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"You're a Feral, Man": Banter as an Index of Footballer Identity

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Abstract

Dressing room banter, a key discourse strategy among footballers globally, is a traditional way of performing the macro identity of footballer. Given that linguistic processes operate at both global and local levels (Blommaert, 2003), we should expect that each team's banter has a local dimension as well. This article examines how one university team employs dressing room banter both to align with the global footballer identity and to construct a local identity. Using a discursive approach to identity and an ethnographic methodology, I analyse naturally occurring examples of dressing room banter. I pay particular attention to the local manifestation of global discourse strategies and ideologies, especially masculinity, focusing on the manner in which macro norms are enacted in ways compatible with local ones. The analysis demonstrates how the participants construct multifarious identities, emergent at different structural levels. While they engage with the discourse strategy of dressing room banter, thus indexing membership at the global level, the players also negotiate a localised form of banter, one that is more supportive and less face-threatening than the normative masculinity which underpins stereotypes of footballers. To account for the players' varying levels of alignment, I propose a tiered model following the principle of layered simultaneity (Blommaert, 2005), which conceptualises the team's banter as a multifunctioning index of the footballer identity.

Keywords

football; masculinity; banter; interactional humour; New Zealand

1 Introduction

Football has a long-running association with normatively masculine identities (see Adams, Anderson & McCormack, 2010), which, at an interactional level, manifest as aggressive and competitive conversational styles (Schnurr & Holmes, 2009). In a footballing context, this stereotypical conversational style is often recognised as *dressing room banter*, a discourse strategy that pervades footballing culture at the macro level, perhaps due to the fact that it facilitates team bonding in a way that the players find safely masculine. In this study, I apply a discourse analytic lens to the dressing room banter of one local university football team, focusing on the discursive construction of identities.

Dressing room banter has had recent prominence in the mainstream media and public eye. For example, the relationship between dressing room banter and toxic, hegemonic masculinity has been emphasised of late, largely in connection with comments made by Donald Trump in 2005, which came into the public eye in 2016 (*NBC News,* 2016). Trump asserted that it is acceptable to sexually harass women when you are a celebrity – a statement he later dismissed as merely "locker room talk" (using the American counterpart of dressing room banter). These comments received public and media backlash, with many arguing that Trump's dismissal of the comments and apparent inability to recognise their damage is symptomatic of a wider societal culture of tolerating behaviour which enacts men's hegemony over women (*The New York Times,* 2016). Some took an even more negative view, arguing that such comments serve to "normalise sexual assault" (*Vox,* 2016). This paints a highly negative picture of dressing room banter, with Trump implying that all discourse of a toxically masculine nature can be described as 'locker room talk'.

Further anecdotal evidence also suggests that there is a deep ideological relationship between dressing room banter and footballing culture, and that the former is strongly connected to the macro identity of *footballer*, particularly in its jocularly abusive form (verbal abuse that is intended to be humorous (Culpeper, 1996, 2005; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012)). While there is little scholarly research in this area (but see Kuiper, 1991, and Long, Carrington & Spracklen, 1997, both focusing on rugby), a simple Google search of "dressing room banter in football" returns a vast number of results, the majority of which are newspaper or magazine articles describing previous instances of dressing room banter among professional footballers (e.g. *Sabotage Times, 2011; Sky Sports, 2017; Chronicle Live, 2017*). The tone of the banter can be described as highly jocularly abusive – a style traditionally associated with normative masculinity (Schnurr & Holmes, 2009; Holmes & Schnurr, 2005). *Sabotage Times* (2011), for example, describes the banter a young foreign player received, to the extent that he often went home from training in tears. Kieron Dyer, a former professional footballer, shares similar experiences, discussing how he was often the victim of racial abuse alleged to be banter (*Sky Sports,* 2017). Further exemplifying dressing room banter's status in footballing culture, Neil Collins, another former professional footballer asserts that what players tend to miss from their playing days after retiring is the banter in the dressing room, also humorously stating that the banter he experienced was at times brutal, which made the dressing room "no place for the faint of heart" (*Chronicle Live,* 2017). Drawing on my own experiences, I also argue that dressing room banter is interconnected with the footballer identity. I have, for instance, witnessed the expectation that a footballer engage in banter. Thus, I argue that engagement with dressing banter is a principal method of performing the macro identity of footballer.

Anecdotal evidence can only take us so far, however. Moreover, while the evidence above suggests a global, stereotypical form of dressing room banter, an understanding of the local manifestation of banter in different discourse communities is required to gain a more encompassing view of dressing room banter and how it functions. To that end, in this article I undertake an investigation of the way in which footballers use both global and local discourse patterns to construct identities at these two levels, taking into account the local enactment of global discourse strategies and ideologies, principal among which is masculinity.

1.1 Global and Local Discourse

While much recent work on global and local facets of language has focused on the globalisation of specific language varieties (e.g. Higgins, 2009; Lo Bianco, Orton & Gao, 2009), aspects of discourse have also been investigated (see Coupland, 2003). Within discourse analysis,

scholars have pointed out that specific social discourses can undergo globalisation, as can discourse genres, styles and strategies. When discourse is globalised, it undergoes a process of relocalisation (Pennycook, 2010) in the immediate social context, where it receives its local form (see Jonsson & Muhonen, 2014). The relocalised discourse draws on discursive and semiotic resources from "several layers of context, operating at various levels", a phenomenon Blommaert (2005, p. 125) terms *layered simultaneity*. The resulting discourse is heavily influenced by both local and global norms – contextual constraints which shape the form of the relocalised discourse. Indeed, Pennycook (2010) argues that all language is subject to local considerations, and the form of discourse is inseparable from the immediate social context, regardless of whether globalisation has taken place. He argues that we necessarily orient towards our local surroundings in discourse, and "what we do with language within different institutions – churches, schools, hospitals – ...depends on our reading of these physical, institutional, social and cultural spaces" (p. 2). Therefore, all discourse is embedded within a number of layers of context, and an analysis of both these global and local aspects produces more nuanced conclusions. Dressing room banter as a discourse strategy offers access to these global and local facets, and can provide insights into identity processes in the context of football. The discursive approach to identity is well-suited to the analysis of multiple levels of discourse, as discussed below.

1.2 Identity and Stance

Firmly located within the social constructionist paradigm (see Lazzaro-Salazar, 2017), the discursive approach considers how identity is negotiated in interaction, and, using analytical tools such as *indexicality* and *positionality* (see Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), how it emerges at a variety of levels. With roots in the seminal work of Silverstein (1976, 1985) and Ochs (1992, 1993), indexicality is the phenomenon whereby linguistic forms become imbued with certain contextually-dependent social meanings. Positionality complements indexicality by acknowledging that linguistic indices function on multiple structural levels. For example, when speakers use indices in interaction, they may index macro social categories, such as age and gender, but, crucially, these same indices also have social value at the micro level. They may, for instance, index membership of a local community, the specifics of which are typically learned by the analyst through ethnographic observation (Eckert, 2000). In practice, speakers construct these macro and micro identities in the immediate interactional context, by displaying stances through the phenomenon known as *stance accretion* (Du Bois, 2007; Rauniomaa, 2003; Jaffe, 2009; Bucholtz, 2009).

Stance accretion describes linguistic forms as indexing interactional stances – epistemically and affectively oriented positions one takes to other people, concepts, or objects in the immediate discourse. These stances mediate between the linguistic form and identity; an accumulation of stances, as opposed to a linguistic feature in isolation, becomes associated with certain identities (Jaffe, 2009). For example, the New Zealand English address term *bro* primarily indexes the interactional stances of solidarity and rapport (Bell & Kuiper, 2000), and it is the accretion of such stances that constructs one's identity. The cumulative expression of these stances often indexes a Māori ethnic identity, for instance, because of the culture's strong connection with such values (Johnston & Robertson, 1993). It is important to note, however, that identity is negotiated with others in interaction. Wilson (2011, p. 21) terms this the "intersubjective negotiation of identity", whereby the meaning displayed by the speaker receives social value in its interpretation by the addressee; the addressee can assign a position to the speaker based on the ongoing interaction (see Jaffe, 2009). Therefore, identity is always

co-constructed, and the above address term, *bro*, may receive different interpretations depending on the immediate interactional context. If used in a footballing context, for instance, it may index masculinity, as *bro* has a documented association with masculine identities (Giles-Mitson, 2016). By extension, *bro* could index the macro footballer identity through the association between this identity category and masculinity, on which I elaborate below.

1.3 Masculinity

Football has a deep-running ideological relationship with normative masculinity. Indeed, Anderson & McGuire (2010, p. 257) assert that prototypically masculine sports such as football serve as social institutions in which "a dominant… ethos of orthodox masculinity is transmitted between generations". Normative masculinity has been characterised differently by a number of diverse scholars. Providing insights from sociology, Roberts et al. (2021, p. 24) discuss the homosocial aspect of normative masculinity, that is, "the platonic social relations and bonds between people of the same sex". Within the dynamics of these relations, men are afforded the opportunity to perform various aspects of a typically masculine identity, such as homophobia, disalignment with femininity, and intra-group competition, particularly with regard to physical prowess. It has been argued that these characteristics fall under the umbrella of *hegemonic masculinity* (e.g. Kimmel, 1994; Connell, 1995; Flood, 2008), a form of masculinity which explicitly reproduces structures of patriarchal gender oppression. Thus, normative masculinity can be treated as the reification (in this case linguistic) of hegemonic masculinity, the latter operating at a more socio-structural level.

Scholars have identified a number of linguistic strategies interactants may employ to index normative masculinity in interaction. Schnurr and Holmes (2009) review a number of previous studies examining typically masculine styles of discourse. They comment that normative masculinity is associated with linguistic techniques such as a lack of conversational co-construction (Coates, 2007), using competitive and confrontational discursive devices (Coates, 2003), regular interruptions and competition over who holds the floor, and unmitigated face-threats. Phenomena such as these link in with the overall interactional style of normative masculinity, which is direct, confrontational and aggressive. This style of masculinity is an important consideration when banter is examined in a footballing context, as such masculinity is often interactionally enacted through dressing room banter.

1.4 Identity Through Interactional Humour

Given the primacy of banter in global footballing culture, it is important to discuss it as a linguistic phenomenon. Dressing room banter is rarely discussed linguistically, though I would argue that it can be simply characterised as any interactional humour a team negotiates. Therefore, the linguistic analysis of dressing room banter is, in essence, the analysis of interactional humour, which has received an increasing amount of attention within linguistics and sociopragmatics (e.g. Attardo, 1994; Ermida, 2011; Giora, 1995; Kotthoff, 1996; Norrick, 2003; Seewoester, 2011). Scholars have discussed aspects such as its varying forms and multifarious functions, seeking a unified framework for analysing humour as a linguistic occurrence. For example, the conceptualisation of humour as a frame – a "communicative mode" (Mulkay, 1988) in which utterances therein are, by definition, humorous – has been an important development (Dynel, 2011; Norrick, 2003). Dynel (2011, p. 219) defines frames as

dynamic entities, which is appealing to those working within a social constructionist framework. She argues that frames are "an interactive event… centred on rules and expectations but negotiated and co-constructed by interacting parties". Thus, a humorous frame is initiated when a speaker offers a humorous contribution. Fellow interactants can elect either to strengthen the frame by supplying more humour or challenge it by contributing a tonally conflicting remark. The co-construction of frames is important for these reasons, but also because the way in which humorous frames are negotiated is consequential for the identities that interlocutors index.

Much fruitful research has centred on the co-construction of humorous frames in interaction. Holmes (2000, 2006) in particular has made important contributions in this area, proposing a framework for analysing interactants' pragmatic orientations during sequences of humour (see also Holmes & Marra, 2002). She makes a useful distinction between supportive and contestive contributions, the former type tending to "agree with, add to, elaborate, or strengthen the propositions or arguments of previous contribution(s)" (Holmes, 2006, p. 33). Contestive remarks, however, will often "challenge, disagree with, or undermine the propositions or arguments put forward in earlier contributions" (Holmes, 2006, p. 33). Importantly, contestive and supportive remarks can co-exist in an interaction. Thus, the analyst takes account of the contribution and its consequence for the interaction as a whole to understand the emic intention. Holmes adds a further layer of depth, distinguishing between *maximally* and *minimally* collaborative humour. In maximally collaborative sequences, features such as increased overlap and concurrent speech, which indicate heightened involvement (Hay, 2001) and speakers seeking alignment with each other (Gumperz, 1982), are prevalent. In contrast to the supportive-contestive dichotomy, maximal and minimal levels of collaboration cannot co-exist in interaction, as they are not terms that exist at the level of each contribution, but rather describe the nature of the interaction as a whole.

The pragmatic orientations of speakers during humour construction are critical, as they index certain interactional stances which, in turn, indirectly index membership of an identity category. For example, if a speaker offers contributions that are supportive and maximally collaborative, they are likely indexing stances of solidarity and rapport. Maximal collaboration also aligns with Coates' (1989, 1996) characterisation of typically feminine talk, which features a large amount of overlap and an 'all together now approach' often with syntactically aligned contributions, resulting in a "richly textured, cohesive, and highly integrated shared floor" (Holmes, 2006, p. 36). Conversely, speakers that co-construct contestive and minimally collaborative sequences are more likely indexing a stance of disalignment or competitiveness, indexed with normative masculinity and the footballer identity. The interpretation of these acts is dependent on the norms of the community, however, as noted by Spencer-Oatey (2000) in her discussion of rapport management.

To that end, this study is concerned with how banter is used by footballers to construct identities at global and local levels, with specific attention paid to the varieties of masculinity which may or may not manifest in interaction. In order to understand how banter functions in the team, especially the local meanings that the players negotiate during sequences of humour, an emic perspective is critical (see Marra & Lazzaro-Salazar, 2018). Below, I discuss how I acquired such a perspective in the method I used.

2 Methodology

2.1 Data

An analysis focusing on both global and local identities requires a methodology which allows access to both arenas. My understanding of the global came from my many years of experience as a football player and fan, the latter consisting of understanding of wider footballing culture stemming from related media. For insight into local meanings, I used an ethnographic method, (partially) integrating myself into the team community. In enacting this, I aimed to strike a balance between an emic and etic approach as far as possible, locating myself at a midpoint between the two extremes of (almost) complete integration into the community (Wilson, 2011) and participating minimally as an observer (Bryman, 2016; Wolfers, File & Schnurr, 2017). I sought to break down the barriers between myself and the participants (Eckert, 2000, p. 71), giving the latter control during data collection, endeavouring to work *with* the team, rather than researching *on* them (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton & Richardson, 1992).

The team itself was a local university men's football team, whose players were aged between 18 and 30. The vast majority of players were Pākehā, apart from two who identified as English. The team is the top team in the University football club and competed in the third tier of amateur club football at the time. Access to the team was gained through personal connections to the club, and I sought each participant's explicit consent before beginning observations and recordings, following methods approved by the Human Ethics Committee of my institution.

The data comprises observations, audio recordings, and interviews. I describe the former two methods, which provided my core data set, in more detail below. The interviews were used as a more informal data source; they were not recorded and served the primary goal of developing my contextual understanding surrounding certain past events involving the team, as well as checking the accuracy of my transcriptions.

2.2 Observations

I undertook observations in three key areas: training sessions, matchdays, and social gatherings after matches. The aim of the observations was to familiarise myself with the local practices of the team. These include ritualistic practices (Wilson, 2017), such as the formulaic customs which constitute a training session, as well as the discursive norms and practices unique to the community. The observations also achieved the simultaneous function of normalising my presence (Copland & Creese, 2015), assisting in my endeavour to become a trusted research partner.

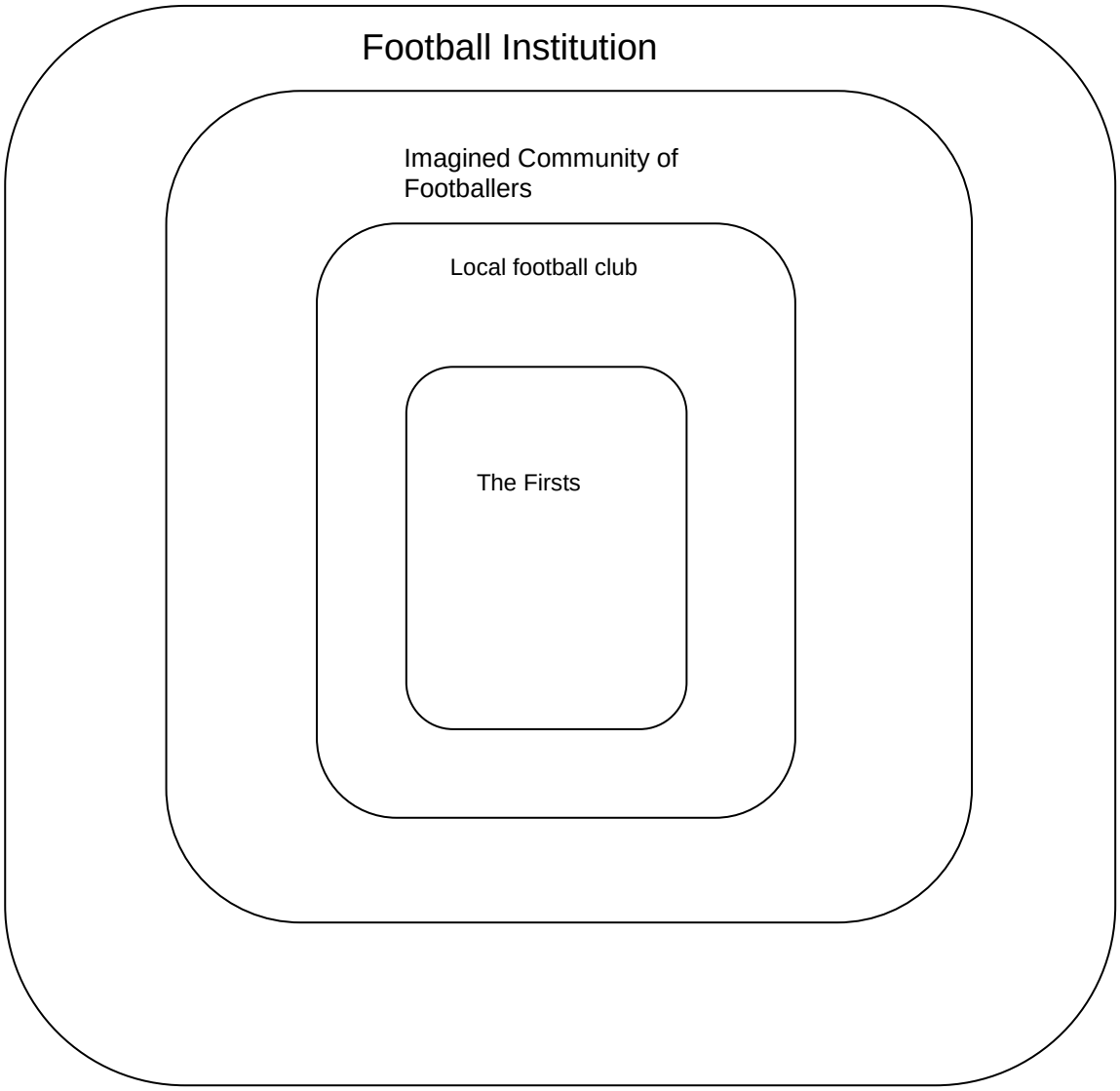
During observations, I took as active a role in the team's practices as was appropriate, in order to gain an insider understanding (Swann & Maybin, 2008). This included attending after-match social gatherings at the club rooms, an important site of meaning negotiation in the team, and training sessions. During the latter, I assisted with various organisational tasks, following Wilson (2011), such as setting up training drills and collecting stray balls. This allowed me to operate in close proximity to the participants, integrating me further into the group and the shared discourse. While I aimed to work closely with the participants, I tried to mitigate the "shadowing" (Copland & Creese, 2015, p. 38; Kusenbach, 2003; Czarniawska, 2007) inherent in observational situations, always endeavouring to be sensitive to the effect of my presence.

2.3 Recordings

From the early stages of planning the research, my intention was to record in the dressing room in order to capture the team's dressing room banter. It is notoriously difficult to record in changing rooms, due to large amounts of simultaneous talk in an enclosed, echoey space. Wilson (p.c. 13/07/18) has spoken of these difficulties, which were particularly pronounced in his study, due to the fact that he used a single recorder dangling from the ceiling of the changing room in which he recorded (see Wilson, 2011). This method of recording failed to isolate the speech of individual players, instead capturing a large amount of concurrent speech, which was difficult to meaningfully transcribe. To address this issue, I used a trial and error type method of recording, constantly re-positioning the recorders for each session to determine how best to capture the interactions of just a few players of interest each time. Two recorders were used for this, both placed in the changing room before and after matches on five occasions, which captured the players' interactions for around 20 minutes pre- and post-match. I was only present in the changing room to set up the recorders, considering it inappropriate and potentially detrimental to be present while the data was being collected (cf. Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). This method resulted in approximately three hours of data over the 10 recording sessions. The data was of the highest quality when the recorders were positioned on the bench directly next to the players whose interactions I wished to record. I regularly negotiated with the players while deciding where to place the recorders, seeking to put them in as unobtrusive a position as possible. Moreover, I explicitly drew all players' attention to them before each recording session, to eliminate any suggestion of unethical, surreptitious recording. While the participants knew the recorders were present, they began to ignore them as the recording sessions went on, regarding them as "a standard part of the furniture" (Holmes, 2006, p.. 31–32).

2.4 Theoretical Stance

In the analysis, I took an approach theoretically aligned with Blommaert (2005), understanding discourse as embedded within multiple layers of context which manifest themselves in interaction. In the case of this team (henceforth the Firsts), the various communities which emerged as relevant were the following (conceptualised as a layered model, following Holmes, Marra & Vine, (2011)):



It is initially clear that the Firsts sit within a wider club, which contains a number of different teams competing at different levels. I have opted to conceptualise the macro community as an imagined community – a global identity category. Following Anderson (2006) and Wenger (2000), an imagined community can be described as a group with seemingly disparate members, who, rather than engage in regular interaction, conceptualise themselves as belonging, due to the sharing of discursive norms. This is an effective lens through which to view the Firsts, as they use certain global discourse patterns to construct themselves in relation to this community, as will become apparent. Finally, we can view all these layers as embedded within a wider institution: the footballing institution (see Meân, 2001) – a social and cultural institution in which, according to Critcher (1994, p. 78), "toughness and aggression are valued". These values percolate down to the imagined community, and manifest in the kind of jocularly abusive, normatively masculine banter that is stereotypical among footballers (as discussed earlier). These attributes may further filter down to the local communities, including the Firsts, where they are manifested at the face-to-face interactional level. Therefore, an understanding of the values and discursive norms of the imagined community is critical to build a cohesive picture of the Firsts' banter. To that end, the analysis is concerned with how the

Firsts align, or disalign, with the imagined community, and the implications this has for the local identities that the players negotiate.

3 Analysis

3.1 Indexicality to the Imagined Community

Among the players, indexicality to the imagined community of footballers occurs in complex ways. It is at times overt, but often implicit. The following extract exhibits overt alignment with the imagined community:

Example 1: Shit Chat

Context: I ask Paul,[i] *who is sitting beside Connor, if I can put the recorder next to him.*

1.	Nick:	can that go there + is that alright?
2.	Paul:	yeah yeah yeah that's fine
3.	Connor:	are you gonna get Paul's shit chat?
4.	Nick:	[enthusiastically]: yeah //yeah\:
5.	Connor:	/[drawled]: oh: you\\ //don't want that eh\ you do not
6.		want that absolute crap
7.	Nick:	//[laugh]\

Paul is in his first season at the club, so is unlikely to have a perfect grasp of the team's interactional norms. Connor is also relatively new, but is in his second season, so arguably has a better understanding of the team's discursive patterns. In line 1, I introduce a transactional frame, negotiating whether I can put the recorder next to Paul. After consent from Paul (line 2), Connor dynamically shifts the frame (see Dynel, 2011), introducing contestive humour through the form of jocular abuse into the interaction (line 3). By labelling Paul's talk as *shit chat*, he is suggesting that it is of very low quality, unworthy of engaging with in normal interaction, let alone being analysed. I strengthen the humorous frame in line 4, by implying that I am eager to collect *shit chat*. In lines 5 and 6, Connor acknowledges the referential content of my contribution, further emphasising the fact that Paul's interactions do not merit intellectual discussion.

Based on the extract, Paul appears not to support the humorous frame (see Hay, 2001). It is possible that he supported it non-verbally, by smiling for example, but this was not the case, as I was involved in the interchange myself and recall the details. Even though he refuses to support the humour, failing to attend to it verbally (Haugh, 2014) he likely still acknowledges the attempt at humour; Zajdman (1995) has argued that we would expect an interactant to show that they recognise an attempt at humour, even if they elect not to support it, as failure to do so can be face-threatening. If this is the case, the lack of Paul's contributions could be analysed as covertly contestive, in contrast to Connor's overtly challenging comments. The resulting sequence of banter is contestive and minimally collaborative (Holmes, 2006) – a style noted earlier as associated with normative masculinity (Schnurr & Holmes, 2009). Banter like this can be seen to index the global footballer identity by indexing stances of normative masculinity (Adams et al., 2010).

While Connor overtly aligns with the imagined community in *Shit Chat*, much of the players' banter showed evidence of disalignment with global footballing norms. This phenomenon is illustrated in Example 2, below:

Example 2: Shot Connor

Context: The team have just lost for the first time at home. Sam asks who the final goal ricocheted off (i.e., who scored the own goal that meant the team lost).

1.	Sam:	who'd that goal come off + the last one?
2.	Dave:	connor + it was going wide otherwise.
3.	Sam:	i know it was
4.	Jim:	shot connor fucking //hell\ + nah
5.	Dave:	/[laugh]\\
6.	Sam:	that's a fine[ii]

As the team have just fallen to their first loss at home, spirits are naturally low. Connor has just scored the own goal that meant the side lost, so he will be feeling particularly dejected. A serious frame is initially introduced (lines 1–3), but is then shifted to a humorous one (line 4), with Jim mockingly congratulating Connor for scoring the own goal (*Shot* is New Zealand slang for *well done* (Kruger & Kruger, 2012), with an implicit *good* preceding it, in this instance used sarcastically). What is most interesting is Jim's rapid mitigation of the remark through *nah*. Through the initial instance of jocular abuse, Jim could be seen to be indexing a stance of normative masculinity through contestive humour (Holmes & Schnurr, 2005; Holmes, 2006; Schnurr & Holmes, 2009). Therefore, his swift retraction of the remark could be interpreted as a desired disalignment with this kind of masculinity, which may be a marked stance in the team. Moreover, he appears to be protecting Connor's face by asserting that the jocular criticism was not to be taken seriously. Such positive face work was common among the players, as the next extract evidences:

Example 3: Hold on a Minute

Context: Some of the players reflect on the defeat they just suffered.

1.	Lucas:	they scored three goals in //10 minutes\
2.	Mike:	/yeah but\\ they were also slower + it's easier to do
3.		it when the ball [unintelligible]
4.	Smithy:	nah they should've scored after about four and a half
5.		seconds
6.	Dave:	[laugh]
7.	Lucas:	[unintelligible] it was a great cross
8.	Smithy:	turn around and there's like four guys just stood at the
9.		back post
10.	Dave:	i know i was like hold on a minute [laugh]

Smithy introduces the humorous frame (line 4), jokingly criticising his and Mike's defensive performance by claiming that the opposition *should've scored after about four and a half seconds*; as the team's centre backs, Smithy and Mike are the players primarily responsible for preventing the opposition from scoring, so the former's comment is highly self-critical. Dave responds positively to the humorous frame (line 6), and Lucas appears to defend Smithy's and Mike's efforts, by asserting that the cross was good (line 7). Smithy, however, seems either to reject or ignore Lucas' defence, continuing to self-deprecate (lines 8 and 9) by acknowledging that he acted poorly in allowing four opposition players to be gathered around the back post of the goal. Dave's contribution in line 10 is of particular interest. As he is the goalkeeper, he has a large role in organising the defence, which, traditionally, includes berating them if they are

out of position. While he aligns with the stereotypical goalkeeper role on the pitch, he orients away from it in the dressing room – an arena in which relational work arguably takes priority over transactional discourse. In this instance, rather than criticising the defence (which Smithy seems to be almost inviting) and initiating a contestively oriented interaction, he navigates away from face-threatening behaviour, attenuating the potential Face-Threatening Act (FTA) with a good-natured, humorous remark (see Kotthoff, 1996; Pullin, 2011). Because he elects not to contribute a contestive remark, he appears to be disaligning with stances of normative masculinity, much like Jim in *Shot Connor*. Furthermore, he is likely indexing a supportive stance in line 10, using humour to "nurture rapport" (Norrick, 1993, p. 56), and construct solidarity among the players.

3.2 (Dis)alignment with the Imagined Community

Thus far, we have seen a complex interplay of stances. In *Shit Chat*, Connor indexes normative masculinity through his contestive instantiation of jocular abuse (Schnurr & Holmes, 2009), with Paul's lack of similar contributions producing a sequence that is contestive and minimally collaborative. Such contestively constructed sequences are consistent with the publicly available examples of dressing room banter discussed earlier, such as the jocular abuse *Sabotage Times* (2011) describes. Hence, Connor arguably aligns overtly with the imagined community of footballers. Such overt alignment was rare among the players, however, as evidenced by *Shot Connor* and *Hold on a Minute*. In these extracts, we saw evidence of normative masculinity's status as an apparently marked stance in the team; Jim explicitly disaligned with it in *Shot Connor*, and Dave elected not to index it during a potentially face-threatening interaction, opting instead to mitigate the potential FTA.

Yet the players are arguably still aligning with the imagined community, just not in this particular way. They typically construct their identity as footballers by indexing a positive stance towards the use of dressing room banter, continually engaging in it in interactional contexts, while disaligning with other stances stereotypical of footballers globally. As will be seen, this disalignment serves as the basis of the team's local identity, which is indexed with the team's local form of dressing room banter. Below, I investigate this unmarked, locally negotiated banter.

3.3 Local Identity through Dressing Room Banter

Example 4 effectively illustrates the standard, unmarked form of dressing room banter in the Firsts:

Example 4: You're a Feral, Man

Context: Mike, the club captain, uses the bathroom before an important match.

1.	Dave:	[laughing]: what's going on here?:
2.	Smithy:	that's wh- that's what that smell is eh + you're
3.		a feral man
4.	Dave	oh [drawled]: MIKE oh: that's disgus//ting\
5.	Smithy:	/mate\\ you should have gone next [laughing]:
6.		door:

7.	XM1:	what's he doing?
8.	Smithy:	he had a shit and it smells real bad
9.	All:	[laugh]
10.	Dave:	that's- you can tell he's nervous
11.	Lucas:	//at least wait until\ afterwards to have a shit
12.	XM1:	/[laugh]\\
13.	All:	//[unintelligible]\
14.	Dave:	/[unintelligible] last time\\ [laugh] + nightmares from
15.		last year
16.	Smithy:	[laugh]
17.		(5)
18.	Mike:	just had too much dinner last night eh
19.	Dave:	was it curry?
20.	Mike:	nah just pasta- you know those fresh pasta dishes?
21.	Dave:	//no\
22.	Mike:	/you\\ have to eat the whole thing
23.	Smithy:	just straight pasta (in //there)\
24.	Mike:	/(whole)\\ broccoli in there + (too much)
25.	Smithy:	[laughing]: you're not helping yourself: there
26.	All:	[laugh]
27.	Mike:	[unintelligible]
28.	Smithy:	i have to stand next to you for an hour and half +
29.		i'm not looking forward to that
30.	Mike:	i'll do it around the strikers around me

The humorous frame, initially introduced by Dave, is supported by Mike and Smithy throughout the interaction. After its instigation in line 1, Smithy thematically builds on the frame, proclaiming that he now understands the source of the smell, while also offering a mildly jocularly abusive remark (*You're a feral, man*)[iii]. Dave and Smithy continue to collaborate in lines 4–16, co-constructing a sequence of mild jocular abuse against Mike. Interestingly, Mike elects to support this sequence rather than challenge it (line 18). The interaction continues to be supportively constructed by the three, with Smithy offering more jocular abuse against Mike in lines 28 and 29. Again, Mike does not challenge this, but co-constructs it, claiming he will *do it around the strikers* from the opposition team. Two instances of jocular abuse are constructed against Mike, and on each occasion he supports the sequence. The supportive nature of the interaction is further exemplified by the fact that shifts in topic are also sustained; lines 1–16 cover the topic of Mike's behaviour in the bathroom. Mike then shifts the topic to his dinner the previous night – a topic that is co-constructed by Dave and Smithy as they collaborate. Here we see an example of jocular abuse and supportive remarks co-occurring in the same interaction, with Dave and Smithy offering a mildly contestive instantiation of jocular abuse against Mike, and the latter supporting it. Analysing the interchange holistically, however, I argue that it is still supportive. Jocular abuse does not have an intrinsic relationship with a contestive conversational style. Rather, it is more likely to instigate a contestive interchange, as the preferred second pair part tends to be rejection of the abuse (Hay, 2001). This is not the case in the above extract, though, as Mike supports each instance of jocular abuse against himself. Hence, Mike predominantly indexes a supportive stance through a supportive conversational style (Holmes, 2006) – a style which is inconsistent with normative masculinity (see Schnurr & Holmes, 2009).

While the resulting interaction is collaborative, it does not exhibit features of maximal collaboration (Coates, 1989, 1996), despite its thematically supportive nature. Hence, the

sequence is situated at an intermediate point between the two extremes of minimally and maximally collaborative (Holmes, 2006) – a style I will term *medially collaborative*. A tentative explanation for such a discursive style, backed up by my ethnographic observations, is the team's desire to avoid any hint of intimacy with one another; Coates (2007) argues that common features of maximal collaboration, such as overlap, imply intimacy. Therefore, the players may be straddling the line between indexing intimacy and indexing normative masculinity - both being potentially marked stances in the team. Example 5, below, further demonstrates this finding:

Example 5: Club Newsletter

Context: The players discuss the most recent edition of the club's monthly newsletter

1.	Smithy:	nah we didn't get a mention
2.	All:	[unintelligible talk]
3.	Smithy:	she made me captain but apparently it featured a
4.		number of players from the women's team
5.	All:	[laugh]
6.	Smithy:	which is true
7.	Mike:	very true
8.	Connor:	to be fair i think i answered one question //[unintelligible]\
9.	Mike:	/[laugh]\\
10.	Mike:	how was that south african rugby joke +
11.		(was that a good one)?
12.	Smithy:	the what?
13.	Mike:	the south african rugby wa- joke
14.	Smithy	[hesitantly]: yeah:
15.	Mike:	dan smithy
16.	Smithy:	//it was\ alright
17.	Mike:	/i thought\\ -
18.	Smithy:	it was okay it was alright
19.	Mike:	quite a niche joke

In line 1, Smithy is referring to the club's annual quiz night, and the fact that neither he nor the other men's player in his quiz team were mentioned in the club's newsletter. It is equally important to know that Mike was the individual responsible for compiling this section of the newsletter. Smithy introduces the humorous frame (lines 3 and 4), drawing attention to the fact that, in spite of his captaincy of the quiz team, *a number of players from the women's team* were mentioned in lieu of himself. This is likely a mild complaint on Smithy's part, as he seems to be humorously bemoaning the fact that he was not mentioned. His contribution in line 6 is, therefore, likely a mitigation of this criticism, to avoid any face threat. The jocular frame is successfully maintained following this, with Mike humorously seeking Smithy's approval regarding a joke the former wrote in the newsletter. The name of Smithy's team was "Dan and Smithy" – an amalgamation of his and another player, Daniel's, name. There is a South African rugby player named Dan Smithy,[iv] which is what Mike was referring to in the joke, worded as follows: "... the glory went to team 'Dan and Smithy', who I believe were named after the South African rugby first five". After some confusion from Smithy, he shows his approval somewhat, claiming that the joke was *alright* (lines 16 and 18). The interaction is, as per previous extracts, supportively negotiated; the initial topic and frame introduced by Smithy are pursued by Mike until line 10. After this, he shifts the topic slightly, changing the focus to

himself and the quality of his joke. Smithy's endorsement of Mike's joke further solidifies the supportive orientation of the exchange. Indeed, all of the contributions in the extract can be classed as supportive, strong evidence that the overall tone was supportive. An interaction supportively constructed in this way indexes stances of solidarity and team (Holmes, 2006; Holmes & Schnurr, 2005). Moreover, the thematically supportive nature of the sequence suggests disalignment with normative masculinity (see Schnurr & Holmes, 2009).

In addition to this, the players employ a medially collaborative style, suggesting the same (dis)alignment as discussed above. Smithy's endorsement of Mike's joke may serve this function, for example; he approved of the joke, but in a manner that suggests he did not want to give too profuse a compliment. This may be because showing too much admiration for the joke would have been interpreted as an index of intimacy, which appears to be a marked stance in the team. The resulting stance Smithy indexes is inconsistent with normative masculinity; he is careful not to index femininity, but he also aligns relationally with his teammates through a supportive pragmatic orientation (Holmes, 2006). He seems to index a more supportive type of masculinity, which was also seen in the previous extracts *Shot Connor, Hold on a Minute*, and *You're a Feral, Man*.

Club Newsletter also contains banter which highlights and draws on shared experiences (Ziv, 1984; Hay, 2000). Hay (2000, p. 734) has argued that a key function of humour is to "capitalise on shared experiences" to maintain solidarity. This achieves the simultaneous function of strengthening in-group status (Holmes & Hay, 1997) and membership of the team community, by highlighting experiences unique to those involved. This phenomenon is further illustrated by Example 6, below.

Example 6: Fitness Work

Context: After a match, some of the players discuss the recent fitness work they have done in training

1.	Smithy:	i hate to say it but + all that fitness work has
2.		kinda paid off
3.	All:	[laugh]
4.	Lucas:	we can stop now though
5.	Smithy:	[laughing]: yeah:
6.	Mike:	what is that like three weeks in a row that
7.		[laughing]: we've come from behind:?
8.	Dave:	[laughing]: yeah:
9.	All:	[laugh]
10.	Mike:	so we need to be like oh we don't need to do fitness
11.		[laughing]: anymore:
12.	Dave:	that was their only shot on target wasn't it their goal?
13.	Mike:	I think so yeah
14.	Smithy:	their keeper was //busy– he was quality\
15.	Dave:	/he was\\ quality

Fitness Work exhibits a discussion regarding the coach's perceived overemphasis on fitness-based drills. Smithy initiates the frame, humorously acknowledging that the coach's fitness drills have *paid off*. He may have framed this acknowledgement humorously to avoid a potential face threat; the majority of the team was unhappy with the fitness drills, so it may be inappropriate for a senior player to endorse them too strongly. Smithy seems to achieve this effect, as the humorous frame is supported through laughter by all those present (Norrick, 1993). Lucas maintains the humorous frame, though he may be merging it with a serious one

(Tannen & Wallat, 1993). It is possible that he is subtly disagreeing with Smithy's claim that the fitness work has been beneficial, by suggesting that it should stop. Smithy defuses any potential face threat by agreeing with this proposal, overtly framing his contribution humorously by laughing. In lines 6 and 7, Mike appears to be agreeing with Smithy's earlier assertion that the fitness drills have been valuable, by drawing attention to the fact that the team has a tendency to come from behind – a feat that relies to a large extent on fitness that carries players through to the end of the game. As was the case with Smithy, Mike may be framing his agreement humorously, attempting to mitigate any potential alignment with the fitness drills. Mike continues the humorous frame by suggesting that the players should advise the coach that they *don't need to do fitness anymore* (line 10). The initial topic and frame that Smithy introduced are pursued and co-constructed by Mike, Lucas and Dave, with the former two seeming to orient away from alignment with that which the team views negatively (i.e., the fitness drills).

Smithy and Mike appear to be indexing stances of in-group, creating a strong team culture, and solidarity, while also showing disalignment with normative masculinity by supportively co-constructing the interaction and disaligning with the fitness drills. In addition to this, the co-construction of an interaction containing knowledge shared by the whole team likely indexes a strong in-group stance (Holmes & Hay, 1997), in a similar way to *Club Newsletter*. Smithy could even be said to assign these stances to all those present in the interaction (see Jaffe, 2009); by initiating an interaction based on a shared discourse, he may be paving the way for the others to demonstrate knowledge of this shared discourse, and, by extension, inviting them to index membership of the team community. These stances accumulate and result in a harmonious interaction comprising a discussion around experiences shared by the players. Furthermore, the medially collaborative style, previously witnessed in *You're a Feral Man* and *Club Newsletter*, continues to index a straddling of the line between intimacy and femininity, and normative masculinity.

4 Discussion

4.1 Global and Local Identities

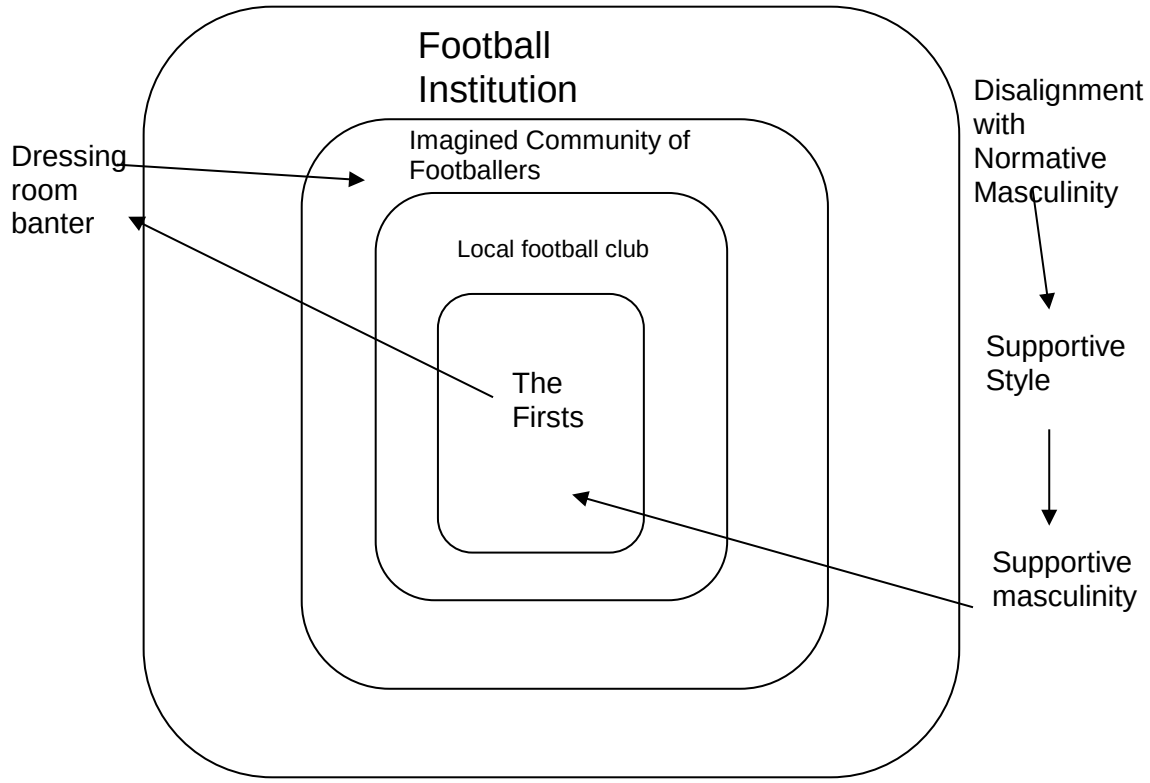
The discourse of the Firsts demonstrates that identity is a complex phenomenon, with the players simultaneously aligning and disaligning with various groups. In *Shit Chat*, Connor overtly aligns with the imagined community by indexing a stance of normative masculinity. Generally speaking, however, the players show a tendency to disalign with this stereotype, often overtly (as in *Shot Connor* and *Hold on a Minute*). In spite of this, the Firsts still construct themselves as 'footballers', though non-overtly. I argue that by indexing a positive stance towards dressing room banter, the players align with global norms, and, as a result, index membership of the imagined community through the "situated use" (Eckert, 2008, p. 454) of dressing room banter as a discourse strategy. This interpretation hinges on the argument that "practices… gain distinct meanings through their reflexive ties to the context and the institutional identities it makes relevant" (Arminen, 2005, p. 50). Along this line of analysis, any use of dressing room banter in a footballing context is indexed with membership of the imagined community, due to such banter's salience at the global level. In addition to this, the players negotiate a local identity, indexed with their locally negotiated form of dressing room banter. Their local style mitigates potential FTAs, while indexing stances of solidarity, support, in-group and rapport, and simultaneously disaligning with stances of normative masculinity. Moreover, the medially collaborative style of the interactions navigates the fine line between

displaying too much intimacy and indexing normative masculinity. The accumulation of these stances constructs one of the core properties of the team's identity, namely the locally negotiated form of masculinity, which I will term *supportive masculinity*. Normative, hegemonic masculinity, prevalent in the imagined community, values attributes such as competition and aggression (Adams et al., 2010). In this community, qualities such as support and rapport are more highly valued – qualities that are indexed by the team's shared repertoire. These attributes feed into the acceptable form of masculinity in the team, as seen in the extracts *You're a Feral, Man*, *Club Newsletter* and *Fitness Work*.

Supportive masculinity is central to the team's local identity, then. The question remains, however, of how to conceptualise this local identity. I conceptualised the global footballer identity as an imagined community, arguing that footballers have global interactional norms which they do not negotiate in practice, but rather orient to as shared knowledge. An appropriate formulation of the local community may be a Community of Practice (CofP) (see Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), which differs from the imagined community in some important ways. In contrast to the imagined community, members of a CofP take part in regular interaction around a joint enterprise, and in doing so develop a shared repertoire which is continuously negotiated and renegotiated by the members (see King, 2014, 2017). Nevertheless, as argued earlier and demonstrated throughout the analysis, the CofP's norms are still influenced by larger social structures.

4.2 Layered Alignment

I previously posited a model of the social structure in which the team is embedded, aiming to conceptualise the various groups with which the team may align. We are now in a position to complete this model of the Firsts' identity, annotating it as follows:



At the macro level, the players construct themselves as footballers by aligning with the discourse strategy of dressing room banter. The strategy has undergone relocalisation (Pennycook, 2010), however, within the Firsts' CofP, such that it has a locally negotiated form. Rather than indexing normative masculinity, stereotypical among footballers, it indexes supportive masculinity. This analysis demonstrates the efficacy of the CofP as an analytic lens. Characteristics of normative masculinity tend to be valued in the imagined community of footballers (see Adams et al., 2010). Ideologies surrounding masculinity naturally transfer down the social structure and are locally enacted by players, but the CofP acts as a filtering system, dictating the unmarked form of masculinity in the local context. This CofP filters out most traits of normative masculinity, replacing them with more benevolent, supportive methods of doing masculinity. In this CofP, masculinity is performed by supporting teammates, while taking care not to show too much intimacy in interaction. A comparable form of masculinity has been witnessed in a rugby context in Britain (Anderson, 2008, 2009), in which the players supported one another in the face of adversity rather than constructing themselves in a typically masculine way. The Firsts' local identity can, therefore, be partially defined as the enactment of supportive masculinity, indexed through a local form of dressing room banter.

5 Conclusion

The principal conclusion to be drawn from this study is that global ideologies surrounding dressing room banter and masculinity are not generalisable to all communities, but rather may be modified in specific local contexts. As noted in the introduction, "locker room talk" has recently been discussed in a negative light. The data I have analysed suggests the reality is less clear-cut, and needs to be considered in a more nuanced way. The analysis indicates that the concepts of locker room talk, or dressing room banter, refer to an abstract discourse strategy which takes different forms in different CofPs. The local forms that dressing room banter may take cannot be presupposed *a priori*. Indeed, the analysis of the data from the Firsts suggests that dressing room banter may function as a benevolent bonding strategy, rather than one which reproduces normative and hegemonic masculinity. I have studied a relatively small set of interactions in only one team so it is impossible to predict how common this form of dressing room banter is, though it is interesting to note that Anderson's (2008, 2009) rugby data is consistent with my findings for this football team. It would be interesting to undertake further research in this area, ascertaining the extent to which other teams negotiate a similar form of banter (i.e., one which comparably differs to that of the imagined community).

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Appendix: Transcription Conventions

These conventions have been adapted from Wilson (2011):

//	Beginning of overlap sequence
/….\	Overlapping turn
\\	End of overlap sequence
[unintelligible]	Unable to be understood
[laugh]	Paralinguistic events in square brackets
+	Pause of less than one second
(5)	Pause of length of time indicated in brackets
[drawled]: oh:	Indicates the manner in which something is said
?	Rising intonation, suggesting a question
(was that a good one?)	Best guess at an unclear utterance

Notes

[i] All participant names are replaced with pseudonyms.

[ii] 'Fines sessions' are a regular practice of the team. After each match, the players congregate in the club rooms and fine one another for any amusing wrongdoings during the match, such as a missed goal or a misplaced pass. It is, essentially, a way of humorously drawing attention to negative actions and characteristics of each player. While fines sessions contain elements of jocular abuse, they are negotiated in a highly collaborative manner, so are arguably less face-threatening than traditional jocular abuse, as seen in Example 1.

[iii] *Man* is a tag in this instance rather than a noun.

[iv] A pseudonym is used in lieu of the rugby player's real name.

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