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## **Male Chauvinist Humour in the Toolkit of Symbolic Violence: Reification and Mythologisation of Women in Everyday Discourse**

*Часто сквозь видимый миру смех льют сяневидимые миру слезы.*

*H.B. Гоголь*

### ABSTRAKT

#### **Męski humor szowinistyczny w arsenale przemocy symbolicznej: teoretyczna interpretacja i analiza medialnego dyskursu codziennego**

Artykuł poświęcony jest analizie męskich dowcipów szowinistycznych, jakie pojawiają się w dyskursach codziennych i tych z zakresu kultury masowej. Wskazuje się na dwa zasadnicze podziały, które są aktualizowane w trakcie tworzenia wspomnianego typu humoru: pierwszy dotyczy cielesności i seksualności, drugi ilości i jakości kapitału kulturowego. Podziały te wypełnione są mitami i stereotypami, które tworzą wzory percepcji i myślenia o grupach antagonistycznych względem własnej; mity te stają się również narzędziem do walki symbolicznej. Humor, który cechuje się „swawolnością”, może więc jednocześnie powielać hegemonię genderową i krytykować ją. Przemoc symboliczna przejawia się zarówno w „szczerych” szowinistycznych dowcipach, jak i w tych, które krytykują obowiązujący porządek genderowy, ponieważ – w trakcie obrony i krytyki – podziały genderowe, rozłąmy i rozdarcia są aktualizowane w taki sposób, że podkreślają swoją obiektywność i nieusuwalność.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** przemoc symboliczna, humor, męski humor szowinistyczny, hegemonia genderowa, analiza dyskursu

In the classical and modern periods of development of social sciences and humanities, the problem of humour usually remains on the side-lines of their subject field. This is, firstly, due to the secret and purposeful „seriousness”

<sup>1</sup> Data złożenia tekstu do Redakcji „MiS”: 31.10.2018 r.; data zatwierdzenia tekstu do druku: 10.05.2019.

of scientific knowledge and scientific activity, which is alien to comic and (self) irony, and, secondly, because of the fact that the very problem of humour has never been urgent, principled and requiring comprehensive and fundamental study. Therefore, a number of scientific stereotypes have been formed, describing the relative self-evidence and comprehensibility of humorous practices and discourses, and their „frivolity“. Humour itself is perceived as a phenomenon that „does not require“ and „is not worthy“ of a separate „serious“ scientific research.

On the other hand, the social sciences have to pay special attention to this issue because, in (post)modern society, humour has spread so much that it can rightfully be considered „opium for the people“: a sense of humour can be considered tacitly a mandatory (or at least expected) social competence of a (post)modern person, which he or she has to use in almost any everyday situation. The long-established industry of humour supplies its products to the daily life of people so intensely and systematically that even the most „serious“ products of popular culture in its most „serious“ genres do not disdain to complement their narrative with a hint of humour. At the same time, the inherent humour's „ease“, „playfulness“ and „positivity“ usually contributes to its trouble-free and uncritical perception, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the humorous impact. And the very nature of such an impact remains largely shrouded in mystery.

In this article, we offer an interpretation of the „frivolous“ phenomenon of extreme humorous discourse – male chauvinist humour, which can rightly be considered as a concentrated and crystallised example of humour as symbolic and discursive violence. As a study of this discourse shows, we can see two clearly defined and opposing unequal groups – men and women – that can illustrate the mechanisms of symbolic violence for maintaining inequality by humour. The practical importance of this research relates to the fact of the collision of various gender paradigms, which takes place in modern Ukrainian realities: male chauvinist humour as a product, as a tool and as a manifestation of „traditional“ gender discourse antagonises „new“ (left-liberal) gender discourses that challenge both bipolar gender division and chauvinist relations. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to study the properties and characteristics of the humour used for the production of symbolic violence (on the example of male chauvinist humour).

The article presents the results of a qualitative discourse analysis of male chauvinist jokes from the everyday discourse of the inhabitants of Ukraine. The purpose of this analysis was to study the spectrum of possible myths that are used in the production of such humour. The research and selection of cases was carried out by means of the „snowball“ method; jokes were searched in their places of accumulation (on thematic web pages, in thematic comic performances and in products of mass culture with a thematic focus, etc.); the collection of observations was compiled to the point of the saturation of information. The main function of this research was not to form a general picture of the male chauvinist humour

discourse in Ukraine, but to offer an empirical illustration of the mechanisms of the symbolic violence production by means of humour.

To achieve this goal, we should start by analysing the existing theoretical developments related to the problems of humour. Despite the fact that this subject is not in the foreground of the subject field of the social sciences, its border status attracts the interest of many disciplines: sociology, psychology, linguistics, anthropology, social philosophy and many others. Therefore, there are many studies of humour, which are devoted to the various manifestations and spheres of application of the comic. Many of them relate to humour in politics (e.g., the work of A. Dmitriev<sup>2</sup>, V. Razuvaev<sup>3</sup>, P. Abrahams and C. Wukasch<sup>4</sup>, G. Benton<sup>5</sup>, A. Sedov<sup>6</sup>, etc.), inter-ethnic relations (for example, M. Barrick's<sup>7</sup> research) certain types of comic practices (anecdotes, trolling<sup>8</sup>, etc.); or are limited to the analysis of individual comic styles, themes and subjects (e.g., M. Nikanorov<sup>9</sup>, I. Yakovenko<sup>10</sup>). There are many works related to the conceptualisation of humour, both within separate disciplines and having an interdisciplinary nature. This set of concepts forms a very chaotic and mosaic gnoseological structure of describing and explaining humour, which S. Attardo presents in the following way:

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<sup>2</sup> Dmitriev A. V., *Sociologija politicheskogo jumora*, Ocherki, Moskow, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Razuvaev V. V., *Politicheskij smeh v sovremennoj Rossii*, Moskow, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Abrahams P. D., Wukasch C., *Political Joke of East Germany*, „Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin. – Murfreesboro”, 1967, vol. 33, p. 7-10.

<sup>5</sup> Benton G., Powell C., Paton G., *The Origins of the Political Joke*, „Humour in Society: Resistance and Control”, New York, 1988, p. 33-55.

<sup>6</sup> Sedov A. F., *Politicheskij anekdot kak javlenie kul'tury*, Balashov, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Barrick M. E., *Racial Riddles and the Polack Joke*, „Keystone Folklore Quarterly”, Philadelphia, 1970, vol. 15, p. 3-15.

<sup>8</sup> Phillips W., *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture*, Cambridge, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Nikanorova M. N., *Istoricheskie anekdoty o Petre I v russkoj literature*, Novosibirsk, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Jakovenko I. G., *Nenormativnyj anekdot kak modeli rujushhaja sistema. Opytkul'turologicheskogo analiza*, „NLO”, 2000, vol. 43, p. 335-346.

**Table 1. Criteria of humour that are used by different types of theories of humour (by S. Attardo)<sup>11</sup>**

Social	Psychoanalytic	Cognitive
Aggressive	Economy	Contrast
Derision	Liberation	Incongruity
Disparagement	Sublimation	
Hostility	Release	
Superiority		
Triumph		

Source: S. Attardo, *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Berlin, 1994.

Cognitive theories usually focus on the psychological and linguistic aspects of the comic, analyse the structure and semiotics of jokes; psychoanalytic theories largely inherit Freud's classic work on the connection of humour and personality structures and try to complement or challenge it<sup>12</sup>; whereas social theories consider humour in the categories of an everyday practice, communicative and performative action, which at the same time carries the conflicting functionality of humour. In a further part of this text, we continue this part of theorising and try to present the ability of humour to cause social conflicts of humour in the processes and practices of symbolic struggle that permeate the everyday life of people and are embodied in humour. But, before we get to this point, we should examine some of the characteristic features of humour and the comic, which are important in the context of this work.

First, we draw the terminological boundaries between the basic concepts (for us, almost all definitions related to humour and the comic are instrumental; they are derived specifically for the purposes of this study, therefore we do not claim their universality):

- Laughter is a physiological reaction of the body in the form of a certain facial expression, contraction of the diaphragm and the corresponding respiratory movements. It is not a specific characteristic for humans but may also be noticed, for example, in monkeys.
- Comicality is all that makes you laugh. It does not imply a mandatory intention to cause laughter, the reasons for extra-social origin can be comic.

Humour, in turn, arises from comicality caused by social reasons. We need only the broadest understanding of humour, which we propose to designate as a social practice aimed at initiating laughter through the comic. Also, humour is

<sup>11</sup> S. Attardo, *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Berlin, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> S. Freud, *Ostroumiei ego otnoshenie k besoznatel'nomu*, Saint-Petersburg, 1997.

related to one's intellectual ability to notice the comic side in the phenomena, or, as I. Kant writes: „Whatever is to arouse lively convulsive laughter must contain something absurd [...] Laughter is an affect that arises if a tense expectation is transformed into nothing”<sup>13</sup>. That is, humour is based on the customary structures of perception, thinking and judgment, focused on the search and interpretation of the comicality, which, in everyday discourse, is defined as a „sense of humour”. Accordingly, humour is inextricably linked with both individual life experience, on the one hand, and the cultural capital of the reference group, on the other.

Secondly, „from the position of sociology, humour is always an expression of any aspect of the public assessment of a phenomenon, event, personality, situation”<sup>14</sup>. Humour is generated and exists only in a certain field („humorous context”) and is subject to its esoteric logic, i.e. it uses dispositions, myths and antagonisms characteristic of the joke producer's position. But, if you extrapolate these characteristics of humour to its „extreme” types and forms, namely „black”, racist and, of course, sexist types humour, then it turns out that those who joke about such topics do not necessarily adhere to the corresponding misanthropic and chauvinist views.

There is as well the actualisation of another characteristic of humour, which can be called „playfulness”. We characterise this game as *Vertigo* (in R. Caillois's tradition<sup>15</sup>), that is the game on the edge and beyond it, which is accompanied by the creation and consciousness of the secondary reality. In this case, the severity of the „extreme” humour acts as a rating factor, which the joker makes, and have fairly autonomous dynamics: „rude” and „piquant” jokes are peculiar to companies of close friends, professional teams (especially, the army), etc. If we do not talk about everyday humour but about its cultural and industrial development, then the „forbidden” topics are separated, forming fairly narrow market segments. Such mutual distancing (on the one hand, „such jokes have no place in decent society”; on the other hand, „this humour is understandable to a few”) contributes to the relative sealing off „abnormal” humour and its separation from the „normal” one by means of censorship or self-control. Nonetheless, its absolute isolation is simply impossible to achieve. Moreover, „forbidden” themes for humour are necessary for the functioning of the „normal” humour because norms do not exist without deviation, and the sacred without the profane.

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<sup>13</sup> Kant I., *Critique of judgment*, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1987, p. 333.

<sup>14</sup> Belova L. I., *Destruktivnye i konstruktivnye funkcii jumora (sociologicheskij aspekt)*, „Vestnik Juzhno-Ural'skogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta”, <http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/destruktivnye-i-konstruktivnye-funktsii-yumora-sotsiologicheskij-aspekt> (15.10.2018).

<sup>15</sup> Caillois R., *Man, Play, and Games*, University of Illinois Press, 2001.

The paradox of male chauvinist humour lies in the fact that the humour structure presupposes self-elevation and the emanation of superiority. The term „chauvinism”, originally interpreted in a purely political and ideological context, as the most odious form of nationalism, the proclamation of national exclusivity, was transferred to a wider range of phenomena, and the „nation” or „ethnos” became variables, in place of which almost any differentiating social trait can be used, including gender. Accordingly, male chauvinism refers to masculine attitudes and practices in which the affairs and interests of men are considered paramount, and women seem secondary. Such bipolar and asymmetric structure, that male chauvinist humour is built on, is a base of affecting gender issues on the spectrum of prejudiced and degrading treatment of women, on the one hand, and declaring the dominant position of men, on the other. At the same time, the formally defining characteristic feature of such practices is still the „intricacy” of sensed meanings. Humour exists in the secondary reality, the conflict and dissociation of which causes the comic effect. But is it all, as it may seem?

To answer this question, we propose to use the poststructuralist concept of symbolic violence. As P. Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron note, any power of symbolic violence – that is, any power that manages to impose values and coerce them to recognise them as legitimate, hiding the power relations underlying it – adds its own, i.e. purely symbolic force to this power relationship<sup>16</sup>. That is, symbolic violence is a necessary function of (symbolic) power, which, in turn, is held not only (and not so much) through direct violence, but through recognition of its legitimacy. The power entails symbolic violence, imposing its own system of meanings and hierarchy of values, which, in turn, acquires the natural, „self-evident” character for the individual<sup>17</sup>. With the help of symbolic violence, the formation and transformation of perception occurs, which is both a cause and a consequence of the crystallisation of the relations of domination-subordination. We mean here deeply learned forms of thinking, which cannot be questioned due to their relying on themselves. Symbolic violence concerns the imposition of legitimisation of meanings. And the „symbolic”, i.e. culturally-objectified reality acts simultaneously as a field of struggle („setting boundaries”, opposing various meanings and types of perception) and as an object of this struggle (since values themselves are means of (re)producing power); because symbolic violence „at its purest appears as its opposite, as the spontaneity of the milieu in which we dwell, of the air we breath”<sup>18</sup>. In addition, the production and selection of values which are imposed and objectively determining the culture of a group (or class), according to P. Bourdieu, is arbitrary – „the structure and functions of this culture cannot be

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<sup>16</sup> P. Bourdieu, J. –C. Passeron , *La reproduction. Eléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement*, 1970, p. 18-25.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> Žižek S., *Violence*, New York, 2008, p. 36.

derived from only one universal, mental, biological or spiritual principle, since there is no internal connection that connects them with the „nature of things” or „with human nature”<sup>19</sup>. That is, the logic of symbolic violence means that the establishment and maintenance of symbolic power occurs due to the imposition of a symbolic system (or individual meanings and symbols) in their arbitrary, eclectic form, which is not connected with other symbolic forms. Thus, there is the distancing of one symbolic system from others, its autonomisation, creation and support of its own internal logic, which cannot be questioned and disproved using only its means. And the more successful the process of distancing, that is, the greater the social distance and the social gap between the one and other systems of symbolic power, the less chance for one to use his or her means to fight the other. Such distancing occurs both in mental structures (by differentiation, identification of one’s own (dis)position and, above all, by ignoring and camouflaging alternatives) and in objective structures (during institutionalisation, formalisation of social relations). Furthermore, there is a non-reflective correspondence and relative symmetry between the first and the last.

The reason for the search of symbolic violence in humorous practices in general – and male chauvinistic variants in particular – is the fact that symbolic violence has such properties as invisibility, irrationality and unconsciousness. This violence is carried out due to the fact that those who create it are completely unaware of it, and, consequently, they become its accomplices<sup>20</sup>. Symbolic violence is often latentised, functioning in the form of hidden and implicit ways of imposing values and meanings; it replaces existing contradictions, moving them from the world of the „real” to the world of the „symbolic”. Humour, which uses secondary reality to recreate the comic, becomes a very convenient medium for spreading the influence of symbolic violence because the „playfulness” of humorous practices contributes to its concealment and disguise, and the affectiveness and emotionalism of humour contributes to its irrationality and unawareness. Humorous discourse, due to its unchallenged „frivolity” and „artificiality”, is a fertile ground for the smooth cultivation and distribution of symbolic systems with the corresponding hierarchy of values, perceptual structures and forms of thinking that contribute to the production and reproduction of hegemony.

To study the role and place of humour in the toolkit of symbolic violence, we conducted an intelligence discourse analysis of male chauvinist jokes that occur in the „specialised” segments of the cultural market (in the thematic public and Internet sections, humorous programs and performances for „targeted audiences”, etc.), and in mass cultural products of general orientation that are aimed at the widest audience. The methodological basis of this study is E. Laclau’s and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 20-25.

<sup>20</sup> Bourdieu P., *O gosudarstve: kurslekcij v College de France (1989-1992)*, Moskva, 2016.

Ch. Mouffe's theory of discursive hegemony<sup>21</sup>. The variables in the analysis were those stigmas, meanings, values that are imposed in this kind of humour, as well as the vectors of antagonism, that is, the axis of assessment and opposition of men and women.

The stigmas, meanings and values that are conveyed through such jokes are mostly in the form of stereotypes, that is, simplified perception, thinking and proposition patterns about a particular object or group of objects. Male chauvinist humour translates and reproduces many modern gender stereotypes, structuring them into myths that serve to reproduce masculine hegemony. We propose to consider the main identified myths that are usually associated with male chauvinist jokes. Before we begin, an important point should be noted: to illustrate one or another abstract, the text gives examples of male chauvinist jokes; therefore, we apologise in advance to those readers who may be offended or discouraged.

1. „*Intellectual abilities*“, „*female logic*“. One of the most popular themes of male chauvinist humour, which lies in the hypertrophied stereotypical perception of the intellectual abilities and logical skills of women, as opposed to male rationalism. Most often, the image of a woman in such humour is reduced to the image of a „blonde“ owner of an extreme form of „female intelligence“. Here are some examples:

- „The difference between a woman and a man is that when the first goes crazy, it's not so evident“.
- „What if a blonde throws a grenade at you? – Pull the check and throw it back“.
- „Women's logic is the absence of any logic“.

Quite often, in this kind of jokes and anecdotes, one can encounter an appeal to stereotypically male knowledge and occupations: military affairs, sports (especially, football), cars, science, technology, and the humour industry itself. Thus, the idea of „incomprehensibility“ of „male“ areas of activity – especially, that they are presented from the sublime side – for women is produced. Such myths are an instrument of the symbolic struggle for the recognition of „male“ cultural capital, its isolation and the elevation of its value. In chauvinist male humour, women are distinguished by their traditional type of activities, which, in the 1930s, one very famous doctor of the University of Berlin dubbed as „Kinder, Küche, Kirche“. In this way, we shall call the next group of myths used in men's chauvinist humour.

2. „*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*“. These myths, being a response to the emancipation processes of the XX-XXI centuries, reproduce male hegemony in the field of professional activity, discursively limiting the areas of activity available to women. Let us look at examples:

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<sup>21</sup> Laclau E., Mouffe Ch., *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics Second Edition*, New York, 2001.

- „A woman was hit by a car. – What was the car doing in the kitchen?“
- „A tree has fallen on a woman. – Who cut the tree in the kitchen?“
- „How to explain to a woman what is „offside“? – Here is a kitchen, and there is an offside“.

Of course, this kind of jokes go beyond the subject of „kitchen“ (e.g., „I have never claimed that the place of a woman is in the kitchen. Especially, when you need to chop firewood“). But the essence of such humour is reduced to declaring and emphasising the inequality and discrimination against women in the field of professional self-realisation, at the same time „saving“ men from the household and raising children (a very good example can be found in the cult American sitcom of the 90s and 2000s „Friends“, season 9, episode 6, in which a joke is based on the fact that a man claims to be a nanny; comicality is imposed by the ambiguous reaction of the main characters and off-screen laughter). Establishing the limitations of the sphere of the life activity of women in the domestic and family work, such myths can also „allow“ and „force“ them to take care of their appearance systematically and purposefully: „A man should have a head on shoulders and a woman should have a face“, „A real woman has two tasks: to be beautiful and tell a man that he is good!“ Such mythologisation of women's practices of physicality is directly related to the third group of myths, which we consider separately.

3. *„A woman is a sexual object“*. These myths describe a woman as an object of sexual desire and sexual „hunting“ of men. Much as the former jokes are told by the passive and weak-willed parties, the latter are shared by the active people of the artistic image of the character in modern popular culture, a kind of „gigolo“ are all built on the myth about the sexual limitations of women. If sitcoms usually present separate characters with such characteristic, then the products of dramatic genres give such attributes to „serious“ characters, and that performs a humorous function. For example, the grotesque misanthropes like Gregory House („House M.D.“) and Tyrion Lannister („Game of Thrones“) are largely revealed by regular self-praising stories about the successes in sexual exploitation of the „priestesses of love“, which contrasts with the other sides of these characters and is perceived comically. This myth reduces women to the role of sexual objects, reifies and dehumanises them. In the most extreme form, such view takes the form of a statement of a man as a „real human,“ while a woman is a „subhuman“. So we come to the next topic of male chauvinist jokes, to the next group of myths.

4. *„Woman is not a human/person“ and „woman is evil“*. The name of this group of myths is a reference to the well-known aphorism from the Soviet times in its broad version: „The chicken is not a bird, Bulgaria is not abroad, the woman is not a person“. This statement even has „evidence“ in the form of logical sophistry: „If a woman is a man, then a young woman is a young man. But a young man is

a guy. Contradiction. Accordingly, a woman is not a man". Similarly, the built-up „evidence" also refers to the statement that a woman is evil:

Girls = Time \* Money

Time = Money

Girls = Money \* Money = Money<sup>2</sup>

Money = √Evil

Girls = (√Evil)<sup>2</sup>

Girls = Evil.

Jokes that exploit this myth are usually found in „sexist" segments of the humour industry, where the audience is prepared for them and responds accordingly („What is the advantage of sexist humour? You can't hurt a person"). In the discursive terms, this myth is indicative of the largest gap between the described groups of men and women, and that is why its exaggeration and pretentiousness creates a comic effect. It is rather difficult to assess the effect of symbolical violence of the jokes built on this myth: on the one hand, it is focused on the dehumanisation of women as opposed to the elevation of men in the broadest sense; on the other hand, it is mostly absurd and preposterous, so it is difficult to take it literally. But, to a large extent, the performative potential of such jokes is focused on the resistance and response from the „victims", as they are a provocation for the „uninitiated", a challenge for those who are not ready to put up with their characteristic „frivolity". This is also a characteristic of the next group of myths and topics that we highlight.

*5. Antifeministic themes and myths about feminism.* Male chauvinist humour can be considered as a form of reaction to the crisis of masculinity which relates to the productive struggle of the ideology and practice of feminism. Therefore, „feminists", as a simplified model of the antagonist of the „real men", are often encountered in such jokes and anecdotes. The first joke using this perception scheme can metaphorically be considered the verbal skirmish of Sir Winston Churchill and the first woman deputy in the history of Great Britain, Lady Astor: „If I were your wife, I would put poison in your coffee" – Churchill famously replied: „Nancy, if I were your husband, I would drink it".

Male chauvinist jokes about feminists are characterised by the dislike of the former for the latter, scepticism about their ideology and activity, ridicule of feminists from the point of view of traditional gender roles (for example, „Announcement: A pretty feminist is tired of working for an independent lifestyle and urgently needs a sponsor"). This humour is built on the distinction between „normal women" and „feminists", with „feminists" amenable to critical attack, ridicule and demonisation. Symbolic violence is based on simplification of the perception of the theory and practice of feminism to a single image (and this image is presented in flaring and negative colours), and the whole diversity of feminist ideologies is brought together and reduced to the most extreme and radical

manifestations of them, which become the object of ridicule. Equality the feminists have fought for is perceived by the chauvinists themselves as hypertrophied and one of the markers which may be the subject of beatings. In the „sexist“ segments, it is quite extensive and self-sufficient, hence, it should be distinguished into a separate group of mythologisation.

6. *Assault and bettering*. This myth is based on the statement that within the framework of „traditional“ gender roles and norms there was a taboo on the use of brute force against women, and this taboo was considered as women’s privilege in exchange for their deprivation; since the „traditional“ roles were replaced by the „modern“ ones, then the ban on battering lost its relevance. One of the topics of male chauvinist humour, which in every way beats the use of physical violence against women, is built on this myth. Typically, these jokes are extremely indigestible from the point of view of their content and, mostly, audio-visual design. Therefore, as an illustration, we limit ourselves to the simplest and most non-conflicting examples:

- „I give all these stars to you – the boy said and hit the girl on the head with an iron basin!“
- „A woman who allows herself to raise a hand against a man automatically loses the status of a woman and acquires the status of a sparring partner“.

Symbolic violence in such humour lies not so much in the legitimisation of physical violence (its attempt, rather, and causes a comic effect), as in emphasising the heterogeneity of gender asymmetry. Thus, inequality is justified and explained by updating the arguments-stereotypes that the very inequality of men and women is not unidirectional, but there are a number of restrictions that are directed at the former, but not at the latter. Humour, on the other hand, makes it possible to translate this argument in the symbolic struggle of gender discourses, exposing it to an exaggerated and absurd form.

Male chauvinist humour, of course, is not limited to these six myths, but these myths are its thematic foundation and fill in the discursive gap formed by the self-distancing of „chauvinist jokers“. At the same time, it should be noted that the secondary reality, created in humour and embodied in these myths, is not identical to the gender discourse itself. Humorous practices and products, isolated and separated (in the industry of mass culture, the sphere of everyday life, the genre of discourse, etc.), have a relatively autonomous logic, i.e. the logic of „playfulness“, „non-seriousness“ and „figurativeness“, which allows using existing symbolic structures in their modified and even absolutised version. In other words, the humorous game, in general, and the male chauvinist humour, in particular, is not specifically addressed to women, it very often makes fun of the existing (gender) stereotypes and myths themselves, thereby questioning them and even criticising them. Therefore, one should not perceive male chauvinist humorous practices as a literal imposition of gender myths and stereotypes in order

to maintain male hegemony. There is, of course, a direct connection between gender discourse and its humorous transposition, but it is not linear. And, analysing the secondary (humorous) discourse, we can distinguish characteristic splits which are inherited from the primary (gender) discourse:

- The schism in corporeality and sexuality, which is a fundament and criterion for the very gender division. This is the non-identity of the bodies and habits of men and women, which develops into inequality.
- The schism in the quantity and quality of cultural capital between men and women in different social fields. At the same time, a symbolic struggle is being waged for the distinction between „normal” knowledge and skills for some and others with the establishment of an asymmetry in their value and importance. Many systems of gender inequalities (professional, family, educational, etc.) are built on this schism.

These schisms are filled with myths that create patterns of perception and thinking of one antagonistic group in relation to another, and these myths become the foundation and tool for the conduct of their symbolic struggle. The „method” of conducting such symbolic struggle – humour (in its masculine chauvinist form) – is remarkable for its dual system of latentisation: disguising and dissolving the producers themselves in their everyday life, which makes it practically non-reflective (which is typical of any symbolic violence in general); as well as „playfulness” and „frivolity” of humorous discursive practices, which allow to smooth the antagonism, without removing it. Male chauvinist humorous discursive practices themselves are built on the following processes:

- selection of two groups by gender – men and women – and their opposition;
- reduction and simplification of the social characteristics of women in accordance with the myth of „traditional” gender roles;
- naturalisation of the myth of „traditional” gender roles, equating it with the „female nature”;
- unification and absolutisation of these myths, bringing them to an extreme;
- reification of these myths in their exaggerated and absolutised versions to the generalised image of a woman.

These processes are embedded in humorous structures that are implemented in completely different practices: in everyday humour, online culture, „specialised” communities, and even in the mass culture industry. Such practices themselves are certainly humorous in their nature; they cannot be regarded as a direct manifestation of the conflict of gender discourses. Moreover, the playful nature of humour makes it possible to combine the incompatible, using and reproducing myths specifically to combat them, that is, a kind of (self)irony, withdrawal through ridicule. But „there is a part of a joke in every joke”, so even the most ardent and sincere criticism and struggle with gender stereotypes and

myths, which can be described in male chauvinist humour, still actualises them and emphasises their existence. The symbolic violence is produced in this way: whether a „sexist” joke is told to ridicule and overcome gender stereotypes, it will recreate existing patterns of gender distinctions in any case, which are precisely built according to the male hegemony. In other words, regardless of whether the „joker” tries to overcome or support the myth, it still reproduces the schism (that is filled by these myths), which is the most latent and unintended symbolic violence. Nevertheless, it is also quite obvious that the effect and effectiveness of the symbolic violence of humour-criticism and humour-apologetics can vary greatly, but this requires a separate case study.

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## **Male Chauvinist Humour in the Toolkit of Symbolic Violence: Reification and Mythologisation of Women in Everyday Discourse**

### Summary

This reconnaissance discourse analysis of male chauvinist jokes in everyday discourse and in the industry of mass culture reveals two fundamental divisions that are actualised in the production of such humour: a schism in corporeality and sexuality and a schism in the quantity and quality of cultural capital. These schisms are filled with myths and stereotypes, which create patterns of perception and thinking of one antagonistic group in relation to another; these myths also become an instrument for conducting their symbolic struggle. Humour, which is characterised by „playfulness”, can simultaneously reproduce gender hegemony and criticise it. Symbolic violence is realised both in „sincere” chauvinist jokes, and in the jokes that are aimed at criticising the existing gender order because – during apologetics and criticism – gender divisions, schisms, and splits are actualised with an emphasis on their „objectivity” and „insuperability”.

Keywords: symbolic violence, humour, male chauvinist humour, gender hegemony, discourse analysis