

Humour and Radicalization in Collective Action

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Abstract

Collective action is of great importance when it comes to societal issues and the road to community improvement. Humour has many communicational and persuasive properties, but the role of humour in collective activity has not been thoroughly studied. In recent years, violent radicalization in collective action has gotten a lot of political attention. The present study aims to analyze the relationship between humour and radicalization processes in activism. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with German left-winged radical activists ($n = 8$) about the functions of humour within activism and the appropriateness of humour within activism. It was found that humour has the ability to strengthen interpersonal relationships amongst activists and simplify and normalize radical ideology. This study offers ingroup connectedness and normalization of radical ideology as mediating variables in the relationship between humour and radicalization.

Keywords: collective action, humour, radicalization, normalization, interpersonal relationships

Humour and Radicalization in Collective Action

In what way do activists adequately battle injustice and inequality, and why do some activists turn to extremist acts to do so? Since the dawn of civilization, social movements have played a tremendous part in the emancipation and liberation of oppressed groups. *Collective action* can be construed as actions privately or publicly carried out on a voluntary basis, aiming to subvert the status quo and/or improve social conditions of a disadvantaged group of people (Van Zomeren et al., 2008). Examples of collective activity are participating in a protest or signing a petition concerning an activist cause. It is an ever interesting question how to effectively seek societal change. Throughout history, collective action has resulted in significant community enhancement time and time again, begging the question in what fashion this is best achieved in the future. Activists are continually striving to reach activist objectives, such as mobilizing new people and getting certain issues into the public eye. Views on how this is appropriately achieved differ, and some activists turn very radical in their convictions and actions. A commonly used tool to reach such activism goals is humour, a sensible choice given its obvious communicational perks ('t Hart, 2007; Curry & Dunbar, 2013).

Humour is a universally known and understood concept, yet it proves to be surprisingly difficult to define (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). A simplistic definition of intentional humour is that one party seeks to create amusement in a different party, which may or may not be successful (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019). In the present research, humour is taken in a broader sense, including any type of mirth, fun, and enjoyment. Humour has the ability to unify individuals, but in highly diversified groups, it can also isolate and exclude (Miller et al., 2019); it can be used both as a tool to bring people together and to drift people apart. This is relevant to the present study, because individuals subject to social exclusion are

vulnerable to radicalization when they find social affiliation within radical groups (Reiter et al., 2021).

What role does humour play in radicalization processes in collective action? Within the context of activism, violent radicalization is an ongoing concern to governments and societies, and has risen to the top of the political agenda since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Logically so, considering extremism can evoke intense fear, poses a threat to societal cohesion and security (Neumann & Kleinmann, 2013), and can lead to political instability (Dogger, 2022). The term *radicalization* in collective action refers to progressive internalization of a collective belief system that recognizes radical activity as an appropriate means for the pursuit of goals (Dugas & Kruglanski, 2014). This is considered a process rather than a static state and does not necessarily end up in violent action (Benevento, 2021); it is important to note that not all radicals turn to terrorist acts, and of course not all those who consider themselves left-radical activists are terrorists. The identification of factors that contribute to development of internal extremist ideas is of great interest to governments, because it offers promise for intervention and prevention protocols and helps understand radicals (Wolfowicz et al., 2020). Humour can be used in many different ways and for many different purposes, and if it is shown that humour is of influence in radicalization processes, humour might also be used as a tool to counter those processes, deradicalize, and ease tension.

There are several theoretical grounds for the conception that humour might be an influential factor within radicalization processes. Firstly, rationalization of radical ideology and subsequent activity are massively influenced by cognitive processes, as “all action - moderate, angry, very angry, and even violent - is the product of reasoning” (Benevento, 2021, p. 6); there needs to be understanding of and devotion to radical ideology in order for action to proceed from it. Development of radical attitudes is considered a key risk factor for

development of radical intentions and behaviors (Wolfowicz et al., 2020). It is known that humour can bring about attitude change (Sternthal & Craig, 1973) and has persuasive properties (Sternthal & Craig, 1973), suggesting that humour might be of influence in these cognitive processes crucial to radicalization. In addition, socio-cultural factors are of importance in the process of radicalization (e.g., strong relationships to radicals or group dynamics through which the justification of radical activity is shared; Reiter et al., 2021). Ingroup connectedness is identified as a significant risk factor for radicalization as well (Wolfowicz et al., 2020). Humour is known to positively affect social relations (Martin, 2007): shared laughter benefits interpersonal affiliation (Curry & Dunbar, 2013) and facilitates rapport through enhancing trust (Hampes, 1999). If the ties amongst activists are strengthened through humour, and ingroup connectedness is thereby enhanced, this might facilitate radicalization.

The Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA; van Zomeren et al., 2008) describes perceived injustice (i.e., subjective experience of inequality, observed through social comparisons), perceived efficacy (i.e., subjective assumption about the likelihood of goals being reached), and social identity (i.e., identification with a membership group) as causally related to participation in collective action. Apart from the well-known communicational functions of humour, humour has also been shown to contribute to awareness of inequality issues (perceived injustice; Riquelme et al., 2020), increase group effectiveness (perceived efficacy; Romero & Pescosolido, 2008) and strengthen a sense of community (social identity; Martin, 2007). It is for these reasons that the use of humor might well be beneficial to those fighting for change, playing into the aspects of efficacy, identity, and injustice (SIMCA; van Zomeren et al., 2008) that are vital to engagement with activism. In addition, so-called *subversive humour* can be used as a tool to criticize societal injustices and overthrow social

asymmetries (Riquelme et al., 2019), and has been shown to increase openness to participation in collective action (Riquelme et al., 2020). The mobilization of people within collective action is a possible starting point for radicalization processes, because one has to be an activist first in order to become a radical activist. Given the fact that humour plays a part in mobilization within collective action, it is interesting to consider the question of whether humour might also increase openness to participation in more radical forms of action.

Although the role of humour in advertising has been abundantly studied (Sternthal & Craig, 1973; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992; Weinberger & Gulas, 2019), little research has been done on the extent of persuasiveness of humour in activism. Delivering a message in a humorous way has strong social influencing abilities; humour can bring about attitude change and increase a source's credibility, adding to the persuasive power of a message (Sternthal & Craig, 1973). More importantly, it has been indicated that joking about immoral behavior signals that this behavior is okay (McGraw & Warren, 2010). In the context of radical action, this means that presenting radical/violent acts as "just a joke" can frame them as morally acceptable. This finding is highly significant for the current study, as it forms a theoretical basis for the notion that humour may shift the boundaries of the acceptable. In light of its known influencing capabilities, questions about the involvement of humour in the radicalization processes of activists have risen: could humour pose risks in terms of furthering radicalization in activists? In consequence, a need for exploration of this topic has emerged.

Current research

This thesis will be directed at qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews conducted with German left-winged radical activists with a wide range of political interests, including feminism, climate change, anarchism, and the Antifa, which is an international movement against facism, rightwing extremism, and populism, and more. The

present research is of exploratory nature and aims to analyze whether humour possibly plays a role in the radicalization process of activists, by encouraging violent and extremist measures to advocate their beliefs. The research will inquire whether there is any way in which humor might play a role in shifting the boundaries of the acceptable, radicalization of activists, and acceptance of violence. The interviews will be evaluated through thematic analysis.

Method

Both the method and the results were written collectively by all students, to make this project fit into the timeline and course credits for the bachelor thesis. Hence, the method and results sections describe my own core topic of radicalization as well as the other students' topics. This project received ethics clearance from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Groningen (research code: PSY-2122-S-0088).

Participants

In total, eight participants were recruited via the personal network of one of the bachelor thesis students in this project. The sample was recruited in order to grasp a wide range of perspectives on humour in collective action. We asked different activists, from various left-wing movements, who were available to participate in our research. This resulted in a sample that is relatively small and heterogeneous in both age and movement categories. The sample consisted of four males, three females, and one non-binary person. Ages ranged from 18 to 77 years old ($M = 37$), with four people from generation Z (born 1997-2012), three people from generation X (born 1965-1980), and one person from generation Post War (born 1928-1945). Participants all originated from Germany, all have anti-fascist beliefs, and have a focus on collective action in Germany. Interviews were conducted with participants with different left-winged political interests and ties to various movements, including the ANTIFA,

Rote Armee Fraktion, anarchists, and climate movements such as Fridays for future and Extinction Rebellion. We feel it is inappropriate to categorize the participants as members of specific movements, because it would inadequately represent the activists as they are all fluid members of multiple movements. Therefore, in the result section we will use quotes of the participants themselves to elaborate on the movements they are or were active in and the political interests they have. During recruitment, participants were told that we were interested in humour in the context of past experiences with protest. No inducement to participate was given. Two persons who were invited to participate, did not participate after all, due to the COVID-19 situation.

Semi-structured interviews

Individual, semi-structured interviews were used to gather the information. This made it possible to gather information about the different topics of interest, and also leaving room for individual experiences and diverse points of view related to humour and collective action. Interviews were done with two or three interviewers at a time, as it was more feasible to keep track of the questions asked with another interviewer, as well as having the interview be more of a conversation. One interview was done with only one interviewer because of scheduling reasons. The main language for the interviews was English, however some parts were said in German as it seemed more easy for participants to express themselves more freely.

Furthermore, one interview was done entirely in German due to the language barrier, with some explanations in Portuguese for the second interviewer. The other interviews have been conducted in English as the entire project was laid out in English and most interviewers do not speak German. All interviews, except for one, were conducted in real life, in a safe environment in a quiet apartment. One interview has taken place online through Google meet, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The duration of the interviews ranged between 44-97

minutes. All interviews were double audio recorded with mobile phone devices and were transcribed manually. All the recordings were deleted after transcription, due to the privacy regulations. The topics that were covered in the interviews, were (1) involvement in collective action (e.g. ‘What kinds of activism have you taken part in?’), (2) functions of humour in collective action, (3) appropriateness of humour (e.g. ‘Do you think there is anything that might make humour/fun around this cause inappropriate?’), and (4) violence around collective action (e.g. ‘Have you ever experienced a moment in which protest/collective action reached a tipping point, when the atmosphere became tense/grim/ when the atmosphere changed?’). The main focus of our questions was which effects humour can have in collective action, as we tried to ask the participants as much about their experiences as possible. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

The interviews were conducted as casual conversations, using open questions (see the above) as a guideline, in line with the semi-structured interview approach. At the end of the interview there was room for the participants to ask questions or add information or discuss topics they felt were relevant to the interview.

Analytic approach

We chose to use thematic analysis as an analytic method due to it being compatible with open-ended inquiry and a deductive theoretical framework. An initial coding scheme was provided by our supervisor, based on the first four interviews that were transcribed. After that, each transcript was coded by one of the researchers, using the initial coding scheme.

Additional codes were added if it was needed, based on new relevant information. We made an attempt to construct a coding scheme that was extensive and that fitted the research questions. See Appendix A for the interview questions and Appendix B for the final coding scheme. A second researcher went over the transcripts again using the enhanced coding

scheme. In that way we tried to make sure that all the relevant information in all eight transcripts were coded, allowing us to answer our research questions as thoroughly as possible.

Results

Our analysis looks at three different research questions, which are: How does humour play a role in radicalization of collective action? What is the role of humour in coping within or with activism? Does humour influence the bond between activists? The analysis has been divided into four different parts, which are then again divided into sub-parts. The analysis begins with an introduction of the participants. After that we look at the role of humour on radicalization. Next, we look at how humour can serve as a tool for in-group bonding. Finally, we will discuss the role of humour in coping with activism. The analysis begins with an introduction of the participants. After that we look at how humour can serve as a tool for in-group bonding and out-group bonding. Furthermore, the role of humour on radicalization will be investigated. Next, humour can as a tool in-group bonding will be analysed. Finally, we will discuss the role of humour in coping with activism.

Introduction of the participants

First and foremost, for the interpretation and understanding of the quotes, it is of importance to be aware of the content of the sample. The sample consists of people from different generations, indicating different eras of activism. This may have an influence on their points of view about humour in activism, thus this needs to be taken in consideration when interpreting the quotes. The political identity of the participants is rather difficult to categorise into specific movements, as this is not set in stone and always subject to change. An overall striking aspect one should keep in mind is that most participants did not feel like they were part of a solid group.

P3, P4, P5 and P7 are all part of the older generations of the sample (post-war and generation X). These participants have taken part in many forms of activism in the past. Currently, they are implementing their experiences from earlier decades in journalism. In this way, they can still advocate for the things they consider important. P3 is currently furthering political action professionally as part of a political paper addressing and informing many activists of current events.

P3: I was mainly in antifascist protesting, because in Germany after the reunification there was quite a wave of neo-Nazis and not only neo-Nazi movement but also militant neo-Nazis who attacked people with a migration background but really we had to sometimes to go to houses where they lived and just stay there to protect them because we knew Nazis are coming, (...). Well, it's [also] important for me to protest around Fridays For Future and against furthering this climate crisis. (...) What I established in my paper was a small group of people like a project who do only climate issues and they reach out to the movement and try to reach the movement to channel the information from the movement in Instagram as mainly, that's where we do it.

P3 became involved in antifascist activism after the Berlin Wall fell and there was a rise of neo-Nazi movements. The climate crisis is also a focus of hers.

A striking similarity between P3, P4 and P5 is the start of their activism, in which antifascism was especially prominent. P4 mentions very early on participation in protests against neo-Nazis. Neo-Nazis were the new generation of Nazis, which led the participant to involvement in antifascism. The participant also mentions his engagement with anti-gentrification movements as an anti-capitalist, since his whole neighbourhood had been in the process of gentrification. He participated in a lot of demonstrations against world

leaders summits of G8 and G20, where the participant was walking alongside autonomous people, however most of those actions are in the past.

P4: Well I started being active when I was sixteen/seventeen years old [In the 80's] when I was still going to school and for many years that was mainly in an antifascist movement so protesting against Neo-Nazis, green research, organising blockades on the streets when a Neo-Nazi march was scheduled, structural work. So antifascism is an entire set of different activities from street activities to organising behind the scenes. Later on in my twenties I also engaged in the Anti-gentrification movement so like community neighbourhood activism. The whole neighbourhood was in the process of gentrifying so like the rent went up, people were squeezed out and rich investors came in. So those kind of activities as well. And I basically also participated in what we in Germany would call the Autonomous movement, like anti G, G8, G20 summits. Generally it would be more like Anti-capitalism activities. So a broad variety of different things with these two focusses, Anti-fascism on one hand and Anti-gentrification work on the other hand.

Both P3 and P4 are now contributing to social movements with their career, they have chosen professional journalism as their form of activism.

P5: And we [me and my friends] put fascism on the daily to-do list. We had a hunch that it was in many ministries that there are Nazis in there (...) It was about the rigid solid everyday culture that included Nazis. That still lived and still does now. That we [students] suffered from, in school for example. And we slowly started to fight against that [oppression]. Because we couldn't dream of any kind of future in this country. (...) I started being part of the SPK [*Sozialistische Patienten Kollektiv*]. The SPK is the socialist patient collective. (...) I was only half a year in the RAF [*Rote Armee Fraktion*].

P5 has mentioned his participation in two different movements. He mentions in both participation of the SPK in 1971 and the RAF, his focus on any form of anti-fascism from a socialist and communist point of view. P5 has participated in various street demonstrations, squatting actions as well as the most militant forms of activism such as hostage taking of an embassy.

P7 has never felt part of a specific movement, which is why eventually he founded his own collective. However, the focus of this collective was similar to the already established movements, the participant mentions leftist, radical, social movements.

P7: Before I also have been a lot in like social movement, I went to some kind of whatever ... leftist left radical and punk rock concerts and places, and you know, so I've been like running around there... (...). I have never really been part of a group, like I never, like I never wanted to, be part of the group. (...) I would like look at it and I wouldn't feel good because there's this dogmatism or there is just like, I don't know what it is. I'm just not uhm... yeah, I'm not someone who is like entering a political group,.. that easily. Rather, after a while, I just created my own! Which is [name group].

Despite the generation gap between the various participants, there is a great deal of overlap between the goals the activists are pushing for. Noteworthy is the shift of the main focus points. Among the older generation, antifascism was the greatest goal to fight for. Given the German history concerning World War II, the split of Germany, as well as the building of the wall in Berlin undoubtedly had an immense impact on the participants' lives. In addition to antifascism, recent activism has included its focus on for example the climate crisis, racism and feminism. Not only is the younger generation pushing for these, but so are the older ones, through for example journalism, as named above.

In our sample, the younger generation (generation Z) is represented by P1, P2, P6 and P8. These participants are all active in street protests, for various purposes. They have

corresponding political opinions, but also differ in their points of focus. P1 and P8 both mention that they have ties to the ANTIFA. While P1 says she is not part of the ANTIFA, P8 does say he identifies with the movement.

P8: In Germany, in Berlin... it's a mix between political parties that I identify with and then social political groups and movements outside that I identify with. Of course, generally I would identify with ANTIFA, just because I think everybody should, and everybody should be antifascist. So that's something that I identify with. Obviously, I attended a lot of Fridays For Future demonstrations, so I would identify with that as well. Those are groups outside of the traditional political parties that I would identify myself with.

Alongside the ANTIFA, P8 makes a stand against climate change. Before he got the right to vote, because of his age, the participant put out his opinion through attending street protests, for the purpose of contributing to democracy. Climate change is for multiple participants a reason for activism.

P2: It [my focus in collective action] is different things. (...) There was like Fridays for Future, but just some general stuff that I was interested in. And then I also went to this really like left wing, not left wing but like leftish political school that really has their own fight against racism club in school. (...) I feel like I'm very interested in feminism just because I feel like that's a topic or an issue that is still very present in my generation [Generation Z] and in my friend groups and in all of my encounters, sort of. (...) It's like everyone, well not everyone, obviously, but like racism or climate change or even the living situation is easier to address and people are more perceivable to it.

Furthermore, P2 feels strongly about the squatting movement and has strong ties to them. She has also participated in different actions concerning the planning of a squatting operation.

A commonality among mainly female participants is the great struggle for feminism. This is not only an important issue for P1 and P2 from generation Z, but also overlaps with the ideologies from P3 from generation X.

P1: I consider myself to be left-radical, radical-left if you say that. I do have connections within the Berlin ANTIFA, but I'm not part of it. I always feel like I have like a half foot in it. (...) I think especially the topic around feminism, this is a huge topic for me, and definitely attending a lot of women-organized demonstrations and intersectional feminism also. Since last year, since the Black Lives Matter-movement, there has definitely been a shift.

In addition, P1 mentions how she has connections to many people in the activism scene, especially a famous street squat in Berlin. She does not consider herself to be an active part of that movement even though she does participate in many events and demonstrations. P1 also mentions that she is anti-capitalistic and thereby critical of the system.

Being critical of the system is a similarity within the sample. All participants want to see change and are committed to it, however, most participants do not feel part of a solid group.

P6: How can I say, it's a lot of social issues I have a problem with and I want to fight against. A lot of issues with racism, fascism, and people being repressed. So what I want to fight for is freedom for everyone, let's call it that, unity.

P6 does not consider themselves to be part of a group. The only group P6 has a connection with is an anarchist group. They meet up with them and go to protests together. As noted down in the quote above, P6 is fighting for freedom for everybody and makes a stand against racism, fascism and people being repressed.

Concluding, participants that were interviewed were all associated with left-winged, social injustice protests. However, most participants have specifically stated that they do not in fact identify with one specific group.

Functions of humour

In this section we will look at 1) the role of humour in strengthening interpersonal ties, specifically the influence of humour in strengthening existing ties as well as forming new ones, 2) how humour encourages or does not encourage radicalization, and 3) how humour and radical action collide.

Humour as a tool for strengthening existing interpersonal ties

All participants mentioned the influence and contribution of humour on bonding with the ingroup. Various ways of using humour which can contribute to the bond between people within a group have been named. These included chanting, laughing together and dancing together among other things.

Interestingly, multiple participants mentioned bonding as an effect of making fun of an outgroup. For example P7 brought up that making jokes about people with more power causes the bond between the ingroup to be strengthened. P7 said the following:

P7: If you're inviting people to laugh about someone more powerful, this is bonding.

P7 doesn't make it clear about who those powerful people are but they could be politicians or the police. He was not the only interviewee who mentioned bonding as an effect of making fun of an outgroup. P1 and P6 also talked about laughing at an outgroup but they specifically mentioned the police as the outgroup who they made fun of. P6 said the following:

P6: The people got together and they were singing songs, making fun of the police, holding together, listening to music, singing.

P6 referred to a situation where they were part of a demonstration and they were pushed into a trap by the police. The activists have then created a small party where people were sitting next to each other, singing, drinking, dancing and making fun of the police creating a feeling of connectedness between the activists.

Another example of bonding by joking about an outgroup but then in a context of feminism is mentioned by P1: “also to bond, again, it’s a bonding moment if we make fun of the stupid men that just don’t get it.” The participant points out that for women who have experienced for example body shaming or another hurtful event, joking about men who don’t understand the pain that it causes, also is a bonding experience. Making jokes about or laughing at another group can thus help to form a bond within the group. It seems that the explanation for this is that by making fun of the outgroup the activists in the ingroup distance themselves from the outgroup making the bond between the ingroup stronger.

However, making jokes about a less powerful outgroup or a minority can be problematic as mentioned by P7:

P7: Sexist humour or racist humour or anti-semitic humour is always trying to bond over a minority. Like, I mean, women are not a minority, but like, like a less powerful group.

The interviewee is talking about how one of the main international bonding attacks among young men is talking about the hotness of women and making sexist jokes. Hereby the participant expresses their disapproval of this manner of uniting. Apparently this way of using humour as a goal to form a bond with the ingroup can therefore also bring harm to a minority.

The previous quotes concerned ingroup bonding between activists but can humour also strengthen new ties with the outgroup?

Humour as tool to strengthen new ties

There was a pattern of responses from participants that suggested that humour may in fact be a useful tool to strengthen new ties and for broadening a movement of any collective action. P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7 and P8 all indicated the above. According to P3 humour can not only be used as an ingroup bonding tool but also as an outgroup bonding tool. P3 said the following:

P3: bonding also with people not of your group but with people around you

This participant said this quote in the context of cynical humour use. They mentioned that cynical humour makes everyone feel like they can still be part of the movement and make others feel more included, even people of the outgroup. P8 mentioned something similar by saying ‘when there’s a lot of humour it helps to bond people together, bond groups’. Both participants stressed that in a street protest humour can bond different groups and even the ingroup with the outgroup.

In addition to street protests, humour can increase activists’ reach through the media. For instance, through graphics on social media:

P1: With humour [in communist memes] you can just reach a lot more people. And I think it’s way more fun to follow them.

Or through music:

P4: I think everybody who listens to that song feels like part of a club. So I think yes but there must be more than just humour, you probably need to direct it and pinpoint specifically how you want to use it.

On one hand most participants seem to agree that humour can be used to bond with the ingroup and to broaden the movement.

Humour cannot broaden a movement

On the other hand, P3 expressed doubts about whether humour broadens a movement. This is in contrast to above mentioned statements.

P3: When I said that I loved memes or just jokes in whatever channel, I don't think that that those jokes really reach people who aren't into this already. (...) Yeah but I still think, so it would be great if all those jokes would reach other people, but I don't think that it's really... [laughs]

J.L.: So you actually don't think it raises awareness among people who aren't already invested in the...

P3: No I don't think so. I didn't think about that before but talking with you, I don't think so because I always, I try to imagine like clowns being at demonstrations and doing stuff, that's funny, but it doesn't ... and then people see it, okay, but I don't think it changes the mind of people who are not invested in the topic before.

The participant thinks out loud about their own experiences. Furthermore, she mentions a love for memes before this specific statement. The memes led to her thought that humour does in fact not broaden a movement but rather includes more people that are like minded already. This participant was the only one saying anything about humour not broadening a movement, however corrected herself again in a later statement. It seemed an overall agreement that humour does broaden a movement.

Thus, most participants agree that humour can create new ties between activists and the outgroup, involve people and mobilise a broader audience for collective action. This can happen through different channels, such as music. In other words, humour seems capable of stimulating collective action. However, can it also stimulate involvement in radical action?

Humour stimulates radicalization

P1,3,4 and 6 talked about how humour can normalise a radical thought or action and therefore can contribute to radicalization: "Even if you're not communist, I mean I don't

consider myself communist either, but that moment if you read it [an anti-capitalist] meme by Simin Jawa], you're like... (...) it seems so obvious when you make a joke and it's funny. It just seems obvious to you, like yes of course. (...) And I think that's probably a process of radicalization." (P1) By presenting radical thoughts as normal, through humour, such an idea is more likely to be tolerated.

P6: So yeah, in politics there may be a lot of humour to like normalise your cause, let's say it like that, make it more reachable for the people, kind of joking about it, so maybe you can present more radical themes, more radical ideologies or ideas a lot toned down because you're being funny about it, or joking about it. So I guess humour is a quite powerful weapon in politics, too.

According to P6, humour can cause radical thoughts or ideas to be expressed with less severity, which ensures that it can reach more people. P6 also mentioned that they think that the first step towards radicalization is people believing that what they are doing is right or normal, and an ideology can be built on that basis. In addition, P6 deems humour an appropriate means of justifying extreme ideology: "Maybe some people would say humour is not okay to legitimize left wing radicalism and I of course say it is okay." (P6)

Normalising radical behaviour or thoughts as seen as the basis of radicalization by P6, is also seen in street protests. Additionally, street protests may turn violent in an instant, when "when it's getting tense and nobody wants an escalation, there are people who just again make fun of each other just to calm down. And sometimes also, that is interesting, some make clowns out of police to allow themselves to go militant, but others make fun out of the police to lower the tension as well to... Those are just clowns. In both ways it's diminishing or making them smaller, but with a different intention." (P3). An instant, where joking about police allowed street activists to engage in more violent behaviour towards police officers. In

doing so, police men were made smaller as individuals, so the activists approved more of their own behaviour. The same jokes to disparage the police are also used to lower the strain. So humour can not only be a way of shifting boundaries of the acceptable, but can also be used to prevent precisely this form of violence and radical escalation. Therefore, humour can be used as a prevention tool for radicalisation.

In contrast to the stimulating effect of humour on radicalization revealed above, there has been a striking mention of the sentiment that humour-use has an opposite effect of preventing radicalization.

P3: If you're banning all humour and you're getting more and more straight and getting into a fight mode, then that [banning of humour] makes radicalisation and not the humour. (...) in the Fridays For Future movement people are more laughing than in the Extinction Rebellion so the more you radicalise yourself, the less there is humour I would say. So quite the opposite. (...) So the other way around, perhaps humour can avoid a bad radicalization.

Quite frankly suggesting that radicalisation is a humourless process and that humour therefore can halt the development of more radical convictions. Humour and radicalization are negatively correlated according to P3, which is contradictory to the views of participants mentioned above. If humour and radical action do in fact not seem to work together, then the question arises whether radical activists overall also use less humour.

Radical action and humour clash

An interesting finding regarding the question mentioned above, was the absence of humour within the radical left. It was explicitly stated by P1, 4, 5 and 6 that radical leftists tend to be very serious and make no use of humour. “Especially since a lot of social protests take themselves extremely seriously like the burden of saving the world is on your shoulder, there is no time to laugh.” (P4) “They [activists] take it [their actions] quite seriously, I have not really experienced that much humour, it’s always like, try to do quite tough and how serious is what we’re doing and there was not a lot of space for humour, I felt.” (P6)

P4 and P6 describe how the gravity of the activism beliefs leaves little room for humour. The radical left ideology is not something to be joked about, as it is severe and to be taken seriously. However, this lack of humour is considered to be a flaw by others. “I still have some [left-wing activist] contacts here in Berlin and also the young sometimes, are all, absolutely humourless. I consider this a serious limit” (P5). Additionally, P1 substantiated the statement by saying:

P1: The radical left (...) are very humourless. They are really not funny. [laughter] It’s just serious shit all the time and everything is taken so seriously. And I think that’s what’s sometimes really annoying, because I’m like “Oh my God, don’t take it so seriously, like, do you ever have fun?” (...) However, the radical left is, again, way too serious on topics and way too emotional on topics. And like, weakens themselves, with no effect.

High levels of strictness and solemnity might result in internal conflict and division.

P5 provides an example of how the radical left is fragmented into separate leftist groups:

“There has been a shift that we [radical left activists] are more and more pointing out or focusing on, or putting political movement into the singular, into the individual, (...) And that’s also, I think from there it also comes that people are fighting against each other all the time. Like “Oh my God, this other left person just silenced me or like misgendered me”, and I think that’s definitely a big topic, and I’m not... but this shouldn’t be the main focus.” This damages the activist solidarity that is vital to successful collective action, because the activists are no longer fighting together towards a collective cause, but each fighting for their own specific beliefs - even against other leftists.

The absence of humour is thus considered harmful to a movement. Even though multiple participants mention that joking around might lighten the tension and further the relationship between activists, participants report that the radical left is not known for its banter among activists. Humour might not fit into that image, but it may serve as a tool in alleviating some of the psychological pressure that many activists experience as a consequence of their continual fighting for change.

Humour as a coping mechanism in activism

Humour as a coping mechanism has been used for a long time to cope with the feeling of being responsible for saving the world. P4 explains this by saying:

P4: Well there is this famous Emma Goldman saying ‘If I can’t dance I don’t want to be in your revolution’ and I like that very much. She said this in the early 1900 and it was meant as a part of the socialist and communist revolutions. Emma Goldman was an anarchist and what she wanted to express is that political activism can’t always be super serious, super severe, super tough, and super straight, there must be room for some fun like dancing and it must be possible to dance and not always to say: “Today we have to save the world.” I think it expresses something which is really important, that beyond these severe and serious business there must be some space for fun, humour, and enjoying emotions. So she at a very early stage way before the internet and the memes she in a way nailed it in that one sentence.

The importance of humour in activism is emphasized here. Humour can be utilized to cope with different aspects of activism. We will analyze four ways in which humour can function as a coping mechanism, based on the different aspects of activism: (1) to interact or deal with other groups of activists or the police better, (2) to cope with emotions as a group, (3) to cope with emotions individually, and (4) to continue the work of being an activist. After that, we will also look at conditions in which it is not appropriate to use humour in activism.

Being able to interact or deal with other groups of activists or the police better

Activism can get burdensome due to interactions with the police or other groups of activists. In some situations these confrontations can even result in violence. According to P1,3,4,5,6 and 8 humour can help to cope with these interactions and the emotions that arise from it.

I.B: Do you think it also helps to release some stress from activists?

P4: Definitely, especially when you have these confrontations like when we drew a blockade in front of the nuclear power plant or when you have confrontations at the G8-summits with the police, there is an enormous level of stress on a physical and psychological level so laughing always eases these moments. (...)

P3: (...) So I remember a lot of more cynical jokes amongst us when we were dealing with all this Nazi movement. Because you had to get out your feelings somehow (...) but also kind of coping with the hatred you see or the threats you see and all that to also sometimes to make the situation better for those who are threatened really (...).

P3 and P4 describe different emotions that can arise from confrontation with the police or other groups. Humour can help deal with these feelings of stress, hate, tension and fear. P3 also mentions a specific kind of humour, cynical humour, when dealing with feelings of hate towards the other group. Use of cynical humour in this context might be used to downgrade the other group, which might lead to less negative feelings during and after confrontation with that group. P8 mentions ironic humour when dealing with feelings of helplessness that can arise in situations where you feel powerless:

P8: The humour that I do like in protest is just being kind of ironic, when for example, when, I've witnessed being at a protest during corona like when the corona virus was happening and then the police told the organizers to everyone have one like, three feet apart, but then the police were so close that the people couldn't be apart. And just taking that with a bit of irony that's something that I find okay, that I do as well, because (...) the organizers make an announcement; alright guys try to be three feet apart, also with the cops or something ... then I mean, it's fine, it's funny. There's nothing you can do about the situation, so you just take it lightly, I guess. So I guess humour just helps take things lightly

Thus, it seems that different emotions can lead to different styles of humour being used, in the context of confrontation with others. Another differentiation that becomes

apparent within dealing with other groups, is the moment in which humour is used. This can be during or after the confrontation:

P6: (...) Like, everybody sat in a circle, singing “Wir haben spass”, [laughter] as the police were like surrounding the people, and that was the moment when I was really laughing about it, because we’re having fun here, we’re sitting, listening to music, taking drinks, everybody was talking to each other, the police were standing there around us. In that situation, if everybody would have been like surrounded by the police, it could have been something so evil, like “Oh my God, we’re here now, the police is around us”, but the people got together and they were singing songs, making fun of the police, holding together, listening to music, singing.

P4: When you’re in such a tough confrontation and everything is so serious including your physical integrity then afterwards the news that you watch on tv about it is all super heavyweight, I think it’s incredibly important to somehow let it go and share it with others. It’s usually much easier to laugh together than to do something else, but it is also important that you see how others feel.

This indicates that humour can sometimes help during confrontations to avoid a clash, and therefore avoid negative emotions that would otherwise arise during those clashes. By using humour the tension decreases which creates more room to take a breath. In other words, humour can help de-escalate the situation. At other moments, emotions can get so high that there is no room for humour during the confrontation. In those situations when de-escalation is not possible, humour can function as a coping mechanism after the confrontation to then create the possibility to deal with those emotions and then let go of them.

Humour as a coping mechanism to deal with emotions as a group

Most activism takes place in groups, which means that people can also deal with emotions together. Examples of these emotions are hatred, anger, anxiety, sadness and

helplessness. Humour can be used to cope with these emotions. According to P1,3,4,5 and 8 it is important to laugh together, because it is a good way to get your feelings out and talk about what happened. In this way, humour can also help to de-stress and take away tension. Lastly, humour can also help to deal with feelings of repression.

P4: (...) So similar to the clowns you have the possibility to be straightforward and attack someone or to take a different route which is maybe not from A to B directly but surrounding. By using humour you make fun of someone and you allow people to express emotions and to laugh about the guy even though you feel like you want to cry because he's so super tough and so unfriendly, but you can laugh about it and that's also an opportunity to let emotions flow

P8: yeah, after a protest, you get like, you could go to a supermarket, buy something to drink and then just sit down on a bench and just kind of talk about the protest, kind of joke about it. And that does help unwind in my opinion. Sort of build down like, regress those feelings of anger you might have had.

P7: (...) there was an Indian move- or like in an Indian village, whenever there would be a new repressive law, they would gather and read it out loud and laugh collectively about it. So this would be like a gathering to kind of ridicule or to like free themselves from this repressive feeling, which is like standing in front of them.

At different moments, humour can be used in different ways to deal with emotions as a group. For example, during preparation for a protest or demonstration, humour can be used to ease the moment and release tension. In contrast, after a protest or confrontation, humour can make it easier to talk about the cause they stand for in a less heavy way. In addition, humour used after a protest or confrontation, can also help to cope with things that happened during activism.

P4: Sometimes there were like twenty people in preparation for an event and everybody was so extremely tight and tense and if someone made a good joke all the tension flowed down like a river that flows down to the valley.

P2: I mean I feel like listening to the music made us feel like we're talking about this. And it just makes it more of a fun activity. I don't think we would have done it if we were just like if we never had a beer and if we never went out after it, we would have just been at the library just painted our posters and then we went. It made it more relaxed, more something enjoyable together.

P2: And this friend of mine, who also gave a speech she was like and next is the neighbourhood legend. And it was really fun, and everyone was really just laughing and just, I don't know, it makes it less formal and makes it more of a get together.

Humour as a coping mechanism to deal with emotions individually

In addition to coping with emotions as a group, activists individually cope with emotions as well. Activists can deal with these feelings before, after and during collective actions. These negative emotions for instance are anger, anxiety or feelings of responsibility. These emotions can for example arise during protest when situations get heated.

P6: If you're in a situation, and you're walking along there and suddenly the flames are burning up, you hear the hammering of glass all around you, there's stones flying, cars burning, police officers beating people to shit, if you see stuff like that... My heart was pounding, I really was in a state of survival there, I went down to primal instincts like, I don't know, live or die kind of. You see how people get beat to shit, get arrested, people officers are running behind you, and you know if you are not fast enough, they are going to catch you and beat you to shit on the ground.

Besides the functions of humour when coping with emotions in a group, participants talk about two additional functions of humour in the context of coping with emotions on an

individual level. The first function is to cope with things they have seen. The second one is to tell themselves that what they did was the right thing to do. It is a way to justify what has happened and lower feelings of doubt and anxiety.

P1: Yeah. I feel like humour is sometimes a good thing to lower your own burden.

Aside from humour being a tool to lower the burden it is also a way to justify things you have done during a protest. Afterwards activists realize what happened during a protest or demonstration. At moments like those, humour is a way to tell yourself that what you did was the right thing. It makes it easier to cope with feelings of doubt and anxiety.

P6: You need the humour to also kind of tell yourself you're right. Because maybe in situations like that you doubt your activism, you doubt what you are doing, because things sometimes get quite ugly. So I guess humour is important to me sometimes too, to cope with the things I saw.

Concluding, humour can serve two additional purposes: to cope with what they saw and to justify their actions.

Humour as a coping mechanism to continue the work of being an activist

As stated above, humour can be used to deal with confrontations and emotions on an individual and group level. This can ease some of the burden that activists experience, making it easier to continue the work of being an activist. Nevertheless, there are various reasons why being an activist can also be burdensome. For example, activism does not always result in the change you wish to see, it costs a lot of effort, and there are various negative emotions to deal with. Also, activists often tend to put a lot of pressure on themselves, because they feel highly responsible for the cause they are fighting for.

P6: (...) it really brings you down if you see how much effort is put in by people, how many people get hurt, and how little change, how much power the state still has. Seeing how many

people get hurt and how many bruises there have been, how many head injuries from police batons, and still so little change. So yeah, it puts a lot of pressure on you.

P2: I feel like especially in left wing activism, there's always this really high standard that people put on themselves, speaking correctly and behaving correctly and just always having to be on the good side, I guess, and never allowing for anything populist. And I think sometimes it gets very tiring of always having to be the ones that phrase what they think well and that they really are thorough in how they express themselves and not never discriminating (...) That really helps relieve some of that responsibility that you feel like you have if you have a certain political opinion... if you identify with a certain group.

Humour as a coping mechanism to deal with feelings of pressure and responsibility is especially used after events or protests. Humour can then help to cope with these feelings. Also, laughing about things that have happened and being sarcastic can help to keep the morale up. This is especially useful when feelings of helplessness arise. There are always causes to keep fighting for, which can make it feel like there is no end to activism. Using humour might help with this.

P3: Demonstrations can get nasty as well, so there's always a kind of tension or even fear (...). You can't be active in this, in some ways, border ways to militants, without coping with it, without lowering the tension.

P6: (...) It is always so emotional if you see things like that [policemen beating activists], again maybe to process it, but in situations like that you maybe only give humour to process the situation, to keep the comadre up, to not focus on the bad things that are happening. But kind of making a joke out of it, like 'We gotta do this, what happened was shit'. Laughing about it, being sarcastic about it, and next time is going to be better. Maybe that can help to keep the morale up and the fighting spirit, but it doesn't necessarily relieve the pressure. It's still there, because you always experience it again and the humour doesn't stop it, because it's not my choice, it's the state and the problems in the world.

Another way in which humour can help activists to continue their work, is by bringing back some of the joy into activism. By making fun of situations, you can take away some of the seriousness.

P6: Humour is probably quite a powerful weapon because you can make fun of things and probably take the piss out of some situations, tone things down.(...) humour brings interest or brings away from the seriousness and more to the joy and the fun and kind of like, it brings people more into it I think.

P4: Political activism can't always be super serious, super severe, super tough, and super straight, there must be room for some fun like dancing and it must be possible to dance and not always to say: 'Today we have to save the world.' I think it expresses something which is really important that beyond these severe and serious business there must be some space for fun, humour, and enjoying emotions.

In conclusion, there are numerous reasons why activism can get burdensome. Humour can function as a coping mechanism in different ways to avoid that the burden of being an activist gets too heavy, making it possible to continue the work of being an activist.

Inappropriateness of using humour as a coping mechanism

Humour is widely used as a coping mechanism by activists, however humour is not always appropriate. There are different situations in which humour might not be appropriate. First of all when others have been treated badly, and therefore emotions are high.

P4: If you see that others have been treated, let's say much worse than you and are crying, then it's inappropriate. So it very much depends on the situation. I think humour in general is a great weapon but you need to be very aware of how you can use it and direct it.

P8: (...) because if someone gets arrested and they also get like punched in the face and they're bleeding while being carried to the police truck, it's, I don't think it's appropriate to laugh about that, because somebody actually suffered and paid a heavy price. So it depends on the

outcome if... if it was difficult, but everyone got home safely, then of course humour is a great way. If it didn't go well and people went to jail, then it's, I'm not sure if I would use humour. (...) But if someone you know suffers then that's not an appropriate moment for humour in my opinion.

P6: I'd say humor is not okay if you are talking about any of the serious issues, like humor at George Floyd. Taking humor for that, that'd be like totally out of place. Humor at serious issues where people got hurt, people even died, or people could die, or people's lives could be, how can I say, diminishing the actual worth of a human through humor. So as soon as humor attacks like, as soon as humor gets inhumane, like calls for violence maybe, in a sarcastic way, against minorities or people that don't really have to do, that can't do anything for their ethnic identity, for their skin color, their age, whatever. I think as soon as humor attacks something people can't change, as soon as humor kind of calls for violence, it's not okay.

As described by these participants, these are conditions where there is no room for laughter. These conditions are all centered around the people from the ingroup, with a focus on the personal consequences of a clash with other groups or the police.

The second situation in which the use of humour might be inappropriate, is when it takes away the focus from the cause that activists fight for.

P1: (...) but... I feel like the radical left is, they're not really funny. They're really serious. And I think that, I don't know, sometimes it's really important because I mean especially on those days, you have, it's really important to remind yourself what this day actually is about and that this is a serious topic, and sometimes humour can also make the topic seem less important.

P4: (...) if you're always funny there could be the danger of losing focus on the whole message. In a way it's naturally the case that the topics that you raise are in a way serious topics like injustice, BLM-movement, neo-Nazis, racism, protests against summit G-8 and so on. In a way it's all serious business so if there's an overdose of humour it carries the risk that

you lose the focus of your whole message. If you only make fun about things then people maybe don't take you serious enough so it's a question of dosing.

So in order to keep focused on the goal, according to P1 and P4, you should abstain from using humour.

The last situation, which is mentioned by the participants, in which humour is not appropriate, is when it is used to make fun of someone on a personal level.

P6: So as soon as humor attacks like, as soon as humor gets inhumane, like calls for violence maybe, in a sarcastic way, against minorities or people that don't really have to do, that can't do anything for their ethnic identity, for their skin color, their age, whatever. I think as soon as humor attacks something people can't change (...) it's not okay.

I: And would you say there are moments where humour could be appropriate or not appropriate?

P2: Um, it's like always when it goes on, like personal level, but I feel like that's more generally my opinion than, like specifically on activism. And I feel like discriminating is never no, I don't ever like that in anyways and don't think that is supportive, ever. I think there are some lines that you should not, you should not cross them. (...) In fact, for me, it's mostly certain words that I use. I don't like when people say disabled, like in Germany, you know, it's a very common word to say. Yeah It's discriminating, and oftentimes I'm like please don't use that word. Why are you doing that? Because I feel like language is really impactful. And the only thing and that's the whole thing also with gendering. That's because our language is like the whole way we think, you know, and so impactful. So I think we should watch it.

When humour attacks specific people or groups, especially minorities it is thus not okay to use humour.

Concluding, when considering the use of humour in activism for coping, it is important to keep in mind the situations in which humour might not be appropriate.

Discussion

The aim of the current research was to explore a possible influence of humour in the radicalization processes in collective action: is there any way in which humour might play a role in radicalization of activists, through shifting the boundaries of the acceptable and acceptance of violence? This was done by conducting semi-structured interviews with different radical-left activists and inquiring about the role of humour within their collective action. It was found that humour has an influence on radicalization processes in several ways, playing into several of the aforementioned cognitive and social factors that are known to influence radicalization.

Cognitive factor: humour simplifies and normalizes ideology

Firstly, a strong influence of cognitive nature was observed: humour has the ability to simplify complicated ideology. It was mentioned by several participants that radical beliefs are simplified by humour, making those ideas more comprehensible to activists, and presented less severely through jokes, as also suggested by McGraw and Warren (2010). This allows for the ideological ideas to be understood and rationalized. Participants also stated that humour plays a role in the normalization of radical ideology. Ideas that might initially be considered extreme or revolutionary, are progressively seen as more normal and obvious. As a consequence, attitudes about such ideology change to be more radical, which is one of the main risk factors of radical intentions and behaviors (Wolfowicz et al., 2020). Normalization of radical ideology appears to be a critical mediator in the relationship between humour and radicalization; it allows the individual to internalize extremist ideas and adds to senses of perceived injustice and perceived efficacy (SIMCA; van Zomeren, 2008), cognitively and emotionally furthering the process of radicalization.

Social factor: humour strengthens interpersonal relationships

Secondly, the power of humour within the context of interpersonal relationships amongst activists was frequently mentioned. It was found that humour has an enormous influence on social relationships within activism groups: all participants reported how social ties were strengthened through joking around, increasing bonding with the ingroup. Shared laughter and making fun of an outgroup (e.g., the police, right-winged activists) is reported by several participants to create a feeling of connectedness among the activists. This is relevant to the process of radicalization, because as previously mentioned, ingroup connectedness amongst activists and radicals is an important risk factor for radicalization (Wolfowicz et al., 2020). Ingroup connectedness can be considered a mediating variable in the relationship between humour and radicalization in that sense. In addition, the social identity and perceived efficacy aspects of SIMCA (van Zomeren, 2008) are influenced by these interpersonal relationships, influencing participation in collective action and thereby making activists vulnerable to processes of radicalization, since mobilization in collective action is a base point for the processes of radicalization. which is critical in order for radicalization processes to start.

Humour is infrequently used by radical activists

Another striking finding occurred, namely a lack of humour within left radical activism. It was mentioned by several participants that they do not frequently encounter humour-use by radical activists. In some cases, joking is deemed inappropriate given the gravity of the cause; the ideology should be taken seriously. Interestingly, some participants thought humour should be used more often, because it can lighten the tension and bring joy into the activism, as also described by 't Hart (2007). This is a fascinating addition to the findings in relation to the current research question, because it adds to insight of how humour

is actually viewed and practiced within the radical left. And furthermore, it teaches us how to interpret these findings of humour influence and extrapolate them to daily practice.

The findings of this research are in line with the available literature on both functions of humour and processes of radicalization. Participants confirm that humour bonds people together and strengthens relationships, as is previously suggested by Martin (2007), Hampes (1999), and Curry and Dunbar (2013). Participants also mention how humour makes complicated ideology easier to understand, like “politics for dummies” (P6), which is in line with a study by Sternthal and Craig (1973). An addition of the present study to the body of literature is that it suggests attitude change through normalization and ingroup connectedness as mediating variables in the relationship between humour and radicalization. This offers clarification as to in what fashion humour influences radicalization. It was noted that humour is not used regularly and opinions on humour-use within radical action varied, with some participants saying there is no room for humour within the radical left, and others stating that humour is valuable to radical action.

Limitations of this study include a difficulty with generalization: the qualitative nature of this research has resulted in a small sample size (N=8). This makes it difficult to draw conclusions about a wider population. Participants were gathered through the personal network of one of the researchers. This sampling method, though flawed, has its advantages, because it facilitated rapport between researchers and participants and allowed a sense of trust and ease into the interviews. It also allowed for the researchers to reach radical activists that might otherwise not be recruited for a thesis-project as easily. Another limitation is that all participants were of German nationality, which is not a proper representation of the radical left population.

In the future, different research questions would be interesting to study. The question of how humour influences radicalization should be studied in further depth to better identify the underlying mechanisms. The possible mediating role of normalization and ingroup connectedness between humour and radicalization needs to be studied quantitatively in order for those relationships to be better understood. Another interesting question has risen through the findings of this study: if humour has an influence on radicalization, as it appears to have, but humour is infrequently used within the radical left, how is this influence to be understood? And which additional factors are influencing radicalization in extremists that tend not to use humour?

One practical implication of this study would be that humour should not be considered as light-hearted and innocent as it is commonly portrayed. It might actually serve a more serious, potentially dangerous cause if it is implemented to radicalize activists, and this study suggests it would be able to do so. Currently, it appears humour is not used frequently within radical activism, but it might be a possibly harmful tool to radicalize in the future. Practically, humour cannot be banned, but its impact on the shifting of boundaries should be carefully considered. Obviously, humour cannot simply be prohibited in the context of activism to prevent radicalization. Humour can serve a variety of communicational and relational purposes, so another idea for additional research would be to look into if and how humour could be used to deradicalize activists or intervene in the radicalization process.

This study aimed to shed light on the influence of humour on radicalization processes in collective action. The results propose that humour simplifies and normalizes extreme ideas and strengthens ingroup connectedness, and those processes in turn influence radicalization. Further research is needed in order to better confirm and understand the mediating role of

both ingroup connectedness and simplification and normalization of radical ideology in the relationship between humour and radicalization.

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Appendix A: Interview questions

1. Introduction about our interests in the functions of humour around collective action. (*limit this to a couple of minutes*)
 - a. Oral informed consent as specified in the document for the ethics request.
1. Involvement in collective action (*limit this to a couple of minutes*)
 - a. What kinds of activism / fighting for social change have you taken part in?
Think of any kind of action you've undertaken to further the collective cause, for instance on the streets or on social media.
 - b. For which cause(s)?
 - a. How would you describe your involvement in fighting for this cause / these causes?
How involved have you been, in which roles (participating, organizing), and for how long?
3. Functions of humour
 - a. So, are these actions always serious, or are you also having fun?
 - b. Can you think of a time when you had fun or made fun in any way around your fight for social change? I'm interested in fun broadly connected to action, so not only during a specific action, but also during the lead-up to or aftermath of an action.
 - c. Can you walk me through what exactly was fun about this instance?
 - d. Can you explain why you were having or making fun? Did you try to achieve something by having / making fun? What?
 - i. *If they don't understand what you're asking for, you can probe for specific functions / give examples:* For instance, sometimes people have fun to lighten their mood or to strengthen their bonds with others. Or people may make fun of something because it feels awkward. Or they present something as "just a joke" to avoid others' disapproval.

- e. Can you provide other examples of when you have had or made fun in any way around your fight for social change? That is, during, in the lead-up to, or after an action.
- a. *If no occasions* Why not?
- 2. Appropriateness of humour
 - a. Why do you think fun is so frequent/rare around the cause you are fighting for?
 - b. Do you think there is anything that might make fun around this cause inappropriate?
- 3. Violence around collective action
 - a. Protests can reach a certain tipping point, when the atmosphere becomes tense or grim.
 - b. Can you think of a time when you felt that this tipping point happened?
 - c. Can you walk me through what you experienced during this instance?
 - d. Why do you think the tipping point was reached here?
 - e. In situations like this, when the atmosphere changes, some people move to the front and others step back. Have you noticed people in your environment who enjoy these situations, who are having fun?
 - f. Can you explain why they/you were having or making fun? Did they/you try to achieve something by having / making fun? What?
 - i. *If they don't understand what you're asking for, you can probe for specific functions / give examples:* For instance, sometimes people have fun to lighten their mood or to strengthen their bonds with others. Or people may make fun of something because it feels awkward. Or they present something as “just a joke” to avoid others’ disapproval.

- g. We have now talked about fun during such an event. Sometimes people also have fun when looking back at grim or tense situations. Can you think of a time when this happened?
- h. Can you walk me through what you experienced during this instance?
- i. Can you explain why you were having or making fun? Did you try to achieve something by having / making fun? What?
- i. *If they don't understand what you're asking for, you can probe for specific functions / give examples:* For instance, sometimes people have fun to lighten their mood or to strengthen their bonds with others. Or people may make fun of something because it feels awkward. Or they present something as “just a joke” to avoid others’ disapproval.
- j. Can you provide other examples of when you or others had fun around a grim or tense protest? That is, during, in the lead-up to, or after a grim or tense protest.
- k. Can you walk me through what you experienced during this instance?
- l. Can you explain why they/you were having or making fun? Did they/you try to achieve something by having / making fun? What?
- 4. Is there anything else you would like to mention about fun around collective action?
- 5. Checklist: Probe about specific functions of humour, based on literature / our interests
- a. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in shifting the boundaries of the acceptable / radicalisation / acceptance of violence?
- b. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in increasing awareness / mobilization of the wider public?
- i. Probe / examples if necessary: For instance, if people use funny memers or signs during a demonstration to attract the general public’s attention.

- c. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in coping with psychological pressure from activism / stigmatized identity / activist burnout?
 - i. Probe / examples if necessary: For instance, using a joke to cheer someone (or yourself) up or to make the cause you stand for less heavy on your shoulders.
- d. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in strengthening ties among activists / strengthening social identity?
 - i. Probe / examples if necessary: For instance, joking among each other and laughing together.
- e. Is there any way in which fun might play a role in self-presentation of activists to the outside world / non-activists?
 - i. Probe / examples if necessary: For instance, making a joke about your involvement in activism to make an interaction with someone less awkward.
- f. Can you think of situations in which fun around the fight for this cause would be inappropriate?
 - i. Probe / examples if necessary: For instance, joking about a certain topic as taboo because the topic is a serious real-life problem.
- 6. Demographic details: Age (in broader categories to prevent identification), gender, country of residence
- 7. Thanks, finish interview, ask whether they know someone else with whom we might want to talk about these topics of fun and protest too.

Appendix B: Final coding scheme

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Sample description	CA background: Movements and topics	Anti-facism
		Feminism
		Racism / BLM
		Anti-capitalism
		Anarchist / anti-system
		RAF
		Climate activism
		Communism
		Not fitting in with existing groups
		Social injustice
	Ways of activism	Protest on the streets
		Journalism
		Squitting
		Identity politics
		Solidarity
Social context	Mention of (radical-)left sub-groups / fractioning	Competition / negativity between sub-groups

Criticism of “performative action”

Division between mainstream “woke” people
and “real” left

	Emotions around CA	Anxiety / scared
		Anger
		Enjoyment / enthusiasm / having fun
		Empowerment / feeling strong
		Humour can take away the seriousness

General typology of humour	Subject of humour	Making fun of police
		Making fun of non-activists
		Making fun of right-wing
		Making fun of politicians

	Different media of humour around CA	Memes / social media
		Other (non-meme) graphic / visual / art
		Music / chants
		Performance (also including clowns during demo)

Verbal / conversational (telling jokes)

Functions of humour	Humour and radical action / radicalisation / escalation	Radical action and humour clash / radicals tough activists have no humour / feelings of anger or taking a topic seriously clash with humour
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Humour can stimulate radicalisation /
escalation

Humour can prevent radicalisation / escalation

Humour and political identification / mobilization	Humour can be used for ingroup building / bonding
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Humour can energize CA

Humour can cause a nice atmosphere /
entertainment / having fun together

Humour can broaden the movement, create
insight / recognition / awareness among a
broader audience

Humour and making people smaller / more human	Humour can make activists seem more “human” / approachable to non-activists
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Humour can make police seem more “human” /
less power = easier and less scary target /
opponent (escalating)

Humour can make police seem more “human” /
less power = reducing necessity for violence
against them (de-escalating)

Humour and coping

Humour can help cope with responsibility of
being an activist / can make activists feel good
about what they do

Humour can help cope with danger / threat /
anxiety, can help people admit they are scared
or overwhelmed

Humour can distract from pressure / fear

Humour and creating
distance

Humour can create distance from a situation =
facilitate de-escalation

Humour can create distance from police =
facilitate escalation (“they are not like us”)

Humour can create distance between activists and the general public = no increase in awareness / mobilization

Inappropriateness of humour

Group & topic: for left-wing activists politically incorrect humour is inappropriate

OR Arguments against humour use

Use: humour is not appreciated if it is the only form of CA (e.g. only joking / memes, instead of part of the repertoire)

Topic & group: humour about other people's (not own) suffering is inappropriate

Humour to facilitate violence is wrong

Humour as ineffective (this is another argument against humour use, other than whether it is appropriate)

Humour as not fitting with one's personality (this is another argument against humour use, other than whether it is appropriate)

Violence undermines the message

Violence can be fun

Violence is (sometimes) necessary to achieve change

Violence is provoked by police mere presence

Violence is provoked by police behavior

Image of ANTIFA as violent

Being targeted by police violence provides status

Violence as male / testosterone thing

Other (inductive) themes we note in the interviews	Inter-generation comparisons / relations among activists	Different generations coming / working together
		Different generations having different approaches

Note. CA stands for Collective Action.