

**Banter, masculinities and Rugby Union: Exploring the relationship between masculinity and humour in men’s lived realities of gender in a Northern rugby club**

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# Abstract

The term ‘banter’ refers to a specific type of jocular interaction that is playful in nature, but characterised by it’s often impolite, offensive, and abusive tone. An interactive practice that permeates many spheres of the social world, it is particularly prevalent within male-dominated sporting arenas. Indeed, banter is often an inevitable part of masculine rugby settings, and the people and interactions that help to construct them. Drawing on data from a three-year ethnographic study of a Northern Rugby Club, this thesis is concerned with how men experience and negotiate the gendered structures which underpin such sporting sites. In doing so, it provides an empirical examination of the ways in which banter is used to engage with hegemonic masculinities in practice. Moving beyond current conceptions of ‘the rugby lad’ to  introduce the idea of ‘mischievous masculinities’, the thesis offers a nuanced way of theorising the relationship between masculinity and humour that enables greater flexibility in our understanding how men construct, deconstruct and negotiate the boundaries of their gendered identities. Indeed, by examining how banter is used within contemporary sporting communities, we can begin to be more productively account for, and problematize, the agency and diversity that characterises lived experiences of hegemonic masculinity.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## Introduction

This thesis is based upon an ethnographic approach to data collection in order to explore how banter operates as a catalyst in conceptualisations of masculinity and the role banter plays in mens’ lived experiences of dominant gender structures, specifically hegemonic masculinity. For this research I became part of the everyday fabric of a Rugby Union club’s life. I attended the club two to three times per week during the season, in doing so I attempted to learn and understand the norms and values of this different cultural perspective. Utilising an ethnographic approach I undertook observations over a three year period. Within this time I conducted thirty two individual interviews with men, ninety four group interviews and logged three hundred and seventy five research diary entries.

## Background

I should probably admit early on that I enjoy banter and have always been curious with regards to what this ‘thing’ banter is. This fascination likely stemmed from my childhood, as at ten years old I started visiting my local Rugby Union club with my family. My brother who is five years younger than me played, my Dad coached and my Mum helped behind the scenes (usually fund policing post-match hot dog consumption). I spent most of my time exploring the club and chatting to people. I believe that this is where I first discovered banter and where my interest developed. I grew up thinking that banter was normal and that this was a natural and important part of rugby identity and club life. It was not until later, when I was undertaking a Masters, that I reflected on my formative experiences of banter. The postgraduate dissertation concluded that banter was a significant interactional tool which linked closely to identity, however I found this to be an under researched area. This finding became the catalyst for my PhD proposal and subsequent thesis.

Banter can be understood to be a specific type of communicative practice involving back and forth interaction which is often competitive in nature, a jocular performance, centring upon the idea of people ‘taking the piss’ out of one another (Plester and Sayers, 2007, Hay, 1994). Typically within popular culture banter is framed to be something fun and friendly, based on shared understandings and repetition of stories. It has become prominent within our language and culture and is part of the everyday in terms of interactions, relationships, consumption and the media. It is important to note that banter has strong associations with other terms such as humour, joking, teasing, mocking and ridicule. However, banter is distinct and though related to such terms, stands apart from them in many ways which will be clarified within the literature review chapter. Conceptualisations of banter have been informed by research on humour more broadly, with continual referencing of banter in terms of fulfilling social functions. The most commonly cited functions referenced centre upon notions of control, cohesion and conflict (Lynch, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007, Fine and De Soucey, 2005). Whilst thinking about the functionality of banter is valuable, it is important to recognise the deficiencies with such theorisations, acknowledging that banter is a unique and distinct interactive practice which warrants examination in its own right. A key objective of this thesis will be to explore the complexity of banter, ensuring that it is not treated as a homogenous practice or simply as a tool within interactions. Banter will be framed as a lever within interactions, understood as being a dynamic part of everyday interactions and communication. Additionally little emphasis is currently given to the agency or creativity of the social actors implementing banter; instead the focus is commonly placed upon the effect, viewing social actors as passive, omitting details of the practices and processes associated with banter. This thesis will aim to address these issues and will think carefully regarding the choices men are able to make and the limitations of these when implementing banter.

Within this thesis I am supporting the argument that banter is utilised as an everyday tool for communication and as a performance device in social interaction. It enables those who utilise it to express themselves, perform particular identities and form relationships, whilst simultaneously expressing opinions. More specifically this thesis will consider how banter connects with other themes and explore how these intersections can advance thinking in well-established fields. This thesis will explore the intersections between banter and masculinity, in doing so expanding work primarily within the fields of masculinity and gender. Banter has been described in previous work as a form of language which expresses normative views of masculinity and as a way of ‘policing’ heterosexual norms (Kiesling, 2005). Building on such work, the thesis will critically reflect on the use of banter as a way for men to engage with masculinities, particularly whether banterous interactions and the language associated with it limits the expression of masculinity, and hinders the potential for men to identify with multiple masculinities.

It is also important to note how masculinity will be framed within this thesis, as it is a cornerstone of my research. The concept of hegemonic masculinity has become widely utilised and is commonly drawn upon in research on masculinities (Howson, 2006; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). This conceptualisation will be a central to my thinking on masculinity, especially given the prominence of such theorising within literature on men and sport (Kidd, 2013; Dempster, 2009; Aitchison-Carmichael, 2007; Messner and Sabo, 1990). Though this theorising has garnered critiques, the notion of hegemony has, as stated by Hearn (2004: 53) “provided a way to think about the overarching ideologies at the level of everyday, taken for granted ideas and practice performed ‘with consent’ and ‘without coercion”. My research will aim to explore the ways in which hegemonic masculinity as a configuration of gender practice is experienced by men in reality (Connell, 1995). Further to this my research will expand new thinking within masculinity scholarship and explore the opportunities men have for resistance to the dominant forms of masculinity, echoing a growing body of research which documents limitations and unrest with regards to theorising on hegemonic theorising (Anderson, 2012; Anderson and McGuire, 2010; McKay et al, 2000).

A further important theme within this thesis is sport. The literature on sport places emphasis upon exploring the links between sport and gendered identities (Aitchison-Carmichael, 2007; McKay et al., 2000; Messner and Sabo, 1990). Much of the work, stemming from Sociology, highlights that sporting activities are intrinsic to conceptualisations of masculinity and that sport provides a site in which young boys are socialized to adopt and value particular characteristics and qualities, such as that of the ‘lad’ (Pringle, 2008; McKay et al., 2000; Salisbury and Jackson, 1996; Reiss, 1994). These ideas are echoed throughout the literature; with Salisbury and Jackson amongst others, asserting that participation in sport is a ‘masculinising process’ (1996:205; Robinson, 2008; Kimmel, 2006). As previously noted Rugby Union is a sport where bodies, and in particular, muscularity and physical strength, power and aggression are extremely prominent, in this way rugby is deemed to be ‘quintessentially’ masculine (Campenhout and Hoven, 2014; Muir and Seitz, 2004; Light and Kirk, 2000; Schacht, 1996:551). These ideas will provide a contextual platform for my research, however emphasis will be placed upon exploring what Wellard (2002:238) refers to as the ‘whole package’ of sport. This allows for the broader aspects of involvement in sports to be included, particularly encompassing those who do not play sport, rather engage in other ways such as spectating. My research expands upon such work and will analyse the ways that the interactional practice of banter as an aspect of sport influences understandings of masculinity.

Close reading of the literature from across the fields of sport, gender, masculinity, identity, humour and banter of which the most pertinent aspects have been outlined here, allowed me to establish the research objectives of this thesis. These have been designed to expand and in some cases critique existing work. Most notably the central aim of this thesis is to provide a Sociological account of banter and through intersecting this with the theme of masculinity, demonstrate the potential advances for other fields within the social sciences. Below are the research questions which will be addressed throughout the analytical stages of the research and will be discussed in greater detail within chapter three.

1. What are the processes and conditions required for banter to operate?
2. How is sports’ team banter performed by individuals?
3. What is the role of banter in notions of the rugby lad?
4. What is the link between banter and masculinity/femininity?
5. To what extent does banter act as a tool to reinforce/challenge dominant masculine structures at the rugby club?
6. How does banter influence men’s experiences of dominant masculine structures and norms at the rugby club?

## Rugby Union and the Robins

Rugby Union is a contact team sport originating in England during the first half of the nineteenth century. The game involves running with the ball in hand and requires two opposing teams comprised of fifteen players, with the aim of scoring points against each other through either running the ball over the line at the end of the pitch, or by kicking the ball through the posts. It is a sport which requires a high level of physicality whereby the players run with the ball and tackle each other to gain advantage and possession. Rugby Union has specific sociocultural connotations with class and is often described as being a middle class pursuit, with Rugby League developed after Union framed as an alternative working class sport.

Since its early days Rugby Union has spread around the world, aided by colonization during which time the sport was absorbed by many of the countries associated with the British Empire. It has now become globalised with a presence on a variety of levels: internationally, nationally and locally and is televised to countries around the world. The sport became professional in the United Kingdom in 1995 and since then has taken up a privileged sociocultural position which means it often features highly within sports media.

Rugby Union has also been a prominent feature of the British education system, being part of the national curriculum and taught to boys at key stage three in secondary schools (Department for Education, 2013). As part of the legacy of the 2003 World Cup, which England won, the RFU made a concerted effort to make rugby accessible for all and since then there has been increased funding and emphasis upon women’s rugby, with this being echoed within schools where girls are being taught touch rugby. Rugby Union is now also entering into primary schools, with national initiatives designed to develop players and encourage engagement from a young age. For the most part rugby is popular in leisure sites, continuing to gain popularity, however notably remains a sport engrained within imaginations of middle class men.

Academic work has identified sport to be an important contributor to male identity construction, with rugby being a site in which heterosexuality and orthodox forms of masculinity dominate (Muir and Seitz, 2004; Light and Kirk, 2000; Messner, 1992; Curry, 1991). However Rugby Union is not only a game; it also creates subcultures and involves ritualised performances which have become synonymous with masculinity (Anderson and Maguire, 2009; Pringle and Markula, 2005; Muir and Seitz, 2004). The rituals associated with rugby still hold some mystique within society, with details of initiations often being kept secret or viewed to be ‘extreme’ when leaked. Often these stories and performances amplify masculine attributes and arguably produce gender myths and identities (Anderson and Maguire, 2009). Significantly though the accompanying rituals can be seen to maintain group cohesiveness and collective consciousness as there is an element of exclusivity attached. Both the act of playing rugby and the associated rituals are important to consider, especially given the increasing amount of people who view the sport and participate within the culture more widely. The diversification and acculturation of this sport requires further attention.

To this end, this thesis is directed towards ‘The Robins’. The Robins are a Rugby Union club which has been established since the 1930’s. Mostly known for their first team which comprises of men aged between eighteen and forty, the club also has a number of other teams playing competitively at a range of age and ability levels. Further to this, there is a women’s netball team which is affiliated to the club and a young girls’ rugby team which was developed during my time in the field. The Robins club is located just outside of the city and has three pitches and a club house. The club house is not only a space for players, but also an important hub for members and the rugby community. The club is open for training and socialising on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, with first/second team matches being held on Saturdays. On match days the bar and ‘hatch’ (café type service) are open, with the bar open till late. Notably most of the operational aspects of the club are run by volunteers which is unusual for a team at this level and shows the dedication of its members. High levels of engagement from the community is perhaps explained by the fact that the city in which the research is based does not have a higher ranking or premiership team, this makes it an interesting site to study as the audience is larger than counterpart teams in other cities, so provides greater scope for the research.

## Structure of the thesis

The next chapter will present a critical discussion of dominant theories and concepts which will comprise the foundations of the argument presented within the thesis, specifically men in sporting sites. This review will document the existing literature which will underpin this thesis drawing from the fields of banter, gender, masculinity, identity, performance, space and sport. The discussion within this chapter will not only explore the limitations of existing theories and concepts, it will also begin to map out new intersections which expand current knowledge as well as developing new areas of research. Intersections between banter and other fields will be established with emphasis placed upon how banter can be linked to masculinity theorising.

Chapter three will outline the design of the study and the methods chosen to conduct the research. The ethnographic approach adopted will be explained and justified including the decision to utilise participant observations, interviews and a research diary to undertake the research as well as the analytical process to extract data. The chapter will introduce the research setting and describe the participants and location, providing contextual information. Discussion towards the final stages of the chapter will explore the practicalities and experiences of conducting the research. Within these sections there will be emphasis placed upon the role of performance within research, focussing on how both researcher and participant performances of gender influence the research process. This discussion aims to expand existing debates and engage with some of the methodological considerations surrounding researching men and masculinities. Finally, this chapter will outline the specific ethical concerns of the research and indicate how these were negotiated and managed before, during and after fieldwork.

The next four chapters provide analytical insights into the data. Chapter four titled ‘conceptualising banter sociologically’ moves beyond framing banter in terms of its functionality and challenges the idea of banter is a homogenous practice. The chapter describes the processes of banter and the elements or contexts within interactions required for banter to occur. Discussion here will be directed towards how we can outline and understand the parameters of banter within the specific context of Rugby Union, in doing so attempting to provide a sociological explanation for banter. The central argument conveyed in this chapter will be that banter is a tool or a vehicle which the men implement in order to enable both successful interactions and belonging within the rugby spaces, as well as to manage performances of masculinity.

Chapter five explores the link between banter and masculinity in more detail. The data is utilised to examine the extent to which existing theorising on masculinities remain useful to understanding men’s everyday lives, particularly theorising on hegemonic masculinity. This chapter also begins to map out potential tensions of existing dominant theorising when applied to the Robins, indicating limitations which will be further explored in the following chapter. The overarching focus of this chapter is to explore the ways in which banter acts as a tool enabling the men to undertake gender work within the rugby site in order to continually uphold their sense of masculine identities (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Chapter six titled expands on the ideas developed in the previous chapter in which banter was deemed a significant mechanism, situated alongside bodily performances, in the continued dominance of hegemonic masculinity. Within this chapter I examine how hegemonic masculinity is realised in practice by the Robins, in doing so extending and critiquing Connell’s theoretical model. Here I argue that men who have been historically part of the hegemonic model, even perceived as pillars of it, are able to show resistance to it. This chapter shows that whilst the concept of hegemonic masculinity is still the culturally dominant ideal and remains prominent within the rugby club site, it does not necessarily take into consideration the lived realities of men particularly in relation to the expression of emotion or transitions through the lifecourse.

Chapter seven titled ‘”I probably shouldn’t say this should I...but…”Introducing mischievous masculinities’ outlines a resolution to the limitations of existing dominant theorising outlined in the previous chapters. This chapter introduces and explores the notion of mischievous masculinity in depth, offering this as a conceptual tool which encapsulates the nuances of men’s lived experiences and diverse performances of masculinity. The overarching goal of this chapter is to position mischievous masculinity within current theorising and to indicate the ways that mischievous masculinity furthers thinking within the field, in doing so highlighting its importance for future studies.

The final chapter will review the central argument of the thesis and discuss the contribution of my findings to various fields within Sociological studies. Additionally this chapter will acknowledge possible limitations of my research, whilst arguing that these do not preclude findings. The chapter will also identify future directions for research; outlining further ways that these research outcomes could usefully intersect with other themes and fields to expand existing knowledge. Overall this thesis will argue that through considering how banter is utilised within the Robins site we can work towards theorising which productively accounts for, and problematizes, the agency and diversity that characterises lived experiences of hegemonic masculinity.

# Chapter Two: Literature review

## Introduction

This literature review will introduce banter into the sociological context and trace how this emergent field of study links to existing theories and perspectives. A central concern of this thesis is to understand men’s lived experiences of hegemonic masculinity and in doing so extend this theory into new directions. This chapter provides the theoretical and conceptual foundations for undertaking this research and will be split into two parts. The first section of the review will outline the central themes of the research, namely, masculinities and hegemonic masculinity, sport, the rugby lad and humour and teasing. These subsections will outline what the thesis is about and highlight some of the problems with existing conceptualisations and theories, specifically hegemonic masculinity, the rugby lad and broad understandings of humour. This initial section will close with a discussion of banter, signposting the existing work within this field. This is an area which has received little attention within Sociology and has rarely been connected to the aforementioned themes. The introduction and intersection of banter with hegemonic masculinity and the rugby lad will be explored through the course of the thesis and presented as a way to expand current understandings and extend existing concepts.

The second part of the literature review will provide further detail into how the relationship between banter, hegemonic masculinity and the rugby lad will be explored. This section will identify the additional fields of study which will be useful to intersect with these initial themes when examining how banter operates in reality. Within this section the fields of gender, language, performance, transition, age and emotion will be introduced as a way of expanding sociological understandings of banter. These are themes which have not collectively been intersected with hegemonic masculinity in previous research. The intersections of these themes will be expanded upon throughout the thesis and will provide potential advancements to existing theorisations, as well as some resolutions to the limitations outlined within section one.

# Part one: Identifying the central concerns of the thesis

## Men and Masculinity

This section will outline the theories on men and masculinities which will act as the foundation for my argument. Hegemonic theorising will underpin the thesis, introduced here and discussed within the context of sporting masculinities and Rugby Union. Once this theory has been summarised within the context of my research this section will progress to engage with theories of the rugby lad, signposting the ways that hegemonic masculinity theorising informs this concept.

### Hegemonic masculinity theorising and its critiques

Theorising on hegemonic masculinity dominates much of the literature on men and masculinity. This is also a prominent theory in research on men and sport. It is for these reasons that such theorising will inform debates within the analysis. My research will aim to explore the ways in which hegemonic masculinity as a configuration of gender practice is experienced by men in reality (Connell, 1995). It is therefore important to provide a discussion of the ways in which this theory has developed and been adopted within research, as well as acknowledging the criticisms and alternatives which have emerged.

Theorising of hegemonic masculinity is a relatively recent advancement within studies of gender and masculinity, with many advocating that the concept proves as ‘slippery’ to understand as that of masculinity itself (Howson, 2006; Connell, 2005; Donaldson, 1993). The idea builds upon the work and Marxian perspectives of Gramsci on hegemony, which he discusses in relation to class (Gramsci, 2005, Connell, 2005). Within this work Gramsci (2005) conceptualises hegemony as being significant to understanding the maintenance of power in society, as well as the formation of dominant social groups and structures. Raewyn Connell supports this, arguing that hegemony is ‘the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life’ (2005:77). Notably, in much of the literature which discusses Gramscian perspectives of hegemony, such as that by Connell, emphasis is placed upon persuasion of dominant cultural ideas through the media and other social institutions, such as the sporting sites at the centre of my research, resulting in ideologies becoming normalised (Donaldson, 1993; Demetriou, 2001; Connell, 2005).

The term hegemonic masculinity became the starting point for which in Sociology has been credited to the emergent behavioural and identity changes seen amongst boys after the Second World War (Howson, 2006). Described by Connell (2005:831) to be a ‘synthesis’ of many other ideas, particularly stemming from frustrations with the ‘male sex role’ model prominent in the literature on gender in the 1970’s, Connell sought to develop this idea further. Male sex role theorisations asserted that specific traits, attitudes and behaviours acted to validate an individual’s sex as male (Pleck, 1987). Such work was problematic for a number of reasons, notably the positivist connotations; however the prominence of the work within academia meant that ‘normative’ ideas of identity according to sex became mainstream. Connell’s work provided a critique of these narratives, offering an alternative to previous theorising, placing emphasis upon issues which had been overlooked, such as power (Moller, 2007; Connell 2005, 1987). The progressive nature of Connell’s work, and its significance as a conceptual tool to further explore masculinity and the gender order were acknowledged as key strengths, even by those most critical of hegemonic masculinity conceptualisations (Moller, 2007; Hearn, 2004; Demetriou, 2001).

Regardless of the existing critiques, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has now become widely utilised and is commonly drawn upon in research on masculinities (Howson, 2006; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). This extensive usage has meant that the term itself has become somewhat diluted in recent years, with definitions altering according to discipline and author. Having said this, consensus remains that the term is conceptualised in relation to Connell’s initial theorising, referring to ‘the pattern of practice that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue’ (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005:832). Early theorising was based on ideas of power, dominance and difference, noting that male power had been achieved through “culture, institutions and persuasion” (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005:832; Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity continues to be utilised as a theoretical tool to explore the construction and maintenance of the gender order, with Howson arguing that hegemonic masculinity took “control of the gender order” (2006:3). The links between hegemonic masculinity and gender more broadly have been widely discussed, with writers suggesting that hegemonic masculinity theorising provided a new way of approaching gender relations (Johansson and Ottemo, 2015).

Jeff Hearn (2004) identifies the limitations of hegemonic masculinity theorising though acknowledges that it remains a significant tool to adopt in the study of gender, asserting that the concept helps us to understand the ways in which men dominate both women, and other men (Moller, 2007). Further to this, Howson (2006) argues that hegemonic masculinity is an important concept for Sociologists, as it allows us to see the “axiomatic position that hegemonic masculinity has assumed” as well as enabling a critique of the ‘mechanisms’ of masculinity itself (2006:3). The idea of hegemonic masculinity acting as a tool to explore masculinity is expressed in Connell’s work, which intersects hegemonic masculinity with themes which had not been done so in masculinity studies previously, in doing so opening up the potential for advancing understandings of masculinity and gender relations (Moller, 2007). However, though the theory of hegemonic masculinity is extremely significant to masculinity scholarship and has been influential to understanding masculinities, it is not infallible and a critical examination of some of the foundations of the theory uncover faults which will be outlined in the following sections and explored through the course of the thesis.

Jewkes et al. (2015) in their recent work exploring masculinity within a South African and Swedish context have examined the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is experienced by men and other groups. Within this work the breadth and scope of hegemonic masculinity is discussed, with the acknowledgement that this theorising remains significant to understanding gender relations. A key point of discussion from this research is the idea of ‘choice’ which the authors acknowledge and expand upon (Jewkes et al., 2015). Building on Connell’s theorising and exploring this within a contemporary and geographically diverse context, this research argues that men have ‘choice’ as to whether they occupy oppressive positions with regards to women and other marginalized men (Jewkes et al., 2015; Connell, 2005). This idea of a critical consciousness amongst men and the opportunity for resistance to the dominant forms of masculinity which underpin particular spheres is interesting, echoing a growing body of research which documents limitations and unrest with regards to hegemonic theorising (McKay et al., 2000).

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) in their writing on rethinking the concept of hegemonic masculinity assert that masculinities are subject to change and that hegemonic masculinity theory is sufficiently robust in order to be able to remodel itself and continue to be relevant. However, in more recent writing there have been critiques of hegemonic masculinity, with alternative ways of theorising men within the wider context of gender proposed. McKay et al (2000:7) acknowledge that experiences of men within sports settings are not ‘uniform’. They suggested the potential for resistance to forms of hegemonic masculinity and that this warrants further exploration. Ian Wellard (2009, 2002) provides further insight into this notion of resistance and uniformity in his work on ‘exclusive’ masculinity. Drawing on ethnographic observations in a variety of sporting contexts Wellard (2009, 2002) argues that there are both exclusive and expected forms of masculinity. Whilst he is to some extent aligning with hegemonic theorising, his work is distinctly different in the way that he acknowledges other forms of masculinity and begins to explore notions of resistance and agency (Wellard, 2009, 2002). Wellard (2009) suggests that men have to work in order to ‘fit in’ with dominant forms of masculinity in sporting spaces. In doing so there is the implication that this is a conscious decision and that those men therefore have the potential to deviate or make different choices with regards to how they situate themselves within the gender order.

Cara Carmichael Aitchison (2007: 17) argues that sport can be seen to be a sphere in which the possibility of ‘resistance, contestation and transgression of hegemonic gender and sexual power relations’ exists. This is based on the premise that in recent years sport has diversified and that identities previously marginalised in sport have become more popular. She talks about the introduction of the gay games, asserting that this shows a major turnaround in the way that sport is conceptualised and understood in society (Carmichael, 2007). This growing narrative advocating inclusivity within sport has been most famously discussed by Eric Anderson who proposes the theory of ‘inclusive masculinity’. Drawing on work with UK University men’s sports teams, including Rugby Union, Anderson and McGuire (2010) propose that the principles of hegemonic masculinity are no longer pervasive, rather there are other ways of explaining men’s practices which are more productive. Anderson and McGuire (2010) assert that gendered identity or sexuality is no longer deemed to be important within sporting spheres and groups, rather the ability to play sport to a high level is imperative to acceptance and inclusion. A key proponent of this work is to argue against the idea that sport remains a site in which homophobia is encountered, in doing so indicating that construction of masculinities in this sphere are becoming more diverse and moving away from dominant hegemonic presuppositions (Anderson and McGuire, 2010). Anderson and McGuire (2010) discuss the ways in which many of the men challenged the language which was utilised by some team members and highlights this as a significant way that masculinity was being tested. Whilst this contrasts with other research, such as that of Barrett (2008) on how language is integral to ‘policing’ masculinity in the US Navy, what these texts do when understood together is highlight the significance in thinking further regarding the tools men adopt to either disrupt or align with hegemonic masculinity in sporting spaces.

Considering all of the points from this section together it is interesting to reflect on where we are with regards to the value and relevance of the hegemonic model in understanding men’s practices and how this theorisation will be implemented throughout the thesis. My own understanding of hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical lens to look at the relationships and power dynamics which inform interactions in men’s everyday lives will act as a foundation for my argument. I want to explore the extent to which the concept of hegemonic masculinity aligns with the practices of men in the research site, examining the ways in which men actively engage with, or have consciousness of, gendered power structures via the communicative tool of banter. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005:830) argue that hegemonic masculinity must be ‘reformulated’ in contemporary terms, in doing so themselves acknowledging that previous theorisations may no longer be relevant in modern contexts. Though they are arguing for reformulation of the concept, the argument and examples presented within this section show that a reformulation of the concept is potentially problematic. It is clear from the critiques outlined within this section that there is potential for new theorisations to emerge. This will be a central aim of this thesis. Having said this, it is important to be cautious when making such assertions, as there are those thinkers who assert that there is no ‘beyond hegemony’ and that through dismantling existing hierarchies and exclusions within society that there is an inevitability regarding the construction of new ones (Laclau and Mouffe, 2005).

### Sporting Masculinities

As has been demonstrated sport is a significant site to study, as it is a sphere in which masculinities and femininities are constructed (Kidd, 2013; Wellard, 2009; Light and Kirk, 2000; McKay et al., 2000). Sporting sites have become tied to particular notions of gendered identities, arguably playing a significant role in understandings and theorising of gender and gender relations in society (Dempster, 2009; McKay et al., 2000; Horrocks, 1995; Messner and Sabo, 1990). Wellard argues that ‘sport is not only a predictor of gender identity, sport also provides and arena to learn about social values, such as gender behaviour, competitiveness, physicality and sexuality’ (2002:240). Here Wellard effectively demonstrates the prominence of sport in society and the far reaching implications this has upon socio-cultural norms and values.

Within the literature on sport emphasis has been placed upon exploring the links between sport and gendered identities (McKay et al., 2000; Messner and Sabo, 1990). Much of the work, stemming from Sociology, highlights that sporting activities are integral to conceptualisations of masculinity and that sport provides a site in which young boys are socialized to adopt and value particular characteristics and qualities, such as that of the ‘lad’ (McKay et al., 2000; Salisbury and Jackson, 1996; Reiss, 1994). These ideas are echoed throughout the literature; with Salisbury and Jackson amongst others, asserting that participation in sport is a ‘masculinising process’ (1996:205; Kimmel, 2006; Robinson, 2008). This is further supported by Schacht who argues that ‘sport is often viewed as femininity’s antithesis’ (1996:550), in doing so, demonstrating the idea that sport acts as a way for masculinity to be constructed in opposition to femininity. In their famous work titled *Sport, Men and the Gender Order,* Messner and Sabo (1990)were amongst the first writers to place analysis of men’s experiences in sport at the centre of research. Wellard (2009) explores these ideas in his work, stating that the popular understanding of a sportsman is one including athleticism, strength, virility and attractiveness. These ideas and characteristics persist within both research on men and portrayals of men in sport within the media, reflecting the dominance of these views within society. The infiltration of such ideas into the everyday lives and imaginations of individuals and groups has led to the construction and maintenance of an idealised form of masculine behaviour which Wellard (2009) argues encompasses action and heroic deeds. Here, links can be made to sport and theorisations of hegemonic masculinities outlined above.

Connell famously asserted when writing on hegemonic masculinity that particular cultural dynamics enable men to sustain dominant positions within society, further describing sport as the ‘embodiment’ of hegemonic masculinity (1995: 54; 2005). These ideas have been extremely significant to theorising of sport and through engaging with such conceptualisations alongside other research, it becomes clear that sport must be understood to be a site in which the patterns of practices enable the domination of men over other groups (Kidd, 2013; Dempster, 2009; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, Light & Kirk, 2000). Wellard (2009) in his work on tennis and health clubs suggests that there are certain expectations of gender within sporting spheres and that practices and structures within sporting institutions reinforce heteronormativity. This notion that sport supports heteronormative ideals has been addressed in research across a variety of sporting sites, with a continual pattern emerging which suggests that sport fosters heterosexual norms and values (Dempster, 2009; Renold, 2004; Connell, 2002). Links can be made here to the notion of the lad, which will be discussed below.

It is also interesting to consider the significance of setting in the construction of masculinities and the way that the spaces in which sports are played facilitate specific behaviours. As previously noted sport is deemed to be a site which encourages specific heterosexual performances of masculinities, centring on advocating qualities such as competition, strength and control, most notably, portraying men as superior to women (Majors, 2008; Kimmel, 2006; Connell, 2005; Messner and Sabo, 1990). Previous research on sporting sites has argued that the social practices associated with sports are of equal significance to the physical activities themselves, with work focusing on locker rooms, club houses, sports team tours and ‘sporting communities’ (Anderson and McGuire, 2010; Jenkins, 2004; Curry, 2001; Wheaton, 2000). Writers such as Loic Wacquant have argued that those who play sport become ‘embedded in a social setting’, supporting the idea that sporting activities are significant to social interaction whilst simultaneously suggesting that sporting practices occur in particular locations (Jenkins, 2004; Wacquant, 1995:65). Masculine sporting culture within particular spaces is interesting to study, as this can help to understand how men experience gender in these everyday spaces.

Tim Curry (1991) writes about men’s experiences of gender in the everyday setting of the sports locker room. Drawing on his research with male university athletes, Curry (1991: 133) asserts that ‘a general rule of male peer groups is that you can say/ do some things with your peers that would not be appropriate elsewhere.’ This quote exemplifies the significance and influence of spaces to construction and performances of masculinities. This is an argument which has been echoed in a number of previous research projects, in which men’s performances are seen to be bounded to particular spaces (Barrett, 2008; Gough and Edwards, 1998; Curry, 1991). The work by Gough and Edwards (1998) highlights the relevance of place to performance. In this research participants were observed in an alcoholic drinking context, thought by the men to be a ‘typical’ male environment (Gough and Edwards, 1998). The participants acknowledged that their behaviour, particularly the topics of discussion and method of communication, revolving around banter, would not be appropriate elsewhere (Gough and Edwards, 1998). Such research is useful in highlighting that there are perceived boundaries to performances of masculinity and that space dictates whether interactions and behaviours are deemed to be appropriate or inappropriate. It is interesting to further explore the limits of these situational contexts and to think critically regarding the construction of masculinities within specific sporting sites such as Rugby Union.

### Rugby Union

Examining existing research, it becomes clear that sport is a site which can create social divisions, particularly amongst groups of men. Interestingly though there are deemed to be variations on the extent to which these divisions are exacerbated according to the type of sport. Arguably there are certain sports which are have stronger links to dominant forms of masculinity than others, these are those which Bryson refers to as ‘flag carriers’ of hegemonic masculinity (1990:74). These sports include ones where emphasis is placed upon the male body and physicality, including Rugby Union, Rugby League and Boxing. Such ideas have been echoed in more recent work, including Steve Dempster’s (2009) research exploring young men’s perceptions of sport, in which rugby was thought to be more masculine than football. Bodies are undoubtedly significant in theorising on sport and were prominent in the narratives of the men in Dempster’s study, in which bodies displaying muscularity and athleticism were viewed as markers of masculinity and laddishness (Dempster, 2009; Swain, 2004).

As previously noted Rugby Union is a sport where bodies, and in particular, muscularity and physical strength, power and aggression are extremely prominent, in this way rugby is deemed to be ‘quintessentially’ masculine (Campenhout and Hoven, 2014; Light and Kirk, 2000; Schacht, 1996:551). The practices of playing rugby itself, particularly the associated rituals, have strong masculine connotations, arguably contributing to the masculine ideals which underpin notions of hegemonic masculinity (Campenhout and Hoven, 2014; Light and Kirk, 2000; Schacht, 1996). Significantly, Rugby Union is a sport in which for the most part men’s’ bodies and achievements are celebrated, with physical attributes championed (Schacht, 1996; Muir and Seitz, 2004; Light and Kirk, 2000). Within rugby the concept of masculinity is relational, with notions of what constitutes masculine developed in conjunction with what is not, notably relying on the gender binary of femininity to define masculine (Schacht, 1996; Connell, 1995). Though previous work on Rugby Union is limited, Schacht (1996) makes some important observations in his work on how male rugby players construct and relate to images of masculinity in relation to femininity, in which he states that ‘rugby like other sporting events, is literally a practice field where the actors learn how to use force to ensure a dominant position relative to women, feminine men, and the planet itself’ (1996:562). Here, once again we return to this idea that through engaging in sport men learn the practices and forms of interactions which lead to specific gendered relationships and understandings of gendered identities more widely.

Though the act of participating in sport is undeniably important for the construction of gendered identities, and in particular notions of masculinity, it is also important to explore what Wellard refers to as the ‘whole package’ of sport (2002:238). Wellard’s (2002) notion of a package here refers to the practices associated with being part of a sports culture more broadly, so rather than simply the act of playing; the idea of ‘doing’ sport becomes multifunctional, including socialising and interactions off the field too. Work by Alan Skelton (1993) provides useful engagement with the way that sporting cultures off the sporting field influence masculinities. He studied initiations of new male physical education students, finding that physicality, withstanding pain and aggressive heterosexuality were all celebrated (Skelton, 1993). Further to this, work on sporting cultures has shown that bonding within the changing rooms, initiation rituals, drinking and having a laugh are all part of the ‘package’ associated with participation in a sports club (Campenhout and Hoven, 2014; Coates, 2003; Wellard, 2002; Curry, 1991). This can be seen specifically relate to Rugby Union. Campenhout and Hoven (2014) in their research on male Rugby Union in New Zealand argue that there are variations in terms of masculine performances depending on whether players are ‘front’ or ‘back’ stage in the rugby setting. It is interesting to think critically regarding this idea of a ‘package’ in relation to the spaces of the clubs. Additionally, it is important to consider whether there are other elements included in understandings of behaviours in these sites which may have not previously been given attention, for example banter, which contributes towards continued prominence of certain forms of masculinity.

Within the Rugby Union context it is important then to consider the practices associated both on and off the pitch, in doing so, continuing to build on and develop Campenhout and Hoven’s (2014) ideas of front and back stage in rugby clubs. Previous research has shown that post-match rituals are a central part of Rugby Union practices and these too are historically embedded within notions of masculine domination and power (Campenhout and Hoven, 2014; Muir and Seitz, 2004; Schacht, 1996; Donnelly and Young 1985). Willis (1982:122) argued that there were particular perceptions of men in post-match settings, noting ‘we imagine men to be at their most gregarious, expansive and relaxed in the pub after a match’. Arguably, through considering the variety of spaces which are available to men in rugby spaces, a greater overall understanding of how Rugby Union influences the construction of masculinities and notions of gender relations can be gained. Furthermore, it is interesting to begin to think critically regarding the ways in which men negotiate and manage their transitions between spaces and activities within the rugby club, and additionally, how men who do not play rugby, rather use the club to socialise, fit in to such theorisations.

### The rugby lad

Lads have become ‘familiar and recognizable stereotypes’ which are often tied to notions of hegemonic masculinity (Gill, 2003:37). A prominent cultural narrative of masculinity and gender relations in the 1990’s was the emergence and prominence of the lad and there has been a legacy of this in terms of gender behaviours and expectations (Gill, 2003; Edwards, 2006). Francis (1999) an early writer on lad culture significantly provides a useful definition of the ‘lad’ suggesting that there are particular features associated which include:

A young, exclusively male, group, and the hedonistic practices popularly associated with such groups (for example, ‘having a laugh’, alcohol consumption, disruptive behaviours, objectifying women, and an interest in pastimes and subjects constructed as masculine). (1999, 357)

This definition remains prominent with current understandings of the lad being centred upon characteristics including: popularity, hanging out with mates, playing sport, having the right image (clothing), being a laugh (Jackson, 2006; Ashley, 2009). Further to this, there is often the understanding that laddishness is constructed in opposition to femininity, with the display of sexist attitudes deemed to be a way of asserting laddish masculinity (Jackson et al, 2014; Wheaton, 2000; Whannel, 1999). Many of the popular conceptualisations of lads depicted through popular culture and the media depict lads as carefree, embracing freedom of changing gender roles and consuming freely, images conveyed in television shows including the Inbetweeners, where lad behaviour is understood to be deemed as harmless fun and situated within particular spaces (Gill, 2003; Gough and Edwards, 1998; Tomsen, 1997).

As Willis (1982) notes there are social practices which are historically associated with Rugby Union. These practices are commonly seen to be aligned with or connected to notions of the lad. Laddishness and sport are tied together in British culture, with the term lad having become widespread in society, no longer associated with working class youth as before (Dempster, 2009; Francis, 1999). Lads have become what Rosalind Gill (2003:37) refers to as ‘familiar and recognizable stereotypes’ and within these imaginings lads and laddism have arguably become synonymous with specific types of practices and behaviours. These often centre upon the idea of men having fun and behaving in ways deemed to align with historical and hegemonic notions of masculinity. These include displaying masculine characteristics such as strength, aggression, physicality, wit and heterosexuality (Connell and Messerchmidt, 2005; Schacht, 1996; Carrigan et al., 1985). It is here that we can begin to see distinct overlaps in terms of the characteristics which underpin lad cultures and those which are associated with rugby cultures. Within Rugby Union notions of manliness are prominent, with ‘rugby masculinity’ continually performed by the men through displaying characteristics including being practical, tough, un-emotional, demonstrating sporting prowess and participating in post-match drinking (Van Campenhout and Van Hoven, 2014:1090; Pringle, 2008; Morin et al., 2001). Sports men then, particularly in the Rugby Union context, can be seen to be what Steve Dempster (2009:481) refers to as ‘exemplars of laddishness’.

Lads and notions of laddism are notably divisive, with conflicting opinions regarding whether the form of masculinity is constructive or damaging. Positive imagery of laddism has been heavily critiqued in recent years, with many thinkers asserting that lad culture, which for a long time had been celebrated as post-feminist and a form of post-modern irony, is actually far more problematic (Nichols, 2016; Whannel, 1999; Jackson et al., 2014). In more recent writings, lad culture has begun to be viewed through a critical lens, with links made to laddism acting as a cover up for misogynistic behaviour and sexism becoming a prominent theme in both academia and the media (Jackson et al., 2014; Phipps and Young, 2013). This increasing criticality towards lads and lad culture has led to differences in terms of how behaviours are framed and the perceived implications of this. A key theme in all of the writing on lads and lad cultures though, both positive or negative, is that laddism is deemed to be a particular way that men understand or ‘do’ gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Jackson et al., 2014). Laddism is viewed as a specific gender performance (Jackson et al., 2014). These ideas are particularly pertinent within current narratives of rugby lads. Recent high profile cases such as the disassembling of the LSE University Rugby Union team due to excessive ‘laddish behaviours’ which were deemed sexist and offensive, demonstrates a popular perception of the rugby lad which is often framed as being problematic.

The framing of lad culture is often situated within the context of ‘boys being boys’ attributing behaviours to a particular moment in men’s lives and locating these within particular contexts or locations. Whilst themes of transition and place will be discussed in subsequent sections, it is important to briefly explore these here in relation to notions of the lad. In Dempster’s (2009) work on male sports groups and men’s experiences of these, he begins to acknowledge separation in terms of how men differentiate between masculine identities, including that of the lad, in relation to place and time. Dempster (2009) states that young men in sports clubs are often referred to as ‘nice lads’ during ‘off field’ situations. He goes on to discuss the way that this understanding of men as ‘nice’ might alter during active participation in sport (Wellard, 2009). Wellard (2009) concludes that sports clubs are sites in which different versions of masculinity can be enacted and where encounters have to be negotiated on and off the sporting field. In these examples we see that masculine identity shifts within sporting sites themselves, leading to critical questions regarding the ways in which men draw upon and utilise the identities constructed in the rugby setting in other spheres. This echoes Whannel’s work which argues that ‘the boundaries of masculinity are always the subject of re-drawing, policing and contestation’ (Whannel, 2007:7). Whilst this literature does not explicitly deal with themes of transition in relation to the rugby lad, it provides a foundation from which to build an understanding of how these themes are interconnected. This will be a key thread of the discussion later in the thesis.

## Humour and Teasing

In order to gain a greater understanding of the relationship between banter and humour it is useful to draw upon the fields of humour, joking and linguistics which have been studied more widely. This section is a departure from the argument presented so far which has been premised on hegemonic masculinity, however humour and teasing also provide an important foundation for the study and so will be outlined here. Additionally, a central concern of the thesis is to understand how hegemonic masculinity is maintained or being ‘reformulated’ and the role of humour, specifically banter within this process will be explored through the course of the research (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). This section will map out existing understandings of humour and teasing, outlining the prominent thinking in this area and starting to consider these sociologically.

Raymond Gibbs (2000) argues that postmodernism and subsequent changes within society can be linked to increasing usage and visibility of humour such as irony and teasing. Researchers agree that studying humour enables a greater comprehension of culture and society (Bing, 2007). Within the literature there is little controversy regarding the role and relevanceof humour in social interactions, with much of the work echoing that of Fine and De Soucey (2005), who argue that there are three key functions of humour in society; to promote cohesion, provoke conflict and to provide social control (Lynch, 2010; Garde, 2008; Plester and Sayers, 2007; Haig 1988).

Humour is understood to be extremely important to peoples’ everyday lives, viewed by Willis (1977:30) to be ‘a multi-faceted implement of extraordinary importance’ (McCann et al., 2010; Lyman, 1987). The earliest work on humour stems from Anthropological studies. Radcliff-Brown (1940) introduced the concept of ‘joking relationships’, arguing that these relationships were significant to interaction and communication between members of particular tribal societies. This idea of humour and joking as linked to social relationships is significant, as this highlighted the importance and value of examining humour in relation to social interaction. Henri Bergson (1911) was the first writer to expand on debates regarding the interactional nature of humour, discussing the complex relationship between the comic and the audience in his influential book titled *‘Laughter’*. Significantly, in this text Bergson (1911) argued that humour fulfils social functions, rather than psychological ones previously advocated. Particularly notable in relation to the development of the concept of banter, Bergson (1911) explored types of humour such as mockery and ridicule, which can be seen to be closely related to banter, suggesting that such types of humour are necessary for the social world to function. This work really situated humour within sociological studies, as it began to question the social effects of laughter and humour, paving the way for how humour is understood today. It is also important to note that the development of this work which examined the complex relationship between humour, social interactions and relationships, coincided with the emergence of the concept of a ‘sense of humour’ in the 1840’s. This marked a shift in the significance placed upon studying humour and signalled the beginning of more rigorous examination of humour by social scientists (Billig, 2005).

Much of the work which followed from these early theorisations of humour stemmed from thinkers such as Herbert Spencer (1987) who emphasised the social significance of humour, in his case applying biological perspectives to outline what he termed ‘necessary’ and ‘surplus’ functions of humour. In this view, certain humour was deemed as necessary for the continuation of social life, whilst surplus types were considered to be unnecessary (Spencer, 1987). Such theorisations echo Marxian approaches and remained prominent for many years to follow. This was regardless of the fact that such conceptualisations overlook the potential for functions of humour to be universal, specifically, reinforcing reductive categorisation tendencies (Billig, 2005; Marx and Engels, 1952). It is important to note that within discussions on the functionality of humour and joking, there has been discord regarding classifying and understanding functions. Referring to problematic conceptualisations, Norrick makes a significant point ‘it is fine to invoke the notion of function, except that there is scant agreement on just what kinds of functions are invoked and on which levels’ (1993:15). This quote effectively surmises that functions of humour are difficult to pin down. This suggests problems with thinking about humour in terms of functions alone and indicates that thinking needs to account for the complexity in the ways that humour operates and is utilised.

Studying the literature which addresses the functions of humour, a recurring theme was that humour smooth’s everyday interactions, enforces societal norms and builds relationships (Billig, 2005; Kotthoff, 2005; Norrick, 1993). The most commonly cited functions referenced within the literature on humour centre upon notions of control, cohesion and conflict (Lynch, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007, Fine and De Soucey, 2005). Owen Lynch (2010) provides a case study of humour between colleagues in a kitchen which provides an example of these functions in practice. Within this work humour acts as a way for hierarchies within the kitchen to be sustained, allows people within the kitchen space to bond and gain familiarity with each other and also plays a role in the negotiation of conflict in the form of disagreements and arguments within the workplace (Lynch, 2010). Although the functionality of humour and banter as described in such work dominates the literature and is valuable, it is important to recognise the deficiencies with such theorisations. Most notably, there limited work within Sociological studies regarding understanding of the practices and processes of humour, specifically banter, resulting in an often prescriptive account of humour in relation to social reality. The way people and groups experience humour or banter, including accounts of how this intersects and relates to other important threads within their lives has not been accounted for. Instead humour is treated as a homogenous practice, with acknowledgement and detail of the varying ways that this can be utilised in everyday lives often missing. In relation to this little credit has been given to the potential for humour to be utilised to convey agency or creativity within interactions, instead focus has been placed upon the effect, viewing social actors as passive, omitting details of the practices and processes associated with banter.

Goffmanian perspectives provide a symbolic interactionist understanding of humour which enables diverse interpretations to be developed. Goffman (1955: 239) asserts that ‘in a society, whenever the physical possibility of spoken interaction arises, it seems that a system of practices, conventions and procedural rules comes into play which functions as a means of guiding and organizing the flow of messages’. Plester and Sayers (2009) add to this perspective stating that various forms of humour act as the oil through which relationships are created and maintained. Building on this argument, there is a consensus within the literature that humour, specifically banter, functions to uphold norms in social groups through providing boundaries for behaviour (Plester and Sayers, 2007; Zijdervelt, 1976). In relation to this, work from Anthropology examining ‘Playing the Dozens’ a competitive oral insult phenomenon in African American groups, found that there were particular rules in verbally abusive conversations, and that in turn social rules emerged from these interactions (Abrahams, 1962). This echoes Goffmanian perspectives and adds to more recent work focusing on various social groups in Australia, where boundaries and appropriateness of laughter and jokes were acknowledged and explored (Garde, 2008; McCullough, 2008). Drawing these points together and referring to the critiques outlined in the previous paragraph, it is interesting to consider whether there are rules of humour, particularly what constitutes appropriate or inappropriate forms and whether this alters according to context, notably place, situation and audience. It will also be of value to explore the effect of time on applications of humour, specifically in relation to age.

It is important to note the other types of humour which are linked to banter and are occasionally utilised interchangeably within the literature. Banter is frequently referenced alongside teasing, sarcasm and irony. Though these are distinctly different there are important overlaps between them and so these will be explored together here, as one of the central concerns of the thesis is to discover the relationship between banter and other related aspects of humour. Theorising on these provides a foundation for new theorising on banterous interactions and therefore it is important to briefly engage with some of the key ideas from these fields of research together. Work on irony arguably provides the most parallels with that of banter. Gibbs (2000:6) focuses specifically on this in his work, noting that irony is present in day-to-day conversations and is a ‘weapon in everyday speech’. Here Gibbs (2000) is referring to the frequency with which individuals utilise irony in their talk, highlighting the various ways which irony can function as a tool for communication in conversations and interactions. Most notable, is that people use humour such as irony or teasing in their talk in order to convey true meanings and to express either positive or negative opinions which may prove difficult if framed seriously (Gibbs, 2000; Colston 1997; Jorgensen, 1996; Dews et al 1995). It is important to acknowledge that though these types of humour all vary in terms of practices and styles; there is consensus within the literature that they serve similar functions in society in terms of being central to socialization and everyday interactions.

This section has provided context for the background of banter and has begun to explore the relationship between banter and other forms of humour. A conceptualisation of banter based on ethnography and narratives from men will enable clarity on the suitability of applying such work to understanding banter in a particular context. However the literature on humour and teasing provides an important foundation from which to begin building a sociological account of banter. This next section will focus on banter specifically and draw together literature from a range of fields and disciplines to begin to construct a clearer conceptualisation of banter sociologically.

### Beginning to consider banter sociologically

Banter is a term and interactional practice which has become prominent in British culture, continuing to gain momentum and attention. The widespread growth of banter is a result of continual referencing and normalisation in society, which has resulted in banter becoming part of the everyday. Banter can be understood to be a specific type of communicative practice involving back and forth interaction. It is often competitive in nature, a jocular performance, centring upon the idea of people ‘taking the piss’ out of one another (Plester and Sayers, 2007; Hay, 1994). As noted above banter has a strong association with other terms, however banter is distinct and though related to such terms, stands apart from them in many ways. This will be clarified throughout the course of this section. The study of banter itself has received little attention in sociological studies, however there is a rich history and background of studying humour, laughter, joking and teasing from a range of theoretical perspectives, which informs the way that banter can be conceptualised sociologically and linked to other themes including hegemonic masculinity and the rugby lad.

The preceding sections have evidenced humour as being an important part of social actors’ lives. Norrick refers to humour as ‘greasing the gears of everyday talk and keeping our interactions working smoothly’ (1993: 20). This is echoed by Plester and Sayers   
(2007) who argue that banter acts as the ‘oil’ through which relationships are created and maintained. These mechanical analogies, which suggest that humour and banter are integral to the everyday running of the social world are important to acknowledge, as they effectively highlight the significance which has come to be placed upon humour, and more recently banter, within the literature. Both humour and banter are clearly social and interactive; however, there are distinct differences in the processes and practices involved in the interactions which need to be acknowledged. Banter is a specific form of jocular interaction, with associated styles and strategies, including interaction based upon adopting impolite, offensive and abusive language and tone (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Plester and Sayers, 2007). The jocular exchange also differs in that it is often fast paced, personal and involves back and forth communication between varying numbers of people. Significantly, banterous interaction is not solely concerned with rousing laughter or gaining control of the dialogue, as is so often associated with other styles of humour such as joking. Rather, I support the argument that banter is utilised as an everyday tool for communication and as a performance device in social interaction. Though this resonates with the function of humour and joking more broadly, the difference can be seen in the way that the tone and delivery enable those who utilise it to express themselves, as well as the instances in which banter is selected rather than joking.

Research has shown that banter is frequently utilised in conversation, adopted routinely by social actors to communicate in their daily lives (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Alexander et al., 2102; Dynel, 2008; Plester and Sayers, 2007). Banter is arguably a practice situated in everyday contexts, taken for granted and commonly utilised in conversations, interactions and representations (Attenborough, 2014; Alexander et al., 2012; Dynel, 2008). The topic of banter is spontaneous, triggered by real time events and action, thus is dependent upon specific everyday activities (Alexander et al., 2012; Lynch, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007).[[1]](#footnote-1) There has been discussion within the literature of how banter is utilised in everyday contexts, with the majority of cases focussing on how banterous interaction assists in negotiating workplace and educational settings (Alexander et al., 2012; Lynch, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007). In the study by Plester and Sayers (2007) of workers in the Information Technology industry, banter was practiced routinely by people in the office in order to ease both work and personal relations; in this case banter was a common everyday practice, central to social interaction. This research is extremely useful, highlighting how banterous interaction is a repeated practice, implemented routinely by those who use it.

However when studying this work in depth, it is clear that there are omissions and areas where further explanation is required. Firstly, in order to build upon this previous work, research is needed in non-institutional settings. By its very nature banter is part of people’s everyday routines, and so it is necessary to establish how banterous practices are adopted in other spheres of social reality, particularly within those such as leisure environments. Secondly, links need to be made between banterous discourses, the associated everyday practices and the life course. Specifically, examining the ways in which the everyday practice of banter effects social interaction and gender order in the long term. Previous work on humour has shown that jokes have what Goffman refers to as a ‘referential afterlife’, meaning that the joke remains important to individuals or groups after the initial event, for example influencing future interactions or behaviours. It is conceptualisations such as these, which weave temporal themes into the study of jocular interactions, which need to be applied to studies of banterous interactions (Goffman, 1981: 46).

Continuing to think specifically regarding the practices and processes associated with banterous interaction, and how banter is implemented in the everyday lives of social actors, the work of Gregory Bateson is significant to note. In the case of humour, conversation may be delivered with the utterance “this is play” (Bateson, 1953). This framing strategy is adopted in order to signal that inappropriate or offensive discourse is meant to be light-hearted and acceptable (Bateson, 1953). This type of language of ‘framing’ jokes is also evident in more modern writing on humorous interactions, with the idea of jokes being ‘framed’ in a certain way significant to shaping interactions and perhaps more notably, to the experiences of interactions as positive or negative (McCann et al., 2010). This relates to Goffman’s work on frames and helps to further understand the notions of the afterlife of banter noted in the paragraph above (Goffman, 1981). In his work *Frame Analysis* Goffman (1974:10) argues that frames are ‘principles of organization which govern events’ thus influencing how the situation is constructed and defined. Relating these framing ideas to banter is useful, particularly when attempting to understand banterous interaction and the associated styles of delivery, which are often deemed to be aggressive, in the delivery and content. It is common within discourse on banter for the term ‘it’s just banter’ to be utilised as a way to justify statements or ideas. This situates banter as part of the everyday and is particularly prominent within media representations, with the most famous recent cases relating to unacceptable language and attitudes utilised by footballers during high profile premiership matches, as well as political leaders during 2017 election campaigns, after which offensive references were passed off as ‘just banter’. It is clear that banterous interaction relies upon a particular ‘banter frame’ to borrow Bateson’s term, in order to work. It is now interesting to think further regarding this ‘banter frame’, specifically the ways in which the frame is entrenched in the everyday and how this operates.

The idea proposed by Bateson (1953) of distinguishing between ‘serious or play’ undertones in humorous interaction enables critical thinking regarding the processes and expectations associated with banterous interactions. A significant point is that Bateson, like many other writers on humour, creates binaries related to humour in his writing, with examples being serious/ play, pleasurable/dangerous and light/dark (McCullough, 2008; Bateson, 1953). These binaries inform the way that humour is understood and practiced, arguably contributing to the formation of what Murray Garde (2008) refers to as ‘basic standards’ and ‘rules’ of humour. The most prominent binary within the literature on banter is that of appropriate or inappropriate. Interestingly these categorisations are commonly referenced together, indicating that banterous interaction involves treading a careful line between appropriate or inappropriate meanings. This also suggests a need for creativity in terms of delivery in order to ensure appropriate connotations, as evidenced in the following quotation by Garde:

*‘By pretending to fight or exchange extreme insults joking ironists revel in and encourage seemingly inappropriate behaviour. Yet, when such pretence is delivered with artful skill, in a licensed context, that which is inappropriate is always the basis for a good laugh’ (2008:249).*

Arguably this quotation, though useful for understanding the processes involved in banterous interactions, demonstrates the problematic nature of making distinctions on humour based upon binaries. Megan McCullough argues that boundaries associated with humour are not fixed, suggesting that they ‘shift’ and are ‘distinct’, adding weight to the argument that binaries are not an efficient way of reflecting the variable and diverse nature of banterous interactions (2008:282). Arguably, a more efficient way of describing banterous interactions is through the idea of a continuum, an approach which offers greater flexibility. Alice Roy (1978) highlighted the merits of such an approach through her work on irony, in which she argued that irony versus non-irony should not be viewed as a binary distinction, rather as a continuum. Further to this, McCann et al (2010) also discuss the various ways that humour is classified and understood, particularly in relation to masculinity. Within their study which focused on the use of humour by men in Australia, there was continual reference to ‘boundaries’, ‘lines’ and ‘the continuum’ of humour implemented to develop their argument throughout (McCann et al, 2010). Though this idea is not fully developed in this example, this type of language in analysis of humour and approach demonstrates the significance of such ideas to our understanding of humour. This use of the continuum idea, though not always fully developed and infrequent, is still relevant and is useful to think about in relation to developing ideas around banter. Applying this approach to banter is useful as it allows further understanding to be gained of the ways that different types of banter relate to one another.

Banter is a specific style of humour, with an associated expression of delivery centring on jocular abuse, sometimes referred to as teasing (Plester and Sayers, 2007). Similar to other forms of humour, it is the intonation and delivery associated with banter which makes it different from other styles, in this way, arguably, making it a performative act (Gibbs, 2000). The significant difference between banter and irony or sarcasm is the competitive nature of banter, the delivery and the associated strategies and tactics, reflected by Plester and Sayers ‘the word banter invokes the idea of an exchange back and forth-of a type of equitable competition’ (2007:159). Although banter has been acknowledged as a significant form of expression and performance, previous work has not linked banter to Erving Goffman (1959) which I believe would prove extremely fruitful. Drawing on dramaturgical perspectives, banter can be seen as a form of performance, as a way of enabling individuals to explore differences and similarities with others, simultaneously informing self-identification (Plester and Sayers, 2007). Moving forward, further discussions of banter will adopt a dramaturgical theoretical approach, describing banter as a type of performance. Goffmanian perspectives on performance and the link to banter will be further articulated within the second part of the literature review.

#### The bounded nature of banter

All interaction occurs in space, and banter is no exception. Previous work has highlighted the places in which banter is most visible and this is most commonly deemed to be in spaces dominated by men including sporting sites (Robinson, 2008; Kimmel, 2006; Messner and Sabo, 1990). However, little discussion exists of the bounded nature of banter and the wider implications of this for understanding social interaction. The community themed study by William Pilcher (1972) on longshoremen in Portland Oregon proves a useful case to exemplify the bounded nature of banterous interaction. Pilcher (1972) conducted participant observations, interviews and traced occupational genealogies as part of research which explored how sense of community created solidarity amongst men working in the long shore industry. Though this work is slightly dated the findings remain relevant to the current discussion as they show that this practice has been happening for a while. Within this work the writer debates the clear separation which was evident between jocular interaction in the work and private domains, noting that vulgarity, dirty jokes, taking the piss and swearing were common during working hours, yet did not spill over into other spaces and spheres of the men’s lives (1972). Arguably, this work can be seen to be amongst the earliest discussion of how jocular interaction varies across space, even if it is not the explicit intention. More recent examples of work which shows that space is a significant factor in facilitating banter is that of Jon Curry (1991), on fraternal bonding in the locker room, which demonstrated that the space played a central role both physically and symbolically for interaction, enabling banter to occur. Curry asserts that ‘a general rule of male peer groups is that you can say/do some things with your peers that would not be appropriate elsewhere’ (1991:133; Clark, 2006). This exemplifies the significance and influence of space to performances of humour and gender.

The performance of banter is closely linked to context, particularly space and time. Arguably, it is the skill of delivery in conjunction with the context which makes banter acceptable (Garde, 2008; Kotthoff, 2006). Though previous studies have recognised that context dictates whether banter occurs, little thorough discussion has followed regarding the actual influence of space on the interaction. Owen Lynch’s (2010) work on humour in a professional kitchen discusses how the kitchen provides the setting for banterous interaction amongst the chef’s, however, he does not address the issue of whether the space itself dictated whether banter would be more or less likely to occur (Lynch, 2010). In this way, previous work considered space as a backdrop, a theme of lesser significance within the research. My study aims to address such a deficiency, acknowledging space as a significant aspect of banterous performances and interactions. Once the significance of space to banter has been established, it will be interesting to reflect on the ways in which performances of banter in one sphere may transition into another, and the effects of such transitions on social interactions. Time has also been neglected in work on humorous interactions, with limited attention given to how applications and understandings of humour may evolve or alter with time. This research will examine how banter may be implemented at various stages of the life course and how this informs men’s experiences of dominant structures such as hegemonic masculinity as they age. Time will be addressed and considered alongside space, in doing so expanding work which highlights the significance of linking space and time together in relation to understanding gender and more specifically extending hegemonic masculinity theorisations into new areas (Massey, 2013).

This first section of the review has introduced readers to the literature and themes which provide the foundations for this thesis. The central aim of this study is to provide a sociological account of banter and to explore the ways that this intersects with masculinity, particularly hegemonic masculinity and the rugby lad in order to extend existing debates. So far discussions have outlined existing research within the fields of masculinity, sport and humour/teasing. This section closed with an introduction into current sociological conceptualisations of banter. This discussion highlighted some of the limitations with existing work and hinted towards ways that this work could be expanded.

# Part two: Introducing new fields to existing debates

The next part of the review will indicate the additional fields which will be drawn upon to expand existing conceptualisations of banter and masculinity. The first sub sections will provide additional context to the study of banter and masculinities, including discussion of the gendered nature of banter, as well as the exploring the literature on language and gender more broadly. Themes of performance will then be introduced, with particular focus upon Goffmanian perspectives and conceptualisations. The final parts of this section of the review will explore themes of maintenance, transition, age and emotion looking at these within the context of masculine performances.

## Beginning to make links between banter and gender

Previous work on humour and gender has the tendency to focus on difference, examining the humour of men and women separately, simultaneously maintaining gender divisions (Hay, 2000; Gibbs, 2000). Historically, it has been suggested that men and women utilize and understand humour in different ways, indicating that there are male and female types of humour (Bing, 2007; Hay, 2000; Gibbs, 2000; Freud 1905; Brodzinsky et al, 1981). A recent NUS report by Phipps and Young (2013) which explored experiences of lad culture in university contexts suggested that banter was often viewed as separate from real life, though had discernible impacts upon understandings of gender. This is echoed by Kotthoff (2006) who suggests that joking styles play a role in social typification. This is the process whereby joking informs ideas formulated about the social world, with Kotthoff (2006) citing jokes which allude to differences in men’s and women’s capacities to manage certain tasks such as cooking or DIY as influencing perceptions and expectations of men and women’s roles in real life. Examining the literature on banter, as well as representations of this in popular culture, it quickly becomes apparent that banter is deemed to be a jocular phenomenon situated in the male domain (Kotthoff, 2005; McDowell and Schaffner, 2011). Banter has been socially constructed as a male phenomenon, exemplified through depictions in popular culture mediums designed for males such as magazines, TV channels and websites which utilise banter as a key identifying feature. An example of this is the TV channel ‘Dave’ which markets itself for a male target audience, showing car and sports programmes, and has the tag line ‘Dave: the home of witty banter’ (Dave, 2013). Not only is banter seen to be associated with males, previous research shows that banter is adopted by males to express discourses of gender relations, particularly those which sustain dominant forms of masculinity (McDowell and Schaffner, 2011). In this way, banter is serving the function of a ‘regulatory or policing tool’ in order sustain masculine identities (Thurnell-Read, 2012; Kiesling, 2005). Further examination of this regulation is required, particularly with regards to the production of difference. Questions arise from this literature regarding the relationship between banter and the male domain.

Evidence from the literature supports the argument that banter has been socially constructed as a predominantly male jocular communicative practice. Early Anthropological work such as that of Roger Abrahams on ‘Playing the Dozens’, a study amongst men in a neighbourhood in South Philadelphia, demonstrates how banterous interaction is inherently male (1962)[[2]](#footnote-2). Within this case study females were not permitted to participate within the banter, present only in the topic of the joke, typically referenced in a derogatory manner in order to establish further kudos with other men (Abrahams, 1962). More recent examples follow this pattern, suggesting that banterous interaction is commonly associated with males. This can be seen in the work of Owen Lynch (2010) in his work on interaction and communication amongst chefs working in a kitchen. Within this study the main form of communication in the working environment was banter, managed by the men and utilized in order to establish organizational structures (2010). Lynch argued that the women in the study ‘conformed to the masculine communication norms and the gendered nature of humour in order to fit in’ (Lynch, 2010:133). This example builds on the idea that banter is inherently male, creating communicative and interactional barriers between genders.

In order to provide balance to this argument it is important to acknowledge that females also use banter, and that it is not only men who interact through banterous interactions, as evidenced in a growing amount of work (Lampert and Ervin Tripp, 2006). However, the significant point, which it seems is hard to navigate away from in the literature, is that banter is a practice which has been deeply embedded within masculine roots and spheres, with a history firmly situating banter amongst men. This is a point on which it is hoped this research can provide further clarity and critical engagement.

Significant to note in current discussions of banter, is the argument that banter enables social actors to relate to one another. Of particular interest to this research, is the role of banter in facilitating relations between social actors of varying genders and subsequently, the formation of notions of the gendered self. It is important to note that work within the field of humour more broadly has documented the ways in which humour is utilised as a tool through which to construct notions of the gendered ‘other’ (McCann et al, 2010; Gough and Edwards, 1998; Lyman, 1987). The work of McCann et al (2010) draws upon Goffmanian (1981) ideas of the ‘other’ in order to demonstrate that humour can act as a way for men to construct notions of gendered identities and ‘other’ in relation to women, as well as with men with whom they felt demonstrated ‘failed’ masculinity[[3]](#footnote-3) (2010:506). Such ideas are echoed in the limited existing work on banter, within which emphasis is frequently placed upon how banter enables people to relate to each other. Here the focus is commonly placed upon the ways in which banter assists people in determining similarities and differences between themselves and others (Alexander et al 2012; Lynch, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007). It is notable that within this literature there is a continued focus on group contexts, in which in or out group relations are discussed (Alexander et al 2012; Lynch, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007). Examples of this can be seen in the case of Matthew Alexander et al’s (2012) study of banter in a hospitality team, where banter played a significant role in establishing relationships between workers in a hotel. Another clear example is presented by Plester and Sayers (2007), of workers in the Information Technology industry in New Zealand. In this study banterous interaction was central in enabling people to relate to one another and establish relationships, particularly insiders and outsiders to the group environment; this is depicted in the following excerpt from the text:

*‘Banter was a tool used by these different individuals to explore differences and similarities and form bonds and camaraderie. By making quips about each other, differences were explored, highlighted and accepted under the safe guise of banter. This shared laughter and cache of friendly banter resulted in bonding and group unity’ (Plester and Sayers, 2007:171).*

Although this work touches upon themes of gender, in terms of how men and women feature in the banterous interaction itself, there is insufficient detail on how banterous interaction informs gender relations, so the way that social actors relate to each other in terms of gender through, and as a result, of banterous interaction. Arguably, more work is required on banter at the interpersonal level and how the practice of banter in everyday life and every day non institutional contexts, influences the ways that people relate to one another.

From the brief discussion of banter and gender so far, it is clear that banter is utilized by social actors as a way to negotiate and understand gender relations; what it less well researched are the wider processes involved in this, particularly exploration of whether increasing banterous interaction is reflective of large scale shifts and transitions in gendered identities and whether this work feeds in to theorising on the ‘crisis’ of masculinity. Arguably, examination of this historical context of gender relations is significant to aid understanding of how banter and gender are linked. The constraints of this review do not allow for a full history to be plotted, or for thorough speculation as to the effects of various changes in gender relations over time; however when questioning whether banter has emerged as a reaction to changing gender relations, the following points are notable. Firstly, it is important to emphasize that previous work has shown that banter is often utilized in reaction to a stimulus, with most notable examples being implementation to display culture when it is perceived as being under threat, in this way illustrating the dominant cultural norms and values (Lynch, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007; Holmes and Stubbe, 2003). A good example of this is in the work by Plester and Sayers (2007) from a case study of the IT industry, where workers in various IT companies commonly implemented banter as a way to provide insight into their specific working culture. Relating back to the topic of gender, it is has been argued that men utilise humour as a way to deal with anxiety regarding the changing gender dynamic in the workplace; however less is known about banter specifically (Lynch, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007). The following example taken again from observations by Plester and Sayers who are amongst the only writers to discuss this, clearly demonstrates banter which reflects social actors negotiating gender boundaries in a workplace environment:

*‘Two (physically short) female workers walked through a work area that they had not visited for some time and a very tall staff member began loudly singing the “Hi Ho” song from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. On the next occasion when the same workers (accompanied by this short researcher) the comment was made, “Here’s a whole army of short people”’ (Plester and Sayers, 2007:166).*

Gender relations and associated power dynamics undoubtedly play a role in this interaction, however there is no mention of this, or the historical contextual background of gender relations within the discussion. This reflects a wider issue with such work in which there is a lack of detail. This results in limited understandings of the practices and processes of banter in relation to gender, a point which future research must address.

### Language and gender

This part of the review examines the links between language and gender, particularly in relation to banter. Drawing on fields from across the social sciences this section highlights a tendency in previous work to examine banterous interactions and language amongst men, rather than between men and women. Although the use of language by males will be the focus of the following discussion, this is not intended to reinforce the simplistic idea that speakers can be divided neatly into men and women, rather it intends to add to those arguments which advocate the complexity of the relationship between gender and language (Coates, 2004). As outlined in previous sections, banter is an expressive communicative practice, which has specific styles of delivery heavily dependent upon linguistic practices and strategies. Before progressing further, it is important to situate my research within that of the study of language in Sociology. Robin Wooffitt argues that ‘while language and communication have not been a topic of sociological research, it has been a central resource in the research process’ (2005:22). Berger and Luckman (1995) further advocate the study of language, asserting that it is the most significant form of signs which people utilise. This study will situate language alongside gender at the forefront of sociological enquiry, aiming to expand existing literature and research.

The study of language in relation to gender is well known and widely debated, with Anthropological studies amongst the first to note the differences between male and female speakers. Arguably this has contributed to the divisive categorisation of ‘men’s language’ and ‘women’s language’ which remains today (Coates, 2004). A great deal of the existing literature focuses on the divisive nature of language, particularly, how it is utilized by men as a tool to oppress women (Saul, 2003; Spender, 1994; Cameron 1992). It is the ‘use’ of language in everyday conversations and the emphasis upon the idea that women and men do not have separate languages, rather they use language differently, which is central to this research (Coates, 2004).

Men’s talk has historically been researched far less than that of women (Coates, 2004). A great deal of the existing literature focuses on the divisive nature of language, particularly, how it is utilized by men as a tool to oppress women and maintain hegemonic ideals (Saul, 2003; Spender, 1994; Cameron 1992). This idea of difference in use of language is a traditional view, with men seen as adopting forceful, serious and authoritative language, in contrast to women, whose language is described as hesitant, weak and insignificant (Coates, 2004, Spender 1994, Cameron, 1992). Building on this, it is argued that these contrasting uses of language inform socialization, particularly the formation and recognition of gender differences in society (Whitehead and Barrett, 2008; Spender, 1994; Cameron, 1992). The idea of difference in the use of language is a traditional view, with men seen as adopting forceful, serious and authoritative language, in contrast to women, whose language is described as hesitant, weak and insignificant (Coates, 2004; Spender 1994; Cameron, 1992).

Banter as a specific linguistic style has been given limited attention as the focal point of research in the social sciences. It is an expressive communication practice, implementing specific conversational patterns, revolving around individuals or groups ‘taking the piss’ out of others (Plester and Sayers, 2007). The ‘one-upmanship style’ relies upon language in order to deliver desired effects; therefore, it is important to recognise banter as closely linked to language and gender (Spender, 1994). I am interested in the language implemented and associated with banter. More specifically, I want to explore and expand understandings of the linguistic premise on which masculinity and femininity are constructed. Previous work has recognised that men and women utilise humour differently, with men being shown to draw more frequently upon irony and sarcasm in their everyday talk than women (Gibbs, 2000; Harris and Knight-Bohnhoff, 1996). Banter has been described in previous work as a form of language which expresses normative views of masculinity; this is exemplified in the work of Kiesling (2005) on male fraternities in the USA, in which banter was adopted as a way of ‘policing’ heterosexual norms and to enable the men to convey homosocial love to each other. Building on such work, it is interesting to think critically regarding the use of banter as a way for men to engage with masculinities, particularly whether banterous interactions and the language associated with it limits the expression of masculinity, and hinders the potential for men to undertake identify with multiple masculinities. Additionally, consideration of whether the language adopted in banterous interactions is utilized in other contexts, subsequently influencing social interactions more widely is important to explore.

Space is a significant theme to consider when examining language and gender, as it provides a setting for all interactions (Cameron, 1992). Here it is important to note that previous work has demonstrated that spaces and imaginations of locations determine the type of language used, recognising that language continues to be created and developed in different social settings (Spender, 1994). An example of this is the work by Curry (1991) on fraternal bonding in the locker room, where the environment played a key role both physically and symbolically in the interactions (Curry, 1991). In this research the banterous interactions were enabled by the peer group dynamics which were specific to that location (Curry, 1991). The banterous interaction included put-downs and offensive language which maintained traditional heterosexual masculinity (Curry, 1991). Arguably a limitation of such literature is the lack of discussion regarding the varying levels of acceptability in language use, particularly exploration of what constitutes appropriate or inappropriate language. Jimerson (2001) offers a critique of Curry’s locker room work, arguing that resistance from some group members to the conversations was omitted from discussion and that there were in fact conflicting opinions between men regarding the language and jokes implemented, particularly that which objectified and described women in a derogatory manner. In order to build on this argument, McCullough’s (2008) concept of the boundaries of laugher is useful to consider. In this work humour is completely dependent upon context and does not occur in all social spheres (McCullough, 2008). The idea of ‘boundaries’ of humorous interaction warrants further exploration, particularly in relation to language and gender. This research will explore such boundaries, implementing particular case studies of the Robins to do so.

### Introducing themes of the performance

This section of the literature review will highlight the way that perspectives on performance will be applied to my research. The section will begin by introducing themes of the performance more broadly, including discussion of Goffmanian perspectives which provide the theoretical foundation for this thesis. This will be followed by a specific focus on masculine performances. Discussion will then be expanded further through an exploration of the ways that maintenance and the transitionary nature of male performances have been framed within existing research. Finally, there will be a brief discussion of performance in relation to the expression of emotion as this is an emerging theme within masculinity scholarship and will enable further critique of dominant gendered theories later in the thesis.

Social life and themes of the performance have been discussed by a number of theorists, with many writers advocating that through this thematic connection, a further understanding of the social world can be gained (Brickell, 2005; Gregson and Rose, 2000; Goffman 1959). It is the pervasive nature of performative themes, linking to a wide range of other subjects, which make performances rich sources of information when considering the social world. Particularly noteworthy, are the layers of meaning which can be gained from studying themes of performance, an idea supported by Nicky Gregson and Gillian Rose as demonstrated in the flowing quotation:

‘*When we start to examine the intricacies of particular grounded performances, they manifest themselves as citations infused simultaneously with multiple subject positions, rather than as an individual subject located within, or in response to, a single subject position’ (2000:446).*

Performance and performativity are conceptual tools which Gregson and Rose argue help to ‘denaturalise taken-for-granted social practices’ assisting in understanding the everyday lives of social actors (2000:434). Arguing further that ‘performance, in short, seems to offer intriguing possibilities for thinking about the constructedness of identity, subjectivity and agency’ (2000: 434). Such arguments provide important points for consideration, highlighting the value of utilising performance as a conceptual framework for research, particularly when there is a focus on the construction of identity and interaction in everyday contexts. Work on performance and performativity has been conducted in the past; however recent development of such conceptualisations appears to have been concentrated within specific fields or themes, including those of the workplace and sexualities (Gregson and Rose, 2000). Arguably, it is time to intersect performative concepts to new spheres such as banter, gender and sport, in order to expand and update the field of performance, whilst simultaneously gaining a greater understanding of the existing fields of study.

#### Erving Goffman and masculine performances

Performance and performativity will be central to my conceptual framework, due to the fact that banterous interaction can be seen to involve putting on a successful jocular performance. Before discussion of how performative themes will be specifically linked to the key themes of my research, it is important to provide some explanation and background to the terms *performance* and *performativity* which will be referenced throughout subsequent sections and the remainder of the thesis. Chris Brickell succinctly surmises the significant difference between the terms, arguing that ‘while the term performance implies enactment or doing, performativity refers to the constitution of regulatory notions and their effects’ (2005:28). These terms have become synonymous with particular thinkers; *performance* with Erving Goffman and *performativity* with Judith Butler. Whilst there are distinct differences between the two terms, there is also a degree of overlap and the progression of the following sections will highlight the perspectival value of amalgamating these contrasting ways of thinking. Significantly, it is the emphasis upon social interaction and self, particularly the acknowledgement that the self is always situated within social processes in the account by Goffman (1959), which renders performance perspectives as most useful to my research. Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical metaphors, utilising theatre references to illuminate theory, can be applied to a variety of performances and contexts, thus proving extremely valuable in the study of everyday life (Brickell, 2005). Judith Butler’s work, which came some time later, is also extremely useful. In contrast to Goffman she rejects theatrical notions of the performance, arguing that the act of performance is productive rather than expressive, instead favouring a focus on discourse and language, in particular the way in which discourses that are repeatedly performed become normalised (2008). Arguably, it is a combination of these two conceptualisations of the performance which provide a conceptual framework to apply to my research. I believe that both performance and performativity are significant to the relationship between banterous interaction and the construction of gendered identities, particularly given the way that banter is a linguistic practice existing in a variety of mediums, performed across various spaces and is often a repeated practice.

Performance can be seen to provide and explanatory framework for understanding identity (Gutterman, 2008). It is the recognition of the performative element of masculine identity which I find most interesting and provides a lens through which to think critically regarding the construction of masculinity. Jeff Hearn acknowledges the relevance of performance in the construction of masculine identities in the following quotation from his work on men and masculinities.

*‘Masculinities are not fixed formulae, but rather combinations of actions, part powerful, part arbitrary, performed in reaction and relation to complex material relations and emotional demands, and recognised by others as signifying that this is a man’ (Hearn, 1994, 54).*

Building on this, it is argued that becoming a man is a dramaturgical task and that men need to perform manhood acts to prove masculine identity (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). The concept of the performance is central to this research, as it provides the potential for further understanding of the construction of gendered identities, as well as exploring the specific processes and conditions required to undertake performances, including banter.

Performance also provides a way of thinking about the social world, evidenced in work which utilises performative language and frameworks in order to develop arguments around the topic of identity (Walsh, 2010; Gutterman, 2008; Cameron, 1997; Curry, 1991). Erving Goffman’s conceptualisation of the dramaturgical theme in his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), in which he notes that people consciously present themselves to others through performances, is one of the earliest works on performance and has heavily influenced subsequent work on interactions and identity. Building on this, thinking specifically about gendered identities, performance is a recurring theme within this literature, though is often underplayed, utilised as a conceptual tool in order to engage with the various ways that gendered identities are formed and negotiated (Walsh, 2010; Butler, 2008; Kimmel, 2006; Cameron, 1997). Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe (2009) discuss the construction of masculine identities through the dramaturgical lens, arguing that becoming a man is a dramaturgical task and that men need to perform manhood acts in order to prove masculine identity. This idea of performing masculinity is common within both literature and popular representations, in which notions of masculine performances are embedded within discourses, practices and symbols, centring upon traits such as aggression, strength and mental toughness (Mac an Ghail and Haywood, 2007). However, there is often insufficient detail regarding how performative perspectives influenced such understandings. This is particularly true of a case study by Frank Barrett (2008) of the US Navy, in which he develops an argument of how hegemonic masculinity is displayed and achieved in this environment. This example is notable here as it has similarities with my research, in that it focuses on groups of men for whom physical activity is a significant part of socialization. In this example there is no acknowledgement of performance or performativity themes. This is despite the reflections and discussions of the practices and processes involved with becoming a naval officer, particularly through the analysis of how masculine traits are learnt through repeated practices and socialization (Barrett, 2008). Arguably, this work would have benefited from engagement with performative theories, as this would have enabled further understanding of the social practices and discourses involved in the construction of the masculine identity in question. This example demonstrates that it is important to consider themes of the performance and performativity in research, particularly that which centres upon men and the construction of masculine identities.

As noted in previous sections, banter is a type of humour and interactive practice which is commonly associated with men, a conception facilitated by the social construction of banter as situated in the masculine domain and subsequent repeated practices in this sphere (McDowell and Schaffner, 2011; Kothoff, 2005). Banter is a communicative tool which typically expresses and reinforces hegemonic views of masculinity. Such ideas are prominent in the work by McCann et al (2010) on male uses of humour in relation to the construction of masculine identities. Within this research performance, humour (including banter) and masculinity are viewed as closely linked (McCann et al., 2010). Commenting on male participants responses to the ways in which male identities are constructed, particularly through humorous performances, the authors make the following important statement:

‘*His performance as a humourist is equated with his performance as a man. As there is no single agreed-upon way of using humour to convey information about the self, great skill is required to manoeuvre around these borders, and the risks of failing can mean emasculation’* (McCann et al., 2010:519).

This quotation supports the argument being developed that humour is a type of performance, specifically one which can be associated with masculinity. Furthermore it highlights the ways in which being able to perform humorous interactions is often viewed by men as an important part of successfully constructing masculinity. This work is important to examine when attempting to conceptualise banter and to understand how banter and hegemonic masculinity are linked. Most notably, the work encourages critical questioning of the precarious nature of constructing masculinity through banterous interaction, specifically the difficulties associated with understanding the boundaries of banterous interactions and how men understand, negotiate and experience these in their everyday lives.

When beginning to develop an argument viewing banter as a masculine performative practice, connections must be made to Goffman’s notions of performance (1959). This link is evident through the routinized back and forth practice associated with banter and the nature of the banterous interaction as being conducted in front of others, in this way reflecting Goffman’s idea of the audience and performer (1959). Brickell in his discussion of masculinity and performative theories strengthens this argument further, through his assertion that masculine selves must be studied in relation to performances, as evidenced in the following quotation:

*‘The masculine self can be understood as reflexively constructed within performances; that is performances can construct masculinity rather than merely reflect its pre-existence, and socially constituted masculine selves act in the social world and are acted on simultaneously’. (2005:32)*

This championing of masculinity studied in conjunction with performance is unusual and begins to bridge an important gap in studies of masculinities. The quote also resonates with the Goffmanesque argument that performances are significant factors in the construction of identity, thus masculine performances such as banter are essential to study (Goffman, 1959). In order to provide balance to this argument, it is important to note how banterous performance links to Butlers’ performativity ideas, as arguably, this enriches Goffman’s argument (Butler, 2008; Goffman, 1959). For Butler the act of performance is productive rather than expressive. This notion compliments rather than contradicts Goffman in relation to banter and the construction of masculine identity, as arguably, masculinities are performed as action in relation to social stimulus, as well as resulting from repeated social practices and discourses (Hearn, 1994). In this way performance must be seen as a way for social actors to creatively display agency, yet as inseparable from pre-existing ideas and expectations, learnt and repeated throughout the lifecourse (Butler, 2008; Goffman, 1959).

#### Focussing on masculine performances: maintenance and transition, age and emotion

##### Maintenance and transition

The concept of maintaining a performance to successfully convey identity is interesting and has been linked to themes such as time, regulation and expectation in previous research (Butler, 2008; Curry, 1991). The idea that through repetition performances become socialized and taken as the norm is not new, however, understanding the performative nature of gendered identity in relation to time is a new development in social research (Bristow, 2010; Butler, 2008; Curry, 1991; Goffman, 1959). Within the literature on male performances, there has been some limited discussion regarding masculine identity in relation to time, particularly regarding the performative expectations placed upon males in certain contexts such as sporting sites, to present themselves as a ‘man’ in order to be accepted (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009; Curry, 1991; Fine, 1987). This is evident in the work by Schrock and Schwalbe in which they assert that:

*‘To be credited as a man, what an individual male must do, in other words, is put on a convincing manhood act. This involves mastering a set of conventional signifying practices through which the identity ‘man’ is established and upheld in interaction.’ (2009: 279)*

It is this idea of ‘upholding’ the masculine performance in interaction which is pertinent to my research. Although some work indicates that performing masculinity is on-going, less detail exists on the ways in which masculine performances, specifically those relating to hegemonic masculinity are maintained, or the techniques adopted by men to do so (Robinson and Hockey, 2011). Through researching banter as a performative strategy to convey masculinity, more detail will be gathered as to the ways in which performances of various masculinities are maintained, and co-exist. The themes of time and performance will be crucial to the development of this argument. It is on this point that a critique of previous work, particularly that of Goffman, must be put forward. Within this work there is no discussion of time, omitting depth of the processes by which performers identify themselves and others when in what Goffman refers to as ‘backstage’ areas, and how this transition between performances through place is managed through time (1959). This omission results in an absence of clarity regarding how performances are maintained or experienced and subsequently limited debate regarding whether repetition of performances influences the construction and transition of identities. This is where is it beneficial to return to the work of Butler, as she reflects more comprehensively on the effects of repeated discursive practices on self and in relation to others, therefore providing a valuable perspective to add to the developing argument surrounding maintaining banterous performances through time (Butler, 2008).

Current research shows that space and time dictate the way that men present themselves (Robinson and Hockey, 2011). However the ways in which men negotiate and move between various performances and manage multiple performances are less apparent. The research on masculinities in transition by Victoria Robinson and Jenny Hockey (2011) on male hairdressers, demonstrated that men transition between different ‘types’ of masculine identity and arguably performances according to context. In this example the men working as hairdressers adopted ‘feminine’ ways to fit in at work, which were not always reflective of their masculinities when not performing that role (Robinson and Hockey, 2011). This echoes the work of Pierre Bourdieu on fields, in which he argued that men enact masculinities in different ways according to varied situations (Coles, 2009; Bourdieu, 1986).

There has been little acknowledgement of such ideas in discussions of performance. The Goffmanesque view of performances shows deficiencies when thinking about multiple and transitioning performances. A possible limitation of Goffman’s *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) work is that there is a restricted account of how sense of self is experienced between performances or the possiblity for performers to undertake multiple performances, potentially presenting contrasting identities as highlighted in Robinson’s and Hockey’s case study (2011). This point is raised in the work by Gregson and Rose (2000) on car-boot sales spaces and the performances undertaken within that setting, in which the researcher found that the distinction between different roles such as actor and audience were ambiguous. The following quotation is particularly useful to note as this expands the argument that performances are multiple and transitionary:

*‘To see performances simply as the theatrical products of knowing, intentional agents at some remove from their other selves, other performers, audiences and power is misplaced. Rather, these performances are at all times interrelational between individual subjects and performative.’ (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 445)*

This quote highlights the point that performances cannot be removed from other selves, advocating a perspective which encompasses the idea of multiple performances. The quote also usefully reflects the argument that any one performance references others, suggesting that these are flexible and alter according to space. Although this multiplicity and transitionary conceptualisation of performance deviates from current theoretical arguments, it shows potential for adding value to and understanding of this field. Specifically, applying this to my research, it becomes clear that banterous performances need to be understood in much more depth than the singular performance itself and that there is significant theoretical potential in tracing the ways in which banterous interactions are utilised in varied ways across spaces, a point on which further discussion will follow in the next section on situating banter in place.

##### Age

When considering themes of performances and transition it is important to draw upon work within fields of age in order to add further criticality to the discussion. As noted both above and in earlier sections, there is an understanding that masculine identity shifts according to age. With age understood and gaining meaning through interactions within wider social and cultural contexts (Laz, 2003). Arguably age is something which is performed and we give meaning to the ages of other’s through our own performances (Cosh et al, 2015; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006; Laz, 2003). In this way it is important to understand age as something which is both social and collective, crucially within the context of wider social processes (Phoenix and Smith, 2011; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006; Hockey and James, 2003). Further to this, understanding and imaginations of lifecourse and ageing perspectives suggest that men grow out of certain behaviours and identity making practices (Jackson, 2002; Francis, 1999). This is particularly prominent within sporting sites, where age is often divisive in terms of providing categorisations and grouping of teams or individuals.

Significantly there are few discussions of hegemonic masculinity in relation to age or how the ways in which men experience this alters through time. However, masculinity more broadly has begun to be explored with sport and age, with the majority of such research focussing on how men perform masculinity in relation to their changing bodies (Phoenix and Smith, 2011; Grant and Kluge, 2007; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006). This relatively new field of research has borrowed concepts and theories from existing literature in order to build foundations for thinking. Laz (2003) directly links performance theorising to age through the adaption of West and Zimmerman’s (1987) concept of ‘doing gender’. This has allowed for critical thinking regarding experiences of age. Laz (2003) considers how we ‘do’ age and suggests that there are a range of resources utilised by individuals within everyday life in order to understand and situate ourselves within the lifecourse. Though this concept has not been applied to extensive sporting settings it poses some interesting insights into the ways that age is ‘done’ or performed. Notably this work encourages conceptualisations of men beyond performances which are bound by age, for example enabling thinking of laddish characteristics beyond the early stages of the lifecourse within which they are most frequently situated. Although this recent work is progressive in the acknowledgement of intersecting themes there remains a tendency to place emphasis upon physical performances of masculinity and there are far less discussions of interactive and social performances within sporting settings in relation to age. Through analysis of a specific case study, Rugby Union, this research will aim to expand upon these existing conceptualisations and think further regarding the myriad performances which men undertake in rugby spaces to negotiate masculinities. My research will build on these ideas and develop further critique of men’s various performances at different ages and stages of the lifecourse.

##### Emotion

When discussing masculine performances within sporting spheres and understandings of hegemonic masculinity it is also important to acknowledge the theme of emotion. Rugby masculinity has historically been tied to notions of toughness and physical strength, with emotionality and expression of feeling often depicted as challenging traditional rugby characteristics (Anderson and McGuire, 2010; Price, 2000). This echoes work on emotion and gender more broadly, in which men are deemed to be less emotionally articulate than women (Lilleaas, 2007; Siedler, 1997; Ekenstam, 1998; Collier, 1998). Within masculinity scholarship exploration of the intersections between men’s experiences, identity construction and emotion is far more recent. Previous studies have demonstrated that men do not find it easy to express their inner feelings (Lilleaas, 2007; Siedler, 1997; Ekenstam, 1998). This is often attributed to the structures which govern society and in particular the hegemonic model of masculinity in which men’s expression of emotion is downplayed or hidden. A consistent thread which runs throughout this growing, yet limited literature is that men’s capacity to ‘do’ gender and to express emotions is complex and challenging (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Although this existing work is useful it raises questions regarding the ways that men may be able to express emotion and the extent to which they are able to do so in highly masculinised settings. Whilst Anderson and McGuire (2010) have indicated through their work on men’s university sports teams that a more inclusive form of masculinity is emerging, one which encapsulates emotion, understandings of the ways that men experience this, as well as the ways in which men manage and express emotions within highly masculinised sites remains limited.

One existing framing of men’s performances and emotion is in relation to crisis. Although this work is heavily critiqued it is important to note as this has been utilised as a way to explain the ideology of gender and the subsequent performances associated with gendered identities (MacInnes, 1998; Lemon, 1995). This work suggests that men are experiencing “crisis”, whereby men are struggling to come to terms with their changing roles in society (MacInnes 2001; Horrocks, 1994; Lemon, 1995). Within this work increasing expression of emotion and therefore particular masculine performances are attributed to unease at changing roles or positions within society. MacInnes (2001) has argued that modernity has meant that masculine values have been questioned, with emotion and the encouragement of men’s emotional articulacy becoming widely accepted. Whilst this work is progressive what is less certain are the ways in which men articulate emotions and or navigate expression within traditionally masculinised contexts. My research will seek to address this and to establish the tools men adopt to express emotionality and perform more nuanced masculinities within the rugby club site.

### Conclusions

This literature review has provided contextual background for studying the relationship between banter and masculinity. Specifically the review has explored hegemonic masculinity and begun to examine how intersections of new themes make reformulation of this theory possible. Through conducting research with the Robins I will explore the extent to which hegemonic masculinity remains relevant within sporting sites, as well as discussing whether alternative theorising might represent men’s experiences of dominant gendered practices more accurately.

This review has been critical with regards to the prevailing theories which have underpinned discussions of men in sporting sites. The argument outlined here has begun to highlight limitations with existing theories and concepts, indicating that there is space for new ways of thinking to emerge. This chapter has presented banter through a sociological lens and has begun to tentatively explore intersections between banter and other more established academic fields. In doing so this has provided the foundations from which to develop theorising which encapsulates the myriad ways which men experience and negotiate gendered structures within the rugby club setting. As Whannel (2007:7) states masculinities are always being ‘re-drawn’ and this thesis will explore the role that the interactive tool of banter plays within this process. The research will specifically examine the ways that men articulate and display resistance to the structures which dominate the rugby space and explore the ways that men in the rugby club are ‘doing’ masculinity (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

# Chapter Three: Methods and Methodology

## Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodological strategy of the study and outlines the methods chosen to conduct the research. I adopted an ethnographic approach to data collection and became part of the everyday fabric of the Robins’ club life, attending the club two to three times per week during the season; in doing so I attempted to learn and understand the norms and values of this different cultural perspective. Utilising an ethnographic approach I undertook observations over a three year period. Within this time I conducted thirty two individual interviews with men, ninety four group interviews and logged three hundred and seventy five research diary entries.

The methods for this thesis were chosen after reflecting on my own experiences within Rugby Union spheres as well as engaging with literature on humour and sport respectively. Both the label and goals of ethnography have been contested within the literature; however there is consensus that ethnography is rooted in the first-hand experience of the research setting, with a commitment to interpreting the point of view of those under study (Atkinson et al, 2006). An ethnographic approach within this research was therefore adopted with the aim of capturing and understanding social action and the meanings of this action (Howell, 2013). As outlined in the literature review, banter is a performative and interactive practice, situated as part of the everyday and therefore necessitates application of methods which accommodate this (McCann et al, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007; Hay, 1994; Norrick, 1993). Existing work on humour and banter has tended to focus upon its functionality, with the methods selected reflecting this and leaning towards conversation analysis which focusses on the minutia of language, tone and intonation (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Haugh, 2010; Garde, 2008; Abrahams, 1962). Though previous research has successfully implemented ethnography and interviews to capture the spontaneity and everyday nature of these interactions these have not spanned long periods of time in the field (Plester and Sayers, 2007; Grugulis, 2002). Whilst such research is interesting, it does not arguably provide ‘rich’ accounts of experiences (Berg, 1998). I wanted to observe banter occurring naturally and begin to understand the nuances of this interactive practice, in doing so moving beyond banter framed as serving a ‘function’, instead thinking about how men experienced banter and the ways that participation/awareness of banter influenced how men felt and related to rugby spaces. Through adopting an ethnographic approach to research and utilising interviews this research aimed to provide thick description of the nuances of banter and the way that this intersected with gender (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Geertz, 1973).

The central aim of this research was to learn how the Robins utilised banter to communicate ideas and conceptualisations of masculinity. In doing so the thesis will provide a Sociological account of banter and highlight how this intersects with other well established themes within the social sciences such as gender. The study will explore how banter fits in with existing conceptualisations such as the rugby lad, in doing so stretching and pushing these ideas into new directions. The research questions below reflect the key aims of the project. These are restated here as they have influenced the selection of methods and shape the direction and approach of the thesis.

1. What are the processes and conditions required for banter to operate?
2. How is sports’ team banter performed by individuals?
3. What is the role of banter in notions of the rugby lad?
4. What is the link between banter and masculinity/femininity?
5. To what extent does banter act as a tool to reinforce/challenge dominant masculine structures at the rugby club?
6. How does banter influence men’s experiences of dominant masculine structures and norms at the rugby club?

Before moving forward to discuss the methodological approach and methods selected, it is first important to be open and honest as to how my experiences of Rugby Union and banter in this sphere have influenced my research strategy. As outlined in my introduction, my personal experiences of banter, as well as previous Masters research, have been significant in the choice of topic. The same can be said of my research strategy. Though I realise that there is a degree of inevitability that as researchers we will be influenced by previous lived experiences, I have attempted to draw positively on these experiences in order to assist in the development of a robust methodology.

As previously noted, the Sunday rugby routine I participated in spanned around eight years of my young life. I spent Sundays collecting subs, serving hot dogs and cheering from the side lines. I was able to move between the various rugby spaces with ease and became interested in the game, the practices and the interactions associated with Rugby Union. I grew up thinking that banterous interactions were normal, though recognised that not everyone would enjoy them. This knowledge is being utilised in my research and is being noted here as I feel that it is significant to both my understanding of banter and ideas surrounding methods. At this time, it is important to note general points related to this issue. Firstly, the choice of setting and sport has been made based on my experience of observing banter in this sphere over prolonged periods of time. My Masters research also supported this, as the young men involved all played Rugby Union and banter was a prominent theme in that research. I therefore believe that this setting will prove fruitful for researching banterous interactions. Secondly, my experiences and knowledge have also influenced my approach and selection of methods. Due to the nature of banter, my previous observations and the experiences of conducting Masters research which involved navigation of banter in focus groups; it was felt that a combination of group observations and individual interviews will be utilised. These will allow for an understanding of how both groups and individuals conceptualise and utilise banter. These cases will be described in greater depth in subsequent sections.

## Theoretical Approach

Feminist and interactionist approaches influenced my methodological stance to research, viewing gender as a social construction, therefore enabling a critique of masculinity (Pini and Pease, 2013; Butler, 2008). Furthermore, feminist thinking was adopted to provide a critique of the construction of knowledge, placing emphasis upon situated experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Flax, 1987). These perspectives acknowledge that the boundaries and relationships between researchers and participants are intricate, suggesting that thinking about these complexities enriches data (Coffey, 2002; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 1999; Oakley, 1981). Furthermore, postmodernism has encouraged an increased awareness of the ways that the researcher’s own context forms part of the narrative of interpretation (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Angrosino, 2005).

The decision to situate my research within these particular frameworks involved careful consideration. Liz Stanley (2007) highlights the perils of working towards formulating methods and methodologies, discussing shifting research frames, and noting how choice of research frames are significant to how the research is received. Further to this, discussion surrounding the understanding and application of terms such as ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods has been the focus of numerous debates within the social sciences; adding further complexity to making research choices (Stanley, 2007, Letherby, 2003;). This thesis is not the place for debate regarding the terms associated with methodological writing. A point which becomes clear though, is that where research methodology is concerned, it is a complex and even messy process, requiring careful navigation and consideration. With this in mind, it is with care that I have explored a variety of perspectives, approaches and conceptualisations in order to construct this methodology. I have chosen to place emphasis upon how theory and practice interlink and overlap, influenced by engagement with feminist perspectives which have been a significant influence on my epistemological and ontological positions, as well as informing my methodological choices (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Stanley and Wise, 2008; Letherby, 2003). It is therefore important to outline my understanding of feminist perspectives and methodologies before progressing with the discussion of my theoretical framework.

Establishing an exact definition of what constitutes feminism and feminist research is problematic, due to the varied opinions and ideas around the subject, as well as the changing cultural contexts (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Jackson and Jones, 1998). Feminism as it is utilised in this research refers to what Stanley proposes as ‘thinking’ about the conceptualisation of gender (2008:202). In addition to this, feminist thinking is understood to provide a critique of the construction of knowledge and places emphasis upon situated experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Flax, 1987). Feminist theorising has emphasised the role of the self in the research process, encouraging reflexivity on the part of the researcher; subsequently strongly influencing research writing (Letherby, 2003). This approach encourages what Dorothy Smith (1990:20) referred to as ‘alternative ways of thinking’ about the social world. In this way feminist thinking has challenged the positivist interpretations of the social world which came before it, paving the way for new research practices. It is also important to note that feminist work has enabled a questioning of gender, which within this research is understood to be a social construction, influenced and sustained through continued performances (Pini and Pease, 2013; Butler 2008; Walby, 2010). Further to this, drawing on the work of writers such as Barbara Pini and Bob Pease (2013) in their introductory chapter within an edited collection on the subject of men, masculinities and methodologies they also reflect on the ways in which feminist methodologies are utilised to study men and the appropriateness of this type of theoretical framework in research on men. These issues will be addressed systematically through the course of this chapter as well as subsequent analysis chapters, and existing ideas surrounding the implementation of feminist methodologies in studying men will be developed.

West and Zimmerman’s (1987) famous work introducing the idea of ‘doing gender’ will also be a central tenet to my research. This will act as tool in order to explore the categorization and construction of masculinities in relation to the utilisation of banterous interactions. In using this theory I will try to avoid the previous pitfalls of many studies which have diluted both the significance of the theory and its sociological implications for theorising gender (Risman, 2009). Whilst I will weave this theory into a wider theoretical framework, I will aim to remain mindful of the feminist critique on which it is based, placing continued emphasis on the central idea that the construction of masculinity and femininity is interactional and institutional, as all relationships are enacted within particular institutional arenas (West and Zimmerman, 1987). This is particularly pertinent to my research as it is being conducted within the institution of sport, where relationships can be seen to be bound by specific cultural and historical ideologies and practices. The theory outlined by West and Zimmerman (1987) has acted as an ‘intellectual tool for conceptualizing gendered behaviour and interaction’ for many, and I will also utilise this theory in this way in order to explore gender in new ways (Messerschmidt, 2009:86). The ideas from West and Zimmerman regarding ‘doing gender’ have also been selected as the theory acknowledges the significance of performance to sociological thinking on theorising gender.

## The research setting

This project adopts a case study method to explore the use of banter by the Robins Rugby Union team and members. The implementation of case studies as a tool in research has been contested, often within debates regarding the merits of qualitative and quantitative research methods (George and Bennett, 2004; Platt, 2000; Feagin et al., 1991). Having said this, there appears to be consensus that case study work allows for rich, in-depth and detailed data which enables conceptual validity, the potential to derive new hypotheses and the exploration for causal mechanisms within analysis (George and Bennett, 2004; Feagin et al., 1991). The case study method using observations, interviews and research diaries is being adopted here as this provides a multifaceted exploration of a single phenomenon and in doing so provides detail which previous studies within this field may lack. Within this study I am hoping to capture people as they experience their natural everyday circumstances, gaining an in depth insight into banter in club life. In doing so, I aim to develop new conceptualisations of banter and masculinities which will expand current understandings.

Identification of a suitable case study site which enables key concerns of the research to be addressed is sometimes challenging (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). In the case of this research, I was looking for a site which would allow me to observe banterous interactions unfolding naturally, as well as occurring frequently enough to enable sufficient amounts of data to be collected. I was interested in exploring the gendered nature of banter, specifically the role of banter in the construction of masculinities. Rugby Union has historically been a site in which narrow versions of masculinity which align with the hegemonic model persist (Van Campenhout and Van Hoven, 2014; Dempster, 2009; Mac an Ghail and Haywood, 2007; Connell, 2008, 2005). Playing rugby and socialising within this sphere has historically been framed to limit performance of masculinity to that of the rugby lad which encompasses interactional and social practices including banter. The rugby site was therefore selected as a way to guarantee frequent observations of banter, so as to develop a sociological account of this practice and to enrich the existing understandings of men within this field. My research aims to explore the minutiae of banterous performances in more depth, thinking beyond laddish behaviours as static, instead considering the diversities within performances of masculinities in the rugby setting. Further to this, my involvement with Rugby Union clubs throughout my life, as well as the findings from my Masters research which focussed on an all-male rugby team, led to the decision to focus this research on Rugby Union.

Interactions which occur within the research are shaped by the context in which they are situated, in this way it can be seen that context is significant to performances within the study (Pini, 2005). The staging of the research process to borrow Goffman’s term, can therefore be seen to be very important (Goffman, 1959). Manderson et al. (2006:1318) note that ‘different settings allow or inhabit the ability of the research participants to position each other’. This can be linked to the work of Barbara Pini (2005) who asserts that the ‘where’ of the research process is significant and needs to be considered in equal measure with the ‘who, whom and what’ which are more frequently questioned. Further to this, the setting is also significant to the relationships which are developed between the researcher and participant(s), as well as influencing the way participants perform versions of themselves to others (Pini, 2005). The theme of performance will be returned to in a subsequent section of this chapter, as it proved extremely significant to the research.

The Rugby Union club at the centre of my research referred to throughout as The Robins has been established since the 1930’s and is located in the North of England. The city in which this research was based is characterised by its largely industrial roots and surrounding countryside. Notably the city does not have a professional Rugby Union team and the club selected for this research was one of two teams in the area which are separated by a single division. This club was selected due to the locality as I was able to attend the site frequently, an important factor in ethnographic research (Silverman, 2013; Bryman, 2012). Additionally, initial investigation had shown that this was a team which comprised men of varying ages and backgrounds, which was important to the research. The Robins is comprised of a number of teams playing competitively at a range of age and ability levels. The teams on which this research is based are the first and second teams. These teams consisted of all adult males aged between eighteen and forty. Teams practiced at the club two evenings a week, playing matches either home or away every Saturday during the season. Training continued all year with the club open for socialising every Tuesday and Thursday evening. It is also worth noting that the club had two women’s netball teams associated with it, mainly comprising of partners of the players. Additionally, a young female under 14’s rugby team was started during my time at the club. These links to female sports teams, particularly the introduction of a female Rugby Union team, reflect changes across the sport more widely.

The club has its own ground with a number of pitches, as well as a clubhouse which was the centre of pre and post-match socialising. The club house is a public place, welcoming both members and non-members to watch rugby and socialise. During my fieldwork the bar area was redesigned to resemble a pub environment. The club has three pitches; however there was a primary one, reserved almost exclusively for use by the first team. This pitch was situated directly in front of the club house and had a hard standing area for spectators along one side. Additionally, there was a small stand which allowed people to sit whilst watching. There was also a viewing area which was attached to the club house which allowed for a slightly elevated view. It is important to note that each of these different areas attracted a distinct type of spectator, those most interested in coming to socialise and have a drink would situate themselves nearest to the club house, and incidentally this was where the most noise came from on match days. Those keen to concentrate on the game congregated along the touch line, often moving up and down the line following the run of play. The stands were most frequently utilised by women, the elderly, those with disabilities or those who were compiling official reports or statistics of the game for the RFU.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The clubhouse itself was large and housed a bar, kitchen, changing rooms, office and gym. The space was spilt into two by short a dividing wall, with archways either side of it. On one side of the wall there were large sofas organised around a dance floor which remained in place for functions. There was also a large screen and projector on this side which was utilised to televise big sporting events. On the other side of the wall there were a number of tables and chairs, this had a feel to it similar to that of a lounge area in a pub. The majority of the flooring was carpeted and this matched the club colours. There were unwritten rules about these areas which dictated behaviours and movements within the space, for example boots were not allowed to be worn in the clubhouse. The club also had a number of small television screens mounted to the walls and the tables and chairs were arranged to point towards these. The club paid for Sky TV and so there was a constant stream of sport always emanating from the screens. The bar itself was towards the back of the room, with an open fireplace to one side. There were a number of bar stools in this area as well as a large wooden table which had an accompanying bench and chairs. This area was affectionately known by The Robins as ‘old farts corner’ as this was the space where the older regulars would most frequently congregate both before and after matches. This table had symbolic meaning to many of the Robins as it had been dedicated to a deceased regular who used to sit there routinely, marked by a brass engraved named plate on one corner.

Within the clubhouse there were public and private spaces. The public spaces were the bar/lounge and pitch areas, however there were also private spaces within the club which were not accessible to the general public. Drawing on Goffman’s (1959) theories of front and back stage areas, these private areas could be classified as backstage areas, as they were spaces in which interactions and behaviour altered, for example players were able to relax and coaches would speak more freely. Private areas included the changing rooms, gym, office and kitchen areas. Though there were no explicit signs notifying the general public not to enter these areas, these spaces were only reserved for well-established club members or players. It was interesting that a number of the regulars moved through these spaces with ease, and that it is almost a mark of true membership or acceptance that an individual was able to navigate between these spaces easily. Upon entering the field I was acutely aware of these different spaces and exerted a lot of energy ensuring that I did not get these wrong. I spent a lot of time hovering on the edges of spaces and loitering around hoping to be permitted access. This changed when I began volunteering, at which point the whole club was open to me.

The character of the clubhouse itself is also important to note here, as I believe it to be fairly unusual. Comparing this clubhouse to that of others I have seen through my life as a sports spectator, as well as through this research process, there was something different about this club, it felt homely, it was a space which was enjoyed in its own right. Though I recognise that this may be a subjective feeling towards the space, there are a number of factors to support this view. Firstly, I felt this way from very early on in the process, so familiarity was not influential. Secondly, sports clubhouses are often cold, dirty, clinical and soulless places; this club was different, it was an inviting space, which was undoubtedly influenced by those who worked/volunteered there, but even when the place was almost empty, it remained a welcoming environment. I think that this was due to the décor. Every inch of wall space was covered in Robin memorabilia, consisting of photographs of teams through the ages, framed sports-wear, images and figures of the mascot and souvenirs from tours and matches. The Robin mascot was present throughout the space and the clubs colours ran throughout the decoration. The identity of the club was prominent wherever you looked and the message that this was a space with its own rich and vibrant history was clear to see.

### Participants

The participants for this research comprised two broad groups, those who actively played rugby and those who were members of the club and spectators. Though this division may appear basic, it effectively positions the participants in the research into two distinct categories, which was necessary as the activities these groups undertook and the way that they utilised the club was different.

The players were majority white males aged between eighteen and forty. Notably participation for the research was not reliant upon age; rather the categorization of players and regulars emerged naturally after the early stages of the research. The men, who have all been given pseudonyms, were for the most part semi-professional, employed in spheres including: health, farming, labour, education and business. This diversity was a welcomed element of the research selection process, as I hoped to ensure that there were similarities and differences between players in order to make appropriate observations. For the players, rugby was a leisure activity external to their working lives. Many of the team had been playing at the club from a young age and had long term family ties to the club. There were also a handful of players in the first team who had joined the club at later stages of their lives and had either been head hunted, or in some cases loaned from other clubs in higher leagues in order to develop skills and knowledge of the game. Each season there were always two or three players from overseas, visiting for a season and often ‘working’ or sponsored by a club member with a business. First team players were not paid to play, though in some cases travel costs were offered as an incentive. Significantly the majority of players opted out of this payment, preferring instead for this money to go back into the club.

The other groups of participants in the research were those who did not currently play rugby at the club. This group of individuals were older than the players, ranging from late thirties to eighties. These participants will be referred to as ‘regulars’ in this research, as they were individuals for whom the routine of attending the club was significant in their everyday lives. Notably, many of these regulars were volunteers at the club, so they were either on the committee which assisted with the running of the club, or they played a role on match days to ensure that the day progressed smoothly. This group of participants were predominantly male, though there were a few females who were part of the committee. Almost all of the women at the club were in relationships with the men or were mothers’ of players. Most of the regulars had historical links to the club, with many of them having played for the club when they were younger, maintaining a keen interest in the club ever since, alternatively many of them were initially linked to the club through their children and had remained involved once their children had finished playing. A common thread which tied this group together though was the passion they had for rugby, and particularly for the club itself. The rugby club was a place where they enjoy socialising and participating in a community outside of work and family. All the regulars knew each other and many of them were friends outside of the club too.

The selection of participants as well as the methods of study has been deliberate in order to alleviate some of the criticisms of previous research on masculinities in sport. Firstly, the focus of similar research has often been placed upon one particular age cohort, usually active participants in sport. Examples of this can be seen in the influential work of Anderson and McGuire (2010) and Curry (1991) in which the participants for research are all young men who currently play sport. This arguably limits understandings and overlooks nuances associated with masculinity in transition or through the lifecourse. Secondly, research has tended to place emphasis on older men, whom are asked to reflect on experiences from when they used to play. This is problematic for the reason that the temporal and subjective distance creates a problem in terms of validity of the analysis (Moller, 2007). To alleviate these issues I implemented case study methods and ethnographic approaches which allow for a gain a richer understanding of the men’s experiences. Observing and interviewing multiple generations of men will allow voices and reflections of those experiencing masculinity in different ways, and at various stages of the lifecourse to be heard.

## Access

Gaining access to the field is an important part of the research and fieldworkers have to work hard at the start of the process to gain the confidence of their participants (Coffey, 2002; Adler and Adler, 1987). Narrowing the scope of the research to Rugby Union helped to decrease the potential sample for data collection. There were only a few Rugby Union clubs located close enough for me to be able to visit regularly. After visiting the websites for these I began to email them in turn. Starting with The Robins, due to the proximity to my address, I approached the committee via email. Drawing on literature which advocates ‘selling yourself’ as researchers when attempting to gain access to the sphere of research, I approached the club secretary via email being mindful of the way that I represented my research interests and intentions (Walford, 1999). After receiving their response I went to meet some of the committee informally to discuss my research. I did not initially disclose that my research centred upon banter, as I did not want the common perception and understandings of banter to inform the interactions and behaviours I observed. Further to this, I wanted to ensure that the research was accessible to the club members; therefore I placed emphasis upon gaining an understanding of Rugby Union cultures and the ways in which people communicate and interact within rugby settings.

After access to the club was agreed I entered the research setting and interacted with the wider Robins’ community. I began “hanging out” in the space and in doing so started talking to a number of members and players regularly (Adler and Adler, 1987; Becker and greer, 1960). To begin with I did not talk much, or approach people, rather I sat and observed, talking only when spoken to. As time passed I began asking questions about what was going on and it was from this point that I formed connections to different individuals who would later become my participants for interviews. After a period of six months I was asked whether I would like to volunteer on the bar. I began bar work on match days and this was another important factor in enabling me to build rapport with the club members as well as gain access to participants for the interviews. Though this posed particular ethical considerations which will be discussed later in this chapter, this shift in roles within the research meant that access was less problematic (Adler and Adler, 1987). This change also undoubtedly altered the data collected and interactions witnessed. Discussion of this including reflexive comments will weave throughout the following sections, as well as in the closing part of the chapter which details the practicalities of conducting research.

My involvement at the club has to date spanned almost four years and I continue to volunteer and socialise with the Robins. The data utilised for this thesis covered the initial three years, though recording of broader ideas is ongoing and provides context. I began the observational period of my fieldwork by visiting the club two to three times a week, on Tuesday and Thursday evenings when the players trained and the club was open. Additionally, I visited the club on Saturday’s for match days, spending time observing the pre and post-match routines and interactions. The regularity of these visits quite quickly paid off as I was given little tasks to do and was asked my opinion during informal match analysis. This meant that I had more opportunities to gather data and gain a greater understanding of the way that banter worked within the group (Atkinson, 2012; Taylor, 2011). The choice to visit on weekdays and weekends was strategic in that these different times provided the opportunity to observe the men in varied social situations and with differing audiences.

## Data Collection

### Observations

*‘Field researchers seek to get close to others in order to understand their way of life. To preserve and convey that closeness, they must describe situations and events of interest in detail.’ (Emerson et al., 1995:14)*

Participant observation was the first of the methods implemented within this ethnographic study. This is broadly defined by Atkinson (2012: 23) as ‘the study of a human group life via a researcher’s immersion in a particular social group, scene, or cultural setting of interest.’ This method aims to grasp how members’ worldviews and practices are organised and developed (Atkinson, 2012; Brewer, 2005; Emerson et al., 1995). The central premise of this research was to understand how the Robins implemented banter to communicate ideas and conceptualisations of masculinity; therefore participant observation was deemed most appropriate (Atkinson, 2012). I adopted an overt approach to participant observations, ensuring at the start of the fieldwork process that my presence was known and understood by those who utilised the space (Silverman, 2013; Bryman, 2012; Adler and Adler, 1987). Ethnographic approaches arguably allow for researchers to capture the social meanings and activities of people’s everyday lives (O’Reilly, 2009; Brewer, 2005; Hammersley, 1992; Burgess, 1997). Participant observations are most commonly associated with ethnographic approaches and this method was chosen for the research as this allowed me to observe the men in their natural environments. This method allowed me to watch and listen to what people in the rugby setting were naturally doing with the added dimension that I was personally experiencing and often part of the banterous interactions (Brewer, 2005; Silverman, 1997).

Participant observation requires researchers to become immersed within research sites, leading to questions regarding navigation of the complexities associated with insider/outsider relationships (Bridges 2013; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Fay, 1996). Feminist perspectives acknowledge that the boundaries and relationships between researchers and participants are intricate; suggesting that through thinking about these complexities data enriches data (Coffey, 2002; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 1999; Oakley, 1981). Furthermore, postmodernism has encouraged an increased awareness of the ways that the researcher’s own context forms part of the narrative of interpretation (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Angrosino, 2005). It is these ideas which underpinned the approach to ethnography taken within my research, and are therefore prominent within the discussion of methods implemented in this section.

Adler and Adler (1987) argue that researchers roles change within the field and that ‘rather than adopting one role and keeping it for the duration of their study, Sociologists often progress through the course of gathering data’ (1987:14). These changes in roles are attributed to the natural progression of relationships in the settings, as well as increasing knowledge of the field. There are varied opinions as to the optimum position of the researcher within the field work, with Gurney (1985:56) arguing that ‘being marginal to a setting is supposedly the researcher’s greatest curse and greatest blessing.’ Within my study, discussions surrounding the changing of roles are particularly relevant, as my own role within the setting altered after the initial six month period from one as a ‘peripheral member’ to ‘complete member’ (Adler and Adler, 1987). This altered my own role in the research, as well as the interactions with the participants. I arguably moved from what Gurney refers to as ‘marginal’ to being more central within interactions. Whilst I do not adopt an auto-ethnographic approach, I will be reflexive of the transitions I experienced in the field during this chapter, as this openness arguably assists in unravelling and understanding the data (Scott, 2012; Back, 2007).

I approached the field with the aim to explore the ways that the men ‘did’ their masculinity through the use of banter within the rugby setting (Smith et al., 2012; West and Zimmerman, 1987). I entered the setting open minded and my only focus for observations was upon viewing how banter was utilised by the men within their more general interactions. Though I was using banter as a way to direct my observations, I initially remained open minded and recorded wider interactions and behaviours within my research notes and diaries in order to build up a clearer understanding of the club more broadly (O’Reilly, 2009). As time passed I became a familiar feature and therefore I was able to recognise banterous interactions more easily. Paired with initial analysis and reflections of early experiences, my observations and recordings became more focussed.

Upon entering the field I was extremely nervous, a feeling I had not foreseen, as I felt familiar with rugby spaces. Though I had grown up in a rugby setting and was comfortable with rugby cultures, on my first few visits to the club I felt exposed. My experiences echoed those described by Zajano and Edelsberg (1993) who discuss having to undertake a ‘dance’ in the early stages of fieldwork, whereby the researcher has to carefully negotiate new relationships. In the early stages of the fieldwork I thought very carefully about my behaviour and interactions, specifically the way I wanted to frame my research. Michaela Soyer (2014:459) argues that ‘ethnographers often claim that who they are, or who they are not affects the type of data they are able to collect’. I was made painfully aware of these ideas upon my early visits during which I was questioned by many of the club members regarding my intentions, as well as more personal questions about my background and often relationship status. Reflecting on these experiences, I can only speculate as to how my demographic attributes influenced the data collected, however I think that the initial questions I was asked by participants provided interesting points for discussion in relation to the construction of gendered identities within the research, a point which will be returned to and discussed in detail in the closing sections of this chapter (Soyer, 2014).

#### Being an insider

After a period of six months attending the club and solely observing interactions, I was asked if I would like to volunteer in a more official capacity as a bar person. It is notable here that this proposition may have been in part due to the close relationships I had built with people, and my own personal desire to be more ‘useful’ and help them. However, it must also be acknowledged that this was in part a strategic move, as previous research suggests that altering positions in the field and becoming more of an insider can be fruitful for research (Schacht, 1996). Steven Schacht (1996) conducted research in a Rugby Union setting and noted the significance of researcher participation in order to gain respect of the participants and access to information. Though I felt that my knowledge of rugby had in many ways enabled me to negotiate any initial barriers in relation to my ‘outsider’ status, I acknowledged that given the significance of the volunteers to the club and the frequency with which I was attending, this transition was natural.

The decision to volunteer on the bar was also informed by re-visiting the literature to explore how researchers in similar situations had made decisions and the implications of this upon data collection. A common theme to emerge from the literature was that researchers’ frequently re-negotiated access to the research field in order to continue to gain new insights (Walford, 1999, Silverman, 2013; Taylor, 2011). Notably, I felt that I had perhaps exhausted the possibilities of networking and observing in the initial role. Further to this, having observed interactions with participants and other bar staff I decided that this would be a positive step for my research. It was at this point that I transitioned into the researcher role which Adler and Adler (1987) refer to as ‘complete member researchers’ described as those who are already members of the group and become fully affiliated through the research period.

Patti Lather (2007) questions the behind the scenes of research, interrogating the front/back stage of researching and writing, drawing on Goffmanian and Butleresque perspectives to do so (Butler 2008; Goffman, 1959). Lather (2007) argues that it is the movement between places within research settings and the varying performances which are interesting to discuss. My shifting role in the research altered the framework within which the men understood and interacted with me (Soyer, 2014). The club setting is one which arguably contributes to the tailoring of specific performances. Through becoming involved in the bar, I was positioned alongside the men in a different context, this meant that I was able to in some ways challenge the performances expected of me in the setting. Further to this, I was also able to view the men in new ways, seeing the nuances of relationships and how the inner workings of the club influenced interactions too.

Though becoming an ‘insider’ within the research setting can be seen in many ways to be advantageous, it is important to acknowledge some of the difficulties discussed in previous research, as well as my own experiences in the research setting. Tristan Bridges (2013) problematizes some of the difficulties the researcher experiences in the field when negotiating appropriate distances/closeness between researchers and participants. Through my frequent visits to the club I became one of the regulars myself, valued as part of the club community. This was proven through the language the men used to reference me, with many of them making jokes that I was ‘daughter number 2’ or ‘their stand in daughter.’ This closeness was interesting and closely links to the debates by researchers such as Bridges (2013) who note the complexities of relationships within the field (Silverman, 2013; Pini and Pease, 2013; Bryman, 2012). Further evidence that my role as a researcher was perhaps forgotten, or that I had become part of the furniture was when at the end of season ball I was awarded a trophy for ‘volunteer of the year’. Though I had ‘worked’ hard on the bar for the duration of the season, as well as showing support by volunteering with other events hosted at the club, I felt awkward and almost uncomfortable at being recognised in this way. I felt dishonest that my role as a researcher and my underlying motive for being there had been forgotten. Reflecting on this in my diary and returning to the literature Taylor (2011:6) makes an important point that ‘one can never assume totality in their position as either an insider or an outsider, given that the boundaries of such positions are always permeable’. This is useful to consider when drawing discussions of conducting ethnographic work together, and in concluding issues relating to the insider/outsider dichotomy. To alleviate these concerns I decided to undertake interviews in order to supplement my observational data.

### Interviews

*‘The interview is a story that describes how two people, often relative strangers, sit down and talk about a specific topic. One of those strangers-an interviewer- introduces a specific topic, then asks a question, the other speaker-an interviewee- gives something hearable as an answer.’ (Rapley, 2007: 15)*

Silverman (1993) argues that interviews have become part of our society and that this method is deemed to be significant to making sense of our lives. Within qualitative research, interview methods have been informed by various theoretical perspectives and utilised to gain insight into the lived experiences of those we are questioning (Silverman and Atkinson, 1997; Bryman, 2012). This thesis adopted semi structured interviews influenced by feminist approaches, in which interviews are understood to open talk, allow for authentic accounts and unmask power balances (Rapley, 2007; Bryman, 2012; Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). I entered into the research intending to undertake semi-structured interviews with forty men, interviewing them external to the rugby setting in order to supplement ethnographic data collection. This method was chosen as I wanted to learn about men’s experiences and to gain first-hand accounts of everyday practices. I selected this method to understand the emergent themes from observations and to talk to men openly external to the rugby setting. I hoped that in speaking to the men independently of others that I would be able to gain an insight into the ways that men experienced banter and how this was linked to their notions of gender, particularly the rugby lad. Men were recruited for interview based on the prerequisite that they were either current players or members of the club. I did not set any parameters in terms of age or amount of time affiliated to the Robins. As a result of this the sample was varied, with the youngest participant aged nineteen and the eldest seventy two.

The process of undertaking interviews did not follow my initial plan and I quickly realised that the context of the research, as well as the relationships posed specific challenges. Initially I began interviewing men external to the rugby settings in their own homes or neutral public spaces, however this did not work and the interviews were stunted, with lapses in conversation. The first three interviews were with men who had been recruited through the club and with whom I had built relationships with during club nights. Whilst the interviews were not a complete failure, I reflected that there was awkwardness and a feeling of unease emanating from the participants. The men found it difficult to articulate and explain how banter operated and what it meant. This was highlighted by Pete a forty six year old businessman, in the following quotation:

*‘Well it is hard to describe really, especially like this. It is one of those things which happens naturally so I could not really say how it works or when it happens. Best to watch me with the others then ask me! Then I would know.’ (Pete, 46)*

Reflecting on this afterwards I considered trialling a different approach to interviews and data collection. Existing literature has outlined ‘reluctant respondents’ whereby participants refused to take part or do not disclose information (Smith et al., 2012; Adler and Adler, 2003; Becker and Greer, 1957). Though my respondents were not necessarily reluctant to take part in the ways implied within such literature, the men clearly had reservations regarding discussing banterous interactions once removed from the rugby club setting. I thought carefully with regards to the significance of space to interviews. I began interviewing men at the club, either on club nights where we would sit in a quiet area and chat, or interviewing men in small groups. I utilised the same semi-structured questions and yet the responses were much more forthcoming. Additionally, with permission, I began to record interactions or conversations between small groups of men and asked them collectively to reflect on the banter immediately after it had happened. This meant that the responses were a combination of reflections on broader themes and specific questions, as well as those which utilised real time events as a impetus for debate. This form of data collection spanned a six month period, during which time undertook ninety four group interviews alongside thirty two individual interviews.

The regularity with which I recorded collective conversations meant that I was able to understand participants in greater depth and to weave narratives together. Further to this, it meant that I was able to build relationships with participants; with those men I had initially interviewed disclosing further information and personal stories than before. As acknowledged by Danny during a conversation five months after I had initially interviewed him:

*‘I mean I didn’t say this before, but I feel like I can now…’*

*(Danny, carpenter, 23)*

Taylor (2011) amongst others discuss the benefits to having regular contact with interview participants prior to interviewing; arguing that this ensures that conversations last longer and individuals have less fear of disclosure (Robinson et al., 2007). My research experience builds on such literature and indicates that regular contact and continual interviews across time can be beneficial as relationships deepen. Recording moments of conversations and asking the men to unpick these also enabled me to observe the gestures associated with banter and to continue to see banter unfolding naturally. This choice to deviate from my original plan echoed Robinson et al’s (2007:190) discussion of interviews in which they note that interviews are ‘a process of negotiation’ whereby there are multiple layers relating to knowledge, understanding and interaction which have to be navigated.

Once I had adapted my approach the process of data collection was much smoother. The only aspect which proved problematic was the negotiation of gendered identities and performances. Holmgren (2013:92) argues that interviews are “complex meaning making processes”. Utilising my theoretical framework of performance and feminist approaches I thought critically regarding my approach to interviews as well as varied aspects of performance. Denzin (2001) suggests that interviews are ‘performance texts’ which is echoed in Walby’s (2010:645) work, in which she states that “during the interview both the researcher and the respondent fashion a sense of self through talk and gestures and this sense of self may be a sexual and gendered self”. The nature of my research and the questions meant that men were encouraged to reflect on masculinity. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) argue that some men see interviews as a threat to masculinity or as an opportunity to display masculine characteristics. This was certainly the case within my research, though notably this was not an issue with all men and any such performances were understood as data. As noted by Herod (1993:306) interviews “cannot be conceived as taking place in a gender vacuum” and therefore cultural ideas of gender are inescapable in the research process. This discussion surrounding positionality and performances within interviews will be returned to later in this chapter.

### Research diary

*Research diaries are rarely sand alone methods but can be used to advantage in mixed methods studies (Barbour, 2014).*

An important tool and method within my project was a research diary in which I recorded initial notes from the field as well as my reflexive thinking. The research diary became a method in its own right due to the complexity of my study and the ways in which I viewed/experienced my own positionality influencing the data. Silverman (2013) suggests that research diaries are spaces in which personal context of the topic and lessons learnt are recorded. This tool was utilised throughout my project and continues to be a space in which I record interactions from the rugby club, as well as ideas regarding interconnections of themes/ideas. The research diary included full field notes in which information about events, people, conversations and descriptions of the space were kept (Bryman, 2012; Drake, 2010; Emerson et al., 1995). The function of my field notes was to understand how participants’ themselves were characterizing and experiencing banter in relation to the gendered structures of the rugby club (Silverman, 2013). Significantly this acted as a space in which my presence as an ethnographer and interviewer was evident and therefore it complimented my other methods through enabling me to write myself into the picture (Bryman, 2012; Coffey, 1999; Emerson et al., 1995; Van Maanen, 1988).

Ghorashi (2005) discusses the significance of being reflexive in research and that research itself can make you reflect on your own experiences. Reading this text before entering the field allowed for some important reflections. Given the nature of my research I thought critically with regards to my own voice in the research and how much involvement I should have within conversations. I agonised over the decision of whether I should participate or instigate banter, or in contrast, remain silent. The research diary became a space in which I thought critically about my own behaviours and position in the interactions. Pat Drake (2010: 85) also discusses the benefits of keeping a research diary noting that ‘keeping and using diaries and external perspectives to stimulate reflexivity whenever possible is encouraged as an important part of self-triangulation’. Heeding the warnings of such texts I ensured that I kept an up to date research diary. This was helped by advancement in technology, whereby I was able to write notes inconspicuously on my phone, adding further details of this when I left the field and expanding on these the next day.

As noted above the body of work exploring the dynamic between researcher-participants has been growing, most recently drawing upon emergent themes within Sociology including emotions to expand these existing debates (Scott, 2012; Scott, 2007 Atkinson, 2006; Adler and Adler, 1987). Scott (2012) explores the pressures placed on researchers to be ‘ideal researchers’ and the potential difficulties faced such as shyness or managing emotions when entering the field. For me the research diary provided a significant space in which I felt able to articulate the dramaturgical dilemmas which I faced privately whilst undertaking the research, in particular whilst trying to perform the role of a professional researcher and negotiate my own identity in the field. Specifically, this was a space I utilised to write about my reflections and feelings towards managing my awkwardness around the men, in particular when I became the butt of the joke or the centre of the banter. Additionally this was a space in which I could outline my frustrations with the attitudes and practices conveyed which I often found offensive. In this way, the diary became a device in which I was able to document my own emotional labour and to consider the role this played in the ongoing research process (Scott, 2012; Hochschild, 1983).

## Research Roles

*‘It’s not you, it’s me…’*

*(Peter, 36, welder)*

Peter a thirty six year old Welder and first team player made this statement to me during an interview in which he appeared to have trouble articulating himself. He was notably frustrated, wriggling about in his seat, sipping his drink after every sentence and asking me for validation of his ideas. At one point during the interview I asked him whether he was happy to continue. It was at that moment he apologised and said *‘it’s not you, it’s me’.* This interaction bothered me and encouraged reflexivity of the data collection process. I began to question understandings of roles within research and how my presence affected people. Peter seemed to think that there was a certain way an interviewee should behave or perform and was concerned that he was not adhering to this. This comment echo previous writing on positionality and negotiation of roles within the research, which highlights inevitable issues relating to research experiences (Atkinson, 2012; Rose, 1997; McDowell, 1992). The interaction with Peter became a stimulus for my own critical thinking regarding my role in the research. Burgess (1982:45) argues that when implementing ethnographic methods the researcher is the main ‘instrument’ of data collection. When reading this work I began to relate this to Goffmanian perspectives and notions of the performance (Goffman, 1959). The idea of positioning myself as an instrument or a prop in the research resounded with many of my experiences and diary reflections (Burgess, 1997). This also echoed in work by Denzin (1970) on the ‘research act’ and more recently the work of Brickell (2005:25), in which he notes that researchers must consider the complexity of relationships in the field and specifically the ‘dooer behind the deed’. Considering such literature alongside my own early experiences, as well as the comment from Peter above, it is important to expand discussion of the performances undertaken by both participants and I during fieldwork (Atkinson, 2012). Though there are intersections between themes and thinking of one theme in isolation has limitations, emphasis in the remainder of this discussion will be based upon gender, as this was not only the central focus of the research, but also a recurring point of contention throughout the research process.

As noted briefly in previous sections there were a number of challenges relating to gender which influenced data collection and my experiences of conducting field work. Most notable were complications associated with the gender dynamics of the research site. Personal experiences of conducting research with men in a similar context at Master’s degree level, as well as engaging with the literature on gender relations in research highlighted potential problems. There were many instances during the research process where assumptions about my gender arguably influenced the action. The most obvious cases of this were when I was drawn into discussions or interactions based on my appearance, gender or sexuality. There was one occasion during post-match socialising when the men were singing collectively. Jason approached me and asked whether I would be part of the next song. Given that everyone was looking I felt like I had to say yes. Below is an extract from my research diary from that day which explores this experience:

*So I had been serving at the bar, listening to rounds of the regular songs (which I still struggle to understand). The singing had been going on for a while and Jason came over to the bar and asked if he could borrow me. He said they were singing a song called White Dove and that I was needed to stand on a chair. I was unsure about this and instinctively wanted to say no, though obviously I was intrigued to know what would happen, what the reaction of my participation would be and was also pleased to be involved. So I followed Jason and stood on the chair which had been presented in front of me at the centre of the clubhouse. A man got up on the opposite chair, we were situated opposite each other but just out of reach of one another. I was immediately aware of all the eyes watching me and felt self-conscious, but then simultaneously happy that I was so centrally involved in the fun. Jason shouted aloud to mark the start of the song and started telling the story. The story was of lost love and Romeo and Juliet style we were lovers separated because we were from different tribes. After setting up the story and telling people what they needed to do (which was to sing certain words and make particular sounds on cue), he began singing. I had never heard the song before, but made the appropriate gestures when signalled to, including jumping off my chair and ‘swimming’ across the river to meet my lover. We then had to ‘kiss’ and he threw me back movie star style three times, as each time it was apparently a little ‘tame’, this was much to the amusement of the rest of the clubhouse, who were by now laughing along loudly, filming it on their phones and cheering us along. We carried on like this for a while and he chased me around and I pretended to be trying to get away much to the amusement of the audience. At the end everyone cheered and I curtsied.*

*Research diary 21st March 2015*

It is without doubt that I was chosen to participate in this song as I was one of the only young females at the club at this time. Perception of my femininity, coupled with my appearance and stature meant that I was a useful prop for this interaction and therefore the type of ‘instrument’ noted by Burgess (1982) above. Females are often seen to have a limited number options in terms of the roles they can play in male dominated research settings, including deemphasizing femininity, working female attributes to their advantage or establishing boundaries by limiting interactions and disclosure (Soyer, 2014; May and Pattillo-McCoy, 2000; Lee, 1997). Further to this, it has also been noted how for female researchers’ bodies are often on display when they conduct fieldwork, with remarks and interactions often centring on the presence of the female researcher and their female bodies (Soyer, 2014; Lee, 1997; Gurney, 1985). Though these arguments are extremely pertinent to my research and can in some ways be applied to the example above, it is important to note my own sense of agency within this collective performance. I made the decision to participate and this choice to engage with imaginations of the researcher is far less discussed. I had been in the field for a year by this point and though I knew what performances might have been expected of me, I did not feel obliged to act a certain way.

This research diary extract also usefully helps to articulate my experiences and feelings when negotiating relationships and the shift from outsider to insider in the research (Smith et al. , 2012; Atkinson, 2012; Brewer, 2005; Adler and Adler, 1987). I felt reluctant to participate in the song, yet knew that opting out would alter the dynamic and direction of the interaction. Smith et al. (2012)comment on the ways that the researcher becomes an important part of the research setting. During my fieldwork I was often a catalyst for banter, becoming increasingly involved in the interactions as I became more confident and comfortable. This often left me with moral dilemmas regarding the extent to which I should participate. Involvement meant that I was influencing the collective performances and altering the definition of the lived reality (Smith et al, 2012). The extract below from a separate research diary entry, including field notes and reflections depicts my uncertainty with actively participating.

*Declan: You think you’d be up for choosing the man of the match today?*

*Warren: Watch it though, this has to be based on skill rather than anything else [winks]*

*Declan: Now, now, we don’t all get as distracted as you do by the opposite sex Warren.*

*Me: Yeah, that would be great, more than happy to give it a go, if I can stop myself from being distracted that is [nudge Warren]*

*Warren: Oi, yeah only messing, I think that you will make a good choice, you know more than a lotta the men here.*

*Reflecting on this I am happy with the way I challenged Warren and matched him in terms of the banter. I think that even if I have reservations regarding whether to participate or not, doing so ultimately helps me to consolidate friendships and enables acceptance in the field.*

*Research diary extract Saturday 24th January 2016*

This interaction was interesting as I had learnt that it was unusual for a female to select man of the match. My role in the field arguably challenged some of the prior assumptions, in doing so leading to a re-evaluation of norms and testing of the rigidity of the hegemonic model (Moller, 2007). Though notably I had the cultural capital and knowledge required to make the decision based on my understanding of the sport, this was still an example of the collective behaviours being altered by my presence.

My inclusion in selection of man of the match was arguably also due to the relationships I had built with the men. This position in the field of ‘insider’ was most abruptly brought home to me when during the end of Season ball I was awarded a trophy for ‘volunteer of the year’. This award was given to the individual who had shown commitment to the club over the season. I was the first female to be awarded this in the club’s history and though I was happy, I felt conflicted in that my position as a researcher had clearly been forgotten. The development and balancing of my relationships and friendships became the hardest part of the research. Feminist work helped me to understand this, exploring the processes of managing friendships and relationships within fieldwork (Taylor, 2011; Coffey, 1999; Hendry 1992). My experiences echo work of writers such as Linda McDowell (1992) who note the challenges when writing ourselves into research practice (Taylor, 2011; Coffey, 1999). Due to the length of time I was in the field, I became close to a number of regulars and was known in the club. Many of the men had nicknames for me and I continue to be a familiar face at the club, warmly welcomed whenever I attend. This caused some unease, as knowing some of the participants so well meant I often felt conflicted during the analysis process. This poses ethical questions which I will discuss in the final section of this chapter.

## Analysis

A feminist approach to research and analysis was taken, viewing gender as a social construction and providing a critique of the construction of knowledge, instead placing emphasis upon situated experiences (Pini and Pease, 2013; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Flax, 1987). The feminist lens also guided the way I considered context, whereby I decided to view this as something which was never settled, rather thinking about how participants continued to co-produce contexts they are situated within and how they experienced this (Silverman, 2013; Holstein and Gubrium, 2007; Schegloff, 1997). There were different phases to the analysis process. This began with analysis of ethnographic data which John Brewer argues (2005) is complex due to the many forms which ethnographic approaches can take. Furthermore, ethnographic data is personal to the researcher in ways that numerate data is not, thus adding complexity to the analysis process (Brewer, 2005; Delamont, 2007; Adler and Adler, 1987). Within Brewer’s (2005:105) discussion of analysis in ethnographic work he defines this as ‘the process of bringing order to the data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories and descriptive units and looking for relationships between them.’ Using these ideas I began the analysis and coding of this data early on in the research. This process intensified when I began to see that my observations were repeating themselves and at this point emergent themes or patterns were identified. Though my participation at the club continued, I believed that I had reached ‘saturation’ point, whereby repetition marked the start of more extensive analysis (May, 2002). Applying a thematic approach, whereby I grouped data together according to similar subjects, I began to explore themes independently as well as any potential intersections. Following advice from the literature I decided to avoid over-theorizing early on and instead built theories from the data (Becker, 1998). The emergent themes which are discussed in the analysis chapters were those which appeared most frequently within the narratives of the men as well as those which were talked about less frequently within the literature.

My analysis of interview data followed the same pattern. Once interviews had been transcribed I added interview notes to the transcriptions. These original notes directed refinement of themes and codes, whereby I organised data thematically into new documents (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Ryan and Bernard 2003). In order to establish themes I looked for repetitions in topics, indigenous expressions (those which were familiar to the men and particularly to that group), metaphors and analogies used, as well as similarities and differences in terms of how interviewees described experiences or events (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). This process itself implemented various stages, with openness to how data would overlap and intersect prioritised. Once data had been organised I made connections to data from my research diary, amalgamating this data whilst also implementing analysis of the diary more broadly, using the same techniques as outlined above.

## Writing up ethnographic data

I approached the analysis and write up stage of the thesis with excitement and trepidation. I was aware that publication and writing up of ethnographic research raises specific complex issues regarding representation of the social world (Atkinson, 2009). Throughout the research I had been recording field notes and a research diary which supplemented interviews, however I was aware of the issues associated with constructing a narrative from these which was representative of the participants’ experiences (Charmaz, 2012; Emerson, et al. 1995; Van Maanen, 1988). Additionally, the large volume of data for analysis, including three hundred and seventy five research diary entries, meant that I was initially overwhelmed with how to formulate a clear and concise narrative. Utilising the feminist lens which encourages researchers to be ‘thinking, acting, feeling participants, rather than disembodied reporters of facts’ I ensured that whilst I positioned myself as a character within the writing, I placed emphasis upon portraying the Robins’ world as described by them (Charmaz, 2012:476). The presentation of ethnographic work within the analysis chapters reflects this decision and echoes the diverse forms that ethnographic writing can take (Brewer, 2005). Within the write up I primarily utilise direct quotations taken from various parts of the ethnography to build the analysis. This style of write up was selected as banter occurs fleetingly; therefore positioning of multiple participants’ ideas together enabled the stories of the large number of men observed to be brought together and the fluctuating nature of banter to be captured.

A further issue during the writing up process was the negotiation of what I referred to as ‘banter blindness’ and issues associated with closeness in the research. I was concerned that the duration of time in the field would mean that analysis and representation would be problematic. I was particularly concerned that I would have become so accustomed to the data and instances of banterous interactions that I would no longer be able to recognise them. Brewer (2005:105) asserts that interpretation is a significant feature of the analysis process as this involves ‘attaching meaning and significance’ to the analysis and providing explanations to the patterns or relationships conveyed. It is therefore important to acknowledge that representation and understanding of the field will be shaped by the researcher and that this process is in some ways inevitable (Roof, 2012; Atkinson, 2009). To navigate this issue I ensured that I always included personal reflections of events in my research diary and encouraged my own critical thinking with regards to how I viewed the Robins. Additionally, I returned to my feminist epistemology which acknowledged that modes of communicating research are inextricable from the research they present (Roof, 2012; Charmaz, 2012).

## Ethics

Ethnographic research raises complex ethical questions, particularly those relating to consent, participation and relationships (Atkinson, 2009; Lipson, 1994). The nature of ethnographic work which is an emergent processual undertaking means that informed consent and complete transparency within research is extremely difficult (Atkinson, 2009; Strathern, 2000). Indeed within ethnographic work collaboration or autonomy is problematic as the creative power of social relations cannot be avoided (Strathern, 2000). Ethical considerations have arisen from acknowledgment that ethnography has historically been value driven, with the representation of other cultures and communities often prioritised (Atkinson, 2009; Parker, 2007). In more recent writing ethics have been given greater significance, with the implications for the individuals and groups involved being recognised. There has also been increased awareness that ethics within ethnographic work need to be negotiated and treated on a case by case basis, with broad standards of ethical practice, such as those by academic institutions or funding bodies providing useful initial guidelines for entry into the field (Parker, 2007).

Access and consent involve negotiation and necessitate reworking whilst within the field. Murphy and Dingwall (2007:5) state that ‘ethnographic consent is a relational and sequential process which lasts throughout the period of research.’ The boundaries of consent are continually changing and so for this reason entering into the field and undertaking long term ethnography poses its own particular challenges (Atkinson, 2009; Murphy and Dingwall, 2007). This was the case within my research, as I was conducting observations within a public space and my presence spanned multiple seasons, therefore new participants were continually entering the field. I was mindful that I did not want to make the assumption that one participates for the duration of the fieldwork or that all participants are equivalent to one another (Atkinson, 2009). Access to the field was gained through initial contact with the club committee. I made an agreement with the committee was that I was allowed to access and spend time at the club whenever I wanted. The only exception to this was that I consciously avoided times when junior teams utilised the space in order to prevent additional ethical issues. The committee felt happy for me to approach men for one on one discussion and were confident that individuals would express concerns or decline participation if unwilling to participate, giving the men opportunity to opt out. At the start of each season I ensured that my presence and reason for being at the club was made clear, circulating information about myself and the research on the Robins’ notice board and electronic mailing list. My information sheet was placed on the notice board, which included details about my project as well as a picture. Notably this was defaced (I was given a moustache!). Anyone who felt uncomfortable with regards to my presence was asked to come forward. Notably this did not happen.

A further ethical consideration within research relates to disclosure of the research objectives, as this influences the data collected (Atkinson, 2009; Ryen, 2004; Brettell, 1993). When approaching the club I had communicated my research as having a focus on the everyday communicative practices and interactions associated with Rugby Union club life. I made the conscious decision not to utilise the word ‘banter’ in the initial correspondence and information sheets. This decision was made after discussions with my supervisor at the time and reflections on my Masters research. Given the nature of banter, and the central research aim exploring banter occurring naturally as part of the everyday, it was felt that early disclosure would influence the way participants approached me, preventing observations of typical banter. As the research progressed and I began recruiting men for interviews, I was more overt with my aims and interests. Notably this had little impact upon the way that I was treated in the field, other than the occasional ‘you might want to note this one down’ comment when the men were about to deliver what they perceived to be ‘good’ banter. This had been a pattern throughout the research, with this data forming part of the analysis.

As already noted in earlier sections of this chapter, my role within the club altered after the initial six months when I began to volunteer on the bar. This decision was perhaps in part a reaction to reflections of conducting research which benefitted participants, and the desire to ‘give back’ (Blake, 2007; Zajano and Edelsberg 1993). Spending time in the field I realised that almost everyone at the club was a volunteer and so this felt like a natural progression. Blake (2007:415) provides support for this, suggesting that ‘trust arises from within relationships at a personal level, therefore “going native” is perhaps a better way to create an honest, trustworthy and “safe” research environment’. I must also acknowledge that this decision was in part strategic in order to gain access and build relationships. I reminded the committee when asked to be a bar worker that I was there in a research capacity, however they did not take issue with this, so I accepted. Previous research, including Wolf’s (1991) famous study of a cycle club in which he recalls becoming a ‘friend of the club’ encouraged me and provided guidance on how to manage these issues.

The transition to becoming a bar person was the start of thinking about broader concerns relating to confidentiality and relationships within the field. Previous work has shown that meaningful friendships often emerge during the ethnographic process and that this can benefit the work, as well as the identity and experiences of both the participants and researchers beyond the field itself (Taylor, 2011; Coffey, 1999; Lambevski, 1999). However, as noted in the section above, I was also acutely aware of the potential problems associated with building friendships within the fieldwork setting, as this can often lead to confusion, feelings of betrayal and conflict (Taylor, 2011; Browne, 2003; Coffey, 1999). I was concerned that through building trust with individuals they may feel obliged to share information.

This issue of closeness was an ongoing concern. Closeness arguably blurs relationship boundaries, as participants may feel that there are particular expectations (Taylor, 2011; Browne, 2003). Taylor (2011) discusses the complexities of conducting research with participants who either begin as, or become close friends, noting that this poses specific ethical dilemmas mostly regarding conduct. I too shared these concerns and was mindful to be reflexive regarding utilising knowledge I had of others and the decision of whether to capitalize on ‘privileged eavesdropping’ (Taylor, 2011; Burke, 1989). I created my own criteria for inclusion of data based on whether I believed that information was being shared based on personal or research relationship, using my judgement to decide what to include from observations and conversations with participants. As I had got to know the participants more personally, I felt able to make judgements regarding what was being told to me in confidence as a friend and what was being told to me as a researcher. Furthermore, if I was unsure of whether I could include the information from a more formal discussion I asked for confirmation from the participants themselves. Overall, I felt that if the story was particularly personal, or could be traced back to the individual by other members of the club, then I would omit it from my research. Taylor (2011:14) discusses the decision to omit information from research, noting that ‘omission is political; it is also tricky, yet it is often necessary.’ Omitting information often caused me conflict, as there were instances where individuals disclosed stories which were particularly pertinent to my research questions. As tempting as it was to include these stories, I knew that doing so could potentially cause psychological harm or embarrassment and so I left these out of the discussion (Taylor, 2011). I resolved this by using these stories as a backdrop for my understanding, even if they were not directly referenced in the analysis. The stories often helped me to make sense of the banterous interactions, specifically the historical context in terms of group behaviours.

One of the most important ethical concerns of this research was regarding anonymity and confidentiality. Providing anonymity for participants and sites is desirable in research and is a standard qualitative researchers aim to achieve (Barbour, 2014; Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011; Atkinson, 2009). Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the study the decision was made to provide anonymity and to give the club and members pseudonyms. I have anonymised all individuals within the research, though due to the number of men with whom I have come into contact in the rugby space, this process proved difficult. I struggled to establish names for individuals which I had not at some point come into contact with. Therefore I selected generic men’s names or popular names from other countries in which Rugby Union was present. Further to this, I ensured that other details including employment and age were altered throughout; blending additional identifying features in order to ensure that there were no similarities which would make participants traceable.

A final ethical concern related to my own safety during the fieldwork. Danger and risk in research are subjective; however in this project danger was understood to mean the experience of threat with serious negative consequences for the researcher (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000). Though I felt comfortable in rugby spaces I was aware that there were issues related to entering the field which were important to be mindful of. For example my own safety when I was alone in the space or when dealing with large groups of unknown men. These ethical concerns altered as my time in the field progressed, as volunteering on the bar meant I was on occasion responsible for locking the club house late at night or I had to manage men under the influence of alcohol. In order to alleviate these issues I took precautions such as giving housemates details of my whereabouts and messaging people on my return from the field.

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined my methodological approach encompassing feminist and performance theories, situating these as the foundational cornerstones of my methodology. I have discussed the choice of methods which have derived from my methodological thinking and have noted the practicalities of undertaking these within my particular research site. This chapter has carefully outlined the role of performance in the research approach, accounting for the performative nature of both banter and gender. In doing so I am advocating the engagement of both theory and practice in the research process to enable alternative approaches to thinking about the Robins and rugby spaces more widely.

I have reflected on the challenges of conducting ethnographic work and commented on my own experiences of undertaking ethnography over a long period of time. In particular I have discussed both the benefits and challenges associated with extended periods in the field. There has been extended discussion of my experiences as a female when conducting research in a highly masculine site, as this was identified to be a significant aspect of the research process and experience. These discussions have encompassed reflections on the tensions experienced during the negotiation of relationships in the field and have expanded existing literature.

The following chapter begins discussion of findings and maps out a conceptualisation of banter within the rugby sporting site, exploring the processes of banter and the elements or contexts within interactions required for banter to occur. Emphasis within this chapter will be placed upon how we can begin to conceptualise banter sociologically and discussion will be directed towards how we can outline and understand the parameters of banter within the specific context of rugby. Once this concept has been established it will be utilised in subsequent analysis to explore the role it plays in how masculinity is experienced by men.

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# Chapter Four: Conceptualising Banter Sociologically

## Introduction

The majority of previous theorisations and conceptualisation of banter have tended to focus upon its functionality, in doing so ignoring the complexity of banter itself (Lynch, 2010; Garde, 2008; Plester and Sayers, 2007). Such work treats banter as a homogenous practice, ignoring both the varying ways that banter is utilised in everyday life and across different spaces. Exploring banter within the specific context of the rugby club, it was evident that there were dense layers of meaning within the performances of banter. This meant that thinking solely in terms of banter as serving a function for the men, as much previous writing has done, was overly simplistic. Though banter did, inevitably, serve some functions, echoing previous work which advocates that humour provides cohesion, control and co-operation, it was evident through both discussions with the men and observations that banter was more complex with nuances within the rugby site which had not previously been noted (Attenborough, 2014; Alexander et al, 2012; Boxer and Cortes-Conde, 1997; Haig 1988).

Though it is tempting to suggest that this will be a chapter which provides detail on what banter ‘is’, I do not believe that this is possible when examining banter within one particular context, as banter, as shown in the literature review, exists in a series of different dimensions and so will vary according to location. For example there will be differences in banter in the workplace, education or leisure sites as well between communication platforms such as face to face interactions or social media (Palmer, 1993). Instead this chapter will focus upon mapping out a conceptualisation of banter within the rugby sporting site and begin to explore the processes of banter and the elements or contexts within interactions required for banter to occur. Emphasis within this chapter will be placed upon how we can begin to conceptualise banter sociologically and discussion will be directed towards how we can outline and understand the parameters of banter within the specific context of rugby, in doing so attempting to provide an explanation for banter within this sporting site. Once this concept has been established it will be utilised in subsequent discussions to explore the role it plays in how masculinity is experienced by men. Within the analysis chapters there will be acknowledgement of the functions banter serves, describing this as a tool within interactions. However there will be a more in depth discussion of how the men experience and engage with this functionality, exploring how men utilise banter to begin to challenge the gendered structures which underpin the rugby club site.

This chapter will focus upon providing a foundational understanding of banter, which will then be utilised in the following analysis chapters in order to enable a more in depth exploration of the effects of banter, specifically the role of banter in the construction of masculine identities. The chapter will begin by outlining banter as part of the everyday of club life, progressing to discuss banter through the lens of performance theories, viewing banter as a performative communication tool. Attention will then turn to exploring the idea of banter being implemented to calculate performances, drawing on Erving Goffman’s (1959) conceptualisation of impression management to do so. Finally, emphasis will be placed upon the ways that the men had to learn to banter, using this as a way to further understand the practices and process associated with banterous interactions. The overall focus of this chapter will be to explore the parameters of banter and to signpost the implications of this for meaning making with regards to gender, which will be the focus of subsequent chapters.

## Banter as part of everyday club life

It quickly became evident upon entering the field that banter was a central feature of the rituals and routines of club life and was normalised within this rugby setting. Thinkers such as Featherstone (1992) have argued that it is through engaging with the everyday that we begin to see how ideas are reproduced and maintained (Kalekin-Fishman, 2013; Jacobsen, 2009; Adler and Adler, 1987). I discovered very early into the research that banter was extremely prominent and part of the everyday for the men, evidenced on my very first visit to a home game at the rugby club. On arrival I bought a match day programme in order to begin to understand the club’s identity, specifically to see the way that the club framed itself to the public. The first page consisted of a welcome to the club written by the club president, a common practice in sports programmes. Reading this I immediately noted that the word ‘banter’ featured in the closing statement by the president. He noted:

*“Please join me in wishing for a high quality, injury free game of rugby with large doses of friendly banter which we have come to expect at the club.”* (Match day programme, page 1)

I later learnt that this closing statement was a permanent feature in the programme, a narrative situated on the front page for the whole season. Notably the message remained the same for the duration of my research at the club and so the positioning of banter as central to the club identity has remained constant for the last four years. The direct inclusion of the word ‘banter’ by the club president, alongside the implications that this relates to the practices associated with the club, powerfully demonstrated that banter was central to the club’s ethos, part of the everyday, and firmly situated within the rugby practices. Furthermore, the inclusion of banter by the president, the person in the highest position at the club, can be understood to be a signal that banter is very much embedded within the club culture. Additionally, the continued appearance and emphasis upon banter within the programme throughout the season and ones which followed further emphasises the everyday and routine inclusion of banter within the club’s culture and structure more broadly.

Throughout the research it became apparent, that for the most part, banter was taken-for-granted, an ordinary and routine form of interaction at the rugby club (Kalekin-Fishman, 2013; Highmore, 2002; Norrick, 1993; Featherstone, 1992; Adler et al, 1987). In many ways, this taken-for-granted character of banter, alongside its continued use, posed a challenge to conducting the research, as for many of the men it was a practice so embedded within the rugby culture that it was rarely questioned or acknowledged. Arguably, due to the emphasis upon sporting prowess and physicality which is tied up to successful rugby masculinities, the associated practices such as banterous interactions were often overlooked, perhaps even under estimated by the men (Kidd, 2013; Pringle and Markula, 2005; Muir and Seitz, 2004; Light and Kirk, 2000; Schacht, 1996).

Banter was consistently utilised throughout my observations and it was evident that the associated language and practices were prominent in the everyday workings and imaginations of the club. This point was reinforced when on one occasion, towards the start of my first season, I was stood on the pitch side-lines observing the game when I overheard the following comments within the context of a conversation between two middle-aged men. The men were talking about the current first team and reflecting on what they believed made them a cohesive group. They spent some time speculating as to the key elements of club life, noting features such as on-pitch characteristics such as physical strength, and then turned their attention towards the ‘off-pitch’ characteristics of rugby at the club. The two men noted:

Man 1: *‘I think it’s banter which makes it, it’s the backbone of the club that is what it is all about, helps them to get along’.*

Man 2: ‘*Yeah I agree, it would be a sad place without it that’s for sure. Like being in bloody work or at home with the wife’*

The comparisons being drawn here between places and contexts in which banter is adopted will be addressed throughout the remainder of the thesis. Further to this, discussion of banter being implemented as a tool to construct identities in relation to the ‘other’, as evidenced here through comments about the second man’s wife, will be explored in detail in analysis chapter two, on gendered stereotyping through banter. For the purpose of the current discussion, the use of the word *‘backbone’* by the men is interesting to explore. This choice of wording and language implies that at least for some of the men, there was awareness that banter was central to the club’s identity, entrenched within the expected practices and routines of the club. Similar to the example from the club president above, the presence of the word banter in the everyday vocabulary of the men within this conversation, and the fact that evidentially both men have a shared understanding of what banter means, aligns with previous research which has shown that banter is frequently referenced in conversation and adopted routinely to communicate in people’s daily lives (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Plester and Sayers, 2007).

The inclusion of banter within conversations as exemplified above was typical of the way that banter was situated within interactions. Although within interviews some men demonstrated reflexivity and awareness that banter enriched the club, this was rare and for the most part banter appeared to be taken for granted. This was evident when participants were asked to comment specifically on banter within one-on-one discussions. On many of these occasions the men struggled to articulate and define exactly what banter was, or note how frequently they utilised it within their conversations and interactions at the club. This suggests that though implemented frequently, the men gave little thought to the action of implementing banter itself, indicating that spontaneity is an important aspect of banter. Additionally the men did not initially appear to consider how the action of participating in banterous interactions defined meanings, or make sense of their surroundings and relationships within the rugby club setting. This aligns with previous work on everyday life which notes that practices which are prominent in the everyday lives of individuals are often taken for granted (Jacobsen, 2009; Highmore, 2002; Featherstone, 1992). Norrick (1993:129) with reference to joking, suggested that ‘we are apparently unaware of the amount of joking in our everyday talk.’ Such ideas can usefully be applied to banter, as from the evidence presented so far, it is clear that banter was an intrinsic part of the everyday at the rugby club, part of the collective group identity and yet was not always overtly recognised as such.

## Performances and collusion as central features of banterous interactions

It was clear from the early stages of the observations that banter was a routine practice and part of the men’s everyday at the club, however once this had been acknowledged I began to think in greater depth regarding the processes and practices associated with banter. I became interested in the ways in which the men were able to carry out banter within their everyday interactions and what banter ‘did’ for the men in terms of enabling the construction of gendered identities. I noted that elements of performance played a crucial factor and vehicle in enabling banter to unfold, therefore, it became important to explore the performative nature of banter, weaving together pre-existing sociological perspectives on performance, interaction and communication to do so.

Performance is viewed as significant in the process of understanding and establishing the everyday rules and routines which comprise the social world (Gregson and Rose, 2000; Goffman, 1974). With Goffman (1981:4) arguing that ‘deeply incorporated into the nature of talk are the fundamental requirements of theatricality.’ As noted in the literature review, these Goffmanian ideas are echoed by other theorists, with Gregson and Rose adding that performances must be viewed as being informed and influenced by the places in which they occur (Gregson and Rose, 2000). Goffman in *Forms of Talk* (1981)argues that performances in our everyday lives become so much part of the routine that they are no longer questioned. He asserts:

*‘We clear our throat, we pause to think, we turn attention to a next doing, and soon we specialize these acts, performing them with no felt contrivance right where others in our gestural community would also, and like them, we do so apart from the original instrument reason for the act.’ (1981:2)*

This quotation usefully adds to the developing argument that banterous interactions can be understood as every day and taken-for-granted performances. As previously noted, and similar to Goffman’s ideas, banterous interactions were undertaken by many of the men with little thought. A further point which this quotation also usefully highlights, which has not yet been addressed, is the role of what Goffman refers to as the ‘gestural community’ within interactions. Goffman (1981) in his writing refers to this ‘gestural community’ in terms of the conventions which become established within groups of individuals within conversations. In doing so, he examines the ideas of rituals and frameworks which underpin conversation and interactions (Goffman, 1981). Through both discussions with men and observations in the field, it became apparent that there were particular rituals and frameworks required in order for the banterous interactions to be successful, in terms of flowing smoothly or generating a continued humorous response, certain elements within the performances of banter were required (Fine and Soucey, 2005). Reciprocity and collusion were the most significant features within the gestural community of the men at the rugby club.

Previous work suggests that joking must be viewed as an act which relies upon the compliance and mutual understanding between various social actors (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Lynch, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007). The collusion of the group to enable banterous interactions, as well as the significance of the ‘gestural community’, was evidenced when analysing the collective understanding required for banterous interactions to progress (Goffman, 1981).. The success of banterous interactions was reliant upon a collective understanding that banter followed the process of a back and forth dialogue, centring upon an unspoken level of reciprocity between a collection of participants within the conversation (Plester and Sayers, 2007; Fine and Soucey, 2005, Goffman, 1981). Furthermore, banter was progressive, organized around the idea of what Schegloff (2007) refers to as ‘nextness’, whereby there was an understanding amongst the men, that within the interaction, banter unfolded via consecutive comments between individuals. This collective understanding of how banter operated highlighted one of the most important features of banter, collusion. The smoothness required for successful banterous interactions to occur resonates with theorising on hegemonic masculinity in the way that some degree of collusion amongst men more broadly is required in order for particular ideals/norms to be constructed/maintained (Howson, 2006; Connell, 2002; Donaldson, 1993). Although banter is spontaneous it appeared that when questioned directly after the event men were able to discuss how banter operated. This is evident in the case of Casey, a twenty four year old labourer, in a discussion in which he was reflecting on banter. I spoke to him directly after observing banterous interactions between him and a group of other men. The research diary extract detailing the observation and his response were as follows:

*I was sat in old farts corner, flicking through a rugby magazine on a training night when the men started to filter in from the changing rooms. There is always a bit of a buzz in the air when the players return to the club house, they always appear to be buoyed up from training, though there is also an underlying tension, marked by a sideways glances and a twitchiness around the manager and coaches, perhaps due to the knowledge that team selection will be imminently announced. The men were forming an orderly queue at the food counter and upon collection a few of them asked if they could sit with me. I was aware that this I was sat in the best spot for eating and had deliberately positioned myself here, but managed to seem suitably surprised by their request to join me. Silence descended for a little while whilst they all ate dinner. By this point I was surrounded by five of the first team players, Cliff, Casey, Hazeldine, Joe and Dan. Casey finished first and almost as soon as he had put down his knife and fork began to banter Hazeldine. They both played in similar positions and I had noted some tension between these two before. Casey was asking Hazeldine how he was feeling and indicated that it looked like he might not be ‘match fit’ and wanted to check that everything was ok. Hazeldine responded by saying that he likes to leave a little bit in the tank, not give everything away. Delivering this is a discernibly dry tone. To which Casey further teased him about the dangers of being a perpetual man of mystery, insinuating that Hazeldine in fact never plays at full capacity. The other men were clearly amused by this and were laughing along, though it was hard to tell if they agreed with Casey or not. They all carried on like this for a while, chipping away at each other until one of them drifted off to clear their plates and the others followed.*

*(Research diary, March 2015)*

*‘Well you give it, you take it, you basically take on whatever roles you need to, you just sort of go along with it. You are all in on it together and just banter away at each other constantly. Sometimes I start it off, other times people are bantering me, it’s all a good laugh’ (Casey, 24).*

Within this description Casey echoes previous conceptualisations of banter as involving back and forth dialogue which can also be seen through the observations (Plester and Sayers, 2007; Fine and Soucey, 2005, Goffman, 1981). Furthermore, Casey alludes to banter as a form of performance through the language he utilises, specifically the use of the word ‘role’.

Exploring Casey’s ideas regarding roles and performances within banter, Norrick (1993) in his writing on humour in conversation utilises the language of ‘the performer’ to refer to those making jokes. Similar to Norrick, Casey alludes to banter as involving the undertaking of a particular role. The role of the performer is significant within interactions, with the role of the instigator being a coveted position. Within the interaction observed Casey took on the role of instigator and was the driving force behind the continuation of the banter. In the following discussion Casey provided insight into the various roles undertaken within banterous interactions, with one individual taking on the role of the initiator of the banter, singling out another individual and inciting banter aimed at another group member, who becomes positioned in the role of the butt of the joke. The remaining individuals within the interaction played supporting roles, most frequently siding with the instigator as seen played out within the observation. Drawing the example, there appeared to be unspoken understandings amongst the men that banter would unfold in particular ways, with each individual maintaining their roles in the banter throughout. This aligns with Goffman’s (1967:225) theorising of Facework, in which he asserts that ‘*members of groups are expected to sustain a standard of considerateness…to go to great lengths to save the feelings and face of others present*.’ Casey articulated these ideas through his depiction of banter as an interactive practice which relies upon flexibility within your roles, and for a willingness of those involved to participate in the collective banter. This shared understanding of the expectations and performances of roles within the banterous interaction demonstrated that collusion was extremely important. Further to this, the collective maintenance of Facework amongst the men extended beyond the clubhouse, through use of social media platforms such as the team Facebook page, which I was shown, but not given ongoing access to by the men (Goffman, 1967). This demonstrated that collusion was pervasive and ongoing

The significance of collusion to the banterous interactions was most clearly demonstrated in instances where this collusion was challenged, or did not occur. At times not all of the men colluded in the banter and this provided the opportunity to understand the ways in which banter operated and evolved. This was exemplified in one instance when the banterous interaction was disrupted during post-match socialising. One of the players Mitch, a twenty nine year old teacher, deviated from the regular pattern of banter which the other men reacted to in an attempt to establish the banterous tone. The following depicts the interaction which unfolded, observed from my position volunteering behind the bar.

*‘I was serving some of the men at the bar after the rugby match and was listening to the banter directed towards some of the players from the regulars regarding their sporting performances during the match. Interestingly the normal pattern of banter did not unfold in the way I have been used to hearing, with Mitch choosing not to participate and in this way disrupting the previously seen patterns of banter. The regulars were bantering Mitch about his technique and choice to kick the ball rather than pass, with one regular noting “did you get confused with the sport you were playing matey, think that you were on a football pitch with all that kicking?” Another chimed in “hey, come on now, he is from Cleeveshire, so what do you expect.” Usually I would expect Mitch to return a comment, using the same banterous undertones, but instead he remained silent and temporarily the banterous interaction was disrupted, which appeared to lead to discomfort and confusion amongst the group of men, shown in shifts in body language and temporary silence. Finally, Troy another player joined the discussion, having been quiet up until this point, adding “oi that is rich coming from you, been to Specsavers recently, there were some classic rugby moves out there, or aren’t you able to see them so well these days?” After this the group carried on as always, as if nothing had happened.’*

*(Research diary, February 2015)*

There were a number of elements within this banterous interaction which are important to focus on. The refusal of Mitch to participate in the banter was significant, as this highlights that banter can be interpreted as relying upon consecutive retorts, and that if the back and forth dialogue is disrupted, the banterous interaction fails. This supports previous writing on humour more broadly, which suggests that humour and banter builds on a number of exchanges between individuals, as well as adding to the ideas highlighted by Casey above of the significance of maintaining your roles (Plester and Sayers, 2007; Fine and Soucey, 2005, Goffman, 1981). The refusal of Mitch to participate in the banterous performances, and the implications for the interaction, can also be understood through the lens of Goffman’s analysis of talk and dialogue as outlined in *Frame Analysis* (1974) and *Forms of Talk* (1981), in which Goffman notes that a shared understanding of the joke and participation within the dialogue from all parties is required amongst individuals in order for performances and interaction to unfold smoothly. Applying these ideas to the example above, it is clear that when Mitch distances himself from the banter, shown through his silence, this is arguably a sign that he is not willing to be part of the group performance of banter in the previously expected ways.

This example demonstrates that indirect inclusion within banter as well as non-verbal cues is also important to the evolution of this interaction. Mitch is withdrawing or refusing to participate in the banter and in doing so arguably challenges the point being made by the other men. The example poses a paradox in terms of understandings of the communication practices associated with banter presented both here and within the literature so far. Up to now collusion within banter has been explained as requiring verbal participation, with silence interpreted as disrupting banter. This echoes previous writing which suggests that the continuation of the joking frame is reliant upon the recipient going along with the mockery, views echoed by Casey in the second example above (Haugh, 2010; Drew, 1987). Significantly, banter has been depicted as being dependent upon a person countering or elaborating on the initial joke, therefore there is an expectation of verbal participation within an ongoing performance (Lynch, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007). However, the view of silence as deviating from this pattern, viewed as a sign of non-compliance within the banterous interaction, is only one possible interpretation. Though the literature suggests that banter requires verbal communication between individuals to be successful, Mitch remains complicit within the banter, in that allows the interaction to continue. He did not walk away and this non-verbal response can therefore be interpreted as a form of participation (Alexander et al, 2012; Attenborough, 2010; Dynel, 2008).

Exploring this idea of silence and conformity further, linguists have acknowledged the significance of silence as being meaningful within interactions, viewed as dynamic and as a powerful communication tool (Sifianou, 1997; Jaworski, 1993; Fink Vargas, 1986; Acheson, 2008). Fink Vargas asserts that ‘we may use silence as a defence against further attack or to punish the attacker’ (1986:79). In this way silence can be viewed as a tool to negotiate positions within interactions (Sifianou, 1997; Acheson, 2008; Ellsworth and Langer, 1976). Further to this Goffman (1981) has argued that even when no talk is occurring participants within the interaction will still be in a ‘sense of talk’ as communication and interaction are based on more than verbal participation. Returning to the example of Mitch in the extract above, arguably his non-verbal communication enables him to remain within the collective interaction, whilst displaying his opinions on the banter. The use of silence by Mitch is a reaction which provides a contrast to other occasions from my observations, whereby men have challenged the banter verbally if they strongly disagree (as will be explored in the final analysis chapter). This suggests that through maintaining his silence Mitch is continuing to play his role within the banter, by selecting a non-verbal style of communication, Mitch is knowingly allowing the banter to continue. Silence then, arguably, needs to be understood within banterous interactions as a way which men negotiate and sustain banterous performances. Through weaving together themes of silence and performance I propose that a greater understanding of the ways in which banter operates, particularly the circumstances needed for smooth banterous interactions, can be gained.

A further interesting point to discuss in relation to the example outlined above is the reaction of the rest of the group to Mitch’s silence, and the subsequent implementation of banter to resolve the tensions amongst the group. Through previous experiences, and arguably popular depictions of banter in the media, the men expected that Mitch would collude in the banter. Mitch implemented his silence as a tool to simultaneously disengage from and collude within the banter, whilst allowing the banterous performance of the group to continue (Acheson, 2008). Goffman in *Forms of Talk* notes that gestures and communication which are not verbal in character ‘may have to be verbally addressed.’ (1981:37). Drawing on these ideas we can see that Troy addresses Mitch’s non-verbal communication and negotiates this challenge, moulding it to the usual pattern of banterous communication through re-implementing banter, and re-directing it towards another group member. Within this example, it is again evident that collusion of the group within the banterous interaction is important in order to ensure that the banter continues smoothly. Furthermore, the example shows the complex relationship between verbal and non-verbal performances of banter.

From the examples of the club President, Casey and Mitch it is clear that banter is often central to interactions and is understood to be a performative interactive practice which requires various forms of collusion from those involved in order to be successful. It is interesting to acknowledge the variety of ways that the men undertake and negotiate banterous performances within the setting, adapting their roles accordingly, as this further demonstrates the complexity of banter. The analysis has shown that the characteristics which have been seen to underpin banter in previous research are limited. The discussion of examples demonstrates that in the absence of continuous dialogue individuals in the group collude in new ways to ensure that banterous interaction continued, showing diversity in terms of performances. This arguably also demonstrates the importance men in the research placed upon banter and the acknowledgement that participation was highly valued.

## Banter as a way to calculate performances

As highlighted within the literature review, bodies are significant to the social imagination of male rugby players, and the emphasis upon bodily capital within sporting contexts such as rugby has been widely discussed, particularly in relation to the construction and performances of gendered identities (Dempster, 2009; Light and Kirk, 2000; Schacht, 1996). Working with the Robins and entering into the club on training nights or match days you cannot help but be struck by the immediate presence of male bodies, particularly the way that the varieties of bodies on display, in various stages of undress, are all mixing together, with little notice paid to them by any other people in the club. Through analysis it became clear that though the body dominates the space and is significant to wider understandings of rugby masculinity, banter is a commodity which enables the men to negotiate and calculate their performances.

Whilst the previous section outlined the diversity of banter, the ways in which the men utilise or understand banter requires further development. The application and manipulation of banter to balance impression management was striking, showing that banter was not a fixed functional tool as outlined within the literature and that the men have some awareness of this process (Lynch, 2010; Garde, 2008). Goffman (1959:121) in his work on the interaction order notes that individuals are calculating within performances, stating that:

*‘Sometimes he will intentionally and consciously express himself in a particular way, but chiefly because the tradition of his group or social status require this kind of expression and not because of any particular responses that it is likely to be impressed by the expression.’*

Here Goffman is suggesting that individuals make decisions and calculate whether to display particular versions of themselves to others based on their perceptions of expected behaviours. This idea was echoed in a conversation with Shane, a 28 year old builder, who shared his initial experiences of becoming involved in the club:

‘*Well I used to play football rather than rugby and hadn’t played rugby since I was at school. Then my mate Rich said I should come up as he thought I would be a tidy player and honestly I was getting bored of the footie lads, so I came up for training and here I am now. I took to the game pretty well so that was easy. Took me a bit longer to crack some of the lads and get used to the banter. I kind of had to pretend to get it for a while. Once I got that [the banter] down and I started giving as good as I got then I knew I was properly in. Didn’t have to worry as much about what I said. No getting rid of me now’* *(Shane, 28)*

Shane states that acquiring the skills associated with banter were more difficult than the act of playing rugby itself, demonstrated in his description of having to ‘crack’ some of the lads and the way he describes being ‘in’. Here he is reinforcing the idea that inclusion is not just about acquiring bodily capital, rather that impression management through the form of banter was important (Bourdieu 1993). Shane is articulating his experiences of being both and insider and an outsider at the club and is linking this to his ability to deliver banter successfully. Shane’s ideas echo previous writing which suggests that banter can be viewed as either supportive, allowing participants to co-operate and bond, or contestive, enabling participants to challenge each other and to establish insiders/outsiders to the group (Dynel, 2008; Holmes, 2006). These previous explanations go some way to explain the role of banter within social interactions and help us to understand how banter is conceptualised by the men in the research, however, what is arguably missing from these accounts is explanation of the implication that banter enables closeness and disclosure within group interactions.

For both newcomers and long term members the successful performances of banter within interactions and conversations was a marker of belonging. The Robins placed importance upon the ability to ‘do’ banter and this was recognised by men such as Steve when they were new to the club. I reflected on this myself in the early stages of the fieldwork and questioned the extent to which I should deliberately adopt banter in order to fit in as demonstrated in the research diary extract below:

*On my drive home tonight I thought about the difficulties I was going to face in the research. Tonight I had really wanted to participate in the banter which was going on around me and I felt confident that I would have been able to. But I am just not sure whether it is right to do so. I think that participating in the banter could be key to fitting in with the group, as nobody really sits around without contributing. I was drawn into it tonight and just remained quiet and I wonder what the men made of this. I think that to be accepted into the group and to be able to gain more of an insight into how they interact I need to engage with it and participate. Perhaps if I don’t instigate it that is ok.*

*(Research diary, February 2014)*

This idea of ‘fitting in’ and the utilisation of banter to calculate performances were reinforced during an interaction and conversation with Jonno, a forty eight year old steel worker. He is a long standing member who had once played and captained the first team. At the start of my second season at the club, when new players were joining, I asked Jonno what he thought constituted a good new addition to the team and club. Jonno noted:

‘*Well for a start they can’t come in here all guns blazing. That is going to piss people right off. You have to understand and respect the team as they are. Suss it out, even if that means holding back for a while. I mean you could be a beast on the pitch, but in here, you don’t want to act like a know-it-all, you have to wait a while, get the lay of the land and then maybe be yourself. When I first came up here in the 80’s believe it or not I was quiet, didn’t really say a word. I enjoyed hanging out with the lads, had a great time of it, but I realised that you have to sit it out a little, if I had taken the piss out of the lads, had the banter the way I do now back then I would have been turfed right out. But now it’s different, I am fully myself, say what I want, but I didn’t do that straight away. No chance, too risky. I would have been hated.’ (Jonno, 48)*

Here Jonno aligns with the Goffmanian ideas regarding interactions which suggest that individuals suppress immediate thoughts or feelings when they are in new situations (Newman and O’Brien, 2008; Goffman, 1959). In this way Jonno is describing the process of what Goffman refers to as ‘effective projection’ of ideas, whereby an individual reflects ideas which are usually reflected back to them, in this way sustaining the status quo (Newman and O’Brien, 2008; Goffman, 1959).

I began to think carefully about this idea of suppression and the role of banter within the narratives of trying to ‘fit in’ or closeness. Whilst banter helped to negotiate awkwardness and enabled bonding, the same tool was drawn upon through time to allow for full disclosure. The men recognised this to be an important commodity within the club site, however were aware that there needed to be an element of control in the use of this within interactions. Shane and Jonno allude to this, however a similar process was described by older men and longer established members, whereby there was a continued awareness that banter needed to be managed. One evening during a training night I was perched at the bar with four of the regulars, Pete, Charlie, Doug and Bruce. We had been talking about pranks on rugby tour when the conversation moved on to appropriateness of jokes and banter. The men, most of whom were retired from work and had not played rugby for some years, were reflecting on the way that banter operated within conversations and presented the opportunity for them to manage the way they delivered news. The following is a transcription of the conversation:

*Pete: You now what, I do think that we have it lucky up here. Like we can talk about almost anything we want to.*

*Bruce: Yeah, agreed. I don’t think I would get away with it everywhere. At work, with the lads there I just wouldn’t have taken it to the same level.*

*Kitty: Do you think you can do or say what you like then when you are up here? Are there any limits?*

*Charlie: Nah, I think I can do most things, just got to pick your moments, can’t be over the top with these things. There is a time and a place.*

*Doug: Oh no, you have to be careful, can’t dish it out all the time. Got to hold back a little.*

*Kitty: Do you think you hold back then?*

*Bruce: Well…*

*Pete: Nah, not really, I think I can say or do anything, just depends how you do it really.*

*Charlie: Anything? (laughs)*

*Pete: Ok, well I am not going to go around stealing peoples wives…but I think I can say most things without judgement. Got to just be careful how you go about it.*

*Charlie: Yeah I agree, you just have to be a bit selective see, maybe go about it the right way.*

*Kitty: What do you think this ‘right way’ is?*

*Charlie: Well it’s about how you say it. Like how you deliver it. Like with Colin, who owns the pub. Went up there the other day and his food was rubbish, if I had said as much that would probably have been a bit rude, but I bantered him, asked if he had been in the kitchen as it wasn’t up to standard and it was fine. He knew what I meant without me having to...like you know, really say it or offend him.*

This interaction once again indicates a degree of strategic thinking and calculation in the use of banter within interactions. The men describe banter as a way of communicating honest thoughts and identify that framing and delivery of banter is important. In this case, banter allowed Charlie to be honest with Colin in a way which might not have happened otherwise. This aligns with both Bateson’s (1953) and Goffman’s (1974) work on framing within conversation, demonstrating the continued relevance of this within modern contexts. It is evident that the frames of banter provide organizational structures for interactions. However, when thinking about disclosure and suppression this example also extends existing work, presenting a response or resolution to the problem posed by Goffman, in which he states that candid expression of real feelings and honesty are unlikely to ever occur within interactions and conversations (Goffman, 1959). Through banter the men are able navigate the complexities associated with impression management and to convey ideas which may not be permitted otherwise.

In thinking about how the Robins calculated performances it becomes clear that men have awareness and make choices when utilising banter, a point which will be explored in further depth in chapter seven. The data shows that banter is of equal importance to the body in terms of understandings and construction of masculine performances. The examples here have demonstrated that calculating the performances of banter is similar to the process of production outlined by Loic Wacquant (1995) in his study of male boxers, in which he describes their process of being beginners and outsiders to professionals and insiders. He describes the ways that the men have to commit time and effort to learning the banter, practising and honing the skills and techniques until they have mastered them sufficiently to pass in the environment (Wacquant, 1995). This idea of learning banter in order to acquire the capital required to successfully be part of the club and to interact with other men will be focus of the next sub-section.

## Learning to banter

As noted in the previous section, banter was highly valued by many of men within the rugby club setting and also became an important element of my transition into the field. Once this idea had been established I began to reflect on the ways that the men acquired the skills and ability to banter. This was in part addressed naturally through the responses of some of the men, echoed in the quotation from Shane above, in which he talks about feeling a sense of belonging once he had the banter ‘down’. This can be interpreted as having the sufficient knowledge and understanding of banter in order to implement it successfully within interactions with other men, or, in other words, undertaking a process of learning to banter.

The idea that banter was not a ‘natural’ form of communication for the men was noted in some of the interviews and conversations I had whilst at the club. Some of the men reflected on the learning process involved in mastering banter within interactions, noting that doing so allowed them to demonstrate what they believed to be a successful masculine identity which was deemed as valuable in the rugby setting. Notably this process of learning involved understanding the way that banter worked within the space and the boundaries of banter, in terms of the parameters of acceptability.

Robin Lakoff’s (1990) work on language highlights that the inability to be able to take a joke is judged and criticised within society, asserting that:

*‘Saying serious things in jest both creates camaraderie and allows the speaker to avoid responsibility for anything controversial in the message. It’s just a joke, after all-can’t you take a joke? In a lite and camaraderie society worse than being racist or mean-spirited is not getting a joke or being unable to take one.’ (Lakoff, 1990:270)*

For the men who reflected on banter within interviews and one-on-one discussions it was clear that concerns regarding ‘fitting in’ and being able ‘to take’ the banter were at the forefront of their minds. Many of the men echoed Lakoff’s ideas, with notions surrounding successfully learning how to banter emerging as a recurrent theme amongst conversations and observations. When beginning to analyse the ways that men had to learn banter, it is once again useful to refer back to theories of performance. Within the discussions of learning to banter, the men frequently made links between banter and undertaking performances. This was exemplified in a conversation with Adam, a twenty seven year old teacher who was new to the club. The following quotation is a comment he made when we were discussing rugby cultures more broadly, and his experience of coming to the club after having moved to the area:

*Me: ‘So what was it like moving up here and coming to a different rugby club?’*

Adam: ‘*When I came I thought, these are a nice bunch of lads and I learnt that if I got in on the banter that was my way in. So I kind of observed for a while, got what is was about, then this one time I teased Jimbo about his car, even though I think it’s actually alright…and boom I was in.’*

Adam notes that he ‘*observed*’ and ‘*got what it was about’* before undertaking banter, implying that he had to learn and ascertain the acceptable ways of interacting within the new context. Through his reflections and description of his experiences of using banter, Adam infers that banter is a skill which needs to be nurtured, playing an important role in being able to participate in interactions and in socializing with the other men. This aligns with, and builds upon work which suggests that learning to joke is an important part of socialization (Alexander et al., 2012; Plester and Sayers, 2009; Wheaton, 2000). Additionally, Adam’s comments further align banterous interactions with themes of performance. This is evident from the way that Adam notes that he bantered Jimbo about his car, regardless of the fact that he did not really believe the car to be problematic. Here banter is being utilised by Adam as a tool to put on a performance or front for the benefit of others, allowing him to carefully manage the impression of himself (Goffman, 1969). Connell’s (2000) work on iron-men usefully helps to understand Adam’s ideas, as within this work banter is tied up with expectations of sporting practices, with participants in her study suggesting that banter is central to achieving a successful sporting masculinity. In the case of Adam, it is clear that he felt that emphasis was placed upon being able to participate in, and successfully perform banter the in order to successfully achieve the rugby masculinity which he believed was valued within the rugby space.

The ideas expressed by Adam regrading banter being a process of learning was echoed by Peter, a thirty two year old IT technician who had been part of the club since he was a teenager. The flowing comment occurred during an interview whilst we were discussing his friendships at the club.

*Me: ‘Did you manage to make friends quite easily when you started coming up here, was there anything that helped you to settle in?’*

*Peter: ‘Oh, undoubtedly you have to be able to have good chat, you know, good banter, as well as being alright at rugby [laughs].’*

*Me: ‘Right, so what do you mean by good chat exactly and why was that important?’*

*Peter:* **‘***You know, by chat I mean banter. Banter is an important part of it, I think that if you can take it and then also give it out good, then you know that you really belong and that you have sort of made it. At first I wasn’t all that good at it I don’t think, I sort of had to pretend, act like I was, but now as I have grown, it sort of comes more naturally now. These days I do it without even thinking.’*

Examining the ideas of Peter alongside that of Adam in the example above, we can once again link this to Goffman’s (1959) ideas of impression management. Peter mentions having to ‘pretend’ that he understood the way banter operated until he felt he had developed the appropriate level of proficiency required to actively participate in the banter. Here Peter’s reflections of his concern regarding being able to ‘make it’ with the rest of the group alongside his openness about ‘pretending’ so as to fit in, show that he was carefully managing his identity and the impression he presented to others. Significantly, this impression management relies heavily upon another of Goffman’s (1967) conceptualisations, Facework. According to Goffman (1967) ‘maintaining’ face involves the effective presentation of an image which is consistent, supported by evidence and is reinforced through interactions with others. This idea of maintaining face assists in the understanding of both Peter’s and Adam’s comments, as well as my own experiences and reflections on trying to fit in introduced in the previous section. For both of the men the ability to develop ‘good banter’ signalled that they had transitioned successfully into the rugby club, having gained the appropriate capital required to be a legitimate member of the group.

The relevance of this idea of learning to banter was most poignantly made clear to me as I reflected on my own experiences of moving from an ‘outsider’ to an ‘insider’ within the research process. The importance of being able to both give and take banter, as well as being included in the group collusion to maintain the banter, were central to my transitioning relationships with the men, and ultimately played a key role in permitting me to understand and observe banterous interactions. Reading excerpts from my research diary in conjunction with interview transcripts, it was evident that through learning and using banter I was able to both negotiate the rugby space far more freely, and to build relationships with the men. This is reflected in my research diary extracts below, one taken from the early stages of my research, notably a month after the extract presented above and another after eighteen months in the field.

*‘Today was my sixth home game and I found myself chatting to my regulars both post and pre-match as normal. People are all being very polite and answering my questions, but I still feel awkward. The group of men I was with were having a joke and Dan was obviously trying to include me by explaining the banter, but it just wasn’t really the same and I felt a bit sorry for him. I don’t really seem to be in on the banter and I wonder how or whether this will happen. Perhaps I can’t force it, I guess I have already made progress, so onwards and upwards!’*

*(Research diary, March 2014)*

*‘I was behind the bar, talking to a few of the regulars when two men I hadn’t met before joined the conversation. The regulars drifted off and the three of us (Seyhan, Harry and I) started talking. Seyhan started talking about his work, explaining that he was a teacher who had moved up when his partner changed jobs. Harry then joined in and suggested that he was a masseuse and that he gave great massages. Judging by the tone of his voice I identified straight away that this was probably not the case. I responded by saying that it must be an interesting job, at which point he came around behind me and began giving me a shoulder massage. I wasn’t really sure what to do here, and given that by this point the chuckles and knowing looks coming from the other men suggested that Harry was not being entirely honest. Once he had finished he asked for my feedback. I responded that the massage was absolutely fabulous and that I could offer his services out to the players both home and away from my position at the bar as a side line for his job. His face dropped and the men surrounding us roared with laughter, holding their glasses up as a sign of approval. Clearly Harry was not hoping to have his services offered out to other men.’*

*(Research diary, September 2015)*

Analysing these two extracts together it is interesting to see the way that through time I had acquired the confidence and skill in order to deliver and collude in the banterous interactions. Along with the examples of Peter and Adam above, it is evident that I had to undertake conscious work to be successful in delivering banter. This relates once again to the work of Loic Wacquant (1995) in which he argued that labour is closely linked to capital. In his discussions of male boxers he asserts that these men had to manage the investment of their physical assets over time, carefully crafting their skill until they were able to reach the top of their physical game and simultaneously be held in the highest esteem amongst their peers (Wacquant, 1995). All of the examples presented here suggest that a key component of banter is that it is a communicative practice which is extremely nuanced which takes investment of time and effort, as well as understanding of the specific group context in order to be delivered successfully.

## Conclusion

This chapter has identified the processes and conditions of banter, demonstrating that it is an everyday practise at the club which though taken for granted, requires skill and an understanding of the club and group dynamic to operate. The data has shown that banter is utilised by individuals to manage performances and that men have an awareness of this process evidenced by their narratives of collusion, calculation and learning to banter. These are aspects which have been overlooked in previous thinking on banter as well as humour and teasing more broadly. From here it is interesting to explore the implications that this prominence of banter has upon the relationships amongst the men, as well as to understandings of masculinity and gender more broadly. The following chapters will focus upon exploring the ways that banter is re-produced and will critically examine the implications of this in terms of the men’s understandings of masculinities. Using the ideas expressed within this chapter, banter as an everyday tool within interaction and type of performance will be the foundations on which to further progress the thesis. Focus will be placed upon developing a sociological conceptualisation of how men negotiate the practices associated with hegemonic structures which have historically governed gender expectations in sporting sites.

# Chapter Five: *“Hey I ain’t no girl, I play rugby*” The role of banter in constructing and maintaining gender stereotypes and sporting masculinities

## Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the centrality of banterous interactions to the social fabric and everyday life of the rugby club, demonstrating that banter is required in order to access, move through and understand this particular rugby sporting environment. This chapter will build on the arguments presented so far, exploring the links between banter and masculinity in greater detail. I will utilise my data to demonstrate that existing theorising on masculinities remains useful to understanding men’s everyday lives, particularly theorising on hegemonic masculinity. I will also begin to draw out potential tensions my data highlights with these theories which will be resolved in the remaining analysis chapters. Significantly I am not viewing the rugby space as a static environment, one in which men separate their identity from other areas of their lives. Rather I consider this to be one site within the men’s lives where masculinity is constructed, part of a broader dynamic environment in which gender is developed and understood. The overarching focus of this chapter is to explore the ways in which banter acts as a tool enabling the men to undertake gender work within the rugby site in order to continually uphold their sense of masculine identities (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

In their work on masculinities in transition Victoria Robinson and Jenny Hockey (2011) argue that identification and difference are significant to gender theorising. Building on the work of Richard Jenkins (2004:5), who notes that ideas of identification and difference are ‘dynamic principles …the heart of social life’, they suggest that through placing the twin aspect of identification and difference centrally within theorising provides a useful framework from which to further understand masculinities. The masculine stereotypes which will be referred to within this chapter are those previously outlined within the literature review, including those institutionalised by specific cultural settings, such as sporting sites, as well as those formed through socialisation (Wellard, 2009; Mills, 2008; Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 1994). This chapter will utilise these theoretical concepts to explore the role of banter within this process, thinking about the function of banter in the continuation of these stereotypes and how this happens on a practical level in men’s lives.

As previously noted, sporting sites have been historically tied to particular notions of gendered identities, resulting in the emergence and continuation of gender stereotypes within society more broadly (Kidd, 2013; Wellard, 2009; Dempster, 2009; Light and Kirk, 2000). Rugby Union is a sport which has been described by Bryson (1990:74) as a ‘flag carrier’ of hegemonic masculinity, advocating very specific notions of men’s identity which encompass characteristics such as being practical, tough, un-emotional, demonstrating sporting prowess and participating in post-match drinking (Van Campenhout and Van Hoven, 2014:1090; Pringle, 2008; Morin, Longhurst and Johnstone, 2001). This ‘rugby masculinity’ also commonly referred to as rugby lad identity is gained through participation in Rugby Union, both in terms of playing and involvement in the culture more broadly. This can be seen to be part of a ‘masculinising process’ whereby men learn how to make it as men (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996:205).

It is important to acknowledge that whilst this chapter recognises that masculinities are not fixed formulae, rather as Hearn (1994:54) suggests ‘combinations of actions’, the stereotypes which have been historically ascribed to sporting masculinities remain important for investigation. These stereotypes infiltrate and influence society far beyond sport, with existing literature demonstrating that sport is pervasive both in the lives of those who participate in it directly, as well as being influential to those who do not (Cashmore, 2010; Reiss, 1994; Messner and Sabo, 1990). The stereotypes of masculinity provided briefly here have been explored in previous research, within a variety of sporting contexts. However, the tendency within this writing is to view men in terms of a social category, rather than thinking in ways advocated by Hearn (2004), who refers to a ‘double complexity’ when studying men. Hearn (2004) notes that we need to instead think about the social categorisation of men alongside the idea of men as being collective and individual agents of social practices. Further to this, categorisation and stereotyping of men is historically based on attributes associated with the body, with the interactive practices and processes which are tied to such stereotypes explored much less. This chapter will introduce banter as a lens through which to re-examine and expand these existing arguments. Through situating banter at the centre of the debate, exploring the role of banter within this ‘masculinising process’ as well as within the construction and maintenance of masculine stereotypes, the chapter will aim to unravel some of the further nuances associated with studying men.

## Identification of rugby masculinity “*It’s like a brotherhood, its home to me*”

On one occasion in the very early stages of my fieldwork I found myself talking to Troy, a forty two year old engineer. He loved rugby and had been lucky enough to visit many rugby clubs around the world whilst travelling for his job. He had played rugby throughout his life until a recurring knee injury meant that he had to officially ‘retire’ and in his own words ‘*become the worst and most angry spectator ever’*. It was during storytelling of his time travelling and visiting different rugby clubs that Troy described the significance of rugby to his life, suggesting that it offered him stability within his identity, particularly during periods of disruption when having to relocate for work. Troy told stories of how the first thing he would do when arriving in a new place would be to find the local rugby club, responding that *‘that’s where I would be able to just be me and chill out a bit.’* On one occasion Troy narrated a story depicting rugby as a strong identifier for men and suggested that this offered a safe harbour for identity. The following is an extract from my interview with him in which he talks about rugby identity and what it means to him.

“*I think for me rugby clubs just feel comfortable, they are where I can just totally be myself. I don’t have to have any airs or graces and can just relax. I have been in so many clubs and it is always the same, if you can have a good chat about rugby, or even better you have played, you are willing to sit next to someone and drink a pint, as well as having some good chat then you are fine. I think if you are the right sort of person they welcome anyone in. You have to enjoy the sport and all that comes with it and then you have a home for life.” (Troy, 42, Engineer)*

When I followed up this narrative with the question of why rugby clubs meant so much to him, Troy responded “*it’s like a brotherhood, its home to me, it doesn’t matter where I am in the world, I can just be myself there.”* These descriptions from Troy early on in my fieldwork encouraged me to think about how men use rugby as a site to anchor their identities. More specifically, this quotation enabled me to begin to consider how hegemonic masculinity is experienced in reality by men in the rugby context. Troy’s ideas here will be the impetus for discussion of the ways that rugby masculinity remains tied to historical gendered stereotypes of identity and the ways that many of the men continue to construct and maintain this form of identity, even though there might be increasing factors competing or conflicting within this process.

### Exploring hegemonic masculinity in the rugby research setting

In the narrative presented by Troy above he attributes specific traits to rugby masculinity, in doing so demonstrating that his lived experiences of rugby masculinity aligns with notions of hegemonic masculinity described in the literature review. Troy discussed characteristics such as physical ability, sporting knowledge and drinking as being part of his self-image. This supports early conceptualisations of hegemonic forms of masculinity, in which hedonistic practices such as playing rugby and drinking alcohol are attributed to ‘true’ masculinity (Kidd, 2013; Dempster, 2009; Francis, 1999; Bird, 1996; Willis, 1977).

When listening to other members of the rugby club telling stories clear similarities emerged with the narrative presented by Troy. A specific form of masculinity prevailed in the rugby setting and men were utilising the rugby space to ‘do’ masculinity in a certain way (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Steven Schacht (1996:562) argues that ‘rugby players situationally do masculinity by reproducing rigid hierarchal images of what a “real man” is’. This was echoed by Ben, a twenty eight year old carpenter who did not play, but came up to the club to socialise. I was talking to him at the bar about his reasons for coming to the rugby club and he said:

*“It is a place to be with the lads. Get up to a bit of trouble if I want, watch sport all day and just be one of the guys. It is one of the only places I don’t get stressed and can switch off and just be myself.” (Ben, 28, Carpenter)*

Within both narratives Troy and Ben suggest that they strongly relate ro rugby masculinity and are comfortable in rugby spaces. In his account Troy also emphasises that the ability to undertake what he deems to be manhood acts, such as sports talk and drinking are important features of rugby identity (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009; Light and Kirk, 2000).

Returning to my interaction with Troy, I asked him to further discuss his relationship with the rugby club. The following is a transcription of our conversation:

*Kitty: So you just suggested that there might be a right sort of person to fit in at a rugby club. Why do you think you feel so at home in a rugby club setting and what makes it easier to fit in?*

*Troy: Well, I think you have got to really understand men you know? Rugby clubs are places where men are just themselves and you have to be ok with that. It’s not like we wouldn’t be welcoming, we have all sorts at our club, but I think you just have to accept what we get up to. Sometimes we just mess around, we wouldn’t behave that way everywhere, but it is just a place to go to sort of remember the old times and have a laugh away from it all.*

*Kitty: Ok, I think I understand what you mean. Are you able to explain though what you feel you might want to get away from?*

*Troy: Oh you know, all the stuff life throws at you. Here you can forget all that and just be one of the lads and have fun. You can’t be a real man everywhere these days. It is not always appropriate and often I find myself thinking at work ‘Troy don’t say that here, people might not get it’ whereas at the club I can say what I like.*

Sharon Bird (1996) suggests that for many men doing masculinity in ways which align with the hegemonic model is in some ways taken for granted and common place. Within the initial interaction with Troy we saw him attribute specific characteristics and behaviours to the rugby setting. In this second interaction, through his language and description, Troy is suggesting that there is a shared understanding and knowledge of what rugby masculinity entails. He is assuming a shared knowledge based on my interest in and understanding of rugby. Building on Bird’s (1996) work, this example demonstrates that there is an awareness of performances of hegemonic masculinity which may not have previously been acknowledged. In saying ‘*I think you just have to accept what we get up to. Sometimes we just mess around, we wouldn’t behave that way everywhere’* and then utilising the idea of history and shared memory to justify his point, Troy is weaving a picture of masculine identity construction which resonates with traditional views of masculinity. Donaldson (1993) suggests that assumptions exist amongst men which permeate society more broadly regarding understandings of masculinity. There is the continual framing of ‘boys will be boys’ and suggestions that this is often both a symbolic, and in some cases physical, separation of men from both other men and wider groups within the gender order (Campnehout and Hoven, 2014; Light and Kirk, 2000; Bird, 1996). Troy is suggesting that men know how behaviours differ in the rugby setting and alludes to the idea that men within this space accept certain behaviours, regardless of whether they may find them acceptable, or practice them elsewhere. He is also insinuating that his self-image in the rugby club is different from his public image elsewhere. Taken together, these examples suggest that the historically hegemonic versions of masculinity are still highly valued by the men, though resistance or change is emerging and needs to be acknowledged and accounted for.

A further point to consider from Troy’s and Ben’s narratives relates to their articulation of how performances of masculinity are interchangeable. Within these interactions, both Troy and Ben are demonstrating awareness that rugby masculinity is situated in opposition to other forms of masculine identity. In doing so mirroring work of thinkers such as Kimmel (1994) who suggest that masculinity is constructed by setting our definitions in opposition to “others” (Chodorow, 1978). Through identifying the rugby spaces as ones in which *‘men can be themselves’* and as spaces *‘away from it all’* the men are indicating that the rugby club is a context in which masculine identities have the capacity to shift. This aligns with previous work suggesting that masculinities are spatially and temporally contingent (Robinson and Hockey, 2011; Meth and McClymont, 2009; Gregson and Rose, 2000, Hearn, 1994). Through Troy’s discussion of the difficulties he faces in managing sometimes conflicting forms of identity when he is in the workplace and Ben’s admission that he can “*switch off and be myself”* at the club, the men are arguably suggesting that the version of masculinity which aligns with the hegemonic model of masculinity are their most natural ones. This supports theorising on hegemonic masculinity which suggests that for many men, particularly within sporting sites, the dominant form of masculinity will prevail in relation to their self-identification (Kidd, 2013; Carmichael, 2007; Swain, 2006a). What is interesting within the account provided by Troy is that we begin to see ruptures and potential for resistance to the hegemonic model which are not always accounted for. These ideas will be explored in the next chapter.

Whilst thinking about the ways in which the men’s accounts of masculinity aligned with historical notions of hegemonic masculinity, I began to consider the theme of tradition. In the accounts presented here by Troy and Ben tradition and themes of memory or nostalgia are significant. In their work on high school rugby Light and Kirk (2000) argue that tradition is a key contributor in sustaining particular dominant forms of masculinity. Understood alongside theorising on sport more widely, which suggests that manhood is historical and that sport, specifically rugby, has produced particular connotations of masculinity through time, it is evident that attachment to tradition plays an important role in the men’s versions of masculinity (Kidd, 2013; Wellard, 2009, Pringle and Markula, 2005; Muir and Seitz, 2004). In his account Troy refers to the ‘*good old times’,* in doing so inferring that versions of masculinity as he understands them may have altered through time. When looking at my field notes for more evidence of this there were many occasions in which the men reminisced about the traditional forms of masculinity. Many of the men explained that they felt rugby spaces were ones in which they were able to undertake more ‘honest’ or ‘open’ versions of masculinity, extending work from Anthropology which discusses authenticity (Velleman, 2002; Taylor, 1991). The following example from an interaction with Adam, a thirty seven year old who worked in recruitment, draws out some of these ideas and includes an extract from my research diary as well as a transcription of our conversation.

*‘There was a rare occasion today during the match when I was asked some questions about myself by Adam. It feels like many of the men have questions for me but don’t always like to ask. It meant that I ended up talking about myself for a much longer period than I would normally, something which made me a little uncomfortable at first, or almost guilty, but actually led to some really interesting discussions. Adam was asking me to explain why I was interested in rugby so I recounted the story of how rugby had always been in my family and how I had become interested in researching it. I also talked about how I enjoyed being at rugby clubs, as they felt homely to me in some way. To which he then responded by almost complimenting me on my ability to be open minded and fit in at the club. At this point I asked if he would mind if I recorded our conversation as I was finding it really interesting. And he agreed.’ (Research diary extract March 21st 2015)*

*Kitty: You just said that you thought it was ‘admirable’ that I am able to just fit in and be part of club life so easily. I wonder if you would mind talking about that a little bit more, as I find that interesting.*

*Adam: Well I mean that this is a space which might not be inviting for everyone. A rugby club is not everyone’s cup of tea and I think that there are certain almost myths about what we all get up to. So I think it is good that you aren’t bothered by that and just enjoy the company and get along with everyone.*

*Kitty: When you say ‘might not be inviting’ what do you mean?*

*Adam: Well up here we have no real airs or graces. It is like where we can just be ourselves and have a bit of fun. I feel like there are a lot of places I have to be careful these days, like with what I say and here I can say what I want. So I look forward to Saturdays and the chance to just be with the lads.*

*Kitty: How are you different do you think when you are up here then?*

*Adam: Well I think there is no judgement. And it’s like I was saying to you before, some people might come up and be unimpressed with our ways, but you have just respected it. Like the old rugby club ways are what we all love. The playing of course is important, but also the singing, drinking, being brutally honest with each other. You just don’t get to do that everywhere, so I appreciate it much more when I am here and am also keen on those who get stuck in too.*

Within this example Adam articulates his attachment to the traditional form of rugby masculinity and awareness that this aspect of his masculinity cannot be performed in all spaces throughout society. He describes “*the old rugby club ways are what we all love”* and in doing so suggests that certain aspects of masculinity have changed. This idea is supported in his reflections that he ‘appreciates’ the rugby space in enabling identification with aspects of his identity which may not be permissible elsewhere, in doing so aligning with the narratives of Troy and Ben above. The ideas described by the men here, particularly the continual undertones of reminiscence and nostalgia, suggest that the men have to continually re-frame and re-stage their masculine performances (Mangan, 2002; Walsh, 2010). The men are placing their rugby masculinity in opposition to others in their lives, in doing so suggesting a hierarchy within the multiple performances of masculinity they navigate within their everyday lives. Hamish Crocket (2012) in his work on male Ultimate Frisbee described the variety of masculinities the men in his research performed throughout a sporting season. This research builds on work such as that of Stephen Whitehead (2002) who proposes that men’s identity is diverse and ambiguous (Messner, 2011; Hirose and Pih, 2010; Heasley, 2005). Crocket’s (2012) emphasis upon multiplicity incorporates Foucauldian understandings of power and discourse. Foucault suggests that ‘we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable’ (1978:100). Applying this to the discussion with Adam, it is evident that the hegemonic discourses of masculinity which are performed and created in the rugby setting remain important and continued factors in the construction of masculinity. Even when these may be challenged or destabilized in some way, the men’s storytelling indicates that the hegemonic model remains a prominent thread in their lives.

The continued influence of hegemonic masculinity within the process of constructing gendered identities and doing gender was made aware to me at various stages of the research. Themes of multiplicity and the necessity to juggle identity in relation to the hegemonic model became a recurrent narrative (Whitehead, 2002; West and Zimmerman, 1987). The following interaction was recorded after I had been at the club for fifteen months. By this time I had become a volunteer on the bar which meant that I was more frequently drawn into conversations. The example is a recording of a conversation between first team players. Initially I was not part of the discussion, but I became involved as the conversation was eventually directed at me:

*Will: Look at the time, why is it that Tuesday nights always go by so bloody quickly. Will have to go home soon I guess.*

*Martin: Chin up mate, back to the old ball and chain (laughs)*

*Will: Tell me about it*

*Chris: Well at least there is Thursday to look forward to and Saturday. The prospect of getting an absolute beasting*[[5]](#footnote-5) *on Saturday is worth it for the break I reckon.*

*[I finish pouring a pint and hand it over]*

*Will: Oi, you, make sure you keep that quiet next time you see Jenny eh.*

*Kitty: Oh don’t worry, my lips are sealed. I have to ask though lads, what is it about coming up here you like so much? Surely a night at home isn’t that bad?*

*Will: Ha, where to start. I think it’s because I can be myself here. No being nagged about appropriate behaviour. I can just be one of the guys and not worry about anything else. Don’t have to watch what I say.*

*Chris: Yeah I agree, my manliness is hard to contain at the best of time (laughs) and here I can just let it all out. Jokes aside though, I get to have a good knock about with the boys, let off some steam and then just chat about blokey shit which everyone here appreciates, even you, what could be better?*

*Kitty: or at least knows to tolerate, there is a difference (all laughs)*

Within this interaction the men are once again openly acknowledging their understandings of masculinities to be multiple. They also indicate a preference for the version of masculinity they are able to present at the rugby club. Will articulates this idea through his assertion that the rugby space is one in which he can *“be one of the guys and not worry about anything”.* Chris adds to this, creating a narrative of his daily life which situates the rugby club as a space where he “*can let it all out, let off steam and chat blokey shit”.* Narratives such as these, understood alongside the stories by the men above, suggest that there remains consensus with regards to the prominence and preferred performances of masculinity within the rugby club site. The men recognise that the form of masculinity which they can perform and undertake at the rugby club is often in opposition to that which they inhabit in other spheres. This is articulated by Will when he explains how his behaviour and identity at home when he is with his girlfriend contrasts to his sense of self in the rugby space. These stories align with previous work which suggests that hegemonic forms of masculinity remain dominant within sporting spheres (Light and Kirk, 2000; Bird, 1996). Further to this, the narratives presented here by the men critique more modern work which suggests that masculinities are spatially and temporally contingent and therefore a singular masculinity does not exist (Crocket, (2012; Meth and McClymont, 2009). For the men in this research it would appear that specific versions of masculinity are valued more highly than others.

The accounts from the men undoubtedly depict an acknowledgement that performances of masculinity are multiple and differ according to place. These stories all understood together provided some interesting insight into the ways that hegemonic masculinity is bound according to place and again highlighted the ways that men are conscious and active in this process. I became fascinated with the idea that hegemonic masculinity operated differently inside and outside of the club and wanted to think about how this was managed. This was encapsulated by Charles, a forty five year old engineer who in a conversation about how club life differed from other parts of his everyday life and routine noted:

‘*I think you just have to be careful you know, like I know here I can say whatever I like. Just have a laugh and not be worried what people will think. But when I go home or to work I have to just think a bit more. The world has gone a bit mad to be honest, everyone minding what they say can’t have banter or make a joke these days, but here I just don’t have to think. It is quite a relief really.’*

Here similarly to narratives such as those presented by Troy, Will, Martin and Chris above, Charles demonstrates that men understand their masculine identities to be framed within the rugby setting and that these are tied to particular characteristics and behaviours which echo historical forms of sporting masculinity. Here the differentiation between how masculinity operates inside and outside of the club is significant, as Charles notes that he is unable to undertake the same banter everywhere. This resonates once again with the work of Sharon Bird (1996) which suggests that men have an awareness of performance of hegemonic masculinity. It was from this point that I also became interested in exploring the ways that this rugby masculinity is continually constructed and maintained through time. In particular I examined the ways in which these contrasting performances of hegemonic masculinity were managed through banterous interactions. Further to this, I wanted to explore whether this form of hegemonic masculinity was deconstructed or challenged by the men.

### The role of banter in constructing and maintaining hegemonic masculinity

The examples from the fieldwork demonstrate that the form of masculinity which dominates the rugby club space resonates with existing theorising on hegemonic masculinity. Though there were some signs of resistance to this, which will be expanded in the final analysis chapter, I became interested in the ways in which this form of masculinity was constructed and maintained, as well as the way that it was often taken for granted or expected.

As has already been noted throughout this chapter, Rugby Union is a sport entrenched in hegemonic masculine ideologies. One of the practices associated with male Rugby Union, as discussed in the literature review and the first analysis chapter, is banter. If we understand jocular interactions such as banter as being central to the development of relationships between individuals, with ‘joking relationships’ referenced by Radcliffe-Brown (1940), to be significant in the socialisation and interactive practices which comprise our daily lives, then we must begin to view banter as an important tool utilised by the ‘weavers’ of hegemonic masculinity to maintain dominant ideologies (Bergson, 1911, Billig, 2005; Plester and Sayers, 2007).

Rugby clubs are positioned in society as sites in which ‘weavers’ of hegemonic masculinity are situated, with the common perception that it is within these spaces that boys learn to be men (Messner 2002; Light and Kirk, 2000; Curry, 1991). Within sporting spheres, including rugby sites, notions of masculinity are tied to the body and physicality and it is these markers which are deemed to be significant in the construction and maintenance of gender stereotypes (Van Campenhout and Van Hoven, 2014; Pringle, 2008; Morin, Longhurst and Johnstone, 2001). It is characteristics attributed to the body such as toughness, strength and resilience which underpin and dominate much of the literature on hegemonic masculinity (Carmichael, 2007; Pringle and Markula, 2005; Light and Kirk, 2000). Throughout the fieldwork I witnessed first-hand rugby masculinity being constructed through understandings of and relationships to the body. This was evident in the prominence of bodies within conversations surrounding first team players. On almost every occasion at the club I would overhear discussions regarding fitness or injury. In this way performances of masculinity were often tied to bodies. However, through observing the men in the research over a long period of time, it became clear that there were particular expectations of masculinity within the setting which went beyond those associated with physicality and the body. Banter was adopted by the men in order to express discourses of gender and to perform or construct rugby masculinity. I began to consider the ways in which banter fitted in with current theorising on hegemonic masculinity, in particular the instances whereby banter was utilised as an alternative form of capital from physical attributes within the space.

Reflecting on my experiences of observing the men in the setting, it became clear that banter was utilised far more widely and frequently than physical markers of rugby masculinity to express or maintain a sense of rugby masculinity. This was due to the fact that all the men were able to participate in this practice regardless of age and ability. For many of the men in my study it seemed that banter was an important way in which they were able to ‘act out’ masculinity and to perform masculinity in ways similar to those displayed through the physical act of playing rugby. The idea of humour being related to conceptions of masculinity has been drawn out in previous work by McCann et al. (2010) in which they state:

‘*His performance as a humourist is equated with his performance as a man. As there is no single agreed-upon way of using humour to convey information about the self, great skill is required to manoeuvre around these borders, and the risks of failing can mean emasculation’* (McCann et al., 2010:519).

This quotation supports the argument that humour is a type of performance, specifically one which can be associated with masculinity. Furthermore it highlights complexities men face when engaging in banter, suggesting that an inability to participate in and deliver banter may lead to failure to fit in or construct rugby masculinity. Wellard (2002) discusses ‘failed’ masculinity in his work on hegemonic masculinity, identity and sexuality, arguing that the construction and adoption of sporting masculinities is an ongoing activity. These ideas were echoed in my work and made clear to me on one occasion when I was talking to Calvin, a forty two year old civil service worker about his rugby friends and memories of his time at the club, particularly fitting in when he first arrived:

Calvin: *Well the thing is I love it up here, you can always have a laugh with the chaps. That wasn’t always the case though, it took me a while to warm to them and them to me. When I first arrived I had to get to grips with their ways. I was from the South, moved up with work, so had to be able to take all the shit they gave me for that. Eventually though, I learnt their ways, their banter and I never looked back. I got it wrong a few times, maybe crossed a line or didn’t judge it right, but then I proved myself on the pitch and started to be more confident with the banter and I fitted right in.*

*Me: Were you worried then what would happen if you were able to dish out the banter or it wasn’t received well?*

*Calvin: Yeah, I guess so at first. Like I worried a bit that I wouldn’t quite be seen as one of the lads. I didn’t want to be soft, or to seem like I couldn’t take or make a joke. But it didn’t last for that long and now here I am, now I can’t play and the chat is all I have left.*

Here Calvin identifies the importance of banter to the rugby masculinity, showing that it was a significant part of how men were identified in the space. Calvin describes how initially he was troubled by his inability to be part of the banter, worrying that this would prevent him from inclusion within the rugby community. He understood that he would not fit in within the space based on his ability to play rugby alone and his position would be questioned if he were unable to, in his words, ‘*take or make a joke’.*  Here once again it is clear that banter forms part of the fabric of hegemonic masculinity. Calvin’s suggestion that the banter has to be worked at suggests that hegemonic masculinity is continually under construction or in West and Zimmerman’s (1987) terms hegemonic masculinity has to be ‘done’. This example also echoes the work of McCann et al (2010) who suggest that humour is a skill to be developed and navigated. Further to this, understood alongside the work of West and Zimmerman (1987), Calvin’s idea reinforces the argument that men are actively ‘doing’ or constructing gender in the rugby space. A final point to note in relation to this example is that Calvin is demonstrating a certain level of awareness here. Calvin reflects on the role of banter in permitting his inclusion and ability to share the collective identity. This theme will be extended to incorporate theorisations of agency and intersected with hegemonic masculinity in the next chapter.

### Hegemonic masculinity in practice. The case of “faggot racing”

As the research progressed I continued to consider how the rituals and interactions I observed fitted in with or challenged ideas of hegemonic masculinity. I became aware of many instances in which banter was utilised as a tool to uphold and enable the continual dominance of hegemonic masculinity. One of the most pertinent examples of this was in the observations of what the men termed ‘faggot racing’. I had heard rumblings and rumours regarding this ritual from the very early stages of my fieldwork, with many men being evasive of the exact practices it involved, seemingly reluctant to let me in on the stories. However, as time passed and I became more familiar in the surroundings I was permitted knowledge of this practice, witnessing multiple events first hand. The following is an excerpt from my research diary which provides reflections of my thoughts the first time I was allowed to watch this ritual, as well as recordings of dialogue amongst myself and the men during and after the events. The diary extract comes from a conversation with a small group of men, both players and regulars when ‘faggot racing’ was mentioned, Rowen, a thirty nine year old lorry driver, proceeded to tell me the story of ‘faggot racing’:

*The men were reminiscing about previous rugby tours when faggot racing was mentioned by Gerry “as probably the funniest and weirdest thing I have ever witnessed in rugby, and that’s saying something”. Rowen started laughing as soon as this was mentioned and the others remained quiet. I said to Rowen that on previous occasions the men had been unwilling to tell me what faggot racing was. He said that he didn’t have such qualms and that “if I really wanted to know and if you think you can take it, I will tell you”. First he encouraged me to guess, which I felt obliged to do and my only pitiful attempt was to offer that it was associated with food. He thought this was funny and said “not quite”. He then explained in detail what it entailed.*

*Rowen altered his tone and said “Faggot racing is when groups of men strip naked and put rolled up paper or material up their arses, clenching to hold it in place whilst they do a lap of the pitch”. By this point Rowen was smiling broadly at me. The catch, he added, was “oh and did I mention, the object inserted is set on fire.” My face must have discernibly dropped at this point and Rowen was chuckling more heavily now, adding that “the best ones are the ones when you soak some of the middle sections of the object in alcohol, as this makes it spark up real good, or when someone is really hairy as they go up like a fucking candle”.*

*At this point Sean interrupted adding “yeah good for you to watch, not so funny when it’s in your arse you smug bastard, can’t help that I am hairy like a real man either…unlike some”. To which Rowen responded “well sorry if you are sensitive and can’t quite manage it like the rest of the lads, or that you don’t have a beautiful baby’s arse like mine.”*

*I was honestly quite shocked by this story and asked Rowen to clarify that I had heard it all correctly. I asked how far around the pitch people tended to get and he said that people have been known to get all the way around “but that takes real balls you know”. I then asked Rowen if he had participated. He said that he wasn’t going to, but then one time all the forwards were doing it and giving him banter and so he thought ‘I can’t let those fatties beat me’ so decided I had to have a go”.*

*(Research diary, 2nd September 2014)*

The narrative provided here of ‘faggot racing’ by Rowen, Gerry and Sean shows how these men utilised banter as a way to construct rugby masculinity. Talking to the other men at the club throughout the fieldwork it was apparent that faggot racing was an important and historically symbolic ritual for many of the men. This was exemplified in the frequency with which the ritual was referenced during my fieldwork. This practice was discussed both with and in front of me on multiple occasions, with men of all ages, both members and players. Below are two more accounts of ‘faggot racing’ which help to develop an understanding of how masculinity was constructed through the discussion of this practice:

Terry a forty six year old civil servant and past player, noted:

“*it [faggot racing] is all part of it isn’t it, part of club life, just what we do. Maybe on the outside it looks weird, but it’s what makes us who we are, just lads having fun and why not eh?”*

Further to this Nathan, a twenty three year old teacher and current player explained:

“*When I saw it [faggot racing] for the first time, I couldn’t believe it, it was sick. You only get that type of stuff in rugby. I told people at work and they thought it was ridiculous. I was like, ‘it’s just rugby lads, its not just all about the playing and its part of the bants’ [banter] they didn’t get it I don’t think.”*

This description of ‘faggot racing’ provided by Rowen, viewed alongside the descriptions from Terry and Nathan, demonstrates that this ritual is an important part of club life. The way that Terry describes the activity as “*making it who we are”* and Nathan’s indication that some people would not be capable of ‘*getting it’* shows that this is a crucial way the men formulate and understand their own identities within this space. Here Terry and Nathan are situating their identities in opposition to those whom may not understand or participate. This form of othering is significant in the construction of the rugby masculinity, with the narratives provided echoing the work of thinkers such as Curry (1991) and Whitehead (2002) who suggest that it is through our relationships, perceptions and interactions with others that identities are policed and maintained.

Reflecting upon the men’s storytelling alongside the interactions observed in the field and thinking about these alongside the literature, I began to further consider how banter worked in conjunction with physical actions in order to uphold the hegemonic model of rugby masculinity. When commenting on his perception of ‘faggot racing’ Nathan states that “*it’s not just all about the playing and it’s part of the bants”.* Through the positioning banter alongside the act of playing, Nathan is supporting the idea that banter forms an important part of the rugby masculinity, one which goes beyond performances which utilise the body. This highly gendered ritual allows men to perform masculinity in extreme ways. Previous work has suggested that a general rule of male peer groups is that behaviours are permitted as a collective which would not be acceptable elsewhere (Fine, 1987; Lyman, 1987). Furthermore the continued domination of traditional forms of masculinity is reliant upon collective participation (Barrett, 2008; Light and Kirk, 2000; Bird, 1996). Nathan and Terry acknowledge some of these issues, showing through their comments that rugby masculinity is reliant upon a shared understanding and is constructed within bounded spaces and places. Through acting out rituals which have specific connotations with sexuality and situating these within the backdrop of ‘having a laugh’ or ‘banter’, the men are constructing and policing the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity.

Returning to Connell’s original theorising on hegemonic masculinity it can be seen that this form of masculinity was based upon what she termed ‘currently accepted strategies’ (2005:77). This highlights the potentially transient and temporal nature of the theory and explains the understanding shown by the men that behaviours are dictated by space and place. This can be applied to ‘faggot racing’ as this can be interpreted as a type of ‘situation’ which Connell (1977:206) refers to as ‘moments in history’. Howson (2006) expands this idea further in discussion of Connell’s work, asserting that the concept of ‘situation’ can be seen to be a ‘framing concept’ which ‘represents the structuring of social relations at both personal and collective levels of reality to produce configurations of practice, which in turn organise human action and consciousness across space and time’ (Howson, 2006:35). The performance of faggot racing can be seen to allow men to formulate collective masculine identity and through acceptance of this ritual enables a sense of belonging. Referring back to hegemony and thinking around the theorisations of framing as discussed in the literature review, the idea of a ‘situation’ is useful in assisting with our understanding of how the men in the research utilise banter to both make sense of situations and to construct/deconstruct them at the rugby club. Tim Curry (1991) discusses the ways in which men create boundaries of gender appropriate behaviour within sporting sites. Curry (1991) suggests that maintaining the appearance of a conventional heterosexual male identity enables men to remain bonded to their team mates. In all of the accounts of ‘faggot racing’ above, the men show an awareness that this behaviour may not be appropriate elsewhere, in doing so acknowledging that performances of masculinity at the rugby club are specific ‘situations’ whereby banterous interactions are understood by the participants to be appropriate in, and perhaps even limited to, the rugby setting. The way that these ‘situations’ become accepted and integrated into the everyday for these men will be the focus of the next section.

### Banter and performances of hegemony as part of the everyday

When exploring how banter is connected to theorising on hegemonic masculinity and the ways in which the men utilised banter within their interactions and construction of masculinity at the club, I began to conceptualise banter as part of the everyday. The examples provided in this chapter as well as the first analysis chapter indicate that banter is embedded within the everyday of club life. Jacobsen (2009) amongst others has highlighted the complexity of everyday life and the value in thinking critically about interactions and practices which are taken for granted (Gardiner, 2009; ten Have, 2009; Garfinkel, 1967). The taken for granted yet overt presence of banter really interested me. The examples presented within the thesis are parts of extended conversations, of which there is not sufficient space to document in full. However, what was striking, when looking back at those conversations and surrounding dialogue, was that banter and the performances of masculinity which it enables are often so obvious to the men that they do not notice it. The men in my research frequently utilised banter without even detecting it and suggested when questioned that it was just part of the club life, something almost taken for granted. This is not to say that there was no evidence of agency or choice in some moments, and I would say that these increased as the research progressed, however for much of the time banter appeared to be taken for granted.

Sharon Bird (1996:125) in her writing on homosociality suggests that ‘doing men things or doing masculinity is simply the commonplace activity of men’s daily lives, recreated over and again maintaining the norms of social behaviour.’ When beginning to problematize and critique the ways that hegemonic masculinity maintains a position of dominance within the rugby setting and is often taken for granted, I returned to some of my earliest field notes and interactions from the research. Upon reading them I decided to ask a few of the participants to reflect on these interactions too. I had spent a long period in the field and from a position as an outsider I had become what one of the regulars Ross referred to as ‘*a part of the bloody furniture we can’t get rid of if we tried’*. I knew the regulars well by this point and was therefore a lot more open in my questioning. The example below contains two parts, firstly an extract from my diary in which I outline my experiences of meeting two men at the club for the first time. The second is a follow up discussion two years later with one of these regulars where we reflected together on our earliest meeting.

*Part one:*

*I was chatting to Charlie at the bar when two men came in. Charlie was keen to introduce me to them and as they approached told me that these two were real regulars, often seen to be propping up the bar on a Saturday evening long after the game had finished. When they sat down Charlie introduced me as “the new researcher, here to study them all”. Our little group had some small talk for a while about where I was from and what a PhD entailed. After some time we began to talk about their jobs and involvement in rugby. At this point Tommy suggested that aside from being an athlete and the fastest pint drinker at the club Giles was a masseuse [masseur] and that he “was extremely talented and gave great massages. In fact as talented off the pitch as he was on it”. At which point Giles sprung down from his bar stool and came round behind me. He began giving me a shoulder massage. I wasn’t sure what to do, and given that I could tell that this was likely not the case (by the knowing looks and chuckles coming from those around us, as well as the poor massage) I decided that I would participate in the banterous interaction. I suggested that the massage was very good and that he had ‘masseuse’ [masseur] written all over him. Then Giles added that his speciality was tantric massage and that he could show me some moves, at which point I politely declined, commenting that the small sample I had been kindly given was not good enough to take them up on the offer. At this point he said “well you can’t blame a man for trying” and we returned to conversations about rugby.*

*(Research diary 19th April, 2014)*

*Part two:*

*Kitty: So I have been looking back and remembering the first time we met, seems like ages ago now, but your meeting with me seemed to stick out.*

*Giles: Ha, well I hope so, for the right reasons I hope.*

*Kitty: Do you remember telling me that you were a tantric masseuse? And being fairly suggestive and a little bit rude? You were really trying to wind me up weren’t you?*

*Giles: Yeah I do remember that. You were an excellent sport though, took it all really well from what I can remember.*

*Kitty: Why do you think you did that? Messed around with me like that?*

*Giles: Well, honestly, I guess I often don’t even think about it. I just pretty much always wind people up when I am up here, just be a bit mischievous. I mean I know I shouldn’t, but it is just fun. I mean I know I can’t talk like that everywhere, but you were in a rugby club and I assumed you would be able to take it. If you can’t take the heat you gotta get out of the kitchen. And you are still here, so I can’t have offended you that much. Even if we wanted to get rid of you I am not sure we could now. Plus you pour a bloody good pint, always get the head just right and that is important after all. Oi oi (winks)*

It is evident that for Giles banterous interactions are very much part of the everyday of club life. Giles states that he *‘doesn’t often think about it’* which suggests that he takes banter for granted, though he later slightly contradicts himself by acknowledging that ‘*I know I shouldn’t, but it is just fun’,* a tension I will return to in the next chapter*.*  The continual presence of banter within interactions and the gendered nature of much of the conversation, as seen above, which is laden with sexual innuendo and references to gender and sexuality was extremely common. The frequency with which men utilised banter as a way to navigate the boundaries of masculinity was surprising. Reading back through my research diary, there were very few occasions at the club when there was not banter of this kind. This reinforces the idea that banter is present but not remarkable to the men and is part of the everyday fabric of club life. This echoes Garfinkel (1967:41) who states that the everyday is ‘seen but unnoticed’ and reinforces the argument made in the previous chapter.

Banter it would seem is accessible to the men, familiar. This was a point highlighted to me by Oli, a fifty five year old steel worker, in a conversation about his long term involvement at the club. In which he stated:

*‘One of my favourite things about club life is the men and all the camaraderie we have. I have been taking the piss out of these guys for most of my life now. The banter we have might seem brutal sometimes but it is just part of what we do. We always have done see, nobody takes it serious like. It is all a bit of fun, just shows the lads how to behave, especially the young ‘uns.’*

Here Oli is describing banter to be part of the routineof club life and suggests in his description that it is also a tool to keep notions of masculinity in check, echoing the narratives presented in the examples in the previous section. In their work on high school rugby through observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews and field notes Light and Kirk (2000) assert that hegemony was maintained through ongoing adaption and reproduction. It is the notion of ‘ongoing’ and processual construction of hegemonic ideas which is interesting. Howson (2006) suggests that the hegemonic model of masculinity is reliant upon certain ‘mechanisms of hegemony’, particularly the complicity of men to uphold this model. Arguably, it is complicity across time which enables and facilitates the continuation of particular gendered ideas. Linking this back to the literature on everyday life, as well as to the narratives from the men here, I argue that it is the everyday nature of banter which enables hegemonic masculinity to be continually maintained. This does not mean though that it was not challenged, or remains the most useful form of theorising to understand the experiences of these men. This point will be explored in the final analysis chapter.

## Conclusion

The examples presented in this chapter provide a strong argument that banter is an important tool in the construction and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity. For many of the men banter was important in their everyday interactions and played a significant role in enabling belonging and bonding. Tyler a thirty two year old fireman suggested that *‘It [banter] sort of* *keeps people in check, you know, if it sort of starts to get out of control or people get grand ideas, it makes sure everyone gets along’.* This encapsulates the idea that banter is an important everyday device in managing interactions and policing collective boundaries (Whitehead, 2002; Kimmel 2001)

Understood alongside the other examples from this chapter Tyler’s quotation supports the argument that banter fulfils social functions and acts as a tool which enables dominant notions of masculinity to be upheld (Billig, 2005; Kothoff, 2005; Norrick, 1993). Further to this, the examples presented here demonstrate that banter can enforce collective norms and assists in building of relationships. Banter can begin to be understood as being a way for masculine ideas to be policed and sustained through time and space, whilst being the basis on which men formulate opinions about themselves and others (Billig, 2005; Kothoff, 2005; Norrick, 1993). Such ideas align with previous work on banter in which focus is placed upon functionality (Fine and De Soucey, 2005; Kothoff, 2005; Norrick, 1993).

Whilst the evidence presented in this chapter highlights that banter is utilised by the men as a tool to reinforce the hegemonic models of masculinity, in doing so aligning with ideas which have been dominant in masculinity scholarship in recent years, I argue that theorising banter in this way can be overly simplistic. A key thread woven through this chapter has been the idea of resistance. In thinking about banter solely as a tool which props up hegemonic ideals of masculinity, this does not give sufficient credit to the complexity of the ways that the men in my research utilised banter, or to the nuances of masculinities themselves. Banter is undoubtedly a form of interaction and performance which the men learn and practice in the rugby setting, in doing so maintaining the traditional notions of masculinity which have dominated the space. It is important to acknowledge and explore this in order to provide a platform on which to begin further critical thinking. In the next chapter I argue that this very tool also affords the men opportunities to rupture the hegemonic ideologies. I will present evidence to suggest that banterous interactions can challenge and critique the hegemonic models of masculinity, moving towards the positioning of an alternative form of theorising in the closing analysis chapter.

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# Chapter six. “I think people like to misunderstand us” Banter, emotion and age challenging hegemonic masculinity

## Introduction

The previous two chapters have outlined banter as a significant tool utilised by the men in my research to perform rugby masculinity. Further to this, the examples included so far demonstrate that banter acts as form of communication which can be used to construct and maintain hegemonic masculinity. The previous chapter noted that the dominance and vast reach of hegemonic masculinity is in part due to the ‘mechanisms’ it has created (Howson, 2006). Banter was deemed a significant mechanism, situated alongside bodily performances, in the continued dominance of hegemonic masculinity in the rugby setting.

Hegemonic masculinity theorising is underpinned by the idea that the hegemonic model is stable and durable, sustained through the complicity of all men, regardless of whether it benefits them directly (Johansson and Ottemo, 2015; Howson, 2006; Connell, 1995). Notably it is the practices associated with hegemonic masculinity, rather than simply expectations, which are, according to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), central to the maintenance of hegemonic ideals. The physical practices associated with participating in rugby and the complicity of men to maintain particular notions of rugby masculinity can undoubtedly be linked to Connell’s notions of hegemonic masculinity (Mac an Ghail and Haywood, 2007; Schacht, 1996). However, within this chapter I argue that through thinking about Rugby Union in a small scale example, focussing on the interactional and communicative practices which are so prominent in this sphere, we can begin to gain a greater understanding of how hegemonic masculinity is realised in practice by the men and therefore the relevance of Connell’s theoretical model within this context.

As noted in the literature review, Rugby Union is a site which is historically tied up to dominant masculine ideologies, constructing particular notions of gendered identities and masculinities which position masculinity in opposition to femininity (Mac an Ghail and Haywood, 2007; Messner, 2002, 1992; Schacht, 1996; Bryson, 1987). Previous research has also shown that there are some spaces in which men are more able than others to express and play with understandings of manhood and meanings of what it means to be a man (Robinson et al., 2011; Wellard, 2009, 2002; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Messner, 2002). Robinson et al. (2011) in their work on male hairdressers suggest that construction of alternative masculinities is possible and therefore that the hegemonic model can be renegotiated. This has been explored most recently in the work of Eric Anderson (2014, 2009) in which he outlines inclusive masculinity as an alternative to hegemonic masculinity.

This renegotiation and deviation from dominant forms of masculinity is not always easy and there are particular sites, those which are historically imbued with hegemonic masculinity, in which this is more challenging. As previously outlined Rugby Union is a sphere in which men often conform to historical and stereotypical notions of masculinity, performing masculine characteristics, sometimes through banter, which align with Connell’s (2002, 1995, 1987) hegemonic model. This can be seen from the examples provided in the previous chapter. Whilst it is unquestionable that some men in the research did perhaps perform ‘expected’ banter in order to ‘fit in’, or as a reaction to shared understandings of particular stimuli, my belief is that banter is not only utilised in this way and that it can be a device to challenge the dominant ideologies in the space, in doing so rupturing the hegemonic model. The previous chapter began to highlight some of the complexities associated with banter and the ways in which men utilise banter as a way to convey resistance to dominant forms of masculinity. Whilst it is clear that the hegemonic model remains prominent in identity making within the rugby space, there is also potential for men to actively work around or outside of these structures. This chapter will explore this idea, utilising themes of emotion and age to do so.

Analysis of emotion and age emerged naturally from both observations and subsequent interviews. Observing and interacting with the regulars I became fascinated in the ways that older regulars engaged with rugby lad identity. Through listening to the men’s narratives I began to see the themes as interlinked. Many of the reflections on transitions through the lifecourse were peppered with emotional expression or discussion of emotion management. Further to this, the performance and expression of emotion by men had both convergences and departures from the traditional rugby lad identity which became interesting to explore.

The intersection of age and emotion was articulated clearly one evening after training when I was sat next to Mark a fifty seven year old mechanic. Mark had been a member of the club for the majority of his life, playing when he was younger, becoming one of the regulars and a volunteer since retiring from the game. The following extract is from my research diary and parts of our recorded conversation. Within this conversation we were talking about rugby and club life. What is interesting from this account is that Mark begins to highlight some of the different facets of rugby masculinity. In doing so leads to questioning of the hegemonic model as being an appropriate theory to broadly explain and understand gendered identity making practices in this sphere.

*I got a drink and took a seat next to Mark in ‘old farts’ corner. This spot is where the older regulars tend to sit as it gives you the best view of the club house as you can sit and inconspicuously watch the players and regulars filter in. We chatted for a long time, as we usually do, about a variety of topics. I started the conversation by asking him about the latest volunteering projects. We then moved on to talk about rugby life. With the tour coming up and chatter about this rumbling around the clubhouse we started talking about tours and initiations. There was a veteran’s tour which was coming up and Mark was excited to go. I asked whether he had been on many Veterans’ tours and whether he ever went to the first team tours. He said he used to go on lots of tours when he was younger, but that ‘they weren’t like they used to be’ adding that ‘they go, often flying there and only play one game. Now when we used to go do it we went somewhere travelling days on a coach and then play rugby constantly for two or three days….not anymore. I still like to go away though. I may not play like I used to, but I can still manage all the other stuff and in some ways can give the young’uns a run for their money.’ He evidently thought that tours were a bit tamer now than in his day, but was still participating in the rugby culture. We then talked about rugby initiations and the practices associated with going on tours and being a traveling side. I relayed to him that I had been listening to first team players talking about the horrible things they had to do in previous initiations and tours. Mark laughed at this and I asked him why this was funny. He said ‘well it is all part of it isn’t it, all part of the tradition. But really, people think that the emphasis is on us all be horrid and wanting to punish each other. When really it is not like that at all, people get it wrong all the time, I think people like to misunderstand us and I guess sometimes it works to our advantage. It is just our way of caring, showing that we are welcoming and that we care about the new people too. I mean it is no bunch of flowers and box of chocolates welcoming people into the club, but it is our way of doing the same thing.’*

*(Research diary 27th May 2016)*

Engaging with recorded conversation such as this during the analysis process contributed towards a re-evaluation of the boundaries and limitations of hegemonic theorising in relation to the lived experiences of my participants. Within this dialogue Mark begins to explain the various performances of masculinities and indicates that collective behaviours such as initiations involve the men putting on a front. He suggests that popular perceptions of rugby rituals miss the point and detract from the real sentiment which lies beneath. This has direct links to Goffmanian perspectives and in some way stretches these (Goffman, 1974; 1959). Mark is suggesting that actors in the space conspire in order to enable the continuation of rituals and historical notions of rugby masculinity to prevail, however, Mark is also suggesting that there is an awareness of this impression management and that the men perform multiple roles or have multiple understandings/interpretations of their own actions (Goffman, 1959).

Additionally, within our discussion, Mark was making continual references to age. This theme was present in many of the narratives from the men in my research, particularly those who had once played rugby and remained affiliated to the club through spectating and volunteering. As in the example from Mark emotion and age were often positioned alongside each other by participants. This chapter will first begin by exploring emotion in relation to hegemonic masculinity theorising and the rugby lad, moving on to the theme of age in the latter sections.

## Emotion

I spent my youth at my local rugby clubhouse waiting for my brother to finish playing and handing out the clubs’ famous hot dogs to players after matches. So I entered the fieldwork with what I believed to be a good knowledge of Rugby Union cultures and practices. I had observed habits and routines and seen first-hand men displaying emotion both on and off the pitch. Yet I had not ever thought about this academically, or realised the value these experiences might have when I began to think critically regarding men’s lived experiences of dominant structures of masculinity. As I was undertaking analysis and considering the literature in conjunction with my experiences of rugby clubs, I began to see the significance of emotion to club life. Rather than being environments devoid of feeling as these spaces are historically depicted, the men in my research were often acutely aware of their emotions and thought carefully regarding displays of emotion in relation to their perceived identity (Campenhout and Hoven, 2014; Muir and Seitz, 2004; Light and Kirk, 2000). The rugby club was a space where men expressed emotions in a variety of ways and it was the management and methods of expression which I became interested in, as this had clear implications for the understandings, construction and maintenance of masculinity in the rugby spaces.

The narrative above from Mark acted as a stimulant for thinking critically about emotion in the rugby space. He suggests that emotions are present and underpin some of the historical rituals and practices in rugby. Mark’s statement is perhaps surprising when understood alongside public perceptions and literature which overlooks or downplays men’s capacity for emotionality in sport (Lilleaas, 2007; Aitchison-Carmichael, 2007). Narratives such as this by Mark encouraged me to consider emotional management and the work men were doing with regards to emotion as part of the construction of masculinity in this sphere.

### Emotional management

Rugby masculinity has historically been tied to notions of toughness and physical strength, with emotionality and expression of feeling often depicted as contradicting valued rugby characteristics (Anderson and McGuire, 2010; Price, 2000). Hegemonic masculinity models have also traditionally been built on a system in which men’s expression of emotion is downplayed or hidden. Further to this, there have been long standing connections made between men and emotion, with previous studies demonstrating that men do not find it easy to express their inner feelings (Lilleaas, 2007; Seidler, 1997; Ekenstam, 1998). In more recent work it has been acknowledged then men have become more aware of their emotions with expression of emotion being more widely accepted within dominant understandings of masculinity (Anderson and McGuire, 2010; Lilleaas, 2007). For many of the men in the research this consciousness of their emotion was evident and articulated within their narratives of everyday rugby life.

Emotion was not directly questioned in the research; however its prominence and emergence as a theme intersecting with so many others meant that it required closer attention. The men often touched upon emotion within their narratives, particularly in discussions of their relationships within the club, as well as their reflections on club life and rugby identity. In a conversation with Stan a thirty six year old teacher, whose Dad was also a member of the club, he told me the following:

*‘Well I mean I think a lot has changed in rugby and at the club since my dad played. Some of it for the better, some for the worse. I reckon that it is probably more diverse up here now, which is a good thing. Like I don’t think you have to worry as much about if you fit in, or whether you are saying the right kind of things, everyone is pretty accepting. Though maybe there are certain things you might not get away with. Like I love these guys, but I probably wouldn’t tell them. Some of them might wig out[[6]](#footnote-6) a bit, think I was a bit of a girl. But then maybe that is just me, I have never been any good at saying how I feel, though am possibly a bit better at home, but you would have to ask the wife.’* (Stan, 36)

Here Stan is directly referencing his belief that the culture of the club has altered with time, suggesting that the club is now more diverse and that this enables different behaviours. Notably though, he indicates that emotion is a key aspect which still has to be negotiated. He acknowledges the complexity of managing and displaying emotions through the admission of difficulties when attempting to express emotions towards friends. The point which I found most interesting though, was that he situates these ideas within the theme of space. Here Stan is highlighting the emotional spatial construction of masculinity (Waitt and Warren, 2008; Robinson and Hockey, 2011; Hearn, 1994). Stan is identifying the club as a site in which displays of emotion are difficult, suggesting that emotional management, or in Goffmanian terms impression management, is required (Goffman, 1959). His comparison between displays of emotion at home and the rugby club suggests that there are distinct differences in terms of emotional expression across space. Furthermore, Stan likens emotionality to traits associated with being ‘girly’ and in doing so makes a connection between emotion and gender. This resonates with literature which argues that men are less emotionally articulate than women and find difficulties in expressing themselves in particular spheres (McCann et al., 2010; Lilleaas, 2007; Collier, 1998). Analysed as a whole, this quotation from Stan indicates that emotion remains tied to the construction of gendered identities within the rugby space and is carefully managed whilst in that sphere. However, it is important to acknowledge that though emotional expression might be in some ways limited or managed, Stan is indicating that there is the capacity for emotion to be expressed and that men have an element of choice when doing so.

This idea of emotional management in relation to space was prominent within the narratives of the men. At one point during my fieldwork I was sat next to Dave, a twenty two year old first team player. We were talking about his disappointment at the current form of the team, as they had been on a losing streak, when he touched upon the theme of managing emotions. In a recorded conversation, in which I questioned his understandings of the appropriateness of displaying emotions, he noted:

‘*Well you have to be a bit selective. You can show emotion, it just depends on your moment. Like I am pretty sure I could say almost anything to some of these lads, but I would pick my moment and place. Like I would talk about being annoyed about losing in the changing rooms and I have seen lads crying about that in there, but I wouldn’t have a big DMC[[7]](#footnote-7) in the changing rooms, that would just be a bit weird. So if I wanted to talk about other stuff I would do it in here after a match, with a pint.’* (Dave, 22)

Dave is clearly suggesting that there are certain understandings amongst the men with regards to where emotion can be shared or released. This extends Stan’s acknowledgment that emotions can be shared amongst the Robins, but that men are selective about this. Dave terms these as ‘moments’. He indicates that the changing rooms are not spaces in which he would feel comfortable in sharing his deepest emotions, though suggests that the alternative space of the clubhouse bar area would be appropriate. Probyn (2003:298) suggests that ‘in space we orient ourselves and are oriented’. The conceptual framing provided by Probyn (2003) places emphasis upon subjective experiences and ties emotion to experiences. It is useful to weave this together with Goffmanian perspectives in order to understand both Dave’s and Stan’s experiences in greater detail. Goffman’s (1974, 1959) ideas of frames and impression management, in which he suggests that frames are invisible structures which govern events, influencing how a situation is understood and that performances are dictated by these frames, is useful. Both of the men insinuate that they carefully manage the emotional parts of themselves and therefore elements of their identity whilst at the club. They also allude to the fact that this management is part of the gendered expectations and performances which are tied to everyday club life and interactions.

Erving Goffman’s (1959) work introduces the idea that individuals make strategic decisions about the information they reveal or conceal from others, with audiences scrutinizing performances and making judgements. This theorising of interaction and identity construction is useful to consider when unravelling Stan’s comments, as well as thinking more broadly regarding other men’s expression of emotion. In the extract at the start of this chapter Mark also acknowledges that there are particular perceptions of rugby club behaviour. This was again echoed in a discussion I had with Doug a forty nine year old engineer. We were discussing a recent case in the media of two premiership rugby players from different teams who were being offensive about each other in media interviews prior to a big match:

‘*The thing is I think that people like to think we are like that and a certain amount of that I guess works to our advantage, helps the game look exciting or whatever. But we aren’t really like that, it is not really like that at all. Sometimes it is annoying that people think that is all we are about. If we are mean to each other up here it is only our way of showing that we care. Really the worse I am to you the more I like you. That is just how it works here. We are what we are and that is nice lads, but we just don’t show it the same way.’ (Doug, 49)*

Doug is indicating that he is aware of the positioning of rugby players within society, particularly by outsiders of rugby culture. Here he is unknowingly acknowledging his position within the structures of hegemonic masculinity which dominate the rugby space and wider societal perceptions of rugby. Interestingly, Doug acknowledges that the rugby masculinity ‘*can work to their advantage’* whilst he also noted frustrations with this. Doug is recognizing the double edged sword of masculinity construction and the issues associated with managing emotion (Hochschild, 2012; Wellard 2002; Donaldson, 1993). He is articulating some of the conflicts between displaying an accepted masculinity and suggests that this can be advantageous, whilst recognizing that this also limits performances and understandings of identity within the space. This echoes writing on hegemonic masculinity which acknowledges that whilst hegemonic structures can be advantageous for all men, not all those who identify as male may actively participate in their continued existence and construction (Whannel, 2007; Wellard, 2002; Donaldson, 1993). Notably he is once again highlighting the complex relationship between masculinity and emotion, specifically the ways in which men’s expression can be discredited if it does not situate itself within conventional or expected forms.

The theme of emotional management which Doug is alluding to above was echoed by many of the other men. In an interview with Peter a forty four year old joiner he talked about his friendships at the club and the importance of these to his life. Within this conversation, somewhat unexpectedly, banter and emotion became the key topic of conversation. Below is an extract taken from an extended conversation with him about club life:

*Kitty: So your friendships with the rugby guys are important to you then?*

*Peter: The thing is I really love these lads, literally some top blokes right here. I wouldn’t say it to them and probably don’t say it enough, but they are great. Always there for you, always around to take your mind off things or just offer a bit of escapism.*

*Kitty: Why wouldn’t you feel comfortable saying that to them? Do you think they know that you care about them that much?*

*Peter: Well they would just bloody rib me for it, the banter would be horrendous. It just isn’t really what we do. I mean maybe you might say it to someone independent of the group, but if we were all together there would be no chance.*

*Kitty: Really, no chance at all?*

*Peter: Well you would need to just box a bit clever with it. There are ways to show people you care or you like them, you just have to go about it the right way.*

*Kitty: Oh ok, what is the ‘right’ way then?*

*Peter: You have to joke with them. We basically just show affection through banter. The more I like you, the more banter you are gunna get. It is not like we don’t care about each other, I love these guys, I just don’t show it the way some people do. We have our own little ways.*

In order to understand Peter’s comments on emotion and the way he manages this to retain a sense of masculinity, it is useful to return to the literature on banter. Understandings of banter within society often suggest that banter is utilised to be rude or indirectly address a point which circumnavigates social etiquette and customs (Garde, 2008; Plester and Sayers, 2007; Fine and De Soucey, 2005). Susie Scott (2015) discusses rudeness from a symbolic interactionist approach and suggests that rudeness enables the veneer of social correctness or politeness to be temporarily suspended. Banter can arguably be thought of similarly, in that it allows expression of self and identity in ways which might not be permissible otherwise. Within the conversation with Peter he directly acknowledges the connection between banter, emotion and masculinity. Peter clearly states that banter makes the expression of emotion acceptable, whilst also acknowledging its role in the policing of masculinity (Whitehead and Barrett, 2008; Whannel, 2007).

As outlined in the previous chapter, banter is an interactional tool which emerges from the lived experiences of hegemonic masculine structures and enables men to perform expected rugby masculinity. The conversations with Mark and Doug, understood alongside other participants’ narratives such as Peter’s, demonstrates that men do frequently express emotion in rugby settings, utilising familiar tools, such as banter, which have previously been framed as constraining or policing masculinity, to do so. The admission by Peter that ‘*we basically just show affection through banter. The more I like you, the more banter you are gunna get’* demonstrates the significance of banter to expressing feelings. Returning to the ideas outlined in the first analysis chapter, it is clear that for Peter banter is a significant commodity utilised in order to produce and enable expression of an emotional self. Peter is articulating the point that banter enables the management of his emotions and that there is reliance upon this in order to direct and display his emotions in ways he believes are appropriate within the rugby club environment.

The examples discussed in this section have also highlighted that the men are aware of the pre-existing limitations in relation to expressing emotion. They have framed these limitations within the historical and societal expectations attached to specific gender roles, in doing so indicating that hegemonic structures in some ways remain significant in the ways in which they are able to do, perform and construct their masculinities in the rugby spaces. However, these examples understood many others in the data demonstrate that the men no longer feel constrained to work within these hegemonic structures and that they have agency. The men utilise banter as a commodity to manage their emotions and to navigate the parameters of gender expectations within the rugby space. Interestingly the men are utilising the familiar tool of banter, itself constructed within this sphere, to demonstrate resistance to some of the building blocks of hegemonic masculinity. Arguably the men adopt banter in order to display aspects of their masculinity which are not usually positioned at the forefront of their identities. In doing so this ruptures pre-existing stereotypes and assumptions regarding masculinity. In this way banter can be seen to expose some of the weaknesses of the hegemonic model and indicates tensions in terms of men’s realities and lived experiences.

### Emotional expression: banter, emotion and masculinity explored

As the research progressed and the analysis unfolded, I thought critically regarding the ways in which banter enabled the men to manipulate the limitations of their masculinities and how banter informed their everyday lived experiences of being rugby lads. Due to the nature of my fieldwork and the amount of time I spent in the field, as time passed discussions with the men inevitably included details of their lives external to the rugby sphere. It was within these conversations that I was able to gain a greater understanding of the significance of banterous interactions to the men’s lives and to think critically regarding how this had enabled them to ‘do’ masculinity in ways which arguably challenged hegemonic theorising (Connell, 2002; 1987; West and Zimmerman, 1987; Carrigan et al. 1985).

Familiarity with them men and the sharing of my own stories meant that they began to talk more freely. Many of the men had suffered some form of trauma or challenges within their lives, with landmarks such as personal illness, shifting relationships, family breakdowns and employment uncertainty causing tensions with regards to how they perceived themselves and their masculinity. It was through the discussions of these experiences that the extent to which men viewed expression of emotion as an integral part of ‘doing’ masculinity became apparent (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

On one occasion during a training night I was sat next to Tom a fifty six year old engineer. I had known him from the beginning of my research and our relationship had evolved to the point that we gave each other weekly updates on our lives. I had developed a bond with Tom and perhaps due to this he frequently disclosed information about his life outside of rugby. He was talking openly about long term health issues and the importance of the club in enabling him to keep what he referred to as a ‘*true sense of self, a grounding, a little bit of balance if you like’.* Tom acknowledged the role that the club had played in enabling him to cope through challenging times. I responded by noting that I thought his case was very interesting and yet not necessarily isolated or unusual, other than in the sense that he was speaking openly when many men might not. I then spoke to him about my research and that I had become frustrated with depictions of rugby players as being one dimensional in the media. This led to the following discussion whichI asked permission to record. This is a transcription of his account:

*Tom: I am not really sure what I would have done without the club and the lads. I have known them almost my whole life and they have helped me through all the bad times. When I come up here I can just escape and I am not ever judged on how well I am. There have been times when I have come up to watch rugby and not really said much, just haven’t had it in me. I have come up here feeling really low, but somehow I always left feeling better. I know the stereotypes of rugby lads, I know that possibly people wouldn’t expect us to be caring or supportive, but I think I am proof that isn’t true. We aren’t what people think. We do really love each other. Perhaps we have slightly less conventional ways of showing it, but we do care.*

*Kitty: Do you ever tell the other lads how much of a difference they have made to you?*

*Tom: Well not directly I guess. I just tend to joke with them, have a bit of banter. That is just our way, it doesn’t mean we aren’t serious in what we say and I don’t think that I am any less of a rugby lad if I say nice things to people, rugby guys have feelings too.*

This quotation from Tom is striking in the way that he directly connects his lad identity to emotionality. He believes that his masculinity is not questioned through demonstration of emotion. In doing so he indicates that masculinity in the rugby club is changing and that the highly valued hegemonic versions of masculinity are becoming diluted (Anderson, 2012). Tom refers to the ‘stereotypes’ of rugby lads and clearly states that expression of emotion and sensitivity are a part of routine interactions and bonding at the club. Tom states that *‘rugby guys have feelings too’* indicating that contrary to popular perceptions of rugby spaces, the club is a site in which men feel that they can express emotion. Tom also positions his ability to express his emotions at the rugby club in contrast to other spheres, displaying agency and resistance within this hyper masculine sphere. This narrative from Tom contradicts some of the literature on lads and lad cultures which suggests that displays of masculine characteristics are limited and that socialisation within lad cultures can lead to restrictions in terms of behaviours and gender practices (Edwards, 2006; Gill, 2003; Francis, 1999). Tom’s narrative does in some ways echo the sentiment that ‘boys will be boys’, however his discussion of emotion indicates that there is greater diversity in terms of performances and expressions of masculinity than has been previously discussed (Thompson, 2002; Connolly, 1997).

This narrative not only provides some critique of dominant theorising on hegemonic masculinity, it also shows limitations with literature on masculinity in crisis too (Hearn, 1999; MacInnes, 1998; Lemon, 1995; Horrocks, 1994). MacInnes (1998:47) notes that emotionality is often framed as a male ‘vice’ and that demonstration of emotion has been publically perceived as problematic. Tom contradicts this idea, as he is clear that expression of emotion is no longer difficult at the club and that through particular delivery and tone in the style of banter, feelings can be frequently communicated. One element of the crisis literature which this example does corroborate with is a critique of hegemonic theory. Arguably a contradiction exists between the hegemonic male image of masculinity and the real conditions and experiences of men’s lives (MacInnes, 1998; Lemon, 1995). Tom’s narrative supports this point and shows that men’s experiences are more diverse than the hegemonic model allows and that there is more capacity for agency within these sites of gender construction than has been previously credited.

Within this example Tom is clear that banter is a method of expressing emotion and that this has become an important element in the construction of rugby masculinity. This sentiment was echoed by many of the participants in the research. This is exemplified in the following interaction between myself and three of the players. On one occasion post-match I was talking to Mike, Oli and Dan whilst serving on the bar. These three were current first and second team players aged between twenty three and thirty one. Though they were younger than Tom, there were distinct parallels regarding their capacity to express emotional aspects of their characters. I had been chatting to them for about twenty minutes, during which they were de-briefing about the game and regaling tales of times spent together. The following is part of our recorded conversation.

*Mike: I wouldn’t say I have ever felt constrained here, like not able to say how I feel.*

*Oli: Nah, you always say what you feel, god help us when he gets going there is no stopping him*

*Dan: Yeah we have to bloody mute him in the end. This guy loves an overshare.*

*Mike: Hey, don’t act like you don’t care. I am just a trail blazer, you just wish you were as in touch with your emotions as I am. I am still the manliest of us all and you know it.*

*Oli: Nah I am messing, you be what you want to be, if that is a massive cry baby then go for it. No judgement here. I only require the one Kleenex not a whole box when I share my feelings, I got some control, just saying.*

Within this exchange banter is being utilised in order to underpin the interaction and communication of ideas. Oli and Dan are bantering Mike, teasing him about his expression of emotion. Within this dialogue Mike is clear that he does not feel ‘constrained’ in terms of his capacity to express emotions as part of his masculine identity. He defines himself as the ‘manliest’ of all the men. In doing so demonstrating that he does not perceive expression of emotion and masculinity as separate. Carmichael (2007) acknowledges that sport is a site in which there is the possibility for resistance and transgression from hegemonic gender power relations, though concedes that this is not always achieved due to the dominant powers which structure many sporting sites. Linking this to the conversation above, the use of banter to express departures from traditional forms of masculinity can be viewed as a demonstration of resistance to the hegemonic norms which dominate the rugby space. Oli suggests that he too expresses emotion freely, though acknowledges that he is better able to ‘control’ this in opposition to Mike. This is evidenced in his comment which relates to how many tissues he would require to wipe away tears, here relying on an understanding of the social construction that men do not cry. This arguably shows that whilst the men are aware of the structures which govern behaviours, alluding to the need for ‘control’, they are able to navigate around these during the process of displaying emotion. They are arguably experiencing the structures of the dominant masculinity in terms of the construction and performances of masculinity, however they are not confined by it (Whannel, 2007; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

Further to this Wetherell and Edley (1999) note that one of the most effective ways of displaying masculinity is to demonstrate one’s distance from a localised hegemonic masculinity. Through the framing of the interaction as banter, a familiar masculine frame, Mike, Dan and Oli are simultaneously distancing themselves from, and working within, the constraints of hegemonic structures. Responses from other men in the research enabled this connection between banter, emotion and masculinity to be drawn out. In a conversation with Jim, a twenty eight year old teacher, he spoke openly about how he shares emotion in the rugby setting.

*Jim*: *Oh yeah, I mean it’s ok to be in touch with the old emotions these days isn’t it? I sometimes cry like a baby, even did here when we got promoted, but it is all good. Men are more sensitive and I think that modern men can be what they want. I think it’s more manly to embrace emotions than to bottle them up. And actually there are a lot of national campaigns within rugby which say the same.*

*Kitty: Interesting, so how do you go about it? Expressing emotion I mean?*

*Jim: Well I probably use a bit of banter to test the waters. But I don’t think you have to, I think I can talk openly about my feelings to these lads, banter is just habit. But maybe that will change.*

This conversation with Jim, one of the most senior and respected first team players was particularly interesting. Hearing him talk about emotions in this way echoed Anderson and McGuire’s (2010) work on inclusive masculinity. Within this work the authors speculate that some men are afforded higher levels of masculine capital than others in sporting sites and that these individuals are influential in enabling a shift in how masculinity is constructed and viewed. As an individual who has played in the captaincy position, Jim was influential in the club. Arguably, this acceptance of more diverse masculinity which he speaks of was trickling down to other members.

Jim suggests that it is ‘*more manly to embrace emotions than to bottle them up’*. Here Jim is alluding to the blurring of masculine performances. His reference to ‘bottling up’ emotions resonates with Goffmanian perspectives of identity construction within the structures of society (Goffman, 1959). The historical rugby masculinity which was predicated on emotional toughness is being challenged here. In this way the rigid structures of hegemony are being critiqued. Jim’s openness at his performances of emotion show that he feels able to choose the form of masculinity he engages with. In this way performances which have been historically categorized as ‘back stage’ are now operating in the ‘front stage’ region of interactions (Goffman, 1959). This has inevitable effects on the construction and understanding of gendered identities. Gutmann (1996) in his famous work on Mexican ‘machismo’ noted that men were able to establish different categories of masculinity and that masculinity was relational. Within the ideas presented by Jim, as well as that of the other men in this section, there is evidence to suggest that men are no longer situating emotion as part of the other, particularly as the antithesis of masculinity. Instead men are taking ownership of emotion and positioning this as part of their masculinity.

This idea was evidenced in the examples provided here from direct narratives as well as from observations of the ways that the men behaved together. One clear instance of this was when I witnessed the group singing together after matches. The captain was frequently the instigator of the songs and therefore would set the tone for the types of songs performed. In the extract below from my research diary I observed some of the changes to this practice at the start of a new season.

*We are about a third of the way into a new season now and I can really notice a difference in terms of how the club feels. The change of captain and some of the committee has definitely brought about alterations in behaviours and practices. The team had won today and I was one of the last people on the bar. It was late and as usual the singing was in full swing. Last season it felt that the songs I listened to on repeat were frequently about women and other groups (gay men). The lyrics tended to create and expose oppositions to masculinity and framed rugby masculinity as something which was superior to any other forms of masculine identity. Honestly I used to feel uncomfortable listening to them. Tonight though it struck me that this had changed. I realised that after all the home matches so far the tone and content of songs has shifted. Listening tonight the songs were all about camaraderie and friendship. Whilst there are still sprinklings of sexism I feel far more comfortable about these songs. At one point I was humming along and repeating a chorus. Tonight it felt like a happy space and one where anyone would be welcome.*

*(Research diary, November 2015)*

This research diary example and Jim’s narrative aligns with the work of Swain (2006a, 2006b) who applies the terminology ‘personalized masculinities’ to describe the ways in which men are able to be selective regarding the form of masculinity they choose. The example from the research diary of the men knowingly and purposefully picking particular songs demonstrates that men have the capacity to select the masculinity which is performed. The notion of ‘choice’ can be understood as selection between different performances (Goffman, 1959). Jim states that banterous interactions are habitual. He also suggests that men can be selective regarding the use of banter. Understood alongside the explanations of emotional expression by other men, this suggests that men have the capacity to manipulate their masculine selves through their use of banter within interaction and performances (such as song), even when there are specific cultural pressures which might prevent them from doing so. What is also interesting here is that Jim notes the potential for this to change, in doing so he is indicating that the hegemonic model is transient and limited in terms of its influence on rugby club culture. In his own way here Jim can be seen to be critiquing the underlying concept of hegemonic masculinity, deemphasizing issues of historical power and stereotypes (Hearn, 2004, 1996; Collinson and Hearn, 1994).

Understood together the examples from this section show that the men in my research are constructing their masculinities in opposition to more orthodox versions of rugby masculinities. The men demonstrate that they are not constrained in their identity making by the limitations of traditional masculinities within the rugby space. This is compounded by Mark when he says ‘*I think that modern men can be what they want’.*  The form of masculinity which these men are constructing is far more diverse than is credited within some of the literature, demonstrating that rugby masculinity is not static. Further to this, respondents had an awareness of the fact that they are in some ways deviating from existing models of the rugby lad, a point which will be explored and critically engaged with in the following chapter. The next section will discuss the theme of age and utilise this as a way to further explore the ways that the men are engaging with and working around the hegemonic structures which underpin the rugby site.

## Ageing Lads: Exploring manhood acts and the lifecourse

When entering the fieldwork I had not initially expected to spend so much time with the regulars, many of whom were retired players and therefore mostly aged forty upwards. However, in doing so I was able to explore the intersections between masculinity and age. Most significantly through observations and interviews I was able to reflect on the ways in which older men experienced the structures of the hegemonic model of masculinity within the rugby club site. I was able to consider the ways in which men navigate, construct and resist these hegemonic structures. This will be the point of discussion for remainder of this chapter. This section begins with an extract from my research diary which encouraged me to question social imaginations of lads in relation to age and depictions of the rugby lad within the literature.

*Today my task of principle bin emptier finally paid off. The little walk between the clubhouse and the bin involves passing a row of parked cars. Being nosey I always have a look inside imagining who owns which car. Today I was slightly surprised to be faced with a large Collie dog looking at me from the window of one car. The club house doesn’t allow animals inside, so that usually means that people leave their pets at home, so I was slightly confused by this. On my return to the bar I asked Oli if he knew who the dog belonged to. He immediately laughed and informed me that it belonged to Chappers and that I should ask him the story as it was ‘a good one’. I was obviously intrigued by this, so once the game had ended I approached Chappers and asked for an explanation. His story was almost unbelievable. He explained that his wife had told him that he could no longer play rugby on account of his shoulder dislocating each time he played. He was clearly amused by this point, as he had a wide grin on his face. He explained that he had devised a way to continue playing, though not ever for the full match, against his wife’s wishes. He told her that on Saturdays in order to get exercise and keep fit he would take their dog for a long walk. Acting as he told this second part, he put on a sad voice and held his head down. He noted that this would not be the same, as he would miss the lads, but that he knew she was right. Indeed the dog didn’t get a walk. Instead Chappers recounted in detail the elaborate story he had created to keep his secret. Animated and now laughing as he told the story he proudly noted how he would give his kit to his mate Dave who would wash it weekly and then after the match throw the ball for the dog in order to get it sufficiently muddy and make the walk plausible for the return. I was shocked and told him as much. This felt like deception and I almost felt a bit guilty being in on the secret. By this point a little crowd had gathered around us and the other men were laughing in chorus as the story gained momentum. I think in part they found my reaction amusing. This story had fascinated me. In conversations which followed that evening Chappers was referred to as the ‘ultimate lad’ by Bruce. When I seemed to be slightly judgemental (I just couldn’t hide my face) Tommy referred to it as ‘absolute banter’. This made me think about which aspects of the laddish behaviour continue as the men age and the ways in which the label is referenced or identified with as the men get older.*

*(Research Diary, March, 2015)*

There seems to be an unspoken assumption within society that ‘boys will be boys’ and that this is a short lived part of the lifecourse which many young males pass through as they become men (Coles, 2009; Jackson, 2002). This story from Chappers begins to disrupt this idea. Understanding and imaginations of lifecourse and ageing perspectives suggest that men grow out of certain behaviours and identity making practices (Coles, 2009; Jackson, 2002; Francis, 1999). This is particularly prominent within sporting sites, where lad cultures and associated laddish behaviours and characteristics are often played out. Conversely, there are also particular social and cultural labels associated with ageing such as being ‘over the hill’ or ‘too old’ and these are often situated in opposition to youthful identities or ageing bodies (Grant and Kluge, 2007; Koch, 2000). These popular narratives of age inform experiences, as individuals are arguably influenced by discourses as well as social and cultural practise. Therefore certain ideas such as being ‘boyish’ or ‘old’ become taken for granted or understood as ‘truth’ (Cosh et al, 2015; Edley, 2001). For many of the men in my research it became clear that such discourses informed identity construction. Age was an aspect of identity which was entwined within understandings and experiences of masculinity. For Chappers a lifetime of playing contact sports meant that he was not able to play rugby in the same carefree way. Locating this experience within the literature, there is an assumption that laddish behaviours would therefore cease and that ageing would necessitate a change in his behaviour (Hockey and James, 2003; Laz 2003, 1998). However, as the story reveals, Chappers has continued to identify with the label of the lad and he continues to engage in and perform laddish behaviours.

It has been suggested that we are continually performing age; however we also give meaning to other ages through interactions and actions (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2005). Within sporting sites age is particularly relevant as it plays a significant role in the construction, understanding and ‘doing’ of sporting identities (Cosh et al, 2015; Phoenix and Smith, 2011; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Don West and Candice Zimmerman (1987) introduced the idea of ‘doing gender’ which suggests that gender is constructed within everyday interactions. This idea has been useful for understanding the way in which the men in my research construct, perform and understand their masculinities. Laz (2003) adapted this concept to consider how we ‘do’ age. Laz (2003) suggests that there are a range of resources utilised by individuals within everyday life in order to understand and situate ourselves within the lifecourse. As previously noted banter is utilised by the men to manage performances of masculinity in the rugby club setting. In the example above Chappers’ behaviour was understood to the other men to make him the ‘*ultimate lad’* and was framed as ‘*absolute banter’*. As my fieldwork progressed I became interested in the significance of age to the performances of masculinity, and in particular, the ways in which banter continued to be utilised as a tool to perform masculinity through the lifecourse.

I began to explore the ways in which the men articulated the continuing significance of banter as a defining and fixed feature of the rugby lad masculinity. On one occasion I was talking to Brian a forty six year old joiner. We were discussing his reflections of club life and how his experiences at the club had altered over time. He noted that banter was an important part of club life.

*‘I just bloody love the banter I have with these guys. You don’t get it quite the same anywhere else. It just gets better too. I am not playing anymore, but my banter is no different, still as good as ever. That ain’t going to ever change. I will always be a rugby lad me’*

Similarly to Chappers, Brian does not engage with rugby on the same physical level as he used to. Once again Brian highlights the way that many of the men positioned banter as a constant feature of the lad identity. Acknowledging that this is a part of rugby lad identity which they are able to perform regardless of age and time. As I continued to observe behaviours and interactions with the men both informally and within interviews, it was apparent that Brian’s narrative describing performances of masculinity as situated within narratives of ageing was common. Returning to the ideas of Laz (2003) on how an individual ‘does’ age, this arguably has implications for both embodiment and corporeal existence. The narratives from Brian echoed this, as he describes how his relationship to rugby has shifted. This idea of ‘doing’ age understood alongside West and Zimmerman’s (1987) ‘doing’ gender will enable further exploration of the ways in which the structures of hegemonic masculinity are experienced by the men in the research.

### Continuation of the lad

This section which begins with an extract from my research diary is going to further explore the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is experienced by men as they age. Francis (1999) who builds on Paul Willis’s (1977) famous work on working class young men defines lads as ‘young’ or ‘youthful’. This aligns with popular imaginations and constructions within current society of what constitutes a lad and related behaviour (Jackson, 2002; Sacks, 1992). The adoption of this label by older men is interesting and provides insight into the ways that hegemonic forms of masculinity are experienced by men as they progress through the lifecourse. When considering the continuation of the rugby lad through time it is important to think about the structures within which the lad identity operates. As outlined in the literature review, the lad is a form of masculinity which in recent years has been heavily embedded within hegemonic masculinity (Jackson, 2002; Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997). It is also a practice of identity which men perform and as such is not a ‘type’ of masculinity (Hearn, 2004). The ways in which this performance/practice of masculinity relates to hegemonic structures through time is far less understood. Previous discussion of age in relation to hegemonic masculinity is limited and it is important to think critically regarding how the structures of hegemonic masculinity influence men later in the lifecourse. Through examining men’s use of banter, which previous chapters have outlined as significant to both historical accounts of sporting masculinity, as well as the experiences of the men in my research, the applicability and flexibility of the hegemonic model will be further explored.

This section begins with an extract from my research diary describing an interaction which progressed my thinking on lad culture, masculinity and age.

*I was positioned on a stool next to the bar when Mark came and sat beside me. We began chatting about initiations as the clubhouse was being used by a local university at the weekend to do first year trials, which led to discussions of initiations. Once we had talked more broadly and Mark had regaled a number of stories I asked his opinion on why male sport initiations placed emphasis upon doing horrible things to each other. He noted that it is probably part of the historical legacy of rugby and that he imagined it wouldn’t likely ever change. He said it was part of them having to prove themselves and show that they are committed to the team no matter what. I then asked whether he thought that it tied in to expressing masculine identity and he responded that ‘yeah I guess it does, if you don’t do the tasks given to you, you are probably thought of as less of a man and perhaps more importantly aren’t seen as being up for a laugh which is worse’. I was intrigued by this and asked him to expand on this a bit further. He said that being ‘game to do stuff and seen as fun and up for a laugh, able to take the banter’ is ‘valued almost as much as your ability on the pitch’. This idea that he was conveying that banter could be valued in equal measure to sporting ability was really interesting and so I probed a little further. I asked Mark why he thought that being able to give and take banter was important. He responded ‘you want to be someone who is a valued member of the team and that people want to be around. Plus when you don’t play anymore you always have those initiations stories, you are part of that club and team forever then. I am one of the oldies now, but hardly any of the young’uns have ever beaten my beer yard drinking time. Up here I am pretty much the same as I have always been’. I thought about these points for the rest of the evening. Mark’s framing and positioning of himself in relation to age really caught my imagination, the concept of older lads and transitioning masculinities appears prominent here. (Research diary Sept 30th 2015)*

This interaction was striking to me and was one of a number of comments which encouraged me to start thinking about the theme of ageing in relation to the construction and maintenance of masculinity. I began to think critically regarding how dominant forms of masculinity are related to and understood by the men as they transition through the lifecourse. Laz (2003) argues that age is constituted within interactions and therefore notions of the ageing rugby lad need to be understood within the specific everyday interactions which constitute club life. Spending a significant amount of time with the older club members, I learnt that in order to continue identifying with the rugby lad identity ongoing work is ‘done’ by the men (Laz, 2003). Chappers, Mark and Brian allude to this in their narratives, in their articulation of ongoing participation within interactions, aligning with work which argues that the ways of performing and undertaking gendered practices continue or adapt with age (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006; Birren et al, 1996).

From both Chappers’ and Mark’s narratives it appears that certain performances or acts associated with rugby lad masculinity are constant, including ‘having a laugh’ or ‘banter’. This aligns with work suggesting that age is continually performed (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2005; Laz, 1998; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Mark clearly states that performances of lad identity enable his identity to be viewed as static; preserving certain expected characteristics of the group. He states *‘I am pretty much the same as I have always been’,* in doing so demonstrating his belief that his rugby identity is stable. This echoes the story recounted by Chappers in which his continued undertaking of laddish behaviours or manhood acts was important to him (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). The ability of both of these men to share banter at the club was significant to their notion of stability. This becomes pertinent as the men undertake transitions associated with the ageing process. Situational aspects of doing rugby masculinity have been previously discussed, both here (in the first analysis chapter) and elsewhere, which acknowledgement that there are firm hierarchal images of what constitutes ‘real rugby men’ and that this is tied to space and place (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006; Schacht, 1996). This can be linked to literature which draws upon the idea of men needing to undertake or perform ‘manhood acts’ in order to be perceived as masculine (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009).

This notion of preservation was echoed by many of the men in my research. In an interview with Carter, a fifty nine year old engineer he made the following comment:

*As you get older you have to sort of realise you can’t do it all, I have always loved coming up here, still do, I just do it in a different capacity now. I don’t play, but I still think of myself as one of the lads, enjoying having a laugh with everyone. We all have the same basic ideas, we just perhaps act a little differently, I am not quite as young as I used to be and can’t always quite keep up with them physically, plus I should really know better, but I like to think I do alright with the chat. That’s what we all have in common, we have good banter, the rest doesn’t matter. (Carter, 59)*

Here Carter is indicating that he “*still thinks of himself as one of the lads”* and also draws upon the idea of ‘knowing better’ due to his age. The tension between undertaking laddish behaviours and ‘knowing better’ as men age, presented here by Carter, aligns with the work of Hockey and James (2003) on social identities and the lifecourse. Within this work they argue that ‘we know that being of a certain age brings with it social obligations and expectations’ (2003:3). Carter acknowledges that he has made some changes to his everyday life as he has aged, however significantly notes that engaging with laddish masculinity through banterous interactions remains prominent. In doing so, Carter once again highlights banter to be a feature of lad cultures and that this is not a static form of behaviour limited to a particular moment in time, rather it is stretched throughout the lifecourse. Carter’s indication that his behaviour does not alter with age/time challenges and expands writing on hegemonic masculinity and laddism, suggesting that structures of hegemonic masculinity are not simply diverse in terms of being subject to change and struggle, but also in terms of the effects on individuals through time (Connell, 1995). This provides an interesting paradox which has not been explored in previous writing on lads which will be explored further in the following chapter (Thompson, 2002).

The body was also a recurring theme within many stories told by men of rugby lad identity and the lifecourse. This was often discussed within narratives of stability and longevity of laddish behaviours. The men acknowledged that whilst their bodies were changing, stability existed in other aspects of the lad identity, namely interactional practices such as banter. Previous work has outlined the importance of the body to establishing credibility as a man, with the male body being understood to be a symbolic asset (Coffey, 2015; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009; Grant and Luge, 2007 Connell, 1983; 1979). Current work has also acknowledged the significance of the ageing body to understandings of masculinity, with emerging research around the implications of retirement from playing amateur sport (Cosh et al, 2015; Cosh et al, 2013). In their work on male swimmers, Cosh et al (2015; 2013) discuss the distress men experienced as they transitioned out of regular physical engagement with sport. Such work addresses the issues faced by men as they negotiate changes to their bodies, however there is less discussion of how the men continue to identify with sporting identities (such as the rugby lad) or hegemonic structures. The men in my research did articulate negativity and difficulties associated with negotiating the ageing process and the shift from player to spectator. However, through observing and listening to men’s experiences, it is clear that engaging with the interactional and social practices enabled them to continue to recognise themselves as one of the lads and therefore overcome these problems. In this way they remained engaged with and actively perpetuated the historical hegemonic versions of masculinity which dominate the rugby sphere.

In the following section from an interview with Drew, a forty nine year old welder, he discusses his reaction to the visible changes he has noticed in his appearance and physical abilities as he has aged.

*Drew: I think that the great thing about getting older up here is that you can just be the same. Sometimes after a Saturday night up here with the lads I wake up on Sunday and I catch myself in the mirror and I am shocked, or my hangover tells me that I am not as young as I used to be. I think I forget that I am getting older and the club especially is a place where nothing much has really changed for me. I have such a great time I don’t even think about age, it is not really important here.*

*Me: Do you behave differently here then than elsewhere then?*

*Drew: Well I guess sort of, like I know there are probably appropriate ways to act which I don’t always abide to when I am here. But that is the beauty of it. It is like I am bloody Peter Pan or something, when I am here nothing has changed. It doesn’t matter that I can’t play, I am still as much one of the lads as before.*

The use of the character ‘Peter Pan’ to describe himself exposes the way that Drew frames the club and his identity. Through suggesting that he feels like Peter Pan in this setting he is indicating that there are elements of his identity which he does not envisage have been affected by the ageing process. Significantly this also once again suggests that his perception of identity in this sphere contrasts his sense of self elsewhere. Drew indicates that the effects of these changes are lessened by the fact that he is still able to participate and engage with the rugby lad masculinity. Once again this mirrors the narrative presented by Chappers at the start of the chapter. Though Drew does not physically play rugby and he is not able to consume the same amount of alcohol as he used to (both historically understood to be markers of lad identity), his ability to participate in banter at the club ensures that he still identifies with the lad identity (Francis, 1999; Willis, 1977).

On another occasion I spoke to Jeremy, a thirty one year old teacher who had retired from first team rugby through injury. He echoed Drew’s responses in the discussion of how he had negotiated his injury. The initial distance he felt at not being able to participate physically was managed through his continued engagement with the lad culture and specifically banterous interactions. As he notes below:

*So I had to retire after last season as basically my shoulder was buggered, the doctor told me that it would pop out every time I had any contact and obviously that can’t be happening. So I became a spectator which I didn’t find easy at first. I worried that I was going to be a bit isolated. Probably a bit depressed to be fair. But what I realised after a whole season of not playing is that it was a small part of it. I still chat about rugby and give tips from things I see to coaches and players, so I am still included on that level. But more than that was that I was still part of the team you know. I still join in all the other activities and have the banter. So really nothing has changed. It surprised me, I thought it would be awful not to play, but actually it is fine. I still participate in all the other parts of club life, so I am not missing out. (Jeremy, 28)*

The fact that Jeremy was surprised that his engagement and inclusion at the club was not hindered by his inability to play was interesting. His ideas say something interesting about the overarching ideologies at the level of the everyday and the taken for granted nature, yet important role that banter plays in the ongoing construction masculinity. Connell (1979) in the earliest theorising on hegemonic masculinity was interested in the ways in which masculinity was reproduced and how specific forms of masculinity sustained positions of dominance over others. Though the concept has altered over time, the idea of reproduction remains significant (Hearn, 2004). Within the narrative presented here from Drew, we can see that the lad identity and therefore the hegemonic form of masculinity in the sporting sphere continues to be reproduced and engaged with as men age. In this way closer consideration of ageing lads can be seen to expand hegemonic masculinity theorising.

### Negotiating transitions

As outlined in the section above men’s experiences of the structures of masculinity alter across the lifecourse. The continuation of laddish characteristics has been discussed, however the experiences of negotiating these transitions and the ways in which men frame this warrants further discussion. Work on ageing and sport most frequently describes the changing body as problematic and discusses the ways in which biological shifts to the physical body lead to inevitable changes of practise and routines (Pheonix and Smith, 2011; Grant and Kluge, 2007; Laz, 2003). These alterations are frequently framed in terms of loss or fragility through the lens of the lifecourse (Grant and Kluge, 2007). However, many of the men in this research viewed the changes to the way that masculinity is performed positively and were not necessarily experiencing transitions as problematic. This again says something interesting about how hegemonic masculinity is realised by the men.

On one occasion during the fieldwork I was sat with a small group of men in the clubhouse when conversation turned towards their changing experiences of club life with age. The group of men were all regulars and had been part of the club for most of their adult lives. They had all played for the first team at some point in their rugby careers and had maintained a routine of coming up to the club house on training nights to socialise, as well as coming to matches (home and away) on Saturday’s. The following is a transcription of our recorded conversation:

*Kitty: So Do you think much has changed for you then? Do you feel differently about the club since you stopped playing?*

*Phillip: Well I think there are some inevitable changes, the elephant in the room is that we are old. I don’t like to admit it, but I am clearly not going to be able to do everything up here I used to.*

*Tom: Yeah, we are older and we don’t play, but I think you just adapt. In all honesty I feel less old here than elsewhere.*

*Carter: Yeah I agree, I know things aren’t quite the same, but it is only really the fact that we don’t play which has changed. I think all the other aspects are the same or as good. We still have fun up here, it is not any different in that respect.*

*Phillip: Yeah, I agree, in fact sometimes it is better. When it is cold and windy we just get to stay in here and catch up over a pint. The way I see it, we have done our time on the pitch, now we get to relax and be backseat players.*

*Kitty: Backseat players?*

*Tom: He means sit and order people around whilst we just watch. We can be pretty annoying like that.*

*Carter: Basically the playing is the only thing which has changed, the banter, the lads and the rugby are still here, we just don’t play.*

It is interesting here that the men once again acknowledge that identity is ‘adapted’ with time. This suggests that they are aware of negotiations and management of their masculinities. Arguably, the men are showing a consciousness of how the mechanics of hegemonic masculinity are operating, through the acknowledgement that particular aspects of their performances at the club allow for continued inclusion in the collective lad identity. The men once again highlight banter to be one of the tools they utilise to maintain rugby masculinity. This relates back to Bourdieu’s notions of capital. Using Bourdieu’s (1993; 1984) approach banter can be understood to be a commodity and a way for the men to ‘fit in’ within the rugby space. Here these ideas are expanded and it is evident that banter as a form of capital also enables the men to negotiate transitions within their lives, from actively playing rugby to becoming spectators. Even though in some ways the men are being aged by the culture of rugby and arguably the hegemonic structures which are associated with this, they are showing resistance and the capacity to transgress negative stereotypes.

As previously noted, the body has been described in earlier research as a resource or form of capital to project an image of masculinity, however the examples from my research discussed so far have demonstrated that this is not the case when looking at lived experiences of men (Evans and Sleap, 2012; Coles, 2009; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2008). The idea of banter being utilised as a form of capital or resource to negotiate the changes to masculinity was confirmed in discussions with other men. In an interview with Alex, a fifty six year old teacher he noted the following:

*Alex: I think as you get older you just have to get a bit more resourceful. I can’t keep up on the pitch, I know that, I would be absolutely obliterated out there, but I know my strengths. I am known for my banter the young ones can’t keep beat me on that front.*

*Me: What do you mean by being more ‘resourceful’?*

*Alex: Well I can’t play anymore, but I still enjoy the other parts of club life. That hasn’t changed, I still feel really part of the club. I guess as you get older there is the danger that you won’t be as involved or able to fit in but there are ways around that. I am known for my ability to take the piss out of almost anyone for anything. So I don’t think anyone views me any differently since I am not captain anymore. If anything it is quite nice, I reckon I am more relaxed since I stopped playing, I am still one of the lads, but I definitely just have fun all the time now. Playing is great, but it can be a bit full on with all the training and that.*

*Me: Do you think that the banter between the older guys is different from the younger members then?*

*Alex: Nah, the banter amongst the older lads is the same, we don’t change. If anything we are better, we have been working on it for years.*

Alex’s idea of ‘resourcefulness’ is interesting to explore and again builds on the example from Carter, Tom and Phillip above. Alex indicates that the ageing process has meant that he has experienced change in terms of becoming a spectator rather than a player. The use of the word ‘danger’ to describe the risks he envisages in relation to becoming an outsider is interesting. This echoes the literature which suggests that within sporting sites inclusion in the collective is often tied to physicality (Robinson, 2008; Pringle and Markula, 2005; Sabo and Panepinto, 1990). Alex suggests that in order to manage these transitions he becomes ‘resourceful’ using banter as a way to anchor his identity within the space. Eakin (1999) suggests that in order to sustain a sense of self we draw upon the models of identity which are available to us through the surrounding cultures we inhabit. This once again resonates with Bourdieusian (1993; 1984) concepts of habitus and fields, in the way that Alex is utilising tools from the everyday to navigate current situations. Notably though this also expands Bourdieu’s ideas in the way that Alex displays a level of agency in his active decision to find ‘resources’ to manage the changes he is experiencing. It is evident that men do continue to utilise the tools learnt within the rugby sphere long after the initial learning period, using these as a form of capital. In this way the men are continuing to align or prop up the hegemonic structures which have historically governed the rugby sphere. However, it is interesting to reflect on the ways that men do have the capacity to work against and around these structures. Through exploring the everyday experiences of older men these hegemonic models can be stretched and challenged. New ways of theorising these experiences will be the focus of the next chapter.

## Conclusion

The examples and analysis presented in this chapter add to current theorising on masculinity and provide evidence to suggest that men who are part of the hegemonic model, even perceived as pillars of it, are able to show resistance to it. Previous theorising has highlighted shifts within and departures from the hegemonic model of masculinity; however, the ways in which men experience this on an everyday basis have been far less frequently discussed. This chapter has shown that whilst the concept of hegemonic masculinity is still the culturally dominant ideal and remains prominent within the rugby club site, it does not necessarily take into consideration the lived realities of men particularly in relation to the expression of emotion or transitions through the lifecourse (Coles, 2009). Men’s experiences are becoming more diverse and therefore the influence of hegemonic masculinity in this site is changing. Different forms of masculinity are arguably emerging.

Although the rugby site in this research remains one which is bound to particular subcultural beliefs and behaviours, it is not one which completely limits the construction of diverse masculinities. The men in my research have created spaces in which to rupture the hegemonic model. Within this space men create diverse opportunities to undertake masculinity making, therefore ‘doing’ gender in unexpected and new ways (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Storytelling and narratives recounting their everyday lives at the club demonstrate that it is the tools learnt within the hegemonic masculine sphere of the rugby club, banterous interactions, which are providing the opportunity for change in the constructions and perceptions of masculinity.

Throughout this chapter I have proposed that we need to think further with regards to the ways in which men facilitate changes to broader gender structures within their everyday lives. The men are becoming resourceful in the ways that they perform masculinity and as a result of this are finding alternative methods to negotiate hegemonic models of masculinity. Through thinking about banter I have added to the progressive theorising on masculinities and considered banterous interactions as a way for men’s perceptions of masculinity to be altered. Moving forward I propose that we need to think of other ways to conceptualise masculinity in order to offer a framework which encapsulates the agency which the men have within these sites and which accounts for the role of banter within the construction of masculinities. The following chapter will set out to do this through the introduction of mischievous masculinities.

# Chapter seven. “I probably shouldn’t say this should I…but…”. Introducing Mischievous masculinities

## Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the ways in which men in the rugby setting have implemented banter as a way to both demonstrate and challenge historical notions of hegemonic masculinity and sporting identities within the field. This chapter will progress the arguments presented so far by introducing and exploring the notion of mischievous masculinity in depth, offering this as a conceptual tool which encapsulates the nuances of men’s lived experiences and diverse performances of masculinity.

Before progressing with the discussion, it is important to acknowledge that although dominant forms of masculinity remain prominent within sporting spheres such as that of rugby, there are changes within the sport more broadly as well as club life which arguably altered the landscape in which the men were interacting. For example, during the second season I was involved at the club a girl’s rugby team was developed. This reflected the demand in the local area for diversity within the sport and also stemmed from the success of the women’s netball team which was affiliated with the club. These changes undoubtedly influenced the everyday of club life, for the most part due to the fact that the club was accessed by a larger number of females. This shift in the fabric of the club must be acknowledged within discussions of how mischievous masculinity is constructed and performed by the men.

Though the term ‘mischievous’ utilised alongside masculinity has particular connotations, commonly associated with play and light-heartedness, I am not using the term here to either diminish or perpetuate the current notions of masculinity which are currently presented within the literature. Rather, I am implementing this term to depict the ways that the men understood and framed their own behaviours and communication to be playful, in doing so viewing masculinity in a new way. This chapter will explore the ways that mischievous masculinity allows men to establish their own gendered identities within the rugby space, with a focus on themes of agency, reflexivity and lifecourse. The overarching goal of this chapter is to position mischievous masculinity within current theorising and to indicate the ways that mischievous masculinity furthers thinking within the field, in doing so highlighting its importance for future studies.

The discussion within this chapter will be divided into sections in which mischievous masculinity will be outlined and explored within the frameworks of current masculinity theorising. Emphasis will be placed upon mischievous masculinity as a performative practice, examining the ways in which the rugby club context enables gender to be understood and framed in a particular way. Specific focus will then be placed upon the way that the concept of mischievous masculinities intersects and builds upon hegemonic masculinity theorising. This will lead to a critique of some of these ideas through the argument that mischievous masculinities enables men to demonstrate agency within the construction of their gendered identities. The final part of this chapter will discuss the principal way that mischievous masculinity functions for the men in the space, namely maintaining the boundaries of lad performances across time. In doing so this will build upon the argument put forward in the previous chapter and highlight the potential for improving understandings of how men both engage in and simultaneously challenge historical notions of the rugby lad within this specific site.

## Outlining mischievous masculinity

### Mischievous masculinity as a performative practice

Mischievous masculinity as an idea emerged from the men’s frequent use of the expression *‘I probably shouldn’t say this should I, but…’* and ‘*I should know better but…*’ These expressions were a routine part of communication throughout my time at the club, used by men varying in age discussing different topics. To begin with, I imagined that these phrases were being utilised for my own benefit, so as not to ‘offend’ the female researcher. I wondered whether the language and choice of wording was employed to carefully negotiate the new interactional dynamic, in which I was becoming a permanent part of the setting. I had prepared for this, and perhaps was expecting tensions associated with my presence within the space. Writers including Bridges (2013) and Walby (2010) have previously highlighted some of the difficulties associated with insider/outsider status in research and the potential influence of the researcher upon the interactions (Soyer, 2014; Rios, 2011; Dunier, 2000). However, as time passed, I realised that these expressions were not implemented especially for me; rather, they were used frequently and in various types of conversations. It became clear that these phrases were continually referenced by the men within their interactions, as well as those between men and women in the setting.

There was a key moment within my field work when I realised that this idea of mischievous masculinity was significant. This moment came when I was talking to a group of regulars about sport more broadly, and specifically the technicalities associated with Australian Football. The following text is an insert from my research diary, detailing an interaction between myself and a few of the men socialising at the clubhouse on a training night:

*Whilst sat at the bar I noticed that there was an Australian football advert pinned to the wall. I talked to Johnno and he was saying that an Aussie rules team was coming to Sheffield to use the ground over the summer. He explained that this would be good for the club as it will mean that it was in use all year round. He also noted that some of the rugby players were going to play for the Australian football team too, so they could keep fit and develop new skills. We were having a conversation about Australian football and the rules etc. when Dylan came over. Johnno and I had been confused about some of the rules, so whilst Johnno went out for a cigarette Dylan and I continued the conversation. I asked the question “Australian football, is that the one that goes like this?” [did the action of a fist moving thought the air], he asked me to repeat the action, which I naively did. Then he said “well I probably shouldn’t say this should I, but you have a great action there” whilst laughing out loud. He was insinuating that I was making a hand signal similar to that of sexually pleasuring a man. I didn’t know what to do, as usual my face betrayed me and I went really red. He added that I had a very, very good action and that I could practise it with him anytime I wanted. I didn’t want to seem offended, so I said that I didn’t feel I needed more practise, but thanked him for the offer. I think what interested me most about this was that he knew he shouldn’t be saying it; it was almost as if he just couldn’t avoid taking the opportunity to make the joke, be a bit mischievous. If he acknowledges that it isn’t really appropriate does that make it better? I don’t think I liked it either way.*

*(Research Diary 8th April 2014).*

This example allows for mischievous masculinity to begin to be unpacked. Within this conversation Dylan is showing that he knowingly participates in behaviours which could be deemed to be inappropriate, though is taking some responsibility for his actions. He is using the interaction to consolidate and reflect the gendered dynamic within the space, in doing so asserting authority within the interaction and positioning me as ‘other’ (Jackson et al, 2014). I later reflected on this interaction and decided to speak to Dylan the following week about his use of what I deemed to be ‘banter’. I questioned him about his reasons for teasing me and probed further regarding the ideas he conveyed of ‘knowing better’. His response was as follows:

*“I was just up to no good, being a bit mischievous, I know I shouldn’t, but I can’t help myself, its only a bit of fun, I guess I don’t always mean it, but it’s a bit of a laugh for the lads. We all do it, it is all part of the crack. I don’t mean to be offensive at all, I picked on you because you were a lass, but I hope you didn’t take it that way, it was just to get a rise out of the lads.” (Dylan, 37)*

As noted in previous analysis chapters, banter is implemented by the men in order to maintain sporting masculinities which are historically tied to rugby settings. The men collude within their interactions to create a group identity and it is both this shared knowledge, alongside the participation, which enables the performance. Banter serves as a form of capital in the space and is part of the everyday fabric of club life. Referring back to the example of Dylan, he is playfully and knowingly engaging in banter, implementing conversation which has sexual connotations, using this as a source of social currency. His acknowledgement of this process within the one-on-one interaction where he states that ‘*I know I shouldn’t, but I can’t help myself*’, demonstrates that he is aware of his actions, however is making the choice to interact in this way. Later he makes the statement that the interaction is ‘*a bit of fun’* and that ‘*he doesn’t mean to be offensive*’, showing that he understands that the behaviour could be viewed negatively. Stevenson et al (2000:381) theorise the use of irony within conversations suggesting that ‘*irony allows you to have your cake and eat it. It allows you to express an unpalatable truth in a disguised form, while claiming it is not actually what you meant*.’ These ideas can be usefully applied to banter and the way that this communicative practice enables mischievous masculinity to be performed albeit in a veiled form.

During my time at the rugby club there were many more instances in which banter was implemented as a way for the men to perform historical notions of the rugby masculinity in this disguised form, in doing so aligning with hegemonic models of masculinity discussed in the second analysis chapter (Stevenson et al., 2000; Connell, 2005; Howson, 2006). One evening, after a training session, I was sat at the bar talking to Janet who was in charge of kit for the season. She was explaining that the club provided each player with a number of items as part of their playing contracts. During the pre-season months each player needed to provide Janet with a number of bodily measurements as well as their requests for items. Prior to the players returning to the clubhouse after training I had asked Janet what this process entailed and she responded:

‘*Oh just wait and see, it is all fun and games until someone has the smallest measurements.* *It is*  *always* *an amusing evening, every year it’s the same, same jokes, same process, but it always entertains me none the less and I just play along.’ (Janet, 44)*

Janet here utilised the term ‘playing along’ to describe her actions, in doing so acknowledging that she undertakes a role within the performances of mischievous masculinities. As already outlined within the literature review, banter is deemed to be progressive, organized around the idea of what Schegloff (2007) refers to as ‘nextness’, whereby there is an understanding amongst the participants that banter unfolds via consecutive comments between individuals. What this example from Janet suggests though is that banter is not solely reliant upon ‘nextness’ within the immediate interactions. Here we see that individuals outside of the interaction are undertaking work in order to ‘set up’ the frame for banter and are therefore enabling the process of the construction of mischievous masculinities. This idea of the framing of the performances of mischievous masculinities will be returned to below, however, here it is interesting to reflect further on the significance of Janet’s role to the construction of mischievous masculinities and to consider the ways in which successful performances of mischievous masculinities include those external to the immediate interaction.

In order to explore Janet’s role within this process further, it is first useful to return to the research setting and the remainder of my interactions with Janet and the men. Still chatting next to the bar area, Janet and I had moved on to discuss other topics when we were interrupted by the emergence of the players from the changing rooms. They were coming in for food and to assess the new kit options. The following is an extract from my research diary detailing the interactions which followed:

*Whilst we were talking the second team and some first team players came in and were helping themselves to dinner and looking at new kit which was directly in front of us. At one point some of the men looked up and invited us into the conversation. The men were in various stages of undress and a comment was thrown over to us about deciding whose neck was better, asking whether bigger was better. Brogan directed a question our way which was as follows ‘ladies, I know it is probably rude to ask, and I shouldn’t say this, or ask this question again, but the lads and I need to know, is bigger better? [long pause] when talking about neck sizes of course. When for a few seconds Janet and I said nothing, Brogan continued with ‘don’t pretend you weren’t looking, or haven’t thought about it before, we are a great looking bunch of lads and it is impossible for you ladies to resist us’…neither of us answered, we just gave them strong looks and eventually Brogan broke the silence and said “hey, you just want to keep quiet, that is fine, you can just tell me later, I will ask again [he winks]. After this they just continued to talk amongst themselves.*

(Research diary, 26th August 2015)

The initial quotation from Janet above enables a greater understanding of how performances of mischievous masculinities are permitted and reproduced within the rugby club site. As previously stated, her compliance within the interactions and indirect involvement are important. However, when understood alongside this second example, it becomes apparent that indirect inclusion within the banter, as well as non-verbal cues, are also significant to the performance of mischievous masculinities. During the interaction with Brogan he can be seen to be constructing notions of the gendered ‘other’ through his performance of masculinity (Jackson et al., 2014; McCann et al., 2010; Gough and Edwards, 1998). Here he is using Janet and I as props within his masculine performance. Through the guise of banter, as well as the language selected, shown in his use of the expression ‘*I shouldn’t say this but…’,* he is able to perform notions of the rugby lad. What is significant here though is that neither Janet nor I directly engage in the banter, rather Brogan utilises our silence as a sign that we are colluding with him. Previous anthropological work has shown that social rules emerge from jocular interactions, and that it is through a shared understanding of expected behaviours and complicity within these that identity is performed and learnt (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940; Abrahams, 1962). Within the interactions outlined above Janet and I are both complicit and permitting the performance of mischievous masculinities within the space. Our silence became an important part of the performance.

Further to this, the example of these interactions also shows that performances of mischievous masculinities are not completely spontaneous. Previous work has shown that sports talk and joking more widely is often spontaneous (Lynch, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007; Cameron, 1997). This suggests little reflexivity within such interactions. Here though we see that such assertions are problematic. Janet acknowledges an awareness of her role, and implies that this practice is routine, occurring each year. Further to this, within Brogan’s description, he is intimating that he has asked similar questions before and will continue to do so. Referring back to the earlier example of Dylan, we see that his explanation ‘*that they all do it’* indicates that the performances are repeated and so in some ways rehearsed. This suggests that performances of mischievous masculinities need to be understood as being carefully rehearsed and reproduced acts. Whilst some previous writing has acknowledged that jocular interactions are reliant upon knowledge and understandings of delivery in order to make a joke successful, this has not been considered in relation to banter (Garde, 2008; Lynch 2010).

### Framing the performances of mischievous masculinities

Bateson (1953) indicates the significance of frames for interactions, noting that within humours verbal exchanges there is the recognition that certain topics can be discussed if the interaction is framed as ‘play’. As noted above, and within the examples of Dylan and Brogan, it is clear that this concept of frames is applicable to the men in the research setting, as banterous undertones and framing permitted sexualised language and insults. In order to understand this in relation to the construction of mischievous masculinity, it is important to relate this to Erving Goffman’s (1974) theorising on frames. Goffman (1974) conceptualises frames as invisible structures which govern events, influencing how a situation is understood. Both of these theorisations, as well as modern examples, go some way to helping gain a greater understanding of the concept of mischievous masculinities. In thinking about mischievous masculinities these previous theorisations are stretched into new directions. Such previous work does not overtly account for, or prioritise, the agency social actors may have in constructing these frames (McCann et al., 2010). Instead the focus is often placed upon the idea that frames dictate behaviours, with less attention given to the role of actors within this process.

The significance of framing theorising to the construction of the concept of mischievous masculinities was particularly evident in instances whereby framing failed. There were a number of situations within the research period when the banterous undertones were not understood as such by all participants, and therefore the mischievous masculinity frame did not work. As a result of this notions of masculinity were disrupted or confused. An example of this can be seen when the men were preparing to play what they referred to as ‘faggot racing’. Outlined in previous chapters, this ritual occurred most frequently when the men were drunk and socialising late into the evening at the club. Women[[8]](#footnote-8) were often invited to participate in this ritual which involved removal of all clothing. In one instance a female partner of one of the other players was being encouraged to participate and this caused disagreement amongst the men. The excerpt below from my research diary outlines the interaction:

*It was fairly late into the evening at the men were in high spirits. They had already completed a few rounds of their favourite songs when one of the men shouted out “its race time, who is in??”. Having been at the club for a while now I already knew what this meant. The ritual they termed faggot racing was about to happen again and I was both excited and frustrated with this…Jenny and I were sat at the side of the bar when Rippon came over to us with a big smile on his face. He asked “which one of you ladies is going to be participating this evening then? You have watched us doing it enough times now you must be able to give it a good go.” We both politely declined, making up some kind of excuses, but he didn’t seem to let it go. Carrying on and trying to persuade us to join in, talking in detail about the various ways he believed we would be able to utilise our ‘womanly’ bodies to our advantage, he was very persistent. By this time a little crowd had gathered and people were interested in the conversation. Some people were laughing along but others looked a little bit uncomfortable. On his fourth time of asking Leroy interrupted him. He said “come on mate, you know the craic, it is not the done thing to ask the ladies.” Rippon responded by saying he was only having a laugh, but Leroy said “you have ruined it now, nobody wants to play with you, go away and think about what you have done.”*

*(Research diary March 2015)*

This example shows that if the framing of the interaction is not understood to be playful then the performance of mischievous masculinity fails. Even though the intonation and style of delivery used by Rippon here was similar to other instances outlined within this chapter, the performance of mischievous masculinities was not successful. This was due to the fact that not everyone understood the framing of the conversation as banter. I had observed that Leroy did not recognise the interaction as playful. This was clarified when I later thanked Leroy for saving our modesty and asked why he had stood up for us. He said:

*Leroy: “Well I know what Rippon is like, he never bloody stops. And though I think he means well, that wasn’t funny, he wasn’t going about it the right way. Imagine you were his daughter, or his bird? It just wasn’t right.”*

*Me: “What do you mean, how could it have been better?”*

*Leroy: “He wasn’t being very funny with it, just being a bit creepy like and pushy. That’s not what we are about, we aren’t those kinds of rugby men. At least not all of us are.”*

The final point here by Leroy that “*we aren’t those kinds of rugby men. At least not all of us are”* is interesting. Here he is making a distinction between the different ‘types’ of rugby men which exist within the rugby space. There is an insinuation that he does not want to associate with the stereotype of rugby masculinity which Rippon is exuding through his interactions with us. Returning to Goffman’s notions of facework and framing is useful here. Goffman (1955) discusses the idea of ‘hinted communication’ which is an important element in the performances of mischievous masculinities. Within the interaction above Rippon is showing the boundaries of masculine performances, in terms of what is acceptable behaviour. Here Leroy utilises his own performance of mischievous masculinity as a way to challenge Rippon and to outline the boundaries of acceptable masculine performances within the rugby space. The fact that Leroy suggests that Rippon would not have anyone to “*play*” with him and that he needed “*to go away and think about what he had done*” demonstrates that banter is being implemented to gently suggest that Rippon alters his behaviour.

Viewing the interactions with Leroy and Rippon alongside that of Janet above, it is evident that the concept of framing is extremely significant to performances of mischievous masculinities. Exploring the instances in which such performances are successful, as well as those in which it fails, or is challenged, also shows the complexity of framing within the conceptualisation of mischievous masculinity. There are two key themes which underpin these narratives and analyses, which have not yet been directly addressed: hegemonic masculinity and reflexivity. It is clear within the interactions described so far that hegemonic masculinity is closely related to performances of mischievous masculinities. Additionally, it is apparent that individuals have the capacity to alter the frames of performances within the rugby club site and to therefore shift the performance of masculinity within this space, in doing so showing reflexivity within their actions. These two themes will be the focus of the final parts of this chapter.

### Intersections between hegemonic masculinity and performances of mischievous masculinity

Similar to the ways that hegemonic masculinity continues to dominate many men’s spaces and interactions, particularly within highly masculinised spaces such as sports spheres, performances of mischievous masculinities are also reliant upon complicity and repetition (Johansson and Ottemo, 2015; Howson, 2006; Connell, 1997). Jeff Hearn (2004:52) suggests that ‘hegemony involves both the consent of some men, and, in a very different ways, the consent of some women to maintain patriarchal relations of power*.’* Within the first example from Janet above, we can see that she is consenting to the performances of mischievous masculinity, albeit in a different way to the men. Janet is not directly participating within the banter, yet plays an important role in its success. Within the second example Janet and I made the choice to remain silent and Brogan alludes to repeated performances of masculinity. Both of these examples can be seen to align with theorising on hegemonic masculinity, in that all parties are playing roles in enabling the mechanisms of hegemony to continue (Howson, 2006). Further to this, within the example above of Rippon and Leroy, we can see that Rippon’s behaviour aligns with notions of hegemonic masculinity. This is demonstrated in the way that he is encouraging participation in a male ritual which supports characteristics associated with traditional forms of masculinity, as well as that which creates hierarchies in terms of men and women (Johansson and Ottemo, 2015; Connell, 2005; 1997).

Where these two forms of theorising depart though is the acknowledgement and centrality of agency to the argument. In acknowledging the role of agency and reflexivity within banterous interactions in this setting, we are able to push the boundaries of existing theorising into new directions. This theme of agency is explored later in this chapter, however within this current debate on performances and framing it is important to briefly introduce this idea. Men are not passive actors within the performances of mischievous masculinities. These examples show that the men in this research continually implemented banter in order to show reflexivity and that men are aware of the processes involved with constructing performances of mischievous masculinities. This idea is supported by the continual use of phrases such as ‘*I probably shouldn’t say this but…’* which were echoed throughout the research process and within the examples outlined so far.

### Mischievous masculinity: making choices, conveying reflexivity

From the examples examined so far, it is clear that many men in my research were actively making the choice to engage in banterous interactions. This element of choice and reflexivity plays a central role in the conceptualisation of mischievous masculinities, a point which will be the focus of the following discussion. The frequency with which banter was framed with the caveat of ‘*I probably shouldn’t say this but…*’ was interesting, and as noted above, became the motivation for my thinking around how masculinity was constructed and experienced by the men within the rugby space. It became apparent to me that the men were aware of their behaviours and actions, particularly when displaying hyper masculinity and laddish behaviours. Relating this to key theorising on masculinity, such as that of Connell (1995) on hegemonic masculinity, I began to question the assumptions that hegemonic masculinity is accepted and naturalised. Though it has been acknowledged that hegemonic masculinity is subject to change, agency within displays of hegemonic masculinity has been given less attention in previous work. This section will attempt to draw out these issues within the following discussion utilising examples from my research to do so.

One of the most notable features associated with men in sporting spheres is the narrative that ‘boys will be boys’ (Thompson, 2002; Connolly, 1997). Previous theorising suggests that there is an inevitability regarding the behaviour of men in sports settings, with the popular assumption that stereotypical masculine identities are learnt and practiced almost unknowingly by men during the early stages of their lifecourse (Jackson, 2002; Connolly, 1997; Connell, 1995; Fine, 1987). This implies that men have limited agency within the process of identity construction and so their behaviour is often viewed to be implicit and unquestioned. More recent work of writers such as that of Eric Anderson (2012) has acknowledged men’s agency within traditionally bounded masculine spaces such as football or rugby union, though there is little other work which positions these ideas centrally within analysis or discussion. Work on men and sport has historically acknowledged that men feel pressure to perform particular forms of masculinity within sporting sites in order to maintain what Jenkins (2000) refers to as the ‘public image’ (Van Campenhout and Van Hoven, 2014; Pringle, 2008; Morin et al., 2001). However, the reflexive aspect of men engaging with their masculinities and the creative ways in which they may do so, has been far less frequently explored.

Throughout my fieldwork I observed behaviours and was part of interactions which challenged the idea that men were constrained to perform in ways which aligned with the hegemonic ideal. Men continuously referenced the point that ‘*they should know better’* and it was this idea which really interested me. Contrary to how men were often perceived in the literature, or within the media, men in my research frequently appeared to be aware of their behaviours. They seemed to be playing with this masculine identity and were aware of the ‘process’ of masculine identity construction (Robinson et al., 2011). This builds upon Robinson et al’s (2011) work on masculinities in which a case study of male hairdressers demonstrated that men had scope to play with dominant hegemonic understandings of masculinity. I realised that notions of agency and choice were central to displays of masculinity and that men actively made the decision to frame their masculine identities in particular ways. Performances of mischievous masculinities were indeed underpinned by the men’s awareness of their behaviours.

An example of men showing awareness of their behaviours can be seen in the following example, in which two of the older regulars were having a conversation about the appearance of a first team player. This player was known for taking care of his appearance and openly admitted to undertaking tanning, waxing and other forms of male grooming.

*Jimmy:**Would you just look at him. What a disgrace, good job he can play. Though not sure I would want to be too close to him in the changing rooms, if you get me.*

Noah: *Careful what you say, not everyone may appreciate those sentiments mate. Plus you would be punching well above your weight there. Though maybe you would be luckier with the men than you are with the ladies.*

Jimmy: *Yeah yeah, yeah, fine, I get you, but you all knows I am just having a laugh, just a bit of friendly banter, obviously I wouldn’t go round making that joke everywhere, but this is a safe space, no judgement, say what you want to say, act how you want to act. And he could only dream of being so lucky [winks at me].*

*(Research diary extract, 17th February 2015)*

Jeffery Weeks (1985:190) suggests that male identity is achieved by ‘warding off’ threats and by ‘rejecting femininity and homosexuality’. The example above echoes these ideas with Jimmy’s comments being laden with views which have become synonymous with the rugby lad, specifically reinforcing heterosexuality (Kidd, 2013; Pringle and Markula, 2005). In this way Jimmy’s ‘laddish’ behaviour also aligns with traditional hegemonic ideals (Connell, 2005; 1997). The opinions expressed here were not in themselves surprising, supporting previous work which has shown how masculine characteristics are continually maintained and perpetuated within highly masculinised spaces (McCann et al 2010; Kiesling, 2005). However, the acknowledgement by Jimmy that he would not behave in that way everywhere was interesting. Within this example Jimmy clearly recognizes that his comments may be viewed negatively by others. In doing so, he is showing that he is making a choice to use this type of communication. He indicates that the rugby club is a site in which he can share opinions and have banter which may be problematic elsewhere, suggesting that the rugby site is a space which permits specific forms of behaviours which might conflict with other spheres of his life. This example clearly demonstrates that some men express agency within their interactions at the club and actively choose to engage in performances of mischievous masculinities.

When trying to draw out the prominence of agency and choice within the construction and maintenance of masculinity within the rugby club, I critically engaged with the work of Jeff Hearn on hegemony (2004). Hearn (2004:53) discusses the ways in which hegemony allows for the consideration of overarching ideologies which influence men’s lives, particularly at the everyday and taken for granted level. Hearn (2004) talks about actions which are performed by men within what he refers to as ‘consent’ or ‘coercion’. Here Hearn usefully articulates the idea that men are being influenced by hegemony without necessarily knowingly participating within this. Utilising this idea as a foundation for my thinking, I began to reflect on these points in relation to the men in my research. For these men it would seem that hegemony does continue to work in ways previously suggested (as discussed in the second analysis chapter), enabling men to continue to develop stereotypical rugby masculinities. However, the men in my research go some way to expanding these debates. The players and members of the club play with, or work around hegemonic ideas, utilising banter as a way to renegotiate the parameters of masculinity. In this way the rugby lad can be seen to be demonstrating a degree of agency which is often downplayed within previous writing.

The examples discussed so far demonstrate that men do have agency within their interactions in the rugby setting and that they are aware of how their interactions can be perceived. Returning to the example of Noah and Jimmy, it is interesting to further consider the ways that men make these choices and display their agency. Lukes (1974) suggests that decisions are choices consciously and intentionally made by individuals between alternatives. Within his discussion of power, Lukes (1974) goes on to indicate that agency is only possible within the parameters of particular structures. Therefore he is suggesting that decisions are limited and will always be in some way predicated upon the structures and context. This approach to power is a sophisticated one, and the purpose here is not to challenge this conceptualisation as a whole. Relating these ideas to the rugby setting though, and the examples discussed up to now, it is apparent that elements of this theorising remain useful. It is clear that men are making choices regarding their behaviours and are therefore showing agency in the way that they are challenging dominant notions of masculinity in the space. However, I became extremely interested in the ways which men were able to do this. It was apparent that men were displaying agency through utilising the tools which this site arguably produces. So the men were using the same tools to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity as they were to construct it.

The example of Noah and Jimmy begins to demonstrate that banter is implemented by the men in order to challenge conceptions of masculinity in the space. McCullough (2008) suggests that boundaries associated with humour shift. Through addressing the homophobic undertones using the frame of mischievous masculinity, Noah is showing his resistance to the dominant model, doing this through the guise of banter. Arguably in framing the challenge in this familiar way, utilising humour in order to keep the interactions flowing, this makes it non-threatening, therefore permitting the interaction (Plester and Sayers, 2007; Norrick, 1993). Once I had begun to conceptualise and analyse this, the methods of displaying agency became a lot more visible within the field. The following example, taken from a recorded conversation with some of the regulars post-training, helps to understand this further.

*Sitting in our vantage point in ‘old farts corner’ my conversation carried on with Lance, Eric and Adrian as they provided their usual running commentary of the activities and interactions. As the players began to file in after their evening of training Eric began to make comments regarding one of the new players’ hair styles.*

*Eric: Would you look at that? [Gesturing to the guy who just came into the room from the changing room entrance] I mean a man with a little bun on his head? Now what is that all about, I just don’t get it at all. Just don’t think it looks right. I mean you [directed at me] wear buns, that is what I am used to, just don’t see why men want them these days.*

*Lance: Yeah, wouldn’t have got away with that in my day, I mean it would be trouble on the pitch and also just ain’t right off it either.*

*Eric: Yeah, just don’t know what kind of man would want it, doesn’t seem right. Shows that rugby is changing, no way would that have been tolerated in my day, doesn’t look like a true rugby player, we would have chopped it off [laughs].*

*Adrian: Yeah, well rugby has changed a lot hasn’t it, I mean Eric, you barely had any hair when we started playing together, so you couldn’t have even had a bun if you’d wanted one. Plus look at him, he is a great number 3, you can’t say that you would have been able to take him on in your heyday. If you ask me it is just a sign men are changing, ain’t nothing really wrong with that. We start banning buns, we will have no team, or good players, then what are you daft pair going to do on a Saturday eh?*

*Eric: [laughs] Well you certainly make a good point about his ability, can’t argue there, if he keeps us up, he can keep the bun. Plus I would have looked ridiculous with that hair, though maybe you could carry it off better. Though guess it still wouldn’t change the problem with your face [laughs].*

*Research diary 2nd September 2014*

In the case above, Adrian utilises banter to challenge Eric and Lance. Before examining this example it is important to add a further interaction I had with Adrian later on that evening. I found Adrian at the bar and decided to ask him how he felt about challenging his mates so openly and whether he was frustrated by their views. His response was as follows:

“*Well I think they are just fairly typical rugby lads through and through its all natural to them. But I feel like sometimes things have got to be said, as the world is changing. It is about how you go about it though. If I went in all guns blazing it would go down like a bloody lead balloon, so you have to box a bit clever. If I make a joke out of it, have a bit of banter with them, nobody really questions it, but I feel that I have still had my six pence worth, you know?” (Adrian, 57, builder)*

Previous research has shown that delivery of information within conversations effects understanding (Garde, 2008; Norrick, 1993). This is particularly the case within the example above, whereby the framing of the interaction as ‘banter’ permits Adrian to express his opinions. The first part of this example demonstrates the nuanced nature of banter and the ways that individuals recognise the subtleties, reacting accordingly. Here banter is functioning at multiple levels in order to enable the interaction to run smoothly. Firstly, Eric and Lance are utilising banterous tones to convey their opinions regarding the player in question. Lance’s jokes about ‘chopping off’ the bun and in this way utilises banter to question the payers’ masculinity. Adrian though utilises the same form of communication to challenge this narrative and to convey resistance to the ideas conveyed by Eric and Lance. Explaining this in our conversation afterwards, Adrian acknowledges that in order to challenge the gendered assumptions in the rugby space you have to ‘*box a bit clever’*. This indicates that he is engaging his agency within the parameters of the rugby lad identity in order to deconstruct dominant ideas. This is an important feature of mischievous masculinity.

Adrian also talks about ‘naturalness’ in relation to the men’s behaviour. Surman (1994) suggests that hegemony becomes viewed as natural and therefore understood to be ‘the way things are’. This sense of naturalness, it is argued, is frequently unchallenged. The men in my research show that this taken for granted form of masculinity is challenged. This is through the application of the tools recognised within historical performances of masculinity to begin to unpick it. In situating agency at the centre of this debate a more diverse understanding of men in sport begins to emerge. Whilst it is clear from discussions both above and within previous chapters that men are in some ways constrained to behave in particular ways within the rugby club space, it is clear from my research and these examples that men are aware of this. The men in my research were negotiating the complexities of manging their masculinities through their playful use of banter. In doing so this unfamiliar territory of challenging existing dominant structures is made more palatable and can therefore become more frequent.

### The role of Mischievous Masculinity in maintaining the boundaries of rugby lad performances across time

The discussion so far has outlined mischievous masculinity as a new concept, highlighting the ways that it intersects, is constructed and operates within the frameworks of previous theorising. At this point it is useful to further explore the uses of mischievous masculinity and how the men adopt this identity in their everyday lives at the club in order to situate themselves within the gender order. In the last chapter it was noted that banter assisted men through transitions in their lifecourse, enabling them to continue to identify as one of the lads and to maintain the rugby masculinity across time. However, through utilising the lens of mischievous masculinities we can begin to understand this further. Performances of mischievous masculinities enable the men to acknowledge the ageing process. It allows them to negotiate their masculine identity and permits them to remain part of the larger ruby group. Further to this, engaging with performances of mischievous masculinities also facilitates participation in the continued boundary making of lad identity within the rugby space.

Within my research the men were aware that ‘acting their age’ was a complex and often contradictory issue (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006). Spending time with the regulars, who were mostly men over fifty, I began to question how the rugby lad identity was sustained through time and started to view performances of mischievous masculinities as facilitating the continuation of the identification process of the lad. The previous chapter explored the discord men experienced in terms of negotiating changes to their bodies and identities whilst still socializing within rugby spaces. These ideas provide an important foundation from which to discuss mischievous masculinities, as it became apparent that performances of this type of masculinity was significant in enabling men to remain part of the group through the lifecourse.

As the research evolved I began to see the relationship between banter, laddism and mischievous masculinity as becoming more important. I viewed the connection of these themes as enabling understandings beyond those which provide a current historical cultural backdrop for men’s behaviours in these spheres. Banter was a significant interactional practice implemented by the men in order to convey laddish identities and to show belonging to the group. The ability to ‘do’ banter was viewed by many of the men as a significant marker of being able to ‘make it’ as one of the lads. This was exemplified in a conversation with a new club member called Shane, a 28 year old bus driver who shared his experiences of moving to the area and becoming involved in the club with me after a training session. He stated that:

‘*Well at first I was a bit uncertain, new lads, new place. I knew I could play, but I was unsure how I would fit in. Quickly though I got involved in the banter, had a laugh with the lads and then I was in.’ (Shane, 28, bus driver)*

Such ideas have been echoed in previous literature, in which masculine discourse has been understood to be significant in regulating masculinity and enabling group identification (McCormack, 2014, McCann et al, 2010; Kiesling 2005). This idea of being ‘in’ as described by Shane is typical of literature on lads and lad behaviour, which describes the desire to be part of the group as a key factor in explaining behaviours and displays of characteristics such as aggression, self-sacrifice, and the denial of pain (Kidd, 2013; Pringle and Markula, 2005, Bird, 1996). I became really interested in this idea of ‘fitting in’, viewing this as being significant to successful performances of masculinities, particularly mischievous masculinities. Spending the majority of time with the older regulars though, I began to think critically about this idea further and what happens after this initial process of ‘fitting in’ has passed. It seemed clear that performances of mischievous masculinities did not stop after early socialization into the group, nor when the men were no longer participating directly in rugby. Mischievous masculinities appeared to challenge previously existing notions of lads and lad cultures, testing the boundaries of such conceptualisations of men.

As shown in the previous analysis chapter, as well as in the literature review, accounts of lads and lad cultures have historically been depicted as static and confined to particular age ranges of men (Thompson, 2002; Wheaton, 2000; Willis, 1977). Further to this, the idea of ‘boys being boys’ which underpins the popularised narrative of lads, suggests that lads are limited in terms of their longevity. This idea of lads as connected to particular moments within the lifecourse suggests that the role of laddish identification for men is momentary and therefore does not influence the continual maintenance of rugby masculinities longer term. Arguably, mischievous masculinity as a form of masculine identity within the rugby site, allows for the notion of the rugby lad to be maintained throughout the lifecourse. Additionally mischievous masculinities enable the men to negotiate and make the choice of whether to engage with hegemonic practices whist in this space. These examples have shown that it encapsulates the experiences of men beyond so called ‘laddish’ years and extends further than this. Using the concept of mischievous masculinity allows for the relationship men have with the identifier of the lad to be understood through time. Mischievous masculinity leads to a critique of previous work on lads and proposes the idea that the lad has no limitations according to age and lifecourse.

## Conclusion

This chapter has proposed a new way to theorise men in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of men in the rugby setting. Through introducing and discussing the idea of mischievous masculinities, this chapter has demonstrated some of the ways that previous conceptualisations of rugby masculinity, particularly the ‘rugby lad’ have been limited. Additionally introduction of mischievous masculinities has highlighted issues with hegemonic masculinity theorising. The premise on which hegemonic theorisations are based can be seen to be challenged by the notion of mischievous masculinities. Research with the Robins’ shows that the dominant men’s practices outlined by Connell (2005) which suggest that the gender order is controlled does not sufficiently account for men’s lived experiences within this context (Howson, 2006). The Robins’ narratives align with more recent work which critiques hegemonic masculinity in which choice, critical consciousness and resistance in relation to hegemonic structures were documented (Jewkes et al., 2015; McKay et al., 2007). In thinking about mischievous masculinity a greater flexibility is provided of how men construct, deconstruct and negotiate boundaries of their gendered identities and gendered practices. Furthermore, it is clear that in thinking within the framework of mischievous masculinities diversity and agency can begin to be more productively accounted for and problematized.

# Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This final chapter will restate the prominent findings from the research and in doing so will demonstrate how the research questions have been addressed. This chapter will draw together the most significant research findings and discuss their contribution to various fields within Sociological studies. Additionally this chapter will outline the possible limitations of the research, whilst indicating that these do not preclude the findings. Future directions for study will also be stated, in doing so once again demonstrating the potential contribution of the research to wider fields.

The central focus of this thesis was to provide a sociological account of banter and to explore the ways that this interactional tool intersects with and expands understandings of masculinity. As noted in the literature review, research on banterous interactions is limited, often positioned as an undercurrent of research rather than as a central feature. Through conducting an ethnographic study of the Robins Rugby Union club and exploring banter within this specific local context, existing conceptual and theoretical insights into both banter and masculinity have been expanded.

As noted in chapter one, banter is polarised within popular imaginations, framed as something which is either damaging and problematic or harmless fun. It is typically viewed as being premised on shared understandings and repetition of stories, becoming part of the everyday in terms of interactions, language, relationships, consumption and media. This conflicting conceptualisation is echoed within the literature, where there is a clear division in how banter is understood (Plester and Sayers, 2007; Hay, 1994; Norrick, 1993). These ideas were reviewed in chapter two; however an important point to return to here is that banter has been frequently understood in terms of its functionality (Lynch, 2010; Garde, 2008; Collinson, 1988). The purpose of banter within interaction is often deemed to include cohesion, control and co-operation (Lynch, 2010; Garde, 2008; Plester and Sayers, 2007; Haig 1988). Whilst discussion within the analysis chapters highlighted that these ideas remain relevant, the data has shown that this is an oversimplification of a complex interactive process. Chapter four identified that banter was a performative practice and that this communicative tool was learnt, repeated and manipulated in order to guarantee successful performances and inclusion within the group. Indeed banter was highly valued in the field as it transcended age and physical ability. This finding expands and challenges existing work which situated bodies as the most prominent feature of sporting masculinities, becoming the impetus for thinking about how the men at the Robins showed resistance to historical sociocultural structures which have dominated rugby sites (Dempster, 2009; Swain, 2004; Bryson, 1990).

Chapters five and six discussed the structures which governed the rugby site and began to highlight the tensions between historically dominant perceptions of rugby masculinity and men’s real life experiences. Banter was important to the social fabric of the Robins club and though not always articulated directly as such by the men, was prominent within imaginations and narratives of rugby identity. It was apparent that to some extent banter could be understood to uphold historical ideals of the rugby lad, in some ways policing these boundaries and functioning in the ways previously outlined in the literature (Lynch, 2010; Garde, 2008; Plester and Sayers, 2007; Haig 1988). Indeed the men remained constrained within their behaviours when utilising banter, however, it became clear that initial ideas of its functionality were not reflecting the diverse ways that the men utilised banter, nor were they accounting for the choices men were making within interactions. Making connections to Goffmanian perspectives, banter began to be understood as a multifaceted tool which provided the men with some flexibility and agency within the confines of the rugby space. This contributed towards critiquing understandings of banter as a functional tool; rather it was framed as a catalyst for interactions, showing its dynamism which is often overlooked in existing writing.

Chapters five and six provided an empirical examination of the ways in which banter was utilised to engage with hegemonic masculinity in practice. In doing so these chapters expanded existing ideas and highlighted potential new directions for masculinity theorising. Rugby lad and rugby identity more widely have been historically conceptualised and embedded within the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity (Van Campenhout and Van Hoven, 2014; Dempster, 2009; Pringle, 2008; Gill, 2003). Chapter five discussed the continued prominence of hegemonic structures within the rugby club space; however analysis began to explore the ways that the men experienced these structures, in doing show highlighting ruptures and resistance to the hegemonic model through the implementation of banter. In particular the narratives provided by the men alongside observations indicated that they were able to convey characteristics and aspects of their masculinity which had historically been viewed as conflicting with performances of the rugby lad. This theme became the focus of analysis chapter six in which the dominance of hegemonic masculinity was critiqued alongside discussions regarding the limitations of the rugby lad. Whilst it was evident that the men were in some ways hindered in terms of their capacity to construct identity and perform masculinity in isolation from the structures of the rugby lad, they were utilising the tools learnt through hegemonic practices to convey awareness and frustrations with these identities. For example, the analysis showed that through banter men were able to manage emotions and negotiate changes to the lifecourse. These were themes which had been for the most part absent from hegemonic theorising or writing on rugby lads. Notably it was through non-threatening and widely accepted methods that the men were able to present these challenges. Whilst it is clear that hegemonic structures still place limitations on identity construction, the men were manipulating known interactional tools to enable more diverse performances of masculinity. This contribution is important as it indicates that existing theorising is useful but does not account for the nuances of men’s experiences. This has implications for how existing theories can be applied and encourages new ways of thinking about men’s experiences in sporting sites which could be expanded into other spheres.

Discussion of how men experience the structures of hegemonic masculinity within their everyday lives exposed tensions and limitations in the application of the theory. Whilst the concept of hegemonic masculinity was indeed culturally dominant, it did not take into consideration the lived realities of men. Chapter seven contributed towards existing debates on hegemonic masculinity presenting the argument that mischievous masculinity captured men’s agency within the rugby site and accounted for the role of banter in the construction of masculinities. It is argued that mischievous masculinity allows for a greater flexibility in terms of explaining how men construct, deconstruct and negotiate the boundaries of gendered identities. Though behaviours are in some ways limited, men are working within the realms of what is possible to construct more diverse versions of the rugby lad, with mischievous masculinity theorising encompassing this complex process.

The findings outlined throughout the analysis chapters can be seen to contribute and expand a number of fields including gender, masculinity, sports, identity and banter. The research has explained the processes and conditions required for banter to occur, demonstrating that it is a dynamic tool which acts as a catalyst in social interactions for the construction and performances of diverse masculinities. This develops the literature on banter as well as extending the key arguments associated with humour and teasing outlined in chapter two. The most significant contribution of this research is that banter provides a catalyst for the men to engage with the structures of hegemonic masculinity in this sporting site and allows the men to transcend performances of masculinity associated with age and physical ability.

## Limitations

In the closing sections it is important to reflect upon the limitations of the research. Martin Shipman (1997) asserts that social researchers should always invite criticism and be open to scrutiny. Reflecting on the research process there are a number of limitations, beyond those concerning the methodological ones outlined in chapter three which need to be acknowledged and discussed here.

On a practical level it is important to note issues which challenged the research such as topography, composition of the club and the surrounding community. The project was based in a city which does not have a higher ranking Rugby Union club and therefore the Robin’s arguably attracted a wider audience than other clubs sharing the same league position. Additionally, the club is situated on the outskirts of the city in an affluent rural area. This means that the club is only accessible on foot by local residents from outlier villages, with anyone from the city travelling to the club by car or bus. An implication of this is that the club is comprised of mainly white middle class men and arguably is not representative of the more diverse population which resides in the city. Having said this, the sample does reflect the larger Rugby Union community which has historically been critiqued for its lack of ethnic and class diversity. It is important to note that the regulars do travel from across the city and therefore the sample does include diversity. I believe that the club was representative of Rugby Union clubs more widely; therefore this does not influence the applicability of the research findings.

Expanding on the points regarding configuration of the club, the majority of the members and players affectionately termed themselves as ‘lifers’. This referred to the longevity of membership and is perhaps due to the fairly consistent positioning of the team within the RFU league which means that players are less likely to move around. This had important implications for the research as usually clubs at this level experience a fast turn-over of players with relatively low numbers of spectators. I believe that even if the configuration were different the key attributes of club life would remain the same. Van Maanen (1988) describes ethnographic spaces as being unsettled, echoing other work which suggests that what we see in the field is not timeless (Atkinson, 2012; Brewer, 2005; Atkinson et al., 2002; Emerson et al., 1995). Even though I witnessed some movement of people and structural changes during my second season, the narrative presented by the committee and club ethos remained the same. In relation to this, it is important to reflect on the changing nature of club life, and how the successes and difficulties experienced during my time at the Robins impacted the research process. I witnessed relegations, battles for promotion and play offs. Arguably this could have altered the mood and behaviours I was able to observe and likely inform the banter. However, changes in the field are inevitable and can be utilised to verify patterns observed (Brewer, 2005; Fielding, 1998). Through conducting observations over four seasons I am certain that the processes and central features of banter remain the same. If anything the changes I observed meant that I was able to see banter in varied contexts and ensure that the analysis was reliable.

A further potential criticism of the research is regarding the relationships developed and the implications of these upon the analysis. Zajano and Edelsberg (1993) question whether it is ever possible to be critical of the organisations or people you are studying if you form relationships with them. Additionally I became concerned with what I termed ‘banter blindness’, whereby due to familiarity and closeness with participants banterous interactions would become normalised and go unnoticed. Inevitably investing time in the space and creating bonds with participants can make objectivity difficult and the process of analysis challenging (Taylor, 2011; Daniels, 1983). Whilst this could be deemed to be a potential issue, I took measures to avoid this. Both Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) and Labaree (2002) discuss the benefits of creating distance between the researcher and participants, arguing that this provides a refreshed perspective from which to progress with writing and analysis. I ensured that I had periods away from the club utilising the natural breaks between seasons to create a degree of distance, during which time my visits became far less frequent and the duration of visits lessened. During the analysis process I also acknowledged suggestions from thinkers such as Soyer (2014:462) who claim that analysis can never be completely objective and that instead we offer ‘an interpretation of a subjective experience’ (Scott, 2012; Bochner, 2000). Further to this I utilised my research diary and discussions with peers to voice concerns and remained reflexive of the process. Importantly my research diary entries presented alongside field notes became a tool within the analysis process and my own stories were parallel to that of the participants to provide rich description and a broader contextual narrative.

Arguably the most significant limitation and challenge to this research has been regarding gender and negotiating gendered performances of both myself as a researcher and the participants. These were briefly noted within chapter three, however warrant further explanation here. Prior to entering the field I carefully considered the existing arguments relating to negotiating gender relations within the research process. Previous work has shown that gender impacts upon the research and can be a significant limitation, with ongoing debates regarding optimum research dynamics, as well as that which explores the implications of particular gender configurations within studies (Manderson et al 2006; McNay, 2003). It is often seen that gender sameness is recommended, in which women are deemed to be best placed to conduct research with women and men with men (Pini and Pease 2013). Whilst it can be seen that there may be issues relating to ‘gender sameness’ in research when those of the same gender are working together, there are specific issues relating to gender differences which are interesting and less documented, particularly research in which women work with men (Pini and Pease, 2013). More recently reflections and debates have been put forward relating to the roles of women in male-dominated research settings, and experiences of negotiating relationships and interactions (Soyer, 2014; Pini, 2005; May and Pattillo-McCoy, 2000). Within my fieldwork I did experience issues related to my gender and these could be viewed to be limitations. The most frequent examples of this were when I was utilised as a prop by the men within interactions due to my gender or perceived sexuality. Often the men referenced my femininity or made comments with sexual undertones. Clearly this shaped the tone of the banter in ways which may have differed for a male researcher in the same environment. However, even in cases where the researcher-researched share gender the research is not problem free. Additionally, it could be argued that there may also be advantages to varying researcher-researched gender dynamics, for example in interviews men admitted that they thought I would ‘get it’ when disclosing sensitive stories and therefore could be seen to be responding based on perceptions of my gender. In this way perceptions of gender in the research and subsequent performances remain a contested and interesting aspect to explore and influence all social research.

A further perceived limitation of this research could be its scope and scale. Recent work within masculinity scholarship has begun to question the implications of research according to scale (Hearn et al, 2016; Gorman and Hopkins, 2016). Previous ethnographic work has tended to focus on what Connell (2000b) referred to as the ‘ethnographic moment’ in which research has been blinkered towards the local and specific, with less attention paid to how this might transfer or be applicable within larger contexts. Arguably my research falls into this category and is part of the ‘ethnographic moment’; however Hearn et al. (2016) suggest that ethnographic work can challenge analysis of wider processes. I suggest that my critical research on masculinities and in particular analysis of the dominant structures within Rugby Union can be transferred across other contexts and sites. For example applying the conceptualisation of mischievous masculinities to other sporting sites, as well as other institutions within society such as work or education could provide greater understandings of gender dynamics and interactional practices more broadly.

## Future directions

A significant challenge and unsettling problem within research is that often you create as many questions as you attempt to resolve. Though this research has addressed the key research aims and objectives, further questions have been generated. One aspect which warrants additional exploration is the way that the processes and practices of banter would differ according to different contexts or within varied groups. Research could be conducted with other Rugby Union teams in different places and leagues in order to investigate whether the patterns are repeated. Further to this, conducting research with participants who are different genders, including other same sex sports groups and those which are mixed would potentially provide greater understanding of banter and allow for intersections between banter and masculinity/femininity to be further explored. Examining banter within other sporting sites would also prove interesting, particularly those in which gender or bodies are less pervasive. Additionally, there is the potential for banter to be explored within different institutions such as work or education, in doing so expanding existing work on humour in these sites and the role this plays in building relationships and constructing identities within these spheres.

There were also themes to emerge out of the data which were not explored within the thesis due to time and space restrictions, or ethical considerations regarding participants’ anonymity. The first of these is the role of banter within men’s mental health. There were stories from the participants which positioned banter as a significant tool in perceptions of ‘wellness’ in relation to mental health. Though chapter six acknowledged that men were able to express emotional selves far more freely through the implementation of banter, I believe that there is more research which could usefully be done in order to expand existing work in this area, particularly enhancing understandings of mental health issues within everyday lives. Another theme which emerged was banter and violence. Some of the narratives conveyed by the men highlighted an interesting intersection between banter, masculinity and violence which could not be fully explored within the confines of this thesis. Some of the men spoke about how banter was connected to violence in terms of being a tool implemented to avoid violence and dissipate aggression, or contrastingly as a form of verbal sparring which precipitated physical violence. There is also further work which could be conducted which acknowledges different types of violence in relation to banter, including verbal forms which contribute towards everyday sexism which I have already begun to develop elsewhere (Nichols, 2016).

Another field which this work has the potential to contribute towards is male friendship. Though this has not been discussed overtly within the analysis, it is useful to acknowledge here in order to discuss some final areas for future exploration. Friendship has been an underlying theme within the research. Further to this, friendship is a cornerstone in Connell’s conception theorising on hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987; 1995; Thurnell-Read, 2012). After all the concept of hegemonic masculinity is relational and therefore is constructed within spaces in which male bonding occurs and arguably is sustained through enduring friendships during the lifecourse (Howson, 2006; Connell, 1995). Ultimately men cared about what other men thought of them and this desire to ‘fit in’ and be one of the guys facilitated the continuation of existing structures, as discussed in chapters four, five and six. Another potential area for future research is exploring the role of men’s friendships in enabling the negotiation and acceptance of changing ideologies at the club, and the role of friendship within performances of mischievous masculinities.

## Final Conclusions

Through observing and engaging with the Robins over three years it was evident that existing literature describing rugby lads did not do them justice. Though this is a small case study within a much broader field, it is important to note the significant theoretical contributions which can be made from this research. This data demonstrated that the lived realities of men within Rugby Union contexts are complex and differ greatly from public perceptions, or depictions within academic texts. My work shows that there are aspects of men’s identity construction which are not captured by existing theories, particularly hegemonic theorising (Howson, 2006; Connell, 2005, 1995; Connell and Messerchmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993). The implementation of banter to display emotion and to manage the ageing process demonstrates that men are able to negotiate the dominant structures of this sporting site. This agency manifests itself in terms of the awareness and choices men make within interactions. This process has been framed here in terms of mischievous masculinities. The use of banter to display this agency is particularly interesting to study, as this interactive tool itself stems from historical hegemonic structures. Through acknowledging the challenges men have to negotiating the dominant structures and the creative ways they are utilising existing tools from within this sphere to show resistance and to test the boundaries, it can be seen that there is potential for new practices of masculinity to be accounted for and described which can make important contributions to other sociological fields.

The increasing prominence of banter within British culture and language, as well as the visibility within sites such as that of the Robins demonstrates that this is an important area to study.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Information Sheet





**Research project**

**Understanding Rugby Union interaction and behaviour**

**Information sheet**

I am conducting research with XXX as part of PhD research affiliated to Sheffield University. It is important that you are aware of why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish. Feel free to contact the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Aims of the research

The aim of the research is to better understand rugby union culture and the way people communicate and interact within rugby cultures. I am really interested to know whether the way people communicate and behave in rugby environments is used in other places outside of rugby, and whether this is used with other people too. I am particularly interested in how rugby union and the associated interactive practices contribute to the way people think about gender. This research will contribute to work in sociological studies on these topics.

What the research involves

You have been chosen to take part as you either play in part of a rugby union club which identifies itself as male, or use the rugby club as a place to socialise. The research involves observations in rugby union sporting environments.

Participation will involve:

Consenting to me observing rugby games, training and socialising.

The observations will be conducted over the course of the rugby season and will involve the researcher being present during matches, training, and clubhouse socialising. The aim of the observations is to understand how rugby union players and those involved in rugby union culture communicate and interact.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide that you do not wish to participate please contact me on the details found at the bottom of the sheet. If you do take part you can withdraw from part of the project, or the entire project at any time. You do not have to give a reason. A copy of this information sheet is also available on request.

Risks and benefits of being involved

There are no foreseeable risks from taking part, but you can withdraw your consent at any time- you do not have to give a reason. If you have any complaints about the research, you can contact the researcher via the details below. You can also contact the Registrar and Secretary at the University of Sheffield if you have any complaints about the conduct of the researcher. Whilst there are no immediate benefits for people participating in this project, it is hoped that you will find the project an interesting chance to reflect on and share your experiences. This work will also contribute to the field of sociology, sport and our understanding of people’s experiences of rugby union cultures and interaction.

 Data security

All information about the research will be stored securely in locked storage at the university, or as a password-protected electronic file. Your name and that of the rugby team will not be used in any of the documents; only the researcher will know your identity. You and the team will be identified by other names in the research to remain anonymous. Any involvement you have in the research will also remain confidential. If you wish to withdraw consent for your data to be held, you may contact the researcher and electronic and paper documents will be destroyed. You do not have to give a reason.

How the data will be used

Your data will be compared to that given by other participants in order to explore the communication and interaction patterns associated with Rugby Union culture. This information will be used to address the key questions of the PhD and form the basis of the thesis, which will be made available for participants to access. The information may also be used in conference papers, articles and books, which will discuss themes similar to the thesis; in all of these cases participants will remain anonymous. Significantly, when the research is written up all identifying information will be altered or removed, so no participant or sports team will be identifiable. As a participant you are able to request copies of any of the final documents and ask the researcher for further information at any point. There is a chance that the research may be talked about in the media by the researcher (for example in a newspaper article), however in this case no direct quotations from any of the participants will be used.

Ethical approval

This is a research project conducted by a PhD student based in the Sociological studies department at Sheffield University and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. It has been reviewed and met all the standards of the University and departmental ethical boards.

Contact details

If you want more information about this project please contact Kitty Nichols either via email at: [k.nichols@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:k.nichols@sheffield.ac.uk) or just find me at the club for a chat (there is a picture of me at the bottom of the page). You may also contact my supervisor at Sheffield via email: [vicki.robinson@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:vicki.robinson@sheffield.ac.uk).

 University of Sheffield

Department of Sociological studies

Elmfield

Northumberland Road

Sheffield

S10 2TU

## Appendix 2: Participant information sheet for interviews

**Understanding Rugby Union interaction and behaviour**

**Information sheet**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you make a decision on whether to participate, it is important that you are aware of why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish. Feel free to contact the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Aims of the research

The aim of the research is to better understand Rugby Union culture and the way people communicate and interact within rugby cultures. I am really interested to know whether the way people communicate and behave in rugby environments is used in other places outside of rugby, and whether this is used with other people too. I am particularly interested in how Rugby Union and the associated interactive practices contribute to the way people think about relationships with other people, the community and gender issues, this research will contribute to work in sociological studies on these topics.

What the research involves

You have been chosen to take part as you play in part of a Rugby Union club which identifies itself as male. The research involves observations of male Rugby Union sports teams of different ages, with follow up one-on-one interviews..

If you choose to participate it will involve:

1. Consenting to allowing me to observe rugby games, training and socialising.

The observations will be conducted over the course of the rugby season and will involve the researcher being present during training, games and clubhouse socialising. The aim of the observations is to understand how Rugby Union players and those involved in Rugby Union culture communicate and interact.

1. Taking part in a one-on-one interview.

This will involve one interview with the researcher, which will last up to an hour. This can take place at your home or another convenient location, at a time that suits you. The interview will have some set questions, with additional open discussion around a list of topics. If you give permission (see the consent form), the interview will be audio recorded. If not, the researcher will make notes of the interview.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form, of which you will also be given a copy) and you can withdraw from part of the project, or the entire project at any time. You do not have to give a reason.

Risks and benefits of being involved

There are no foreseeable risks from taking part, but the interviews may touch on topics you find sensitive. You are free to stop the interview at any time. You do not have to give a reason. If you have any complaints about the research, you can contact the researcher via the details below. You can also contact the Registrar and Secretary at the University of Sheffield if you have any complaints about the conduct of the researcher. Whilst there are no immediate benefits for people participating in this project, it is hoped that you will find the project an interesting chance to reflect on and share your experiences. This work will also contribute to the field of sociology and our understanding of people’s experiences of banterous interaction.

Data security

If you give permission for the interview to be recorded, this will be stored as a password-protected electronic file. The recording will be transcribed by the researcher, and the transcript of the interview will also be stored as a password-protected electronic file. The recording will only be used by the researcher. All the paper documents, including the consent forms will be stored securely in locked storage at the university. Your name and that of the rugby team will not be used in any of the documents, only the researcher will know your identity, you and the team will be identified by other names in the research to remain anonymous. Any involvement you have in the research will also remain confidential. If you wish to withdraw consent for your data to be held, you may contact the researcher and electronic and paper copies will be destroyed. You do not have to give a reason.

How the data will be used

Your data will be compared to that given by other participants in order to explore the communication and interaction patterns associated with Rugby Union culture. This information will be used to address the key questions of the PhD and form the basis of the thesis, which will be made available for participants to access. The information may also be used in conference papers, articles and books, which will discuss themes similar to the thesis; in all of these cases participants will remain anonymous. It is important to note that in some cases quotes from interviews may be used directly as evidence in order to build arguments and make a point; this will only happen if it is agreed to in the consent form. Significantly, when the research is written up all identifying information will be altered or removed, so no participant or sports team will be identifiable. As a participant you are able to request copies of any of the final documents and ask the researcher for further information at any point. You are also able to withdraw consent for use of the quotes. There is a chance that the research may be talked about in the media by the researcher (for example in a newspaper article), in this case no direct quotations from any of the participants will be used.

Ethical approval

This is a research project conducted by a PhD student based in the Sociological studies department at Sheffield University. It has been reviewed and met all the standards of the University and departmental ethical board.

Contact details

If you want more information about this project please contact Kitty Nichols either via email at: [k.nichols@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:k.nichols@sheffield.ac.uk) or via phone on: 07969952987. You may also contact my supervisor at Sheffield via email: [vicki.robinson@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:vicki.robinson@sheffield.ac.uk).

Date and signature of the participant­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3: Participant consent form

**Participant consent form**

Title of the research project*:* Understanding Rugby Union interaction and behaviour.

Name of researcher: Kitty Nichols

Participant identification for this project:

Please initial appropriate boxes on the right below

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated *[insert date]* explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I agree to take part in the above research project
4. I agree for my interviews to be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher.
5. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for the researcher to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or publications that result from the research.
6. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research
7. I give permission for quotes from the data collected from me to be used in published materials and presentations made by the researcher. I understand that I will not be identifiable from any of the quotes used.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name of participant Date Signature

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name of researcher Date Signature

1. Themes of memory are significant to banterous interaction, which is important to acknowledge; however I am not able to expand on this here due to the space limitations of this review. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Due to the age of this work, at a time when the term banter has not yet emerged, the jocular interaction is not explicitly referenced as banter, however, using the conceptualisations outlined in the earlier part of this review, this interaction is understood as banterous. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Within the work of McCann et al (2010) ‘failed’ masculinity was seen by the participants to refer to those men who did not fit within the idealised perception of masculinity, often including those who identified as homosexual, or those who did not display hegemonic masculine qualities. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Rugby Football Union (RFU) is the governing body for Rugby Union in England. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ‘Beasting’ is a word used by the men to refer to a rugby match in which they are likely to be beaten and which will be extremely physical. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The expression to ‘wig out’ is utilised by the men to mean that they would become unnecessarily anxious or worried. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. DMC is understood to mean Deep and Meaningful Conversation [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Notably there were only ever two or three women present at these times as this was often in the evening when the main crowd had disappeared and only first team players and longer term members tended to be around. The women present were either bar staff, members of the committee or partners of players [↑](#footnote-ref-8)