would be delivered to men and women through unconventional access sites, such as recreation centres, and sports and health clubs. Other suitable venues might include libraries, church halls, and social centres. These entry points are appropriate because it is in such informal settings that people interact and produce humour. To ensure satisfactory take-up of these professional services it is essential that local agencies advertise widely in the local media, and use the humour model to promote humour as a positive communication skill that is an integral part of community and healthy lifestyle initiatives.

The humour model could also be used to promote the benefits of humour to socially excluded and disadvantaged individuals. For instance, in England, the humour model could be incorporated into communication skills training or
coaching for the long-term unemployed, which could be delivered in Job Centres where people go to find work. In addition, homeless people who are often the most socially isolated and vulnerable individuals in the community, may benefit from humour skills training or coaching.

Having current personal experience as a Chief Executive working to improve the lives of the homeless and rootless, I recommend workshops be held in the familiar and informal surroundings of local Day Centres for homeless people. The sessions would be aimed towards building self-esteem and confidence and empowering individuals to make the vital first step towards reintegration into society. Providing support for marginalised people is an important part of promoting social inclusion and helping them to live a more independent and fulfilled life. To this end, delivery of the sessions would need to be in a language and style that is relevant and easy for them to understand. It would also be necessary to consider possible mental health problems and learning disabilities and ensure that the training or coaching meets the specific needs of these individuals.

The humour model could be employed to raise awareness of how men and women engage in humour in social interaction. For instance, trainers and teachers, like counsellors, could use the humour model to promote humour as a positive activity. Training for men and women could be theoretical by encouraging understanding and by examining beliefs, and more practical by
using role-play to perform behaviours expressed in positive humour. The role-play could be video-recorded and replayed to the men and women who could watch and learn from their interactions with one another. Raising awareness of humour and rapport through education could benefit personal relationships. Through a more thorough understanding of communication behaviours that are used to convey humour, individuals will be encouraged to think for themselves and employ behaviours that promote rapport in their interactions.

Teaching these communication behaviours would empower men and women by providing them with the tools to engage in humour. However, educators need to be made aware that to express humour men and women use various communication behaviours, albeit sometimes similarly and sometimes differently. For instance, even though men in the present study produced more humour than women did, this does not suggest that the women did not possess a sense of humour. Not all humour is funny for any given person in any given situation. In other words, humour is subjective and depends on how it is interpreted by the hearer.

Furthermore, teachers of English as a second language could raise awareness in their students of the way humour operates verbally and non-verbally between men and women in informal social interaction. Without this awareness, learners of English could misinterpret the meanings of these humorous messages, and when communicating socially other people could misinterpret these learners.
Educators could also use the humour model as a strategy to increase student involvement, prolong their attention span, and to maintain rapport in the classroom. Humour may help in learning if the humour is integrated directly with the information to be learned and may help lighten a heavy topic. Moreover, a teacher’s sense of humour can positively contribute to management of a classroom by promoting relaxation and creating a safe and comfortable learning environment. Teacher humour helps to reduce tension and stress, manage undesirable behaviour, build self-confidence and produce positive physiological benefits (see LeMieux, 2000). Therefore, using the present model to introduce humour into the classroom could help students absorb new ideas and make lessons more enjoyable for teachers and learners.

Men and women who undergo relationship counselling or mediation are usually those whose relationships are not working and may not have been working for some time. Findings of this study could be incorporated in texts, popular self-help texts, and similar publications to encourage men and women to take responsibility for their relationships.

A vast quantity of new self-help texts are published each year aimed at a general audience of men and of women. However, most self-help texts, texts and similar publications trivialise the importance of humour by mentioning it in passing or by not mentioning it at all. Such publications, presumably written to inform readers and improve their communication practices and outcomes, could employ
the humour model to present a new understanding of humour and highlight its value and practical application in everyday situations. For instance, despite explaining how each gender can use various communication strategies to achieve a better understanding of one another, writers (e.g., Gray, 2003, 2004, Platt, 2000) fail to explore the possibility of humour or emphasise its value in promoting rapport in social interaction between men and women. Typically, authors of such texts do not explain how humour can be developed and expressed in everyday life.

It is acknowledged that humour is not the only way of maintaining rapport in relationships, however, findings show that in face-to-face social interactions men and women create and maintain humour through their verbal and non-verbal communication. The consequence of creating humour is feelings of rapport among group members, which could help to ensure the friendships continue beyond the present interaction and that lasting personal relationships are formed.

Therefore, the humour model and the communication behaviours unearthed by this study could be incorporated into texts or promoted within various texts. Some individuals, for instance, may find it helpful to know that men and women are more likely to use Returned Humour in preference to laughter. With this knowledge an individual could understand why another person does not laugh at their attempt at humour but responds with Returned Humour instead. Thus, it is recommended that ideas within the humour model could promote the concept of
permanent positive change in people’s communication, through texts, self-help
texts and other such publications, which are easily accessible and easy to use.

The media communicates information and ideas about men, women,
relationships, and ways of living. Through the media the humour model could
highlight the benefits of humour in social interaction demonstrating how to
approach life in a more joyful way and improving the quality of social
interaction. Comedy is the most popular genre of television programming,
accounting for over 45% of the 100 highest rated television series of all time (see
Zillman & Bryant, 1991). Consequently, the use of humour to promote rapport in
relationships could be encouraged in the media, namely, television programmes,
i.e., situation comedies and in educational broadcasts, radio chat shows, popular
music, films, magazines, and advertisements. Humour can be used to make
advertisements more interesting and attract more attention.

The humour model therefore can be used in various ways, namely in counselling,
coaching, education, community and healthy lifestyle initiatives, in texts, and in
the media to promote greater awareness in men and women. Utilising positive
humour may help men and women prevent misunderstandings, produce more
rapport and enjoyment, and build lasting friendships as explained next in
Chapter 7.
Chapter 7   Hooked on humour

The previous chapter addressed the research question in light of findings, which were compared and contrasted with those of the extant literature. This was followed by a discussion of the implications of this study for existing theory and practice, with recommendations for future research. Chapter 7 examines the impact of the entire thesis for communication, for relationships, and for society as a whole.

At the beginning of this thesis it was emphasised that most people regard their connections with friends as an integral part of their lives. Therefore, it is crucial for individuals to communicate effectively with one another to ensure the survival of their relationships. Although humour is not the only way to sustain relationships, results show that humour is an important communication tool for maintaining rapport, which can strengthen relationships and assist their continuation.

In particular, this study identified communication behaviours that were used by men and women to express humour. These friendships flourished on humorous interactive communication to keep them alive, on track, and enjoyable as the act of engaging in positive humour enabled interactants to achieve rapport. It is argued that men and women could empower themselves with a more thorough understanding of impromptu humour, and by learning practical skills for
engaging in humour. They could challenge the perceptions they may have about each other, and examine their communication to help them develop more satisfying relationships.

It was discovered that individuals can achieve rapport by employing a range of verbal and non-verbal behaviours. For instance, focused and non-focused humour, hyperbole, overlapping speech, Returned Humour, laughter and chuckling. Other behaviours included agreement, interrogatives, intonation, pauses, personal pronoun use, singing, and ingroup identity markers. These behaviours were combined with facial expressions, head and eye movements and gestures. Certainly, it is desirable to be verbally humorous in social interaction but, as this study showed, non-verbal communication behaviours, that is, paralanguage and body language, are often all that is needed to show appreciation of humour and to prolong and extend the humorous episode. Moreover, friends would do well to display their understanding and appreciation of humour by accommodating or mirroring one another’s verbal and non-verbal behaviours.

At any stage of human relationships misunderstandings may arise if men and women do not understand the way each gender is doing humour. Using humour to focus on gender differences could enable individuals to learn more about the opposite gender in a light-hearted and un-confrontational way, thus heightening
rapport. By making gender relevant, men and women can tactically employ humour as a non-threatening device for preserving gender boundaries.

This study also threw light on the ways in which men and women can use humour to achieve a common understanding of each other and to create and maintain a sense of inclusion, equality, and community. Although each person’s humour was highly individualised, humour was a shared experience and interactants placed much emphasis on collaboration and co-operation. All parties were enthusiastic and they drew one another into the whole experience of humour. Therefore, open displays of collective or group laughter fostered agreement and camaraderie among group members. Further, jointly engaging in humour allowed participants to display similar ideas, attitudes and beliefs, which reinforced the personal bonds between them, helping to sustain their friendships.

It could be argued that humour is addictive because it is pleasurable and may create a desire for more humour. Humour can have a powerful although positive effect. As commented by one of the participants “it’s like a drug ... its addictive, but in a good way haha we’re all hooked on humour!” Therefore, a humour addiction may be beneficial for everyone involved, as it can bring people together in a shared sense of merriment and jollity enabling people to have a good time in a mutually enjoyable way. Moreover, it can be said that the friendly inclusiveness of humour also helps to transport information in a light-hearted way, opens the door to interaction by breaking barriers to communication, keeps
the mood light, and makes people feel valued, understood and loved. Addictive or not, it appears that humour is an essential part of a healthy lifestyle.

As more theoretical and practical knowledge about impromptu humour is made available through academic inquiry, perhaps men and women will integrate humour into all aspects of their lives. People may not realise that humour is one way to achieve rapport and keep their friendships alive. Having a sense of humour, that is the ability to perceive, appreciate and express humour (Wickberg, 2000), is a skill that everyone can possess, whether young or old, rich or poor, male or female.

Nevertheless, like any skill, becoming skilled in humour may require some practice. Findings indicate that building humour into one’s daily life does not involve telling jokes, teasing someone, or *trying* to be funny, but it does require being *extra* receptive to the humorous events that each day presents. Humour needs to arise naturally from the situation and the speaker’s personality. For instance, a spontaneous remark with a cheeky grin, a raised eyebrow, and a twinkle in the eye was enough to instantly trigger a humorous response, providing an opportunity for shared fun and intimacy.

Even professional stand-up comedians are becoming increasingly aware that keeping their audience entertained may require more than the usual fast-paced succession of jokes. As remarked by British comedian Lenny Henry “I don't tell
jokes in my act ... I started off doing that … I changed… I realised that that's where I needed to be, being more observational rather than telling jokes” (2007). Therefore, Lenny Henry’s approach to humour concurs with current findings, which suggest that participants prefer to engage in impromptu humour, rather than telling jokes.

Most important, this study shows that humour has a central role in providing a source of entertainment, and surely this is what makes friendships pleasurable. Throughout history, comedy has been employed to amuse and entertain others. Now, as in ancient times, humour and entertainment are inextricably linked. For instance, entertainingness, a term coined by Aristotle (trans. 1963) in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, is still a significant feature of friendship in present times and entertainment is directly linked to the production of humour. Taking the time to engage in humour can indicate an acceptance of the other person and shows that person they are recognised and valued for whom they are. When individuals entertain themselves and others with humour, they can help to promote a relaxed and friendly environment in which positive interaction flourishes.

The fundamental role that humour plays in preserving positive social relations has been highlighted by this study. Undoubtedly, close personal relationships make life meaningful and more enjoyable and findings suggest that because humour can be such a pleasant experience it plays a pivotal role in sustaining satisfying relationships. In particular, impromptu humour promotes and
maintains rapport and harmony in informal communication. Crucially, the current research has shown that rapport underpins social relations and binds them. The primary concern of men and women in this study was to use humour to build rapport, unity and solidarity to ensure future social interactions.

Findings signpost directions for further investigation of humour and rapport as it occurs in real-life face-to-face social interactions. In addition, results establish an agenda for continued research that is aligned with current perspectives in studies of human communication, and research on humour and gender.

For many people, it may be impossible to imagine life without humour. It can be argued that humour enables people to make sense of their life worlds, and that it is integral to everything they do, who they are, and what they want to become. Although humour can provide practical interpersonal and social benefits it is often taken for granted. It is hoped therefore that more attention will be given to humour as a positive force, and that it will be developed actively in social life to make communication smoother, that is, more harmonious.

It is imperative that research in human communication now affords humour a more prominent place than it is usually assigned and that continued efforts are made to ensure that men and women take time to maintain and nurture their friendships. As in ancient and medieval times, humour now needs to be celebrated and brought back into the interactional arena as a central feature of people’s daily lives. After all, what is more important than human relationships?
List of references


378


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Appendix A  Definitions of key terms

Definitions adopted by researchers may not be uniform, therefore key terms are defined to establish positions taken in this research. Other key terms are explained as they emerge throughout the study.

Interaction - refers to the participants when they are gathered together in their respective groups for the purpose of engaging in informal or casual conversation. That is, the group interactions are not task-oriented conversations but “authentic and spontaneous, occurring in real contexts in the everyday lives of the participants” (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 1). Interacting is a process of making meanings. When people take part in any interaction they negotiate meanings about what they think is going on in the world, how they feel about it, and how they feel about the people they interact with (ibid, p. 6). The interactions are between men and women in face-to-face gatherings with “no external pressure on the participants to be self-conscious about what they are saying” (Slade & Gardner, 1985, p. 273). The four group interactions are labelled: Interaction one, Interaction two, Interaction three, and Interaction four.

Natural settings – the group interactions took place in natural settings, that is, informal everyday social settings where participants felt relaxed and where they often met for a chat. Thus, Interactions one, three and four took place in participants’ homes, and Interaction two took place in the lounge of a local pub (public house). Formal environments such as the workplace, university, lectures,
debates, medical environment, or contrived situations such as the laboratory are all excluded from this research.

**Participant** – means that the person is engaged in a conversation and includes someone who is momentarily disattending the conversation (Goodwin, 1981). All participants taking part in the research regarded themselves as friends of the other people in their group.

**Verbal behaviour** - refers to oral language, that is, words or statements spoken aloud.

**Non-verbal behaviour** - refers to the way in which people communicate intentionally or unintentionally without words and may be used to transport emotion, attitudes, interest, and to help or vary verbal communication (Gire, 2003). Non-verbal behaviour encompasses *body language* and *paralanguage*.

**Body language** - refers to the following four behaviours: 1) gestures, i.e., use of hands, feet, and other parts of the body, 2) body movements, i.e., leaning forwards, and getting physically close, 3) facial expressions, i.e., changes in the eyes, brows, and mouth, and 4) eye movements, i.e., gazing, and glancing.
Paralanguage - refers to the following behaviours: intonation, emphasis, pauses, jocular voice, hyperbole, laughter, laughing voice, and overlap (see Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991; Duck, 1999; Eggins & Slade, 2005).

Speaker - is the person that initiates the humour.

Recipient – is the person toward whom the humour is focused.

Hearer or hearer(s) - includes all members of the group including the recipient but excluding the speaker. There may be more than one hearer, that is, hearer(s).

Audience - includes all members of the present group, excluding the recipient and the speaker.
Appendix B  

Transcription conventions

The transcription conventions for the present research are based on the system devised by Gail Jefferson and now well established in conversation analysis (see Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974, p. 731-734), with some modifications. Techniques and symbols are revised and symbols added or dropped as relevant. Line numbers are provided in all the excerpts to aid reference to specific areas of the text. Text in bold typeface signifies the person that initiated the humorous remark. No real names of participants or places, i.e., towns, have been used in any of the excerpts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[</td>
<td>Left brackets between lines indicate overlapping speech. The point of overlap is indicated with brackets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/=</td>
<td>If someone’s speech follows another’s directly then latching is signalled, e.g., indicates point at which next speaker interrupts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>The equals sign indicates that speech continues from an earlier line.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>Micro pause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>++</td>
<td>Pause slightly longer than micro pause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>,</td>
<td>A comma indicates a short intake of breath during course of speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPITALS</td>
<td>Capital letters indicate emphatic stress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>!</td>
<td>Indicates exclamation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Question mark indicates rising pitch at word or phrase ending, not necessarily a grammatical question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Indicates that the sound that precedes is cut off, stopped suddenly or sharply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((yawns))</td>
<td>Comments or paralinguistic features are contained in double brackets. These are transcribed when they relate strongly to verbal interpretation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((? ?))</td>
<td>Indicates transcription is impossible; unintelligible word or phrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haha</td>
<td>Laughter for up to one second.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hahaha</td>
<td>Laughter for up to two seconds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hahahaha</td>
<td>Laughter longer than two seconds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>its like this</em></td>
<td>Italics indicate speaker is laughing whilst talking (laughing voice).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL LAUGHING</td>
<td>Phrase indicates that all group members are laughing at the same time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>Double quotes mark the beginning and end of a quoted statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ctown</td>
<td>A capital letter placed before the word “town” indicates the name of the town or place referred to by participants. Used to preserve anonymity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dtown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C    Selected transcripts

The first seven pages of each of the four group Interactions are provided in this Appendix. Note that the four complete transcripts are saved onto a disk, which is attached to this thesis.

Transcript – Interaction one

Four participants: Two men (Steve and Malc) and two women (Nora and Lucy)

*Tape commences*

Steve did you watch um King of New York the other night?

Malc yeah

Steve that was good that was

Malc good film that ++ I don’t particularly like

Christopher Walken though

Steve OH HE’S BRILLIANT what are you going on about?

Nora Christopher Walken is he the one that was in Sleepy Hollow?

Malc yeah that bad guy

Nora [he scares me

Steve [he’s basically he’s basically the SAME in all his films but he’s such a [cool guy

Lucy [he went out with Natalie Wood

Nora didn’t he?

Steve have you ever seen Communion?

Lucy outside

Steve went out with Natalie Wood?

Lucy yeah

Steve who’s Natalie Wood?

Nora the woman that DIED ++ she was in West Side Story the original West Side Story

Malc no

Nora you don’t know who Natalie Wood is?

Steve I’ve heard the name, the name rings a bell

Malc ((whistles)) I’ve heard of James Woods haha

Steve he’s good I like him, I watched Casino yesterday he was in that

Malc who is?

Steve James Woods

Malc not Casino

Steve yes he is

Malc what?

Steve he’s like a pimpy boyfriend of Sharon Stone

Malc OH course he is yeah

Steve that’s a good film that is

Lucy oh [course he is

Malc [yeah it is a good film

Nora hmm Casino
malc I like the bit where he puts the guy’s HEAD in the
vice ((to steve))
steve I- [I watched [it I watched it loads of times
yesterday=
malc [hahahaha
nora I haven’t- I haven’t seen hardly ANY films
lucy I haven’t, but my boyfriend has
steve =but I [kept paying=
lucy [have you seen the-
steve =[attention to that, and his eye does actually=
nora [I haven’t been to the cinema in ages
steve =[pop doesn’t it?
lucy [((inhales breath)) GO and see Casino
malc yeah [have you seen that?= ((to lucy and nora))
steve =[that’s disgusting
malc =in Casino where they put the guy’s head in the vice
and
[his eye pops
nora [I haven’t seen Casino
steve that is [FOUL
nora [errr
steve you don’t actually see it you just like see like a
[bit of like, GOO
nora [it’s a bloke’s film innit? ((to lucy))
steve go like that, [it’s horrible ((demonstrates with
hands))
nora [errr
malc and then they say he’s gonna put his um they’re gonna
put um cocktail sticks in his testicles haha
nora ha[haoww
steve [no they already- they already did that ice picks
yeah
malc ice picks in his testicles
nora I thought that- I quite liked Johnny Basco
steve I liked that [yeah
malc [yeah so did I
steve er I’m not too sure about=/
nora /=and they cut off all his
limbs ((exhaled breath)) that’s nice ha[ha
lucy [haha
steve cos I liked er Al Pacino I didn’t like seeing him as
an old guy=/
    /=hmm=/
steve /=who’s like really
++
nora he was good at that he’s very vulnerable
malc I preferred De Niro to Pacino though
lucy I don’t know
malc yeah he’s better
lucy some of the films [that
steve [yeah no I agree I like De Niro
    =better
+++
nora yeah he is yeah he is ((yawns))
lucy has anyone seen the Green Mile?
malc yeah
nora [I really wanna see that
steve [no
lucy what did you think? ++
malc I cried though hahaha
lucy OH BLE[SS
malc [a little- well only at the end where he goes um ++ he goes, when he says “don’t put that HAT on, [I’m scared of the dark boss” I went HO! ((high pitched))
nora [oh yeah
lucy ahhhh [it’s horrible ((sad voice))
malc [haha|haha you can’t because=/
nora [I can’t imagine you guys
lucy /=they take him into a cell and they say “any questions?” cos he’s like SEVEN FOOT tall [and a really really BIG black bloke, really scary,=

nora [yeah
lucy =and he said “any questions?” and he’s like “can you leave the lights on after bedtime? it’s just that I’m scared- I’m afraid of the dark”
malc among other things, no the [best bit is at the end=/
lucy [and you just think ++ /=ah
nora haha
malc and it’s quite- there’s a good scene right- Tom Tom Hanks goes up to him and says he goes “what am I gonna say on my judgement day when um God asks me why I put one of his um greatest- [er servants in to the” then he goes=
lucy [yeah
malc =”I can’t just say it was my job” he goes “what do you want us to do?” and he goes “oh there’s so much HURT and nastiness in the world” that he just he wants to die doesn’t he?” ++
oh [it’s just ((exhaled breath)) it’s quite moving
lucy [ahh
malc but the book’s better
lucy is it?
nora it’s not meant to be as good as Shawshank though is it?
lucy [it’s different
steve [I like that
malc have you ever read the book Needful Things? ++ Stephen King
steve I’m not a Stephen King fan
malc no but The Shawshank Redemption
lucy [and The Green Mile weren’t wrote wrote=
nora [you’re not?
malc =under his name were they?
steve no who was it? um
malc I forget his
steve it starts with B doesn’t it?
+ malc I don’t know it’s another name he
[writes other books under it love stories and—]

steve [he did er The Running Man in that name as well didn’t he?]
malc did he write the The Running Man?
steve yeah
malc I didn’t know he wrote hah The Running Man + Shawshank Redemption is one of the BEST [films
nora [hmmm
steve that’s brilliant I love the ending of that film
nora I haven’t seen it in ages + cos I didn’t know it was written by him at first
steve well I watched it when I was off, I watched loads of films, I was gonna read loads of books but I can’t read
malc hahaha
steve [(exhaled laugh)) haha I didn’t [have anything good to read
malc [hahaha that’s always— that’s always— that’s always what I do yeah, I’m gonna read books and I end up watching films
nora have you’ve read all the plays ((? ?))
malc um + we all have ++
lucy hah really?
malc which— [all the ones that make SENSE
lucy [do you know what, I can’t remember any of the Tempest that’s cos I didn’t come till late so, I don’t know the Tempest ++ I know Our Country’s Good, what else are we doing?
malc I know the [story I know— I know the stories
steve [whahey! I got a distinction on that essay for all of them, I’ve read since, I’ve read um
lucy don’t you think we [don’t do enough about the um=/
malc [Top Girls /I’m not touching that Berkoff crap Ill throw it right in the bin, [useless
lucy [we did— that was awful
steve have you done the Duchess of Malfi?
lucy [no
malc [no
steve I did an essay on that
malc why can’t they pick some more contemporary plays=
steve yeah
malc =you know bloody Duchess of Malfi! + Tempest
steve shut up
malc Berkoff
lucy Fences is— we can do Fences if you want
nora yeah
lucy [Fences is um
malc [I never did that
steve I’m surprised Berkoff hasn’t actually been done
malc oh not many people like Berkoff=
nora no
malc =but sort of=/
steve /=I think he’s overrated
malc =he’s too phy- physical and
nora he’s- he’s too CRUDE
malc he’s not underrated he is=/
lucy /=he is very crude
steve no I think he’s OVERrated
nora I think he’s [overrated
malc [yeah yeah
nora I think he’s overrated to be perfectly honest
especially with that- I didn’t like Greek- I didn’t like=/
malc /=Greek’s BRILLIANT
steve what’s that [one we went to see the other day
nora [did- did you see Greece?=/
lucy /=no=/
nora /=GREEK
malc Greece haha
nora [haha Greece
Steve [East was terrible
lucy EAST? + was terrible?
steve yeah hah
lucy I went to see that in the West End it was ABSOLUTELY fantastic
malc what East?
lucy [yeah
steve [God almighty
nora they did the whole monologue of
[that, it was sick
lucy [it was AMAZING yeah it’s disgusting and it is very
[very crude but=
steve [there’s another one about
malc but it was so dismal [sometimes
lucy [but it was it was brilliant all
steve they had was five chairs and they- they went on stage
lucy =at the back and they all had their own little place
and just sat there, until it was their turn to come on
steve yes I liked the dad, the mother and malc, the other two were just- ((makes a funny face))
++
nora I didn’t see it
malc was she in West? ((exhaled breath))
steve but I think it’s overrated I really do
nora I do
steve I went to see THAT because that was a good monologue
he did weren’t it?
malc yeah Matt- Matt Calerband did a great monologue from
Greek when he’s fighting + fighting ((? ?)) can you remember?
nora er I didn’t like that play though
steve he’s the one who’s gone to Newcastle hasn’t he?
malc no
nora no he went to Mount View
malc that’s Ralph
++
nora it’s RALph
malc no I remember last year when Tash screwed up a speech
Malcolm: afterwards that would make his look better and he did this- brilliant- the most brilliant piece of amateur acting I’ve seen that term can you remember it?

Nora: no

Steve: what- was he was the in your year then or was he second year?

Nora: I went-

Malcolm: you see Tash screwed up a a monologue a huge monologue

Nora: did I come and see it with you?

Malcolm: no you went to another night I think

Nora: ah

Malcolm: and um after- after that monologue followed um Matt’s speech which was also HUGE and um Tash and Matt had this little thing that if Tash screwed up, because they only had a week to learn their lines um he would turn to Sam at an angle and Matt would come in with his monologue, and they’ve oft- people often say in a monologue if the scene that follows the one that’s just screwed up has done a lot better than the one that’s screwed up is forgotten, so Matt could remember this monologue and he just did it so well he just completely forgot about Tash and just stood up not even when the play had finished just after his monologue

Nora: really?

Malcolm: yeah

Lucy: hmmm

Nora: I don’t- I didn’t um cos I don’t remember that one that play cos I thought that um thingy was really bad the two girls were really bad at it

Malcolm: ah Kelly and Sarah [wasn’t it?

Nora: [er Emma

Malcolm: I HATED her

Lucy: [hahahah

Nora: [they were really AWFUL their southern accents as well, did Kelly do? [Kelly didn’t do one did she==

Malcolm: [((starts singing)) =God

Lucy: she [was meant to do um

Malcolm: [God she was the most USELESS- Kelly

Lucy: Emma did like um the southern accent [American accent

Nora: [hmm

Malcolm: well she tried

Nora: she tried and the other girl didn’t and it just sounded out of place

Malcolm: Emma was- oh God I DIDN’T like her at all it was annoying she thought she was good at acting

Steve: do you have some real wastes of spaces in your er class?

Malcolm: some real what?

Steve: I’m just taking my jumper off ((removes his jumper))

Nora: ha ha

Lucy: wastes of space
malc waste of- yeah Jason er
lucy er no no no well- no [when he’s- when he’s here
steve [no no I don’t mean that I mean
  the first year?
nora oh God yeah
lucy in the first year- the amount of people that dropped
  out
nora only I [think we had about six people seven people
malc [yeah we had um
nora NO we had about ten people drop out
++
malc ten hah
nora NO there were [loads only had three
lucy [we only had three
nora and then there was that girl, your friend four we had
malc Sharn Charlotte Helen, Matrina Dale=/
steve /=I’m losing weight
lucy Kirsty [Marie
malc [who’s Kirsty?
lucy Kirsty Marie and that other girl Sarah
++
malc yeah and Friday [and thingy
lucy [what’s her name?
nora that’s more than ten
malc yeah
lucy Gem- was that?
nora yeah Gemma cos I went to=/
lucy /=so about ten
nora my friend Lucy Kiri Kim
steve ha[hahahah
malc [hahaha
nora [that’s more than ten
lucy it’s about [fifteen, twenty that [have dropped out
steve [hahahahahah [all the Karen’s
malc number twenty’s been in hospital
steve yeah
malc you-
nora what was?
steve nothing much
malc you have haven’t you?
steve I’m not gonna tell ya
malc how much have you lost?
steve not much half a stone something like that
nora [that’s a lot haha
lucy [I could lose half a stone + love to lose it
malc yeah when I had my appendix out I lost a stone and a
  half
steve I’m all muscle there now apart from my midriff
nora haha [muscle madcap
lucy haha
malc [more muscle, you’re all muscle apart from the
fat
ALL LAUGHING
steve you’re not meant to say that hahaha
Transcript – Interaction two

Four participants: Two men (Grant and Stan) and two women (Lisa and Jill)

*Tape commences*

grant so what did you do then Lisa?
lisa at the weekend? I had um=/
jill /=haha[ha
lisa [haha Andy’s mum and
dad came to stay and we took them to Oxford on
Saturday
stan ow yeah
lisa that was nice
stan I was in Oxford last week-end
lisa it’s lovely actually
stan I went to Otmore, round a friend’s crazy Willis has
just moved over there so he’s got the=/
grant /=haha[ha
lisa [hahaha
grant I thought it was crazy Bob
stan ahh it’s crazy Bob that lives over there, he says
you’ve gotta check out these pubs they’re SO quaint
and like they’re really NICE + but then in the first
pub we went to was SO old and so quaint it hadn’t even
got a till, just a BOX that the money goes into, and
the barman just counts it out, it was excellent ++ it
REALLY was cool down by this river and everything
grant hmmm
lisa it’s lovely actually
stan yeah it’s just north of Oxford on the Otmore wherever
that is ++ nice part of the world
++++
lisa tut very nice ha[ha
jill [haha
lisa are you working Jill?
jill only two days + Friday and um Sunday hahaha
grant I bet that was an interesting
week-end [hahahahaha=/
jill [hahaha /=Sunday was just=/
grant /=wasn’t it?

hahaha
jill [yeah!
Sunday we had a DRUNK come round in and we had to call
the police, [to get him evicted
lisa [ow
stan uh a bit of drama ((raised intonation))
jill YEAH it was! + and she was really cool she was a
WOMAN, a policewoman, and she come all on her own, and
I thought that they would come with men ++ but she
wasn’t she was in the car on her own and she come in
to this drunk bloke and was absolutely brilliant ++
she did [really well
lisa [hmmm
stan yeah
lisa it’s amazing actually when you see like a police car
with a woman in + and they’ve not anyone else with
them you do think that’s quite dodgy isn’t [it really?
[yeah!
stan yeah they’re all=/
jill /=well when we ’phoned up we said we’ve
got a drunk man getting VERY abusive, VERY nasty, we
want him off the premises + and they send a woman on
her own
[and you=/
lisa /=hmmmm=/
jill /=think=/
stan /=yeah but=/
jill if like the men there couldn’t get him off the
premises
stan yeah but the problem is that, I mean you’re presented
with a uniform you tend to listen don’t you?
jill no he didn’t
grant haha you can be happy about drunks
jill ((to grant)) no he didn’t at all + it was like the
first woman, the bar woman wouldn’t serve him because
he was too drunk, so he started on her and he was
gonna have her out of a job and the
rest of it=/
stan /=haha[ha
jill [so then the manager came=/
stan /=oh right=/
jill =and tried to talk him down right, had enough of him,
he was gonna be out of a job he was picking on him,
that’s it I’m gonna have you all sacked + police woman
come in she said “right they want you off the premises
and everything” “WHY?” “well it doesn’t matter why
it’s up to them if they don’t want you on the premises
don’t have to have you”, and then he’s like “right
you’re picking on me I want your name and number
you’re gonna get the sack” he’s going all through the
same thing again, it just like oh go home, so=/
stan /=you
obviously attract a certain element to this place
erhmmm ((exhaled breath))
lisa hahahaha
jill whether he remembered any of it in the morning is
another [thing haha]ha
lisa [hmmmm [the only thing it is you could say
that you shouldn’t have women police officer in the
car ((? ?))]
[doing the same job as MEN=
stan [no I disagree
lisa =NO [I’m not saying I agree with that=
stan [I
lisa =but some people might say=/
grant /=I think, yeah
lisa if [if they always need to be accompanied=
grant [some women are just as tough as men sometimes
lisa =by a male [while-
((?) that there are so many (?) that have to be- that a policewoman has to do, I’m not talking about rape, that sort of thing y’know, I mean I don’t know why, but I mean if- if a big six foot policeman stood in front of me and said “stan I want you out of this [pub] I’d probably go ++ “yeah”

grant

((exhaled laugh))

stan

- if a six foot- er, policewoman said it to me I’d be SO damn ashamed I’d just get the hell out of there

jill yeah [it’s true

stan [I really would be

lisa hmm

stan I guarantee that her FRIENDS weren’t very far behind

jill ah that’s right she said “right if I have to call backup to get you out you’re gonna be arrested, or you can come quietly with me” + so=

stan /= ((?)

jill but you just think first instinct if you ‘phone the police and say you’ve got an abusive man they would send a man

lisa hmm

jill [well I [would

lisa [yeah

stan so that was er made for an interesting evening then?

jill yeah that’s was quite a bit of entertainment ((raised intonation))

stan hmm

jill yeah

++

grant Andrew Davis Andrew Davis was talking to me and he’s gonna to STAY in the Strathmore Hotel for two weeks ((raised intonation))

jill oh no

[that’s mean he’s gonna be in there every NIGHT=/

grant [I said to him /=no

but I said to him “you must be MAD” cos it’s in the middle of NOWHERE=/

jill /=yeah

grant =and there’s nothing to do and he’s gonna live in Htown, so why don’t you go for ten quid a night, oh I don’t know how much it is but=/

stan /=yeah

grant =instead of spending twenty quid a night in all why don’t you get- find a hotel? “oh” he said “that’s a good idea” I mean I=/

stan hmm

/=where where does he come from? [like- from

stan young though isn’t he?

grant yeah, no no [no

stan [he’s

lisa um oh he’s the new guy [taking

grant [yeah yeah

jill I dunno that’s what=/

stan /=how old is he?
grant thirty
jill he’ll be bored stiff at the Strathmore Hotel for two weeks
grant [yeah probably early thirties I would have thought
++
stan sorry? ((to jill))

jill he’ll be bored stiff at the Strathmore Hotel for two weeks
grant [that’s what I said to him he kept asking me where the shops were [and where to do=

lisa [ahh
grant =his shopping and what=/
lisa /='it’s not fair though to just
jill there are a lot of people though that come in for a meal and they’ll say “oh where can we go for a walk” or, y’know after they’ve had their dinner=/
stan /=hahaha try the M1 ((motorway to London))
ALL LAUGHING
stan try the M1 hahaha try the M1
jill that’s right just go back to your room [that’s all you=
lisa [hahaha
jill =can do round here
grant yeah
lisa yeah I mean I think it’s alright for a couple of nights but=/

jill /=yeah=/
lisa /=if you’ve not got transport and you
jill hmm
stan does he have transport?
grant oh yeah yeah it’s a yeah=/
lisa /=but if you don’t know the area it’s a bit [dodgy isn’t it?
stan [I think er especially if you’re thinking of moving to Htown I’d move straight over there
grant well he has, he’s got a flat there anyway
stan right
grant he’s gonna rent a flat at
[ Easter or maybe the end of May or something y’know

jill [so he might as well go straight there mightn’t he?
stan I used to live in Htown, FOUR years
jill did ya?
stan yeah + I quite enjoyed it um I’ve bought a house in

Ltown that’s the thing I suddenly realised that I needed to buy a house so ++ you sort of look at the Htown prices and see [the prices there=

jill [yeah it’s expensive
grant =I could have- he said that the rent for a one bedroom

flat in Htown is about three to half the size of what he’s got but three times the price
stan  hmm
grant  wherever he is in ((? ?))
jill  yeah but Htown is one of the most expensive values
you’ve got round here ++ I mean it is a quite a small
flat he’s got innit in Htown?
grant  yeah
stan  is that a company flat?
jill  it’s not [a company flat
grant  [well we haven’t got one have we? it’s all we
have
stan  yeah there is, you know you get these people over for
like six months
grant  yeah but they’re just they’re just rented from
agencies
lisa  [they’re just rented-
yeah cos someone has suggested getting a company flat
or house, like if they’ve got a five or six bedroomed
house there is no need to keep one
grant  yeah but you’ve got to look after it then and you’ve
gotta change all the ((? ?))
lisa  yeah I suppose so
stan  yeah
grant  type of beds, ((? ?)) in Gtown
lisa  but no one does haha
+++++
lisa  have you got a little local over in Gtown y’know that-
you go to?
grant  haha
stan  haha The Jumping [Dingo
grant  [yeah that’s- yeah the haha
jill  [the Dancing Dingo haha]
haha
stan  [the Dancing Dingo or something
like that
All  LAUGHING
stan  it’s not one of these LAP dancing establish[ments is
it?
grant  [no no no
it’s not no it’s an Australian bar ((raised
intonation))
lisa  OH is [it?
stan  [ah he’s got his own little bar stool and
lisa  has he? haha
ALL  LAUGHING
jill  and his own little friends haha
lisa  haha[haahaha
grant  [and my own little friends [yeah haha
+++ stan  okay I shall be back in a moment
lisa  don’t be too long!
stan  I won’t
lisa  [haha]ha
jill  [haha]ha
stan  [just talk amongst yourselves
lisa  [hahaha
jill  [hahaha
**stan leaves table to get drinks**

lisa  so this little bar then in Gtown ha[ha[hahaha
grant  [hah[ahah
jill  [hahahah
grant  is that what he told you on ‘phone?
lisa  he didn’t tell me that though
jill  oh I’ve got some more on
[ha[hahahah
lisa [haha
grant  oh ha|haha
jill  [haha
lisa  [now we know who to talk about it haha
jill  [hahahah
grant  yea[h what about it?
lisa  is it nice there?
grant  [no it’s a DULL place
lisa  [cos you’re over there quite a lot aren’t you?
++++
g[rant  yeah ++ [quite a lot hah
lisa  [haha
lisa  it’s like a lit- little home from home is it?
grant  NO it just- it happens to be next door to the hotel
that’s all ++ it’s run by a- [NO it’s not a-
lisa  [the thing though if
you’re if you’re away from home you’ve gotta have
something to do haven’t you in the evening?
jill  hahahahah (laughs for 11 seconds)
gr[ant  [hahahah
ALL  LAUGHING
grant  yeah I go running usually ha|haha
jill  [hahah
lisa  y’what?
grant  I go running ha
lisa  haha
grant  I do!
jill  yeah you do don’t you?
gr[ant  I do yeah I do
+++++
lisa  hahahahaha anyway
jill  [haha
grant  talking of str- strange things in your life then, Ian
on er- Sunday night=/
jill  /=hmm
grant  =that he was out with this girl that he’s been seeing
for a few months and she asked- we went to see a band
and afterwards they would go back-
**((grant accidentally knocks his glass and spills his drink))
gr[ant  oh!
jill  [ha|hahahahaha
lisa  [ha|hahahahaha
grant  [phaw ++ um fortunately, I didn’t- I didn’t
bother to go with them I just went home, and er her
husband followed them and let the tyres down on her
car=/
jill  /=really?
grant =and dumped two suitcases outside his flat hahaha
jill oh was she married then?
grant yeah but supposedly he’s been trying-
jill [same old story hahaha
grant yeah [yeah probably yeah- well I dunno know, I don’t know=
lisa [hmmm
grant =she supposedly trying to buy a house for several months,
but she hasn’t been really living with [him for many years??
stan [jill=/
jill /=yeah?
stan [a soda or lemonade?
jill lemonade please
+++++
lisa so ++he’s found out she’s having affairs?=/
grant [yeah then they decided to- /=who is?
lisa he is
grant well yeah but I mean he knew that anyway I mean
supposedly they weren’t ++ getting on- married
lisa oh right
grant they were trying- they’re obviously getting a divorce
and they’re trying to sell the house and everything
but, I mean I dunno whether you do something like that
when you’re in a ++ situation
++
lisa hmm
+++ I dunno
++++ lisa that’s a conversation stopper hahaha
grant [but she’s er hahaha was it? hahaha
jill [hahaha
grant it was like ((? ?)) hmm
+++++++++++++
grant cut
lisa haha[haha take one haha=/
jill [haha /=if my Benjamin gets squished
/about ((? ?))=/
lisa /=ahaaaa=/
jill /=you’re in trouble ?
lisa how [how can you tell?
grant [how did you tell?
jill aw right down to the M5 (raised intonation)) + he
followed me out of the estate and I was going “no go
home go home” and he was like ((knocks on table three
times)) kept running up behind me and so I was running
to try and get away from him and he come right down to
Ramsey Road
lisa ah
Transcript - Interaction three

Four participants: Two men (Ron and Hank) and two women (Deb and Sue)

*Tape commences*

hank well is she the one from Big Brother that’s going?
deb oh yeah
sue oh yeah that was REALLY good wasn’t it?
hank I didn’t hardly watch it
ron I didn’t watch ANY of it
hank only when the children did
sue I didn’t watch all of it, I I just saw um bits cos whe-
other people had it on,
[um but in the end I sort of got gripped, and=
ron [hmm
sue =if I knew it was on I went and had a quick look
hank I could never work out who was who I think that was the
problem or what they were doing, or WHY
sue yeah, well I kept asking, my husband
[seemed- and he told me what was happening=
ron [and who cares ((exhaled laugh))
hank well the children seemed to like it
deb hmm
ron mine did they were addicted it, but I mean- I think
it’s like looking through somebody’s KEYHOLE isn’t it
really?=/
sue /=well it is
ron /=and seeing what’s going on, I I don’t practice
voyeurism really,
[I think that’s the answer to that
sue [except that they were aware that it was happening um +
I I well both THAT and the Treasure Island, not the
Treasure Island
[the um=
deb [Castaways
sue =CASTAway thing as well-
deb that was a fly on the wall thing wasn’t it?
sue yes, yeah and I find that- that I don’t know, whether
it’s- that’s what HAPPENS when you’re in a closed unit,
but everybody seemed to be very immature, and both in-
in both programmes I thought + they seemed y’know to be
[getting worked up ABOUT SILLY things
ron [makes you wonder what-
sue and and they seemed y’know to be getting worked up
about silly things and you [know
ron [yes, it makes you wonder
what their motives are anyway, because
who [who would want to go I [suppose it’s money
sue [well it was money
hank [YES but it was what?
sue yeah
hank I heard the count of seventy thousand I don’t know but
deb is that the prize [then yes
ron [is that the prize then for the winner

sue is it?

ron yeah that’s right

sue oh, I didn’t know that

hank but he gave it away

sue he gave it away to a little down’s syndrome girl=

hank hmm hmm

sue =that’s got to go and have this op

deb I think I saw a tiny small bit but I + just didn’t like
what I saw and I didn’t want to watch it again + they
just seemed such horrible PEOPLE
[and I thought I don’t wanna sit here=

hank [haha[haha

sue [haha

deb =watching [horrible people for half an hour

hank [they deserved to be locked up [some of them

sue [haha[ha

ron [did you

find that more interesting than the Castaways one on

[the Scottish Island

deb [CASTAWAYS I find I quite enjoy actually

ron yah?

deb yes I find that quite um=/

ron /=I watched a bit of it, I

thought that was a BIT more interesting, I couldn’t

stand the um,

this last [one, um I’ve forgotten the name already=/

deb [Dom /=Dom, the

chap + was it Dominick Warren?

ron um whoever it was I couldn’t stand that reminded me of

that American soap, the er was it Friends? or something

like that?

hank er I don’t know I’ve never seen it

ron well my girls do they’re sort of addicted to these

things and er,

[I thought it was very similar to that really

deb [hahaha

ron and who cares? ((inhaled laugh))

hank but I mean it strikes me that the people who go in for

this, must by and large, start out as misfits and want

to do it

sue hmm

deb well absolutely

sue exhibitionists really

hank because if they’ve got normal lives=

sue hmm

hank =they wouldn’t want to leave them

sue hmm hmm

deb that’s TRUE, and that came out quite clearly when they

were being selected, that they all had some kind of,

axe to grind=

hank hmm yah

deb =some personal + QUEST + and this- this- this was sort

of providing an answer

hank so was this some sort of horrible experiment? let’s get
ten or twelve misfits put them together
and see if they remain misfits=

hahahahaha

or would they suddenly MELD into one coefficient individual

[hmm

light the- light the blue touch paper and

[retire and see the reactions [in the group, yes

yeah haha

take and see the reactions [in the group, yes

[hmm

I could see the point of the Castaways thing really cos
it- it could be quite an adventure couldn’t it? and you
get people- these people that do the er Duke of
Edinburgh’s Award

[and that sort of thing, it’s a similar sort of thing=

hmmmm

going and living on a, on a desert island and

[surviving

yes

and finding out how to keep yourself warm and all the
rest

of it=

hmmm

looking at that, but with Big Brother and just
finishing up in the house, I think it’s just y’know,
see how long it takes to [drive you insane haha

what do they- what do they all discuss when they’re
all together? what do they play games or something? I
mean

[what do they DO?

weren’t there tasks allotted to [them which seemed

pretty=

hmmm yeah

futile a lot of the time, they had to make up PLAYS or

[something and pretend

[yes

to be news reporters and=/

/=I think it was just to keep

them AMUSED wasn’t it? because they were=/

/=hmm yah

um otherwise they would have gone crazy I think,
because they didn’t HAVE much did they? because I know
that towards the end I noticed that er the guy who
wanted to put some pictures on the wall, and he was
mixing up coffee and stuff to do that, because they
didn’t have any [anything to amuse them,

hmm

um so they had to make their own amusements, THAT was
quite interesting actually because it takes you back to
the day when we didn’t have T V [hahaha

[yes

and [er what what do we do these days without a T V to=/

[hm

/=UM

blank our minds out
ron well I don’t know [you'd you’d sit- sit in a group
[like this
sue [hahaha
deb [hahaha
ron =wouldn’t you really and=/
hank /=listen to the news on the
wireless
ron listen to the wireless yes, I I imagine so yes
sue someone would have to learn to play the piano again,
wouldn’t they?
ron yes
sue =y'know back in the good old days they used to stand
there and=/
ron /=switch the wireless on in good time to allow
it to warm up because=
hanh hahaha
deb hahahaha
ron =this is what would happen
hank hahahaha that’s right you’d be doing that to save your
money
ron yes hahaha
ALL LAUGHING
sue well my friend’s got his clock set five minutes fast so
that when the chimes goes off he thinks “AH News” and
it gives him time to tune it in, so y'Know
hank has he got a proper wireless, an old fashioned
wireless?
sue ah no no he’s got an ordinary radio but er
hank you don’t=/
sue /=just to make sure he doesn’t miss the
programmes, cos it, I mean if it chimes on the hour and
you’re in the middle of something
hank yah
sue you’d [miss the BEGINNING
ron [a wooden cabinet and you have a dial in the
middle and you can watch the, needle going [round
deb [I remember-
hank going past Hildersen
ron past Hildersen and Brussels and Luxemburg yes
sue hmm
deb I remember religiously listening to the World Service
when we lived abroad + the World Service
[from the BBC=/
ron [yes /=PROPER news
hank the [BBC World Service yes
deb [yes
hank what’s what’s— was it Bolero the theme tune isn’t it?
ron is it? I don’t know
hank yah
deb the BBC doo do da do dun ha|haha
sue [hahahaha
deb [doo doo doo dooo
hank [da da da da da haha daa
sue [hahahaha
ron da da ha
ALL LAUGHING
hank preceding the broadcasting [yes yah
deb [yes
sue hmm ((chuckles))
hanh yah
deb hmmm hhaa yes, it’s quite emotive quite emotive
that tune for people living abroad=
ron that’s when your stuck in the colonies isn’t it?
debo because it’s sort of [y’know
ron [yah
hank where were you?
debo um well all over, but I particularly remember when we
were in Cairo + because we- I didn’t like Cairo, stuck
up on a- in a fifth floor flat, fifth floor flat=
hank hmmm
debo =and er it was a bit sort of hot and grey and, sultry
all the time and=/
hank //=you told Danielle this before she
went on holiday did you?
debo I DID yes!
sue hahaha
hanh [she’s a cheerful soul aren’t you?!
debo hahaha
ron [nothing’s changed
debo we were there for eighteen months and it rained three
times ++ one of those three times [was on my birthday
hahaha
sue [hmm
ron hahaha
ALL LAUGHING
ron with nothing but the BBC World Service to console you
on your birthday when it was raining
debo no no it wasn’t that bad, but um it was er, quite a
restrictive society especially as a child of a
foreign national, you know you just have to be a bit
sort of careful
ron and as a female too presumably
debo well that’s right
rob yes yes
debo yes
hank so where else were you? well you weren’t stationed but
your father was?
debo um we were in Singapore for three years + Malaya, when
I was very small, um that’s it’s really, we we sort of
travelled around
[from from those points=
hank [hmm hmm [yah
sue [hmm
debo =but we came back to England when I was twelve
hank hmm hmm
debo that was a bit of a shock hahaha
sue [hahaha
hank [yes, well yes yes
debo for my mum it was especially a shock because she had
always had servants when we were [abroad
hank [hmm
ron  ah yes
deb  =and relied on a cook
ron  huh hmm
ron  so um it was a bit of shock really
deb  yah
ron  only to suddenly do it all for herself yeah
hank  yah I think it’s pretty common
ron  people always seem to come back from these trips in
ne  sort of January and February don’t
hank  /=exactly, [that’s exactly right
ron  they when=/
deb  [haha
hank  ALL LAUGHING
sue  ice on the car haha
ALL  LAUGHING
ron  [yes
sue  [in the middle of January
ron  yes that’s right [yah
hank  [brrrrrrr haha
deb  that’s right the heating won’t work and
ron  yes [nothing works, and there’s- there’s a bus strike=
sue  [hmm
ron  |=or something hahaha oh dear yes
deb  yes
sue  hmm my brother-in-law was- was in the army and he used
to travel around, and he was in Cyprus for a while and,
not much rain there, and his sister used to always tell
us about how she go out and DANCE in the streets if it
rained, because it was such a
rarity and such a [pleasure
hank  [hmm [yes
deb  well in Singapore when it- during the monsoon season, I
mean we were young, we used to put our swimming
costumes on and just go out and play in the drains
sue  hmm
hank  in the drains?
deb  well they would gushing you see, I mean they wouldn’t
be DIRTY, they’d- they’d [just have these little storm
drains
hank  [yah
deb  and we’d- [we’d play out in the rain
sue  [hmm
ron  hmm
deb  warm rain it was great fun
ron  oh lovely
hank  oh yah I mean, I’ve been out in the West Indies when it
rains [and they just call it liquid sunshine
deb  [oh
sue  ha|haha
hank  = [there’s no point in getting out of the swimming pool
because, the rain that’s coming down is about the same
temperature as the pool anyway [if not warmer
sue  [yeah yeah hmmm
hank  and if you wander about in it you dry fairly quickly
anyway
sue  hmm hmm
but you were saying about having staff all the time, I remember my grandmother lived in South Africa in the late fifties and early sixties for about four years, um + she couldn't come to terms with the way the staff were treated + was it like in the far east or- [or were they well treated?]

[um er ah yeah I mean they were, they were like um part of the FAMILY really,
[they had a room in the house + and er=]

[often it was a- a husband and wife team y’know
[Kahinder and Alma=]

[yah]

as she was called, and er and I think um for a lot of these people, that was the only work they could get you know

and they- and they would start so young that it would become a way of life, and they would be lost if they didn’t have those jobs

hmm

and I know it sounds a bit sort of + y’know

[yes]

[that’s not- that’s not that much different to what it used to be like over here about a hundred years [ago=

I mean my grandmother both, well my grandmother and my mother in law were both in service=

[y’know and put in service at sort of twelve thirteen years old

but it wasn’t thought to, be a BAD a thing at the time, it was, [not

[no it was the accepted way of life

it was right wasn’t it? it was what you DID, it’s=/

weren’t a lesser person because you were in service=

[in fact in many ways to get into- in service in a decent house was you know quite a step up

yes

[hmm]

[that’s right yeah

a good job wasn’t it?

yah

for for men certainly, I mean a cook is always well respected and the the footman or the butler [or

[yah

whatever in a BIG house, [was always being, well [hmm
Transcript – Interaction four

Four participants: Two men (Dan and Ted) and two women (Jen and Mel)

*Tape commences*

jen that’s glamorous
ted its not ice-cream dan is it?
mel its not ice-cream + no [dan hasn’t used any ice-cream
jen [I think I’ve had too much wine
hahaha
dan don’t worry about the liquid in it
jen he does things so nicely doesn’t he?
mel he does doesn’t he
ted yeah but he hasn’t given you the washing up to do yet
{(raised intonation)}
ALL LAUGHING
jen er that’s the um penalty coming along is it? haha
ALL LAUGHING
ted yeah
mel haha
dan did you know Rick and Karen came round for lunch about
a couple of weeks back and Karen started doing all the
cleaning up I said “Karen leave it I’ve got a
dishwasher”
jen ha[haha
ted [haha
mel has Karen got a dishwasher?
dan I don’t know if they have or not actually, I notice she
doesn’t do the washing up when they invite me round for
a meal because she’s got Richard
ted she’s got Richard hasn’t she?
mel I can’t imagine Richard um doing the bit with a cheap
dish washer
dan oh he’s the D I Y man these days {(D I Y = handyman)}
mel D I Y?
dan yeah
mel he doesn’t need to be a D I Y [man does he?
ted [would you like some more
wine? {(offers wine to jen)}
jen no thank you, thank you
ted you're not driving are you?
jen no I’m not [+ I’m only little and it only goes [so far
hahaha
ted [oh right {yeah
mel [haha
jen [I’m only five foot and it only goes as far
as there and then haha
ted [haha it’ll be alright + dan would you like? no, drink
that one first
dan you [don’t want to mix them do you
mel [((exhaled laugh))
ted well I’m impressed [dan
jen [what is it dan? what is it?
dan [what do you reckon it is Kerry? look
Kerry, look
ted [doesn’t that look nice
jen [oh its lovely
dan um and its cream and, the liquid is brandy
jen goodness, I didn’t know you had all these talents dan
mel no no
dan I didn’t know I had either [y’know
jen [you dark horse
mel hahahaha
+
jen very nice
mel I think I’ll drink a bit more of my wine ++ hahaha
((everyone eating))
ted very nice
mel you need your glasses on when you’re eating this hahaha
ALL LAUGHTER
dan they’re not sunglasses ted you’ve supposed to wear- you
only wear sunglasses like that
ted [((mock coughing))
mel hahahaha
jen [hahahaha
dan I forgot- I forgot you don’t like brandy do you, oh
never mind ((exhaled laugh)) ((to ted))
mel hahahah
jen [cor I can taste the alcohol, lovely
ted ((coughing))
mel hahahah
dan you should have sunk in- you have sunk it into the
holes I made, a bit more but um
jen cor this is nice, cor lovely
mel hah
jen hmm
ted ((exhaled laugh)) very nice dan
gen gorgeous
ted I will, I will eat it
mel hmm
dan there’s some more brandy if you want to have it
afterwards
jen there’s a half a bottle of brandy in here isn’t there?
dan no its just- just a spoonful [in it there’s only a
spoon=
mel [hahahaha
dan =there’s only a spoon for one- poured over each one
jen hah
mel so it hasn’t been- er sorry right- it hasn’t
[evaporated
ted [yeah it was just that big LADLE that he had earlier
jen [oh right psssh hahaha ((makes pouring sound))
mel so its not even that you set light to it and the
alcohol evaporated?
dan oh no
mel oh dear
jen hello + [hello ((to dog))
dan remind me, where did the giraffe come from?

dan my mum gave it me when it’s um ++ [when she went to the W]

jen [what are you doing then?] ((to dog))
dan =one night, and they had that guy David Sheppard speak
mel oh yeah
dan and it’s actually one of his prints and he was selling them, so and then she decided she hadn’t got room for it and I said I’d I’d like it y’know
mel its wonderful I really like it
ted its very nice dan how did [you do this dan? ((eating))
mel [he’s the elephant man isn’t he? the one that does all the elephants
dan yeah ++ um you melt all the chocolate and you beat some eggs up and you mix it all together, and then you have to separate the eggs as well to get all technical [and then you=
ted [oh well that’s too complicated dan
mel hahaha
dan =and then you put it in the fridge for ages [until it sets
jen [you put me to shame haha[ha
mel [hahaha
ted I bet dan does this every day of the week
jen does he [really?
mel [hahahaha
dan ah no +++ ((everyone eating))
ted that’s why he needs a cleaner because he doesn’t have much time for anything else
jen [hahaha
mel [hahaha
+++++ ah it’s a bit potent isn’t it?
mel yeah
ted and you like brandy hahaha
dan not as much as you think I do, y’know its just that er, you just don’t like it
+++++ ((everyone eating))
ted don’t [worry
jen [ah
+++++ ((everyone eating))
ted I haven’t wasted it
dan everyone else has hardly started you know
+++++++ ((everyone eating))
mel we got Kerry from a [um a rescue base in Ntown
ted [rescue base
jen did you?
dan there’s no more of that ((to ted))
ted [well done mate
mel [and um our neighbour said oh just have a female border collie she’s y’know [she’s a mongrel, she’s- not that it mattered anyway=
jen   [yeah
mel  =to us
jen  no
mel  and we’ve had her for six years and um a few weeks ago
we were up in Yorkshire, a place that we go to quite
regularly=/
jen   /=yeah
mel  =and there was this dog, trotting along the road on a
lead that looked exactly the same as she did, and we-
and we stopped and talked to this woman to find out if
she knew anything about his um [background because er
he was just SO like her, but she=
jen  [hmm
mel  =didn’t as it happened because she had only had it six
months but she said there were quite a few of them
around in this Yorkshire village [so um so yeah so I
think she=
jen  [ah
mel  =is a true short coated border collie
jen  she looks pedigree anyway!
mel  hahaha
dan  um when I was up [in um Teesdale a few years back they=
jen  [you look pedigree + yeah ((to dog))
dan  =actually had one of those sorts like Kerry but his
ears stuck up like a collie
mel  oh yeah hah
dan  cos it was a blue merle but its ears still stuck up a
bit like Jemma’s y’know
mel  yeah like Jemma
ted  the vet says she’s a blue merle doesn’t she?
mel  yeah she is
dan  oh she- oh [she is good
mel  [she’s more characteristic
dan  the reason I knew she was a blue merle was cos I’d seen
Kerry
mel  hmm
jen  gorgeous colour[ing
dan  [they were a bit disappointed because I
said “oh you’ve got a blue merle” and they wanted to
tell me all about it, and I’d taken the wind out of
their sails because I
[said “it’s a blue merle isn’t it?”
ted  [hahaha
mel  I think this woman thought we were a bit batty didn’t
she? because I got my camera out and I took a
photograph
[ hahaha
ted  [we jumped out the [car
jen  [hmm yeah
ted  we stopped, we soared past, we turned round and come
back, and got out and walked to her and it was almost
like God what have we got coming here ha[hahaha
mel  [hahaha
jen  [hahaha
++
so you saw a little friend that day then did you? {{to dog}}
yeah so they weren’t allowed to meet [because like this one they=] [did you? ah{{to dog}}]
don’t actually like other dogs very much
[so she said “no don’t- don’t get her out”]
[because like this one they=]
did you? ah{{to dog}}
don’t they? + oh funny [how they're all different isn’t it?]
[so she said “no don’t- don’t get her out”]
don’t they? + oh funny [how they’re all different isn’t it?]
[so she said “no don’t- don’t get her out”]

she’s alright with Scamp I mean she has a little moan [at him]
[well she nips him]
yeah but=/
/=she shows him who’s boss doesn’t she?
yeah but she doesn’t actually + cause a fight does she?
with him
no
I mean he just sort of lays on the floor and says “I submit” {{silly voice}}
does he really hahaha
[oh yes {{chuckles}}]
[hahahaha]
yeah he knows who boss
{{everyone eating}}
hmm hmm
[hahahaha]
very nice
lovely and cool
{{everyone eating}}
if you clean it up enough ted it wont have to have to
go in the dishwasher
[hahahaha]
very nice indeed
goes well with celery doesn’t it
[hahahaha]
++
that was jolly good mate, your talents are well hidden aren’t they
he’s good isn’t he?
are you sure you're not doing a cookery course?
no, just used the book
just a look though hahaha
just a just a look at Rick Stein and Delia Smith’s book that’s all
[hahahaha]
++
I thought in your spare time you were doing a cookery course as well
Id like to actually now
yeah ha
haha
++ you haven’t got time at the moment
dan          [actually-
mel          [apparently you could though cos um you could learn new
             recipes every week, and we could come over [about once
             a month
             [and we
jen           could test them ((raised intonation))
mel            hmm
jen            that’s right!
mel            hahaha
jen            we wouldn’t mind would we? hahaha
mel            hahaha
              [no he’d be telling me down the phone, then you’d
ted            expect ME to do it {{to mel})
mel            well [yeah, [I’m still waiting, I’m still waiting
jen            [hahahaha
mel            well [If I had that situation where you wh-
y’know like you won the lottery something like that, I
think Id actually like to try work- working as a chef
y’know one of these sort of- I think I could actually
find pleasure out of that, y’know
jen            yeah I think you’d [be good actually dan
mel            [I could do- I could actually, I
             could quite enjoy that
jen            and actually to have a kitchen where you'd got
mel            [all the right gadgets=
             [all the [right work surfaces and everything
ted            [if you didn’t have to worry about earning
             money
dan            well the thing [is-
mel            [all these- these celebrity chefs and
             whatever, they’ve got amazing equipment
dan            well most celebrity chefs of course they don’t have to
             worry about the cost of the ingredients=/
jen            /=that’s right
dan            =um, and + of course they’ve got someone to do the
             washing up for them afterwards
ted            yeah
jen            hmm
dan            and my mum always said to me, the only + cookery advice
             that’s practical for a person at home is actually Delia
             Smith
             [because she only- she she’s actually=/
mel            [hmm
ted            /=ah
dan            =being- being a cook y’know, cos all the others being
             restaurant chefs
jen            yes
ted            hmm
mel            she also teaches you the basics as well so if [you are
             starting=
jen            [hmm
mel            =from scratch
++++++ ((everyone eating))
er it's a Rick Stein swordfish and a Delia Smith mousse, there you go

which Delia Smith is this then?

hmm?

which one is it in?

the complete cookery course

the one he bought while he was staying with us

no not that [one

no mum gave you it?

no that's um + that's um + the one with four boiled eggs on the front

dan they've both got boiled eggs on the front [of the book

[ha]

++

dan also it would be sad if I said I read cookery books in my spare time

mel [ha][haha

ted + you can see what it's like being with these two don’t you?

jen [ha][ha

mel [ha][ha

dan [ahh

++

ted ah lets talk about cookery AGAIN tonight shall we?

jen ha[haha

dan there's no point because there's now- there's nothing more being cooked for you so

ted hmm

jen that was absolutely [wonderful

dan [not even coffee y’know ((raised intonation))

ted oh dear, no we’re here again next week-end mate

oh there will be no cooking, it’ll- it’ll be drinking

ted OH NO ((raised intonation))

mel hmm we’re gonna have to have some um beer soaking up food next week-end then?

dan have a curry

ted yeah curry chips what[ever

dan [hmm

dan are you going to the beer festival? or are not into beer? ((to jen))

jen hmm ((nods))

ted that’s good fun you should go ((raised intonation))

jen yeah it IS good fun

ted it is good, good atmosphere and

jen hmm

mel they had a band on last time [we went didn’t they?

ted [yeah ((raised intonation))

dan they always have a band on Saturday, and they always have a band on Saturday night

ted hmm you should [come ((to jen))

dan [cos about three years ago, it used to be Friday nights=/
### Appendix D  Questionnaire for PhD research

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Name:</td>
<td>Telephone (optional):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Age:</td>
<td>E-mail address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Are you Single/Married/Divorced/Separated:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Approximately how long have you lived in this area:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>What country were you born and raised in:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Do you have any children:</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>a) How many sons:</td>
<td>Ages of son(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>b) How many daughters:</td>
<td>Ages of daughter(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>What is your present job title:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Do you enjoy your job:</td>
<td>No/Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>If you said no, what would you rather be doing:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>What age did you leave school:</td>
<td>a) 16  b)17  c)18  d)19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Have you attended College:</td>
<td>No/Yes  If yes, qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Have you attended University:</td>
<td>No/Yes  If yes, qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Have you lived abroad:</td>
<td>No/Yes  If yes, where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Do you have any brothers:</td>
<td>No/Yes  If yes, give ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Do you have any sisters:</td>
<td>No/Yes  If yes, give ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>In what country was your father born:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>In what country was your mother born:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>How long have you known the 3 other people in your group:</td>
<td>Years/Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>In what capacity:</td>
<td>Close Friend/Friend/Boyfriend/Girlfriend/Husband/Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>How did you feel BEFORE the conversation took place:</td>
<td>Very relaxed/Relaxed/Nervous/Slightly Nervous/Very Nervous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>How did you feel AFTER the conversation took place:</td>
<td>No/A little/Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Which person/people did you think were the MOST humorous during this conversation (you may include yourself):</td>
<td>No/A little/Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Which person/people did you think were the LEAST humorous during this conversation (you may include yourself):</td>
<td>No/A little/Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Do you think you have a sense of humour:</td>
<td>No/Not sure/Sometimes/Yes/Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Have others ever told you that you have a sense of humour:</td>
<td>No/Not sure/Sometimes/Yes/Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>How important is a sense of humour in a romantic partner:</td>
<td>Very important/Important/Not important/Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>When in a social situation do you ever use humour as follows:</td>
<td>Yes/No/Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>What do you consider are the positive aspects of humour:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>What do you consider are the negative aspects of humour:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E  Flow of topics

Tables E-1 to E-4 present the flow of topics, that is, the sequence of topics that were discussed by participants in the whole conversation in the four group interactions. The topics are numbered in succession and placed in the order in which they were discussed. Analysis revealed that the majority of topics contained humour.

Interaction one

Twenty topics were discussed in Interaction one. As shown in Table E-1, one of the main topics was the arts. For instance, participants talked about films, plays, and television (TV) programmes they had seen. They also discussed books, music, actors and acting, TV presenters, models, and celebrities that they found attractive. Other topics included keeping fit and losing weight, mutual acquaintances and relationships. In addition, participants talked about illegal drug use, glue sniffing, and a budget supermarket that had just opened in town. The conversation began with participants discussing films they had watched recently.

Table E-1

Flow of topics in whole conversation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Interaction 1 (Steve, Male, Nora and Lucy)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Films (films participants have watched)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Plays (plays participants have read and seen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Other people (people’s acting ability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Body weight (weight loss, exercise and cycling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Parallel conversations a) and b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Favourite music and bands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Sexual reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Television (alternative comedy show on TV – mimicking comedian, Ally G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Television (body shape of popular TV presenter. Participants’ body shape)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Physical attractiveness (attractive male/female actors and pop stars)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Shakespeare (his appearance and literary works)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Actors (attractive male/female actors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Films (favourite films)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Actor (Sylvester Stallone’s acting ability, and his films)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Actors and film directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Famous people/models (which famous people/models are attractive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Sexual reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Plays (plays that some interactants will be appearing in, i.e., “gun laws in America” and “interpreting the feeling that drugs induce”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Drugs and cigarettes (illegal drugs and smoking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Glue sniffing (glue sniffing and substance abuse)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Local DIY shop (hardware store), and boring instrumental music played in store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Lidl (budget supermarket selling cheap goods)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

432
Interaction two

Table E-2 lists the 18 topics that were discussed in Interaction two. Some topics occurred frequently in this conversation. For example, participants talked about consuming alcohol and also about pubs that they frequented. Other popular topics included discussing other people outside the group, and relationships. Participants also talked about property prices in their area, domestic pets such as cats and dogs, the local annual carnival, Christmas parties, unpleasant experiences when donating blood, and a discussion about travelling. Participants began the conversation by discussing what they did the previous weekend.

Table E-2

Flow of topics in whole conversation

Group Interaction two (Grant, Stan, Lisa, and Jill)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic discussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The weekend (what they did at the weekend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Drunken customer (drunken customer at hotel where Jill works)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Other person (discussing someone they all know)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Property (house prices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Pub (pub in Norway, next to hotel where Grant stays when he works away)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Other people (Grant’s friend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Domestic animal (Jill’s cat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Domestic animals (cats and dogs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Location (place where Stan and Jill’s friend live)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Pub (Stan’s local pub, web pages, gossiping)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Pubs (pubs in Jtown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Carnival (carnival in Jtown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Pubs (going out in Jtown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Christmas parties and pubs (in Jtown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Other people (people Jill and Grant know)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Blood donation (experience of giving blood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Aeroplanes (frightening aeroplane journeys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Aeroplanes (accidents)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interaction three

Table E-3 lists the twenty two topics that were discussed in Interaction three. Topics of conversation in this interaction focused on a recent “fly-on-the-wall” television programme, which led onto a discussion about the days when there was no television and people listened to the wireless. Deb talked about her childhood in Egypt and this led onto a discussion about the weather, her father’s job as a foreign correspondent for the BBC, and about servants and butlers. Other topics included mobile telephones, Hank’s car, the weekly shopping at the supermarket, shopping on the internet, and drinking alcohol. Participants also discussed family, children and relationships.

Table E-3

Flow of topics in whole conversation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Interaction three (Ron, Hank, Deb and Sue)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. TV (fly on the wall TV series called “Big Brother”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Radio (listening to the wireless before TV was invented)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Radio (BBC World Service and when Deb lived in Cairo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Weather (rain in hot countries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Servants in foreign countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Butlers and alcohol (butling and alcohol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Returning to England (change in climate and lifestyle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. BBC correspondent (Deb’s father’s job as foreign correspondent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Mobile telephones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Hank’s car tyres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Mobile telephones (children and mobile phones, text messaging)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Shopping on the internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Supermarket (weekly shopping at supermarket)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Children (TV in children’s bedrooms and wanting latest technology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Alcohol (other people wasting wine. Participants’ drinking habits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Cakes (chocolate éclairs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Tape recorder (awareness of tape recorder)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Sign language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Walkie talkie (children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Cordless ‘phone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interaction four

Table E-4 lists the topics of conversation discussed in Interaction four. Twenty three topics were discussed. The dinner, consisting of swordfish for the main course followed by chocolate and brandy pudding, was the main topic of conversation and was mentioned nine times during the course of the interaction. Participants repeatedly complimented Dan on his cooking ability and how much they enjoyed the meal. Throughout the course of the interaction, food (fish, sugar, cornflakes) and drink (alcohol, coffee, tea) were popular topics that stimulated further conversation. Mel and Ted brought their two dogs with them and they were the subject of conversation on various occasions. Other topics discussed were washing up after the dinner, the two beer festivals that Mel, Ted and Dan attend every year, eating and enjoying fish especially when on holiday, dancing, drinking alcohol, relationships, football, holidays in Tenerife, and the Derbyshire mountains in England.

Table E-4

Flow of topics in whole conversation

Group Interaction four (Dan, Ted, Jen, and Mel)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic discussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The dinner (the pudding, alcohol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Picture on wall (depicting a giraffe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The dinner (how to make the pudding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Domestic animals (dogs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The dinner (the pudding, cookery courses and cooking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Beer Festivals (in Btown and Ctown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The dinner (general discussion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Fish (different kinds of fish to eat and eating fish when on holiday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Placemats (on the dinner table)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Dancing (Ceroc dancing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The dinner (cooking the dinner and drinking alcohol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Alcohol (drinking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Other person (participant’s niece and drinking alcohol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Food (the sugar bowl and sugar on food)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. TV advertisements (Kellogg’s cornflakes, beer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Holidays (Tenerife)</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Alcohol (wine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Holidays (Tenerife, volcano)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Mountain climbing (climbing mountains in England)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Domestic animals (the dog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Washing up (the dishwasher)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>