On the "Dark Side": Facebook humour used for inclusion and exclusion

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Abstract

This study examines the use of online humour in a subversive local community Facebook group set up in 2017 by disgruntled members banned from a similar group "in opposition to [the original group's] arbitrarily-applied rules, [its] enforced happiness, and [its] suppression of any post that isn't about giving away lemons or asking to borrow small appliances". The dissatisfaction with the guidelines and the administration of the original Facebook group provides rich material for humorous posts in the new group, many with varying degrees of aggression directed at the founder and certain members of the "Dark Side", as the original group is frequently referred to.

This article will demonstrate how the use of humour in this new rival Facebook group is used for the purposes of inclusion and exclusion, and how it contributes to a sense of belonging in this online community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) created by a small group of self-declared dissidents. It will be shown how the humour shapes the identity of the group through the members' shared ideologies and beliefs (Tanskanen 2018), and how the humorous messages intended to denigrate and belittle the "Dark Side" reinforce unity among the group members, since the feeling of superiority over those being ridiculed coexists with a feeling of belonging (Billig 2005).

Fifteen single comments or multi-post threads were chosen for analysis. These appeared during the first twenty months of this rival group's existence, and included primarily affiliative and/or aggressive humour (Meyer 2015) directed at the original group. The analysis was carried out using elements of computer-mediated discourse analysis (Herring 2004), and an insider participant-observer online ethnographic approach. The examples chosen illustrate how the humour is used to unite the members of this subversive group by dividing them from the original one, to create the joking culture (Fine and de Soucey 2005) of the new group, and in so doing, creates and sustains the members' shared identity as irreverent breakaway troublemakers.

Keywords: *humour, belonging, inclusion/exclusion, Facebook, affiliative/aggressive.*

1. Introduction

Figure 1. Dictators and lemmings

An earlier publication (Mullan 2020) reported on how the use of spontaneous online humour contributed to a sense of belonging for members of a local community Facebook group. According to the Facebook page, the group's aims were to provide local members of an inner suburb of Melbourne with the opportunity to positively contribute to the lives of other people in the neighbourhood through "openness, compassion and empathy, collaborative problem solving, unity and inclusion, positivity, empowerment and action". The group was founded in April 2016 and prompted the establishment of a network of similar "Good Karma" groups across Australia (currently forty) with a combined total of over 62,000 members in May 2019.[1] Many of the posts in the group are from members seeking assistance for house/pet/babysitting, looking for recommendations for local services, promoting events, notifications of items lost and found (including pets), and/or offering goods that are no longer required to other members of the group at no cost. There are explicit guidelines around no: advertising, selling, complaining, negativity, political opinions, reporting crime, or offering information that has not been explicitly requested. Any posts that breach these guidelines are reported and/or removed and repeat offenders are banned from the group. (My own recent attempt to share a post from a local animal shelter announcing an abundance of animals looking for homes was refused.)

Perhaps inevitably, the strict guidelines (and, notably, the perceived lack of humour referred to in countless posts)[2] led to a growing sense of member dissatisfaction within several of the Good Karma groups, resulting in a number of rival groups being established with names like "[suburb] Good Enough Karma Network", "[suburb] Pretty Good Karma Network", and "[suburb] Good Korma Network". The Facebook Directory page for these rival groups "houses a list of the alternative Good Karma Networks that have been created across Melbourne because the 'real' Good Karma Networks are too strict".

Among these, in 2017 the "[my suburb] Actual Good Karma Network" was "created in opposition to [the original group's] arbitrarily-applied rules, their enforced happiness, and their suppression of any post that isn't about giving away lemons or asking to borrow small

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[1] https://www.goodkarmaeffect.com/ (Membership figures are no longer publicly available.)
[2] One thread of 138 comments on 15th April 2019 decrying the strict guidelines included the post "Anyone remember the post on free leaves or banning red cars? It used to be fun..." (the thread on free leaves was examined in Mullan (2020)).

appliances". The information claims that "[t]his group is a genuine community forum where people can discuss issues in a safe and respectful environment". The founder hopes that members "find this group useful, entertaining, and totally irreverent", where one "can post relevant stuff without fear of being arbitrarily banned". The welcome message proclaims: "Welcome to everyone fleeing the dictatorial excesses of the 'other' group! We hope you enjoy your new, light-hearted, irreverent community." The explicit reference to light-heartedness and irreverence[3] is particularly noteworthy, and the group information and welcome messages make the purpose of this rival group clear. To further signal the nature of the group, the Facebook banner is a photograph of the main high street in my suburb, with two photoshopped mobile phone towers added. The censorship of the discussion about these new local towers in the original group was the catalyst for the creation of this breakaway rival group.

2.   Previous studies

This study is informed by and combines research from several areas, namely social network sites and online communities, group identity and membership, affiliative vs. aggressive humour, and humour in online communication. The aim of the study is to show how the use of humour in this rival Facebook group is used to include and exclude members, and how it illustrates or contributes to a sense of belonging in this community, by answering the following specific research questions:
1.   How is humour in this rival Facebook group used to include and exclude members?
2.   How does the humour highlight and contribute to the members' sense of belonging to this online community?
In order to draw all of the above together, I will highlight the most relevant aspects of the afore-mentioned areas of research and show how these relate to the Facebook group under examination.

In existence since at least 1997 (Baym 2011), social network sites are the online equivalent of social networks, and have been defined by (B)boyd and Ellison (2007: 211) as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". For their part, de Souza and Preece refer to such sites as online communities, made up of "group[s] of people, who come together for a purpose online and who are governed by norms and policies" (de Souza & Preece 2004: 580). Schwämmlein and Wodzicki (2012: 388) later identified two main types of online communities: (i) common-bond (e.g., blogs, Facebook), where the members are primarily interested in one another; and (ii) common-identity (e.g., discussion boards, email lists), where individuals focus on shared characteristics (such as interests, attitudes, or values), or on a common task or purpose (such as sports teams or work groups). Lambert Graham (2016: 310) points out, however, that the distinction between the two types of communities is neither fixed, clear-cut, nor solely determined by the medium, as is the case here.

The Facebook group under investigation could best be described as an online (primarily common-identity) community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991), created for a specific purpose by a small group of self-declared dissidents in reaction to what was perceived as an overly authoritarian approach by the administrators of the original group. In their study of subversive humour in the workplace, Holmes and Marra (2002) liken joining a community of practice to an apprenticeship, where new members need to learn the appropriate behaviours and discourse

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[3] Goddard and Cramer (2016) claim that *irreverence* is an Australian cultural key word and deeply engrained in in the Anglo-Australian psyche (see also Discussion).

that characterise a certain group (such as humour). Not only does this group have shared attitudes, values and a common purpose, it has developed its own norms and behavioural standards (Baym 2011), and developed its own sense of identity and individuality.

Identity is an extremely complex area, a full discussion of which is not possible here. For the purposes of this study, however, I adopt Bucholtz & Hall's (2005: 587) definition of identity as "a discursive construct that emerges in interaction", which is particularly relevant for group identity. As also pointed out by Tanskanen (2018: 133), "identity is dynamic, interactive and contextualised". At the same time, identity is based on shared ideologies and beliefs, both of which play a significant role in the construction of group identity in particular (Tanskanen 2018). The very name and description of the "[my suburb] Actual Good Karma Network" sets up the identity the group wishes to display: the subversive breakaway group of troublemakers. This social identity is then constructed dynamically and contextually in interaction by the members in this online space, performed primarily (but not exclusively) through the use of humour. It is significant that humour and irreverence are explicitly mentioned as some of the objectives of the group.

Ultimately, what binds the group is the 'us vs them' mentality: the common enemy in the form of the original Good Karma Network (the "Dark Side") creates and strengthens this group's solidarity and identity. As Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997: 283) claimed, "what makes us part of an in-group is having in common an 'out group'". Hübler and Bell (2003) point out that the negotiation of group boundaries often involves aggressive humour, where members denigrate other individuals or groups to find their own status within the group.[4]

It is well known that the main social functions of humour are to unite or divide, and that both are often performed simultaneously (Meyer 2015). Meyer (2000) referred to humour as a "double-edged sword", uniting interactants through identification and clarification on the one hand (affiliative humour), and dividing them through enforcement and differentiation on the other (aggressive humour). For example, as will be shown in this study, laughing at what is perceived as flawed behaviour can reinforce unity among group members, as a feeling of superiority over those being ridiculed can coexist with a feeling of belonging (Duncan 1982, in Meyer 2000: 315). We can see here the superiority theory of humour and its application to disparagement humour, the latter defined by Ferguson and Ford (2008: 283–284) as humorous messages "that (are intended to) elicit amusement through the denigration, derogation, or belittlement of a given target (e. g. … social groups)". Dynel and Poppi (2020) refer to this as disaffiliative humour[5] (see also Dynel 2013), involving denigration and belittlement of the target. The group members manifest their superiority over the target while attempting to amuse other members, who also disaffiliate themselves from this deprecated – and for the most part, absent – target (see also Boxer & Cortés-Conde 1997), in this case the original Good Karma Network. This in turn reinforces group unity and creates a feeling of belonging.

Particularly relevant to the group under examination here is Robert's (2014) claim that humour is both the cause and effect of social networks, influencing how people affiliate with each other (Robert 2014: 709), and how social groups develop their own joking cultures. Fine and de Soucey (2005: 1) define a joking culture as "a set of humorous references that are known to members of the group to which members can refer and that serve as the basis of further interaction", noting that over time the joking becomes historicised. They go on to argue that there are five elements involved in the creation and continuation of themes within joking cultures. The item needs to be: known (by at least some members of the group); usable (i.e., it

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[4] It is important to reiterate that the group identity in this study is not always performed through humour; some of the "us vs them" discourse is critical and aggressive, and without humour, but this will not be examined here.

[5] Dynel (2021) also refers to this type of humour as "genuine humorous insults" as opposed to "ritual/jocular insults".

fits within the moral boundaries of the group); functional (in that it smooths interaction, builds cohesion, creates norms and/or sets group boundaries); appropriate in light of the group's status hierarchy; and triggered by some collectively experienced event (Fine & de Soucey 2005: 5).

Similarly, Hübler and Bell (2003) explain that humorous discourse becomes constitutive discourse when it defines shared group identities, demarcates the boundaries of a group, and/or sustains shared identity and culture. Humour influences the way social structures emerge and the way communities take form. They point out that this is amplified online, because the discourse represents the entirety of the group's interactions and experiences (Hübler & Bell 2003: 281), as in the case in the present study. This is backgrounded by what Suler (2004) famously called the online disinhibition effect, although I would argue that a sort of performative "exhibition" effect (my term) is also at work here. Tagg et al. (2017) apply the sociolinguistic term "context design" to this concept of how participants' awareness of the various ways in which their post may be understood both shapes and constrains what they say. Tagg et al. (2017) also introduce the notion of "intradiversity" to describe the complexity of the Facebook audience, rather than being organised along traditional offline community lines. This complexity and context design can be seen in the selected examples below.

3. Methodology and data

This Facebook group fits the afore-mentioned description of a common-identity community (Schwämmlein and Wodzicki, 2012), where individuals focus on interests that are shared by the community members such as attitudes, values, or a common task or purpose, resulting in a more cohesive and unified group identity. As explained above, this group was created by - and for - disgruntled members banned from the original group to be a more flexible platform for the local community. (Indeed, its original name was "Banned from [my suburb] Good Karma Network" for a few days when first created.) The group was founded in December 2017 and at the time of writing comprises 2,486 local members. According to the 2016 census, there were 10,812 residents in this area, meaning that approximately 25% of local residents are members (compared to the original local Good Karma group's current membership of 9,521). Comments in the posts in the breakaway "[my suburb] Actual Good Karma Group" suggest that many of its members still also belong to the original group (such as myself).

The data under examination consist of fifteen spontaneous humorous single comments or multi-post threads chosen from a period of 20 months, which represent all the examples of humorous posts relating specifically to belonging to this breakaway group and/or mocking the original group.[6] The instances of humour were identified using my own knowledge of both Facebook groups (see also below), and from the responses in the form of laughing emojis, laughter tokens (e.g., LOL, ha ha etc.), metalinguistic comments ("this is pure comedy gold"), and other signals of appreciation (repetition, exclamation marks and/or further amusing remarks). The posts are divided into three categories to reflect this division: primarily and overtly affiliative (n=1); primarily and overtly aggressive (n=7); both affiliative/aggressive (n=7). However, it is important to note that they are rarely exclusively one or the other. Indeed, by virtue of being affiliative towards one group, the humour in these examples is necessarily aggressive towards the other group, and vice versa.

The founder of the group gave permission for the analysis of the posts from inception up to and including 31st July 2019 (as this was the period that had already lapsed when the study commenced and meant that members would not be influenced by being observed when making

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[6] This included a systematic search of the group's page, rather than just relying on my personal feed due to the selective nature of Facebook algorithms.

any future posts).[7] A message was posted on the site explaining the research to the group members, and invited them to opt out (no-one did) and/or to participate in short survey and/or interview on their impressions and use of the humour in the group. Only four survey responses were received and there were no volunteers for an interview.
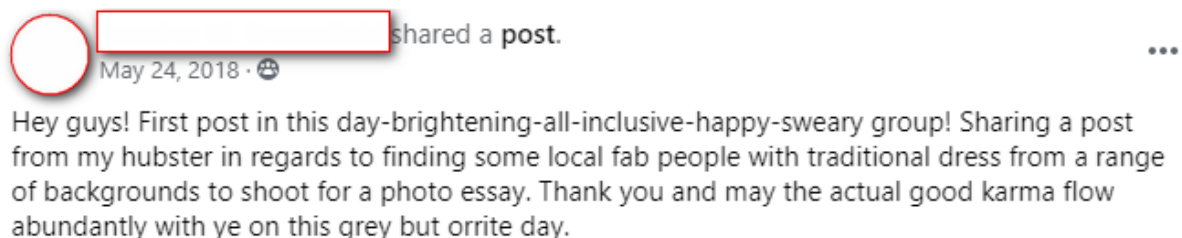
To analyse the posts, I follow the principles of the linguistic theoretical and methodological approaches outlined in CMDA (Herring 2004), which aim to provide a qualitative descriptive analysis of the detail of interactional practices in a specific context to show how all participants contribute to these practices. As is increasingly common among scholars studying discourse in social media (cf. Sinanan and McDonald 2018), I also used a participant-observer online ethnographic approach to more fully understand and describe the practices and references of this community. As a member of both the original Good Karma Network and this breakaway group, I was able to locate occurrences of humour which would not have been obvious to an outsider (e.g., Fig. 3). This insider status also allowed me to decode several insider jokes and allusions that informed and enhanced my analysis, and enabled me to check the membership status of posters in both groups. This combination of linguistics and ethnographic approaches provides both a macro and micro level of analysis, with which to better understand this virtual community.

4. Examples

Extracts of the threads presented below are taken directly from the Facebook page in the original format with identifying details removed. In the interests of space, I will present a selection of examples from each of the three categories referred to above: primarily affiliative; primarily aggressive; both affiliative and aggressive.

4.1. Primarily affiliative

In this example, this person begins their post asking for help by referring to the "day-brightening, all-inclusive happy-sweary group!" While not exactly laugh out loud material, the language play through the creative use of hyphens to create a potential slogan for the group, the non-standard but increasingly common addition of the adjectival ending 'y' to a verb to create "sweary", and the exclamation mark all signal a light-hearted tone. The friendly tone continues with the wish for good karma to flow abundantly to all, and the juxtaposition of Old English "ye" with the colloquial pronunciation of "all right" are all designed to amuse.

shared a **post.**
May 24, 2018 · 🌐

Hey guys! First post in this day-brightening-all-inclusive-happy-sweary group! Sharing a post from my hubster in regards to finding some local fab people with traditional dress from a range of backgrounds to shoot for a photo essay. Thank you and may the actual good karma flow abundantly with ye on this grey but orrite day.

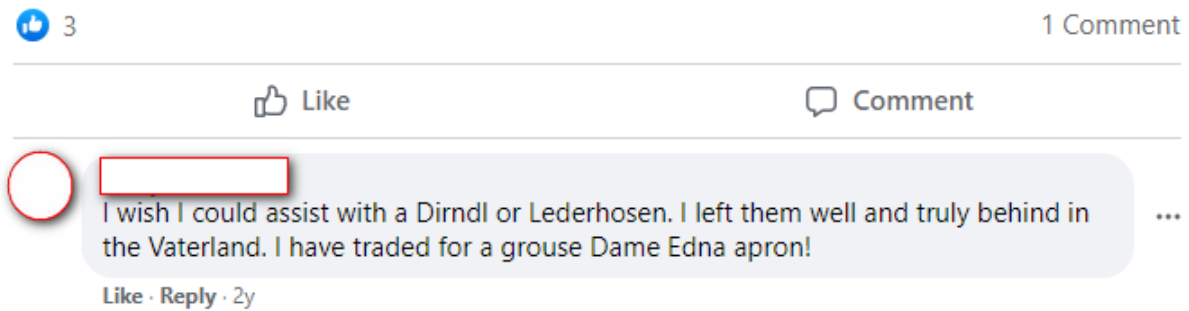[7] University ethics approval was also obtained (reference CHEAN B 2392-08/19).

Figure 2. Primarily affiliative

The author declares themselves a first-time poster in the group, but clearly signals that they know what the reputation and characteristics of this group are and why it was created (some six months earlier). "Day-brightening" refers to the group's propensity for humour; "all-inclusive" to the acceptance of all types of posts and the expression of opinions; "happy" to the general disposition of the group - perhaps caused by fewer (or no) arguments with the administrators over the content of posts; and "sweary" to a general feeling of irreverence and a much greater freedom of expression than in the original group.

The author is also a member of the original group and no doubt aware of all the 'troubles' over on the "Dark Side". While the out-group is not explicitly mentioned in this post, the 'us vs them' sentiment is evident. By complimenting the group in this way, and calling for "local fab" people, the poster is charming their way in to the group by flattering them, demonstrating their common ground and their own identification (Meyer 2000) and alignment with the values of the group and expressing a desire to belong. The apprentice, so to speak, (Holmes & Marra 2002) is signalling their knowledge of the expected behaviour and discourse in the group. The poster also makes a reference to the "Actual Good Karma" group name. Interestingly, however, the post only received one comment in response to the actual request for people in traditional dress, and three "likes", one of which was from the founder of the group.

4.2. Primarily aggressive

The sole objective of the following post was to entertain the group by attacking members of the original group. The reference to IKEA is an example of shared knowledge and in-group humour which can only be understood by those who were members of the original group. Since the closest IKEA store is located on the other side of Melbourne from this suburb (approximately 14km away), members of the original group regularly ask if anyone is going to IKEA and then ask them to buy something for them; alternatively, when people are going to IKEA they sometimes post to ask if anyone needs anything.

Figure 3. Primarily aggressive

While seemingly innocent on the surface, the humour here is aggressive, both in its appearance (a lack of signals of light-heartedness, such as emojis or exclamation marks), and its references. It is an example of what Dynel (2021) refers to as a genuine humorous insult. The poster is mocking the members of the original group who make the IKEA requests and offers. The joking culture of the group (Fine and de Soucey 2005) gives this poster the right to joke about this, and in doing so, they are making a clear differentiation (Meyer 2000) between the two groups and declaring their allegiance with this one against the other. The laughing at the flawed behaviour of the members of the "Dark Side" and the feeling of superiority over them reinforce the sense of group unity and belonging. As shown, this comment generated a lot of

comments and 29 appreciative reactions (including a "like" from the founder of the group), indicating how many members understood and appreciated the joke.

Most of the 27 comments constituted a side-sequence with people who clearly knew the poster personally and were asking about what had been purchased. However, some mocking in-group references were made to running out of tealight candles and exchanging them for succulents (both popular items for swapping in the original group). One person commented that they would now have to drive "all the way" out to IKEA themself, to which the original author posted a sarcastic horrified face emoji. Another member added "from [my suburb] probably", further mocking the idea that 14km is an unreasonable distance to travel to do one's own shopping. These comments and reactions condone and support the poster and their original irreverent post, showing that the humour was appreciated and successful, and encouraging further contributions. In their collective laughing at the other group, these members are united against them. This is also an example of what has been referred to variously as "joint fantasising" (Chovanec 2012, Stallone and Haugh 2017), and "fantasy humour" (Hay 2001), where the humorous scenario is collaboratively co-constructed by a number of participants.

Yus (2018) argues that humour serves as a "connective device" (p. 295) that brings people together, creating a sense of "closeness and an in-group feeling" (p. 297). This feeling is due to sharing the background knowledge needed to understand the humorous reference, as in this case. Those who do not share this knowledge cannot be part of the in-group. This is an example of what Hübler and Bell (2003: 281) call "constitutive discourse", as it is sustaining and shaping the group's shared identity and culture.

4.3. Affiliative/aggressive

The following example contains affiliative and aggressive humour in more equal measure. It is in two parts: the first part was posted to the original group; the second part is where the post is then shared to the subversive group. We will look at these in turn.

The indented section of the screenshot (indicated by the blue arrow) is taken from the original local Good Karma group, where the author has posted a provocative and ironic request for an expert in censorship. This is a direct face threatening attack aimed at the administrators (or the "guardians" as they are known in the original group), their strict rules, and their prompt removal of posts that flout these rules (accompanied by a reprimand via private messaging). As mentioned previously, this perceived strictness was the very catalyst for the establishment of the subversive group, and this post was obviously created with the sole intention of taunting the founder and/or moderators of the original group. (This was not an isolated incident; several members posted similar 'baiting' comments.) This post received ten favourable reactions and three appreciative comments from members of the original group.

Figure 4.1. Affiliative/aggressive part 1

Although Suler's (2004) disinhibition effect is in evidence here, what I would call an "exhibition effect" is even more prevalent. The original post was designed and performed entirely with the audience in mind – both the one being attacked and the one being entertained. The poster was acutely aware of how both audiences would understand and react to this post; indeed, it duly received a number of appreciative comments and reactions. (As the post was removed, there is no evidence of any further reactions following those captured here.) While dissociative anonymity and invisibility (Suler 2004) were no doubt in play, these members were keen to participate, and to show their approval and support, again demonstrating the collaborative nature of the humour in this thread.

A member of both groups then shared this post to the breakaway group for the amusement of its members, "tagging" the original author, who responded by saying "I've made my coffee and I'm now awaiting my special message from [founder of original group]" (Fig. 4.2 below). This instigated a flood of humorous and appreciative comments.
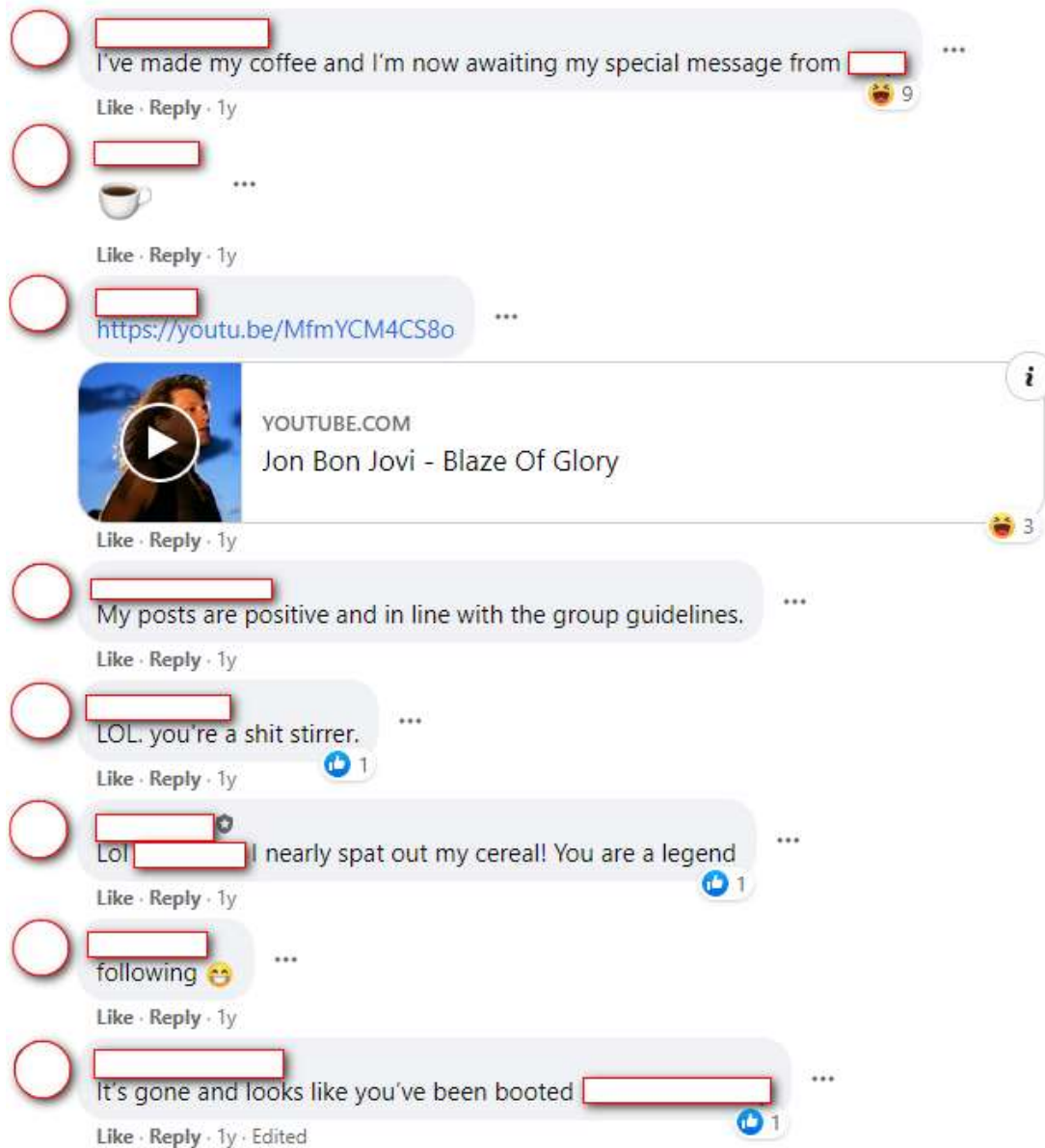
Figure 4.2. Affiliative/aggressive part 2

   While the two previous examples also include both affiliative and aggressive humour in the sense that by being one, they are automatically also the other, the actual humorous comment made reference to only one or the other (covertly in the affiliative example and covertly in the aggressive example). This third co-constructed example, however, contains explicit references to both groups, publicly announcing support for - and alignment with - the subversive group, while overtly attacking and mocking the original group. Whereas the target of the humour was absent (although understood) in the first two examples, in this one the initial post mocked the target directly to its online face, so to speak, before being shared (by another member) to the subversive group for their entertainment and approval. (See also Fig. 4.3.)
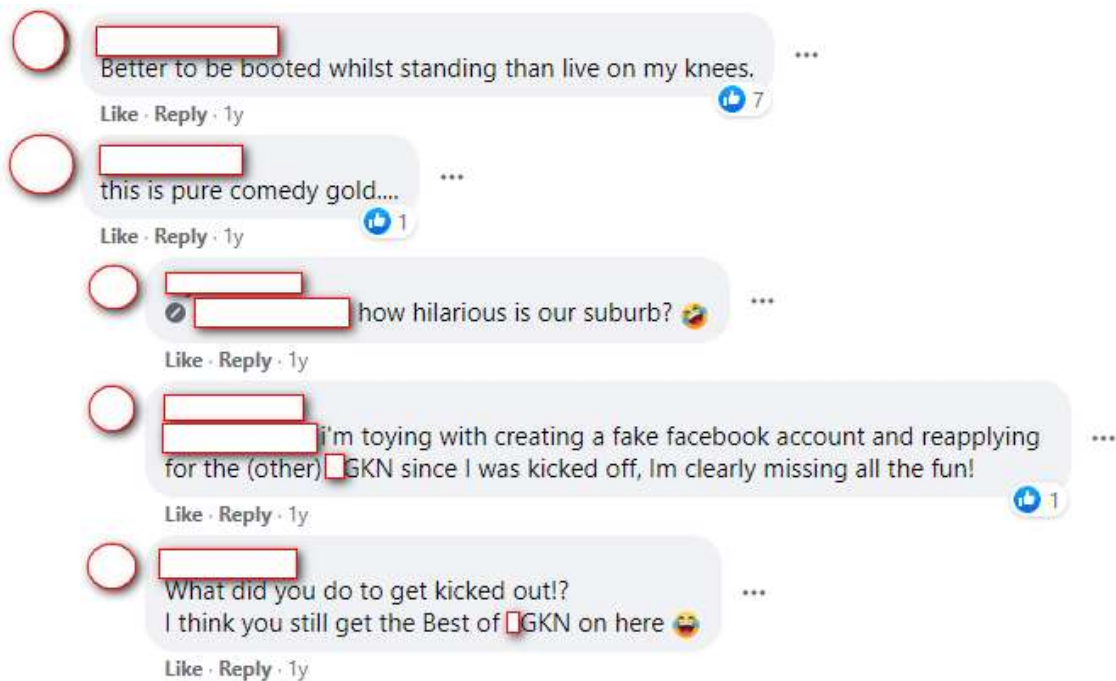
Fig. 4.3 Affiliative/aggressive part 3

This example of disparagement humour (Ferguson & Ford 2008) designed to denigrate and belittle the administrators of the "Dark Side" elicited great amusement. The supportive and appreciative comments for the author of the original post indicate high praise and collective admiration for this provocation (it is the founder of this subversive group that nearly spat out their cereal). Another member declares the suburb hilarious (more likely meaning this group), while another suggests it would be worth opening a new fake Facebook account to be able to re-join the other group and keep up with all the controversies. The next poster expresses an interest in why the latter was banned from the first group (a popular question as part of the solidarity building in this group – almost an initiation test; see also below), but points out that some members who are still in both groups post the best material from the original group in the breakaway one anyway, suggesting that only the controversial posts are worth knowing about. The comments demonstrate the dynamic construction and reinforcement of the group's identity as subversive troublemakers in interaction (Tanskanen 2018) and the use of aggressive humour to negotiate the group's boundary (Hübler & Bell 2003).

The final example in this section is a tongue-in-cheek poll created by the founder of the group, inviting people to say why they had left or been banned from the original Good Karma group. These responses were intended to be created by the members and to be worn as a badge of pride. (Two answers included direct references to the founder of the original group, one of which is a particularly insensitive and personal attack.) The poll produced six appreciative reactions, twelve comments, and votes from 29 members.
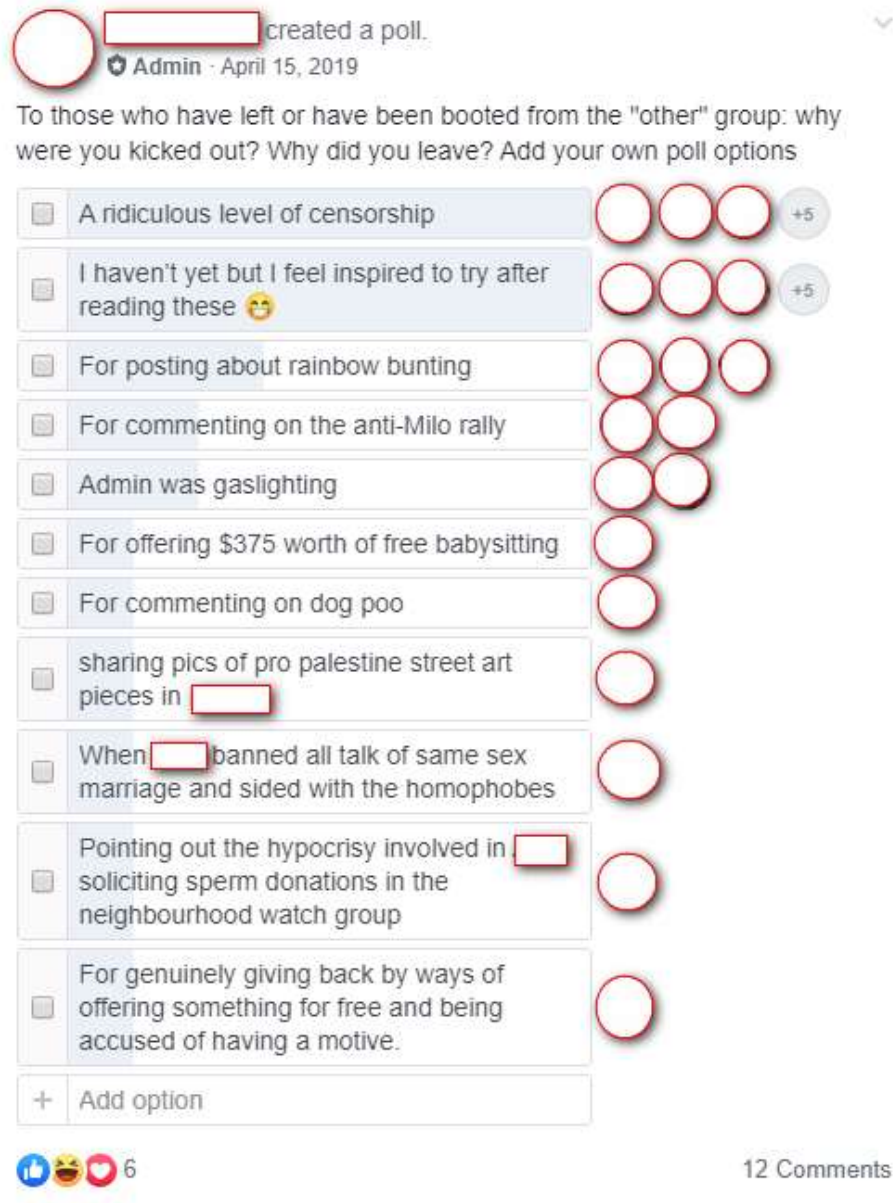
Figure 5. Poll

It is interesting to note that this poll was posted eighteen months after the creation of the group, suggesting that for some reason at that time the founder wished to strengthen the affiliative bonds among members by asking them why they had left the original (out)group and joined this rival (in)group. Perhaps it was an appropriate time to remind members of the common enemy over on the "Dark Side" and to foster the 'us vs them' mentality, strengthening the group's solidarity and identity.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Figure 6. Dark Side

The examples here all illustrate humour as a double-edged sword (Meyer 2000) used to unite the members of this subversive group by dividing them from the original "Dark Side". The humour creates the joking culture of the group, where appropriate topics for humour are understood and exploited (Fine & de Soucey 2005). The approval and appreciation of the humour is then fostered and/or jointly constructed by others, including the founder of the group who frequently "likes" and/or comments on humorous posts to show their approval. As argued by Cooper (2008), sharing and appreciating humour means that the individuals involved perceive a certain similarity between themselves, which makes them like each other more. Cooper concluded that "over time, humor expression and relationship quality will reciprocally influence each other" (2008: 1110).

The emergent humour also serves to define and demarcate the in-group members, and in so doing, creates and sustains their shared identity and culture as irreverent breakaway troublemakers. While not the sole basis for the creation of this group, humour was an important objective in the creation of the group which aimed to be "entertaining and totally irreverent". Goddard and Cramer (2016) and Goddard (2009) argue that being irreverent and not taking oneself too seriously are built into the very fabric of being Anglo-Australian, so it is particularly interesting to see that these notions formed the basis for the creation of this group. Without saying it explicitly (and perhaps without realising it), the founder and members of the group were reacting to what they perceived as a demonstration of anti-Australianness by the moderators of the original group who tried to curtail (amongst other things) the use of humour in the group. The new group, in turn, demonstrates its larrikinism, with its links to anti-authority attitudes and defiance of social convention), where targets for humour can include "not just authority, but … anything that people hold dear and take seriously" (Goddard & Cramer 2016: 97). The irreverent humour serves to sustain the group, in turn providing the context for more humour.

Given the extremely limited number of survey responses received, we obviously cannot draw any conclusions. Nevertheless, two of the remarks support the claims made here about the feeling of identity and inclusion fostered in this particular group. When asked why they enjoyed the humour used in this Facebook community, one participant answered: "It's refreshing when compared to the dark side.....and less needy wankers....i.e. more people with a sense of humour....!" And in answer to a question about if/how the humour made them feel differently towards the community in this group, another participant said: "I don't know many, if not the majority of the members, but we have something in common". This also supports Baym's (1995) longstanding claim that humour in digital communication establishes group solidarity.

Interestingly, but perhaps understandably, the subversive and aggressive humour aimed at the original group was much more prevalent in the early days of the breakaway group (the first twelve to eighteen months), when it was obviously still establishing its identity and building

solidarity among the members. This aligns with the observation that the initial phase of group formation involves a "cohesion-oriented humor for the emerging group identity" (Robinson & Smith-Lovin 2001: 144).[8] The humour still exists in this Facebook community, but is less frequently aimed at attacking the original group, and seems to be less frequent overall; in fact, many of the posts are now standard requests for help and are posted in both groups. There are a number of possible reasons for the development of these new norms. Firstly, the humour was an integral part of the construction of the group's identity in the early period. Since then, the original motives of the group seem to have evolved, and asserting and/or publicly declaring the group's renegade identity is perhaps no longer required (although a banishment from the original group results in the occasional flare up). Secondly, in late 2018, the founder of the breakaway group moved to another suburb and started up another group in that area (which I am not a member of), resulting in a decrease in the aggressive humour, a style that this person favoured and often instigated. Finally, as with all new trends, people tend to lose interest and move on from something after a period of time.[9]

A number of aspects warrant further comment and investigation, although they are not all directly related to humour. The fact that many members are still in both groups is interesting (including one member in particular who displays and performs a completely different identity in each group, exhibiting an extremely aggressive style of humour in the rival group). This may indicate that members appreciate the different joking cultures (Fine and de Soucey 2005) and values of each group for different reasons, and/or that they wish to observe the interactions in both. It is also well known in the breakaway group that the administrators of the first group have 'spies' in the second group who report back to them on what the dissidents 'get up to'. This supports my argument that much of the humour in the breakaway group is performed with an 'exhibition effect', for the benefit of the group members, but also for the 'spies'. Not only that, but most members use their real names, many have photographs of themselves as their profile pictures, and it is difficult to remain completely anonymous in this neighbourhood. Many members know each other personally, can recognise each other from their Facebook profile image, and/or can click through to view a member's personal profile (which in most cases are not set to private). It would also be interesting to investigate the "listeners" (Crawford 2009), both the 'spies' (who might more aptly be called 'lurkers') for their reporting purposes, but also the members of the breakaway group who listen, but do not actively participate.

Finally, it is also noteworthy that on occasion there have been comments from members suggesting that this breakaway group is unnecessarily and/or overly harsh or aggressive towards the original one. (Indeed, there are more examples of serious insults and aggressive comments directed at the founder and administrators of the original group than those which contain humour. Although, as pointed out by Meyer (2000), harsh comments directed at disliked groups are in fact often perceived as humorous.) As the member in the following example commented, there's "not much good karma here". This comment was, however, not well received, and members quickly closed ranks against him.

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[8] Fiadotava found a similar evolution from ironic to genuine fandom in her (2021) study of the FK Slutsk Worldwide Facebook group created by Australian football fans and dedicated to the eponymous Belarusian club.

[9] It is beyond the scope of this paper, but one possibility would be to apply complexity theory to track and understand the evolution of the collective humour in the group, as in Demjén 2018.

Figure 7. Not much good karma

The first response to this post is a rather biting and sarcastic one (Boxer & Cortés-Conde 1997), suggesting that the author would be better off in the original group than this one. The next comment agrees that there is not much good karma in this group (the irreverent and

rebellious "nope" implying that good karma is not the objective), but that there is a lot of silliness and humour. This then prompts a suggestion to change the group's name to the "[my suburb] Bad Karma Network (BKN)", thereby proudly owning the bad karma connection and the 'bad' identity; this suggestion is supported by others. Another poster suggests changing the name to the "[my suburb] Laugh out Loud Network (LOLN)", abbreviated by yet another member to the "[my suburb] 🤣Network (N)". Some less than complimentary remarks towards and about the original author of the post follow those shown here, including one by the founder of the group confirming that the author has left the group. This aggressive attack on the original author reaffirms the group's identity as subversive dissidents, clearly demonstrating to any would-be detractor that they and their opinions are not welcome here. Tanskanen (2018) refers to this as an ideological battle between one participant's personal identity and the group identity.

In another example of clear messaging, the following meme - posted two months later at the end of a 51-post thread discussing the reasons for a sudden influx of new members to the group - sends a warm welcome to any "weirdos" wanting to join their tribe.

Figure 8. Welcome

The examples and analyses demonstrate that:

[i]ndividuals strategically construct jokes that resonate with the intelligence, character, and goodwill of others in hopes of defining themselves as part of a group. The affirming laugh or devastating silence of other individuals quickly establishes boundaries for a group. Humor, then, helps participants to find their place in a community and simultaneously constitutes or reshapes that community.

Hübler & Bell (2003: 282)

It is to be hoped that the present study has demonstrated that this holds true for any community, including social network sites, and how such locally constituted humour can be used for the purposes of inclusion and exclusion in a Facebook group such as this.

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