**Chapter 6: Destructive Relational Rituals**

**6.1. Introduction**

*6.1.1. Destructive rituals: A definition*

From the perspective of relating, this book has so far studied constructive rituals, i.e. in-group ritual practices that positively contribute to the formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. The present chapter will further elaborate upon the theory of relational rituals by exploring destructive relational ritual acts. This is a relatively unexplored area: the anthropological literature to date – as well as areas that rely on anthropological literature when it comes to rituals such as linguistics – seems to have enduring interest in the constructive aspect of ritual behaviour, and destructive ritual practices have been left behind. As the references of this chapter will indicate, it is mainly educational studies and child psychology where such ritual acts are studied, but in these fields the ritual element of these relational practices usually remains unmentioned. Therefore, the exploration of destructive rituals fills a knowledge-gap in the field.

Destructive rituals can be defined as rituals that operate differently from their clearly constructive counterparts. That is, instead of boosting in-group relating,

*destructive rituals stigmatise one in-group member (or several in-group members), that is, they have a target, and they destroy the victim’s relation with, and symbolic role within, the group*.

In previous public and academic discourses, various manifestations of destructive relational rituals are aptly described as ‘bullying’ (see more in Section 6.4.1). It should be noted, however, that not every type of bullying has a ritual nature, and so bullying is not a suitable technical term for the present framework.[[1]](#endnote-1) As Smith, Madsen and Moody (1993) and Smith et al. (2008) note, bullying can be physical, verbal, relational (e.g. social exclusion) or indirect (e.g. rumour spreading), and it can include single and isolated as well as recurrent cases. Destructive in-group ritual practice as it is represented here is limited to verbal and relational cases, and it excludes isolated (non-recurrent) interactions that take place outside of a relational network – that is, which might include lexical elements that conventionally occasion rudeness but which are not recurrent *practices* of a network that trigger stigma (Goffman’s 1963 term; cf. the notion of ‘stigma’ in Section 6.2). For example, one can use conventional swearwords in a single utterance (instead of a series of speech events), but this does not become ritual in a relational sense. In order to illustrate this point, it is pertinent to refer here to a recent homemade short film on Youtube,[[2]](#endnote-2) *Fuck you*, which depicts an American teenager who screams ‘Fuck you!’-s to cars from the roadside in order to show his ‘braveness’ to his peers, until a truck stops and the boys run away. Whilst from the performer’s perspective such an act has a clear in-group ritual value (in a constructive way), from the drivers’ perspectives it is not ritualistic as it is uttered by unrelated personae on a single occasion.

This, of course, does not mean that destructive ritual can only occur in an in-group form, even though the present chapter focuses on in-group practices. Similarly to its constructive counterpart, destructive ritual exists in out-group contexts as well; for example, the verbal representation of an unknown person’s stigma (such as dispreferred racial origin) vis-à-vis a mimetic performance is potentially ritualistic. But then similarly to in-group destructive ritual practices such an out-group utterance can become ritualistic only if it stigmatises the victim. It is also pertinent to note that there is a degree of difference in the social recognition of certain in-group destructive ritualistic forms. For example, an acquaintance of mine in Hungary retold me that in primary school he was ridiculed by others, in a recurrent ritualistic way, as *sírós* (a person who cries). Obviously, such a form is rooted in a group’s relational history (this male person cried once when he was victimised, which became a source of shame picked up in the destructive ritual practice), and so it is more locally ‘codified’ than, for example, a term which attacks one’s sexual orientation such as ‘gay boy’.

To sum up the introduction of in-group destructive rituals, lexical research on swearing and foul language (e.g. Hughes 1992), as well as more recent work on linguistic impoliteness (e.g. Culpeper 2011a), revealed that there is a pivotal interface between convention and foul language. However, foul language in itself, as well as conventionally abusive acts do not have ritual value without recurring and being performed within a relational network. In other words, an offence acquires ritual value through the recurrent symbolic performance element (mimesis, cf. the previous chapters), which stigmatises the victim. In order to illustrate this point, let us refer to the following online posting:

(1) i was in year 4 when i started to get bullied and i am now in year 7, in year 4 i was bullied by this bunch of boys and they just constently kept saying stuff that would really hurt my feelings like saying that beacause i looked ugly they kept on calling me a RAT, it used to make me feel really upset.And now im in year 7 and im getting bullied again on facebook by this girl i dont even know because i told her to stop being horrible to my friend she kept on being horrible to me like calling me a dog and saying have u looked in the mirror lately because u look like a DOG, and just keep constently saying stuff behined my back.I would never bully anybody easle because i no how they feel and that feeling of somebody hating you is not nice and iv bin there and i am still being bullied.SO WE SOULD FIGHT BULLING TOGETHER xxxx by and 11 year old girl called demi xx :( its a horrible feeling :( so dont do it.

(Retrieved from: http://familyinternet.about.com/u/ua/computingsafetyprivacy/Cyberbullyua.01.htm)

The type of bullying described here is a destructive ritual act due to its recurrent nature.[[3]](#endnote-3) Notably, using animal names to describe others is a conventional form of offence in various cultures, as Bruce Fraser ([1981]2012) argued, but in example (1) the conventionally offensive animal name “dog” becomes a ritual offense as a) it refers to the targeted person’s stigma, her perceived lack of beauty, because b) it recurs, and c) also it has a performance value (the girl referred to wraps her offensive question into a form of a staged inquiry, i.e. “have u looked in the mirror lately”).

Along with conventionality, it should also be noted that not every manifestation of destructive ritual is relational, at least in the sense the present book interprets this term. For example, a secret evil curse that the other does not hear, or which is uttered towards an unrelated person, is not relational, despite the fact that it is ritual due to its schematic and mimetic character.

Destructive ritual reflects and reinforces the ethos of a given social network,[[4]](#endnote-4) just as constructive ritual, but it represents ethos is a contrastive way, by conflicting it with one or several negatively perceived characteristics of the victim who thus becomes stigmatised. Although directly violent abuse is potentially present in destructive ritual practices, it is not a precondition for a certain act to become destructive, as Section 6.3 will illustrate.

To summarise the present definition of destructive ritual it is useful to recall the definition of relational ritual which was provided in Chapter 1:

Ritual is a formalised/schematic, conventionalised and recurrent act, which is relationship forcing. Ritual is realised as an embedded (mini-)performance (mimesis), and this performance is bound to relational history (and related ethos), or historicity in general (and related social ethos). Ritual is an emotively invested action, as anthropological research has shown.

As examples in the present chapter will illustrate, destructive in-group ritual practices also fit into this model, as they are also formalised/schematic, conventionalised and recurrent acts within a social network, and also they operate through (mini-)performances. There is, however, a substantial difference between constructive and destructive in-group ritual practices, in terms of their “relationship forcing” character. As it was argued in earlier chapters of this book, constructive ritual is relationship forcing in the sense that its performance stimulates interpersonal relationships to develop. Destructive ritual practices function differently: their performance causes the corruption of the relationship between the performer (and the relational network) and the stigmatised person(s), and so they should be defined as ‘relationship corrupting’.

It is pertinent to note that the difference between constructive and destructive ritual is primarily relational and not moral: whilst destructive relational rituals are perceived as ‘immoral’ (cf. Section 6.4), we should not claim that constructive rituals are inherently perceived as moral ones. For example, a recent Hungarian newspaper article has introduced in-group ritual practices of sexual slave traders, such as giving the victim a new ‘trade name’.[[5]](#endnote-5) Technically speaking, such practices count as constructive rituals as they give a certain in-group status to the victim as a prostitute (despite that the forced victim may not like to have such a status at all), whilst they are clearly perceived as immoral by the public.

*6.1.2. Analytic significance*

We must explore destructive rituals not only because they are regretfully neglected, but also because their research contributes to the theorisation of relational rituals *per se*. In various other linguistic areas which focus on relational studies, such as linguistic impoliteness research (see e.g. Culpeper 2005, 2011a), scholars have devoted more and more attention to relationally destructive phenomena in recent years. A key rationale behind this interest is that destructive relational behaviour is not merely the “evil twin” of its constructive counterpart, to use Bousfield’s (2010) definition, and so its study can bring cutting edge insight into both the constructive and destructive aspects of relational phenomena such as im/politeness. Following this train of thought, the present chapter argues that destructive rituals are worth studying for two interrelated reasons. First, as Section 6.4 will argue, examining the destructive vs. constructive aspect of a ritual practice brings different perceptions and evaluations into the relational ritual theory. The importance of relying on more than just one understanding and perception of ritual acts (e.g. by conducting interviews) – according to what was suggested by Kádár and Haugh (2013, forthcoming) for im/politeness – has been emphasised elsewhere in this book (see e.g. Chapter 5). Yet, evaluations become particularly salient when we involve constructiveness vs. destructiveness in the ritual framework. Since constructive rituals count as normative from in-group perspective, their presence does not contradict with moral expectations (cf. Section 5.2 in Chapter 5). However, destructive ritual, as the present chapter will illustrate, infringes upon whatever is regarded as normative, and so participant evaluations become salient as soon as one performs this type of ritual. Studying participant perceptions instead of simply relying on a scholarly definition on a given ritual act being either constructive or destructive also reveals that it is problematic to apply the notions of constructive and destructive in a dichotomic way. As Section 6.4 will illustrate, destructive ritual practice has a constructive value for those who perform it, that is, it is a matter of participant perception whether a ritual practice is perceived as constructive or destructive. To sum up, no theory of (constructive) relational rituals can be complete without an account on destructive rituals.

Secondly, approaching rituals as relationally constructive and destructive can help us to streamline categorisation in the field. As Chapter 4 has argued, a relational approach to rituality calls for an alternative typology, and this applies to destructive rituals as well. There are a number of terms in both popular and academic discourse on rituality which describe practices that could be associated with the destructive aspect of ritual, but which in practice allow both constructive and destructive interpretations, depending on the participants’ perspectives. Thus, while the categories these terms describe are certainly useful for other disciplines such as anthropology, from a relational perspective they are vague. In what follows, let us briefly overview the perhaps most representative of these terms, including ‘evil ritual’ in folk-theoretical/scientific discourse, and “ritual of exclusion” in scientific research on ritual.

‘Evil ritual’ is a folk-theoretical term, which includes rituals of violence, as well as other ritual practices that are condemned by the public in a given society or social network. In public discourse certain rites which do not meet a given community’s moral standards are likely to become evil ones (see more on morality in Section 6.1.3). For example, certain forms of what Bell (1997) describes as “political rites” are represented as evil rites if they reflect political ideals that are immoral in our eyes. These can include, for instance,

the Nazi “Heil Hitler” salute, the public execution of a convict … [and] the cross-burnings of the Ku Klux Klan (Bell 1997: 129).

Some other political acts of rite, on the other hand, such as “the state funerals accorded John F. Kennedy” (Bell 1997: 129), are likely to be represented as ‘acceptable’ as they do not violate our norms.[[6]](#endnote-6) Due to the interconnection between morality and ritual, ritual practices are divided into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ rites,[[7]](#endnote-7) and within a certain network or society there is usually a normative public agreement about the goodness or evilness of certain rituals (even though these agreements might be contested by members of a group as well as some groups within a society). For example the rituals of the Nazis are likely to be described as evil ones in public discourse in many societies (for such rituals see e.g. Goodrick-Clarke 1985). Rituals of violence are also often referred to, by members of ‘civilised societies’, as evil rituals (see Section 6.4.1 on the relationship between violence and normativity).

In a relational sense not every evil ritual is different from the rituals studied in the previous chapters: unless it has a stigmatised target and so gains a destructive function, a ritual like a secret Nazi greeting simply strengthens the bonds of a relational network, however morally unacceptable it is to certain observers. If one surveys theoretical accounts on such rituals (and it should be noted that ‘evil ritual’ is used also in scientific discourse, see e.g. Frankfurter 2001), it becomes evident that researchers argue for the constructive values of morally condemned and/or violent rituals. For example, as Schechner’s (1995) noteworthy monograph notes, violence is usually regarded as a constructive phenomenon:

What about the violence of ritual––human and animal sacrifice, cannibalism, flesh-piercing, initiatory ordeals […] on through a very long list […] Do these practices tame the violence they simultaneously actualize and represent? […] they are homeopathic––that a little ritual violence inoculates a society against more general, and destructive anarchic violence. (Schechner 1995: 260)

That is, many scholars regard rituals of violence as “necessary evil”, which help maintain order in a given group or society. This seems to be a dangerous argument in the sense that while a little violence goes a long way in securing public order, any form of violence has potential to transform into abuse – and this also calls for the alternative approach to rituals in terms of de/con-structiveness proposed by the present chapter. To sum up, while in contemporary public discourse rituals of violence are associated with evil, at least in societies which regard violence as a bad thing, scholars generally agree about the constructive nature of these rituals, which includes relational constructiveness as well.

The present framework will contradict these accounts to some extent, as the main question for us is: constructive and destructive to whom? Arguably, a ritual of violence is constructive for the community but destructive for the targeted person. To sum up, the above description illustrates that “evil ritual” is a broad term, which fails to capture the constructive and destructive aspects of ritual relating.

A somewhat similar problem emerges if one surveys scholarly terms for certain ritual actions that are destructive as default, such as the ‘ritual of exclusion’. This term originates in Foucault’s (1975: 231) work, in which he noted that “the leper gave rise to rituals of exclusion”, as a mechanism of society to protect itself from this menacing epidemic. Accordingly, the ritual of exclusion is often associated with the ritual practices of a society that targets stigmatised individuals. However, Foucault in an interview pointed out the complexity of this term, in the following way:

There is the first function of the university: to put students out of circulation. Its second function, however, is one of integration. Once a student has spent six or seven years of his life within this artificial society, he becomes “absorbable”: society can consume him. Insidiously, he will have received the values of this society. He will have been given socially desirable models of behavior, so that this *ritual of exclusion* [my emphasis] will finally take on the value of inclusion and recuperation or reabsorption. In this sense, the university is no doubt little different from those systems in so-called primitive societies in which the young men are kept outside the village during their adolescence, undergoing rituals of initiation which separate them and sever all contact between them and real, active society. At the end of the specified time, they can be entirely recuperated and reabsorbed. (cited from McKenzie 2004: 27-28)

That is, it is obvious that while the usual default application of rituals of exclusion is destructive (at least from the excluded person’s perspective), it is not inherently a stigmatised group which becomes the subject of these ritual practices.

It is pertinent to note that the relational vagueness in terms of relating also applies to categorical terms that refer to certain aspects of ritual relating which have a constructive default function. For example, one can refer to a ‘deconstructive ritual’: this term describes rituals that reshape relationships through the ludic deconstruction and recombination of relational configurations (see e.g. Turner 1967; and Deflem 1991). Thus, deconstructive rites e.g. a marriage, tend to have a constructive default function from a relational perspective, as it is traditionally a ritual which deconstructs the membership of the bride in her family and at the same time constructs her membership in her husband’s family. However, one could argue that liminal deconstruction is also a key element in destructive rituals, which induce the corruption of the relationship between the performer (and their network) and the stigmatised person(s).

*6.1.3. Data and structure*

Unlike earlier chapters, the data studied in this chapter consists mainly of anecdotes and post-event accounts of destructive in-group rituals, as well as post-event discussions of these rituals such as example (1) above, rather than authentic recordings. This is due to the hidden nature of destructive ritual practices.[[8]](#endnote-8) While it has been argued that certain forms of in-group ritual practices tend to be ‘hidden’ from the observer, this seems to be even more pertinent for destructive rituals. This is due to the shame value attached to these practices in normative public moralising discourse (cf. Section 6.4.1): as destructive rituals are immoral, those who perform them prefer secrecy (irrespective of the fact that they may evaluate their ritual positively, see 6.4.2). Thus, apart from analysing films such as *Bully* (2001) which display interactions that are ritualistic, and reality shows and ‘roasting’ shows (i.e. when well-known people are invited to ridicule a celebrity), it is difficult to record spoken data that represents destructive ritual practices. The situation is somewhat similar in the case of written interaction even though there are open threads that represent abusive ritual in communities,[[9]](#endnote-9) and extracts will be cited from such websites in this chapter. Unfortunately, it is more often than not difficult to access community websites which belong to closed “communities of practice” (Wenger 1998; see also previous chapters) with a relational history, and also reference materials on cyberbullying hardly cite abusive threads (see e.g. Kowalski et al. 2008). The present research relies on a database of 137 interactions and anecdotal descriptions of destructive rituals (see more in Section 6.3), as well as a set of 25 short (and slightly edited) interviews which I conducted in Hungary.

This chapter has the following structure: Section 6.2 will discuss the Goffmanian notion of stigma, which is key to theorising destructive ritual behaviour. Section 3 then explores the inventory of in-group destructive ritual – that is, its most representative practices – by drawing on some studies of impoliteness. As Chapter 2 argued, there is an important overlap between im/politeness and relational rituals. Section 6.3 will illustrate that destructive rituals operate according to some patterns identified by impoliteness researchers, even though there is a key difference between ‘proper’ impoliteness and ritual offence within relational networks, namely, that destructive in-group rituals obtain their destructive function by being performed again and again.[[10]](#endnote-10) Finally, Section 6.4 will examine de/constructiveness from the perspective of participant perceptions.

**6.2. Stigma**

Unlike some other forms of abusive behaviour, destructive in-group ritual practices need a constant victim in order to operate. But a question to be answered when discussing a framework for ritual is how one becomes a victim of the recurrent practices of destructive ritual?

Scholars engaged in organisational studies seem to be unanimous in their opionion that being perceived as ‘different’ from others is the most obvious *casus belli* for becoming a victim within a relational network (see a useful overview in Vartia 2008). The danger of ‘difference’ is illustrated by the following extract from the episode “The Bully” (2001) of the popular cartoon *SpongeBob SquarePants*:

(2) Mrs. Puff: [walks in] Good morning class. Sorry I’m late. I got caught in traffic on the

way in here when that whole “I’m- going-to-be-doing-this-for-the-rest-of-my-life’ thing reared its ugly head and I... [Everyone stares at her blankly] Anyway, we have a new student starting today, so let’s all put on a happy face for Flat the flounder. [opens the door to show a skinny flounder from the front but when he turns sideways, he’s large. The entire class, except SpongeBob, has paper faces, painted with faces, on] Tell the class something about yourself, Flats.

Flats: Well, I like to kick people’s butts. [Mrs. Puff laughs]

Mrs. Puff: What a card! Now Flats, it’s time to pick your seat. Just go ahead and sit anywhere you’d like. [the class move their desks away from the middle of the room, except SpongeBob. Flats sits in the empty seat next to him] Okay class, as you remember last week...

SpongeBob: [to Flats] Hi, I’m SpongeBob!

Flats: Hi, SpongeBob. I’m going to kick your butt.

(Retrieved from: http://spongebob.wikia.com/wiki/The\_Bully\_%28transcript%29)

Although this is a humorous representation of aggression, it neatly pinpoints that SpongeBob’s difficulties start from being different from others (not putting on a paper face, etc.). Yet, what happens with SpongeBob is simply abuse, which is remedied as the plot unfolds, i.e. Flats’ behaviour is not ritualistic.[[11]](#endnote-11)

In SpongeBob’s case, being different is a one-off. However, there are cases when differences from the rest of the group are perceived as long-lasting, sometimes lasting a lifetime. This phenomenon is called *stigma*, and it is defined by Goffman’s (1963) illuminating study in the following way:

The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term *stigma* to refer to bodily signs designated to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor – a blemished person, *ritually* [my emphasis] polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places. (Goffman 1963: 11)

That is, stigma is a ritual symbol, which excludes the individual from a relational network. It is perhaps needless to note that stigma does not necessarily entail any conscious abusive behaviour. However, as Goffman notes, stigma is an inherent source of conflict as there is a gap between non-stigmatised and stigmatised:

While a stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind – on the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and unusual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive; sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap. (Goffman 1963: 12)

In terms of social psychology, this gap also implies, as Goffman argues, that being stigmatised is likely to create a perception of being abused.

Destructive ritual practice comes into operation when the person who sticks out for any reason, or who is regarded as being different or simply vulnerable, is stigmatised by the performer of a given abusive ritual (and potentially by others whose voice the performer animates). Once a markedly negative characteristic is attributed to the victim – i.e. s/he is being stigmatised – she gets a “virtual social identity” (Goffman 1963: 12), i.e. a (negative) identity attributed to her by other members of the network, and can be ritually and repeatedly attacked.

Stigmatisation practices are performed in many ways, but a unifying factor behind these practices is that the victim needs to have a stigma which *markedly contradicts the relational network’s ethos*. While there are many people who are born with potential social-level stigmas (e.g. a physical handicap, racial or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, etc.), it does not follow that it is a social-level stigma which will be taken up in a destructive ritual. An interesting example can be found in Eglash’s (2002) study, which documents the case of “black nerds”. Eglash mentions the case of black children who were being abused – in a way that would be considered as ritual in this book – by other black children, for speaking in an ‘educated way’ (i.e. by using standard American English) which contradicts the in-group ethos of being ‘cool’ associated with black American vernacular.

Stigma and destructive ritual practice could not come into existence if the ethos which the victim’s (claimed) attributes/behaviour contradicts was not that of the *majority* of a relational network. Goffman (1963) defines this majority as “the normal”, whom he describes as follows:

We and those who do not depart negatively from the particular expectations at issue I shall call the *normal* (Goffman 1963: 15).

In my data, “the normal” often seem to have their uncodified in-group values, and the victim becomes ritually stigmatised as a result of an unspoken agreement, i.e. as “the normal” perceive the tension between network ethos and the stigma. However, as it was noted above sometimes it is enough simply to be vulnerable to be targeted (and stigmatised), and “the normal” can negotiate as to how to stigmatise the victim who has no apparent stigma, as the following case illustrates:

(3) I am an Occupational therapist in the NHS and I love my work. I am conscientious and dedicated with expertise in Brain injury. I have been qualified for 18 years and live for my work. Over the last 5 years I have been subjected to consistant bullying *where a group of managers have talked about me in their lunchbreak, joked about ‘smashing my face in’, made a secret agreement not to answer my questions in regard to a new computer system, making gestures behind my back and many many more nasty things* [my emphasis]. Eventually, I walked out of the building and was on sick leave for 3 months. A meeting was arranged with HR but my angry manager used it to critise me stating things like ‘look at the state of you, bursting out of your uniform. No wonder people don’t respect you’. I was advised to complete bullying forms, then one of the bullies filled in a bullying form against me saying she felt harrassed that I had accused her of bullying. I was subjected to 3 hours of questions. 5 months later I have heard nothing from HR and the bullying continues. I have gained 2 stone in weight in 5 months and had a chest infection for 3 months. I despair. My wonderful career has died. I put a brave face on for the patients and nurses on the ward. I am considering sick leave again and seeking legal advice.

(Retrieved from: http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/workplacehealth/Pages/bullyingatwork.aspx)

As section 6.3 will illustrate, recurrently *not doing* something is a typical practice of destructive ritual. A noteworthy point in this description is, first, that this person becomes stigmatised without having any apparent stigma. Whilst the case might be that the narrator is simply silent about a stigma (s)he has, this is not likely, considering that prior to the 5 years period mentioned in this posting (s)he was *not* stigmatised. This seems to indicate that there can be many reasons for one to become stigmatised: for example it could be that before this person worked in another unit (community of practice) in the NHS (National Health Service, UK), which tolerated vulnerability more than the one discussed in example (3), and it is due to the new community of practice’s different ethos that he suddenly found himself in a difficult position. Secondly, example (3) illustrates the above-mentioned point that there can be clear-cut agreement about the abuse of the stigmatised person. A key point here is that it was a group of managers – i.e. people who animate the voice of the community of practice and who have power to question the in-group member’s right to membership – who came to this ‘secret’ agreement.

Example (3) is noteworthy also because it illustrates that some stigmas can transform as destructive in-group ritual practices develop. Although the victim was originally not stigmatised for being overweight, when the destructive ritual practice is being discussed the manager notes “look at the state of you, bursting out of your uniform. No wonder people don’t respect you” – i.e. the original ‘subjective’ stigma (the managers seem to have decided to “smash in” this person) transforms into an ‘objective’ one (cf. the ritual practice of ‘objectivity’ in Chapter 5).

As a matter of course, the managers’ negotiation of stigmatisation in example (3) represents a specific case. It seems to be more often the case that stigma is interactionally co-constructed as the ritual unfolds, as the following post-event interview in Hungarian which I conducted illustrates:

(4) Először az egész viccesnek látszott. Nevettek a méretemen és törpének neveztek, én is velük nevettem, de nem vették az adást. Másnap az egyik srác már eleve bekiabált, hogy törpe, majd lassanként már mindenfelöl jöttek a megjegyzések a szexuális éltetemre, a „gnómságomra”, meg amit el tudsz képzelni. Ez már nem volt vicces, de amikor mondtam nekik, hogy állítsák le magukat, úgy látszott, csak még jobban behergelődnek. Ez így ment hetekig.

First the whole thing looked like fun. They laughed about my height and called me a dwarf, and I laughed with them but they didn’t seem to react to this. On the next day, one of the guys shouted dwarf at me and then gradually remarks came from everywhere about my sexual life, my ‘gnomely’ figure, and whatever you can imagine. This was already not funny at all, but when I told them to stop, it seemed to me that this made them even worse. This went on for weeks. (#8)

In other words, stigma often comes into existence through a co-construction process. As this account of the interviewee’s experience in his teenage years illustrates, there can be a transition from a relatively harmless reference to the stigmatised feature and the recurrent, destructive ritual reference to the stigma.

The present section has argued for the importance of stigma in the operation of destructive rituals. As Chapter 4 has argued, certain ritual practices tend to trigger stigma; however, destructive rituals are different from these in that stigma is the motor of these practices. In what follows, we will overview the most representative forms of destructive ritual practice.

**6.3. Inventory**

Destructive ritual has the following practice features:

1. Recurrent non-doing (ignoring)
2. Recurrent covert offence
3. Recurrent reference to the stigma

This listing follows an increasing degree of directness. However, it must be noted that different degrees of directness does not necessarily imply differences in the perception of these practices as ‘more or less destructive’. First, as Culpeper (2011: 194) argues in his study on impoliteness, unlike what was claimed in previous research such as Leech (1983), it cannot be taken for granted that the more indirect an utterance is, the less offensive it becomes. As Culpeper notes,

Generally, with respect to directness, it is departures from the convention, whether through using directness or non-conventional indirectness, that led to higher evaluations of impoliteness. Regarding low-power speakers commanding high-power addressees, we found that the differences between the different degrees of directness with respect to impoliteness judgments were relatively small. We suggested that the mere fact of commanding someone of relatively high power in a context where they clearly have no special right to do so is enough to lead to the evaluation of strong impoliteness, and at these higher levels of impoliteness the finer linguistic differences amongst our command items gets lost in the ‘white noise’ of offence. We suggested that the fact that the conventionally indirect ‘could you be quiet’ uttered in this context does not exacerbate the impoliteness more than the other directness categories may be because of possible leakage from the conventional polite meaning associated with ‘could you X’ structures and the fact that the mismatch between the conventional meaning and the context is not strong. (Culpeper 2011: 194)

While the present book uses ‘conventional’ somewhat differently from Culpeper (cf. Chapter 2 and Chapter 5), this description is certainly useful as it illustrates that the perception of a destructive act basically depends on the relationship between the interactants, rather than the in/directness of a given act.

Secondly, as the following section 6.3.1 will illustrate, the recurrent nature of ritual practices renders different degrees of in/directness relatively insignificant. In other words, as a given ritual act recurs, it does not seem to matter that much whether it is indirect or not, in that recurrence itself conveys the clear message that “the normal” intend to stigmatise the victim through ritual practice(s).

In the dataset of 137 interactions and anecdotal descriptions, the three practice types of destructive rituals are represented as follows:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Practice of ritual | Recurrent non-doing (ignoring) | Recurrent covert offence | Recurrent reference to the stigma |
| Number of interactions/anecdotal descriptions | 38 | 47 | 52 |

Table 6.1: Different practices of ritual in the data studied

*6.3.1. Recurrent non-doing*

An important form of destructive ritual is *not* to perform an act which is perceived and, perhaps even more importantly, anticipated as a proper (normative) convention. As Haugh argues, anticipations involving expected behaviour are always present in the perception of the appropriateness of a given social act because “social norms are expectations in the sense of *thinking something is necessary*” (Haugh 2003: 399). Furthermore, as Haugh notes in Kádár and Haugh (2013 forthcoming), “Anticipating […] involves presumptive forms of reasoning where inferences are grounded in experience and associative links.” Thus, when a given act that is considered as normative and which is anticipated to occur is not performed and intentionality is captured behind this non-performance *vis-à-vis* inferences grounded in experience and associative links – i.e. the hearer knows that the speaker knows that the hearer would expect him to perform the given act – this lack occasions evaluations as offensive. It is due to the recurrence of not-performing that the stigma value of a given ritual act is confirmed to the victim (and also it is recurrence that seems to give power to ritual offence, as the present section will argue). In other words, recurrence occasions perceptions of “higher-order intentionality” (Haugh 2012) behind the act, that is, that the given act is *planned against* the victim.

The operation of ritual non-doing can be illustrated by the following example:

(5) Isolated – staff involved would never sit with me during morning tea, lunches, meetings, courses, etc. My name was omitted from birthday acknowledgements. All other staff names on whiteboard in staff room and on work trays were in black, only mine was in red. When we were asked to bring a plate for morning teas or special lunches, no one ate any of mine. I volunteered to help on many projects only to find later that the projects had been completed without my help. (Retrieved from: http://www.sheilafreemanconsulting.biz/case-studies.htm)

This description was found on a website dedicated to workplace bullying. As the author’s “never” makes it clear, the sense of offensive isolation is occasioned by this ritual practice *vis-à-vis* repeated non-doing: he is being left out from activities in which one would normally expect to be invited.[[12]](#endnote-12)

If we revisit the question of the degree of indirectness of different practices of destructive ritual it is obvious that ritual non-doing is a most indirect practice, in the sense that in the course of this social action no visible action is made against the victim – this is of course relative, as non-acting is an action when action is normative and anticipated. In this respect, ritual non-doing is a special type of relational ritual, as unlike other ritual acts it is not bound to visible forms or patterns; but then of course non-doing something over a period of time is in itself a pattern.

Furthermore, ritual non-doing is an indirect practice in the sense that it is a social act which is difficult for the victim pin down. As a recent bestseller book *Bully Free at Work* (2008) notes,

[p]erhaps the most difficult part of being excluded at work is that it’s nearly impossible to pinpoint the behavior or know who to confront. Exclusion is often an act of omission rather than commission, that is, instead of doing something to the target, the difficult person at work doesn’t do something, which makes the target feel confused and off-center.

(Retrieved from: http://www.bullyfreeatwork.com/blog/?page\_id=8)

The victim can, of course, attempt to refer to the ritual of non-doing to “the normal”, but as the following thread illustrates it is often the case, at least in the data I studied, in the co-construction of ritual interaction such an attempt creates an opportunity for further abuse:

(6) ***Everyone Plzz Stop Ignoring Me!!!!!***

**1.** [*AIR*FLKISAAC](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/42503/) (07-30-2011)

Mr.Bean ignores me pasqualina ignores me nmeade ignores me what am i not “pro ” enough for them everytime i say hi they dont say anything and the next they say hi to some random person again am i not a “pro”mkwii racer do you guys want me to be 9999 vr or hack the game well first of all im all legit racing second i HATE when people ignore me..... and dont put smart alec responses on this thread it will get me even more mad and dont put this thread is in wrong section because I DONT CARE IM TRYING TO PROVE A POINT AND ITS NOT JUSt pasqualina and mr.bean its everyone!!!!!!!!!

2. [Daphne](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/41218/) (07-30-2011)

Actually you are. Most say that people that can keep over 9000 VR are pro.  
And anyway, I’m ignoring you because playing with legit people is making me mad as of late (Except for Miller).

3. [Wolfy](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/20955/) (07-30-2011)

It’s because they don’t feel like talking to you.   
Now stop bitching.

4. [*ξve*Porta](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/39635/) (07-30-2011)

Who cares? They don’t have to talk to the random fanboys.  
Just kidding, it’s cause you’re Canadian.

5. [Wolfy](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/20955/) (07-30-2011)

Or it’s probably the Canadian thing.

6. [Vices](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/32390/) (07-30-2011)

\*Pats head\*

7. [13Stark37](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/32220/) (07-30-2011)

you suck soul

8. [tortuga](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/29939/) (07-30-2011)

\*ignored\*

9. [*AIR*FLKISAAC](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/42503/) (07-30-2011)

ok im sorry.... i just feel bad now

10. [Flying Mint Bunny](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/40137/) (07-30-2011)

[…]I know I would ignore him after that..

11. [*Γ&#*Megalodon24](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/40945/) (07-30-2011)

xD

18. [Ryan1191](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/20858/) (07-30-2011)

\*Ignores\* This is the wrong place to put this thread. **Now** everyone’s ignoring you

(Retrieved from: http://www.mariokartwii.com/f18/everyone-plzz-stop-ignoring-me-80655.html)

This interaction was retrieved from an online car racing game fun site. [*AIR*FLKISAAC](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/42503/) sends in this post upon perceiving the higher-order intentionality behind the behaviour of other members of the online community. That is, he feels that he is being (ritually) ignored, as other community members do not respond to his postings. If one analyses the responses to his appeal to the community, it becomes clear that it is taken up by the others to further stigmatise him. In turn 2 [Daphne](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/41218/) makes a non-committal response (see more on non-committal responses in e.g. Clift 2012), by stating that he or she does not avoid [*AIR*FLKISAAC](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/42503/) for what the latter claimed as a potential reason for being ignored – that is, not being a professional player – but exactly because he or she is not interested in playing with professionals. By this response [Daphne](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/41218/) manages to diplomatically distance herself from [*AIR*FLKISAAC](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/42503/), i.e. this is a strategy of “disaffiliation” (cf. Drew and Walker 2009), and the stigmatised person thus remains isolated. In turn 3 [Wolfy](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/20955/) animates the voice of “the normal”, as he or she refers to [*AIR*FLKISAAC](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/42503/)’s stigmatised status in an explicit manner (“It’s because they don’t feel like talking to you.”). Furthermore, he downgrades [*AIR*FLKISAAC](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/42503/)’s appeal to the group by designating it as “bitching”, which is a frequently used word to label somebody’s behaviour as deviant, i.e. different from what “the normal” would expect (cf. Zurcher 1985). In turn 4 [*ξve*Porta](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/39635/) makes use of what seems to be humour, by posting “Who cares? They don’t have to talk to the random fanboys.” While in the following sentence he designates this utterance as “kidding”, this is not ‘harmless’ humour in the sense that a) it represents [*AIR*FLKISAAC](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/42503/)’s appeal as insignificant (“Who cares?”), i.e. it confirms that [*AIR*FLKISAAC](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/42503/) is excluded from “the normal”, and b) it reinforces the divide between the group and the victim by portraying the stigmatised person as a “random fanboy”. The ritual abuse then continues, and the next turn of specific interest is 8 in which [tortuga](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/29939/) makes an explicit reference to “the normal’s” stance to ignore the stigamtised by posting “\*ignored\*”. In turn 9 [*AIR*FLKISAAC](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/42503/) makes a last attempt to restore his status amongst the normal by apologising for posting his enquiry and referring to his negative emotions (“ok im sorry.... i just feel bad now”). Apology could work in many other settings to restore membership; as Tavuchis (1993: 8) argues, “apology expresses itself as the exigency of painful re-membering”. However, [*AIR*FLKISAAC](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/42503/) remains stigmatised and the destructive ritual continues: in turn 10 [Flying Mint Bunny](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/40137/) turns towards other members of “the normal” as he refers to [*AIR*FLKISAAC](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/42503/) in the third person, as one he will ignore, and in turn 11 [*Γ&#*Megalodon24](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/40945/) supports this uptake by posting “xD”, an emoticon for laughter. The ritual continues to unfold to turn 18, in which [Ryan1191](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/20858/) addresses the victim directly again, but not with the goal to ‘acknowledge’ his existence. Instead of this, he animates the group’s voice in the form of a verdict, by posting the utterance “\*Ignores\* This is the wrong place to put this thread. **Now** everyone’s ignoring you”.

The indirectness of non-doing does not decrease the destructive effect of this ritual practice, as noted above, due to its recurrence (which also gives it a clear mimetic value). Recurrence decreases the ability of the victim to mentally disarm destructive rituals as harmless ones: while an isolated occurrence of non-doing could be dismissed as an ‘accident’, recurrence practically forces the victim to recognise that they are being abused.[[13]](#endnote-13) This point is illustrated by the following comment in an interview that I conducted:

(7) Nem hívtak meg. Amikor szóba hoztam a dolgot, nem reagáltak semmit, de láttam a fejükön, hogy magukban röhögnek a szemetek. Aztán újra kihagytak, és ez már magáért beszélt.

They didn’t invite me. When I mentioned this matter, they didn’t react, but I saw that they laughed amongst themselves, the shitbags. And then they left me out again, and it spoke for itself. (#14)

If one compares this description with example (4) above, it becomes evident that non-doing is clearly offensive due to its repeated nature, just as in the case of its counterpart.

It is pertinent to note that recurrence often appears as a salient issue in meta-discourse when victims recall destructive rituals such as non-doing, as in the following case:

(8) Let’s start from the beginning, however. Friday, was just a lazy day at work again. I finally, with the help of my boss, managed to get the man with the golfing issue to sign his settlement. And then I settled another case and made plans to settle yet another case. So, all in all, a good day on the job. So, I was in high spirits as I packed up my car and left for Vegas. The traffic was light and I made good time to my first stop to pick up two roommates. They wanted to eat, so I took them to get take out and gas up and off we went to pick up the last person. We picked the last person up and away we went. Now, the annoyance started. First, let me just point out, I don’t mind driving the long distances. I don’t mind if you sleep or eat in my car. I really just have two rules for these long drives – if you are going to be awake, entertain me or else go to sleep. Well, let me just say. Right from the pick ups – it was just jabber in Tagalog. Constant jabber in Tagalog. Which, let me point out, I don’t speak. And the bits that were in English and I tried to join in – were ignored. And you might be thinking – well, maybe they couldn’t hear me from the front, but trust me, *this was not the last time they just ignored me* [my emphasis] like I didn’t just say anything. It was like I was a chauffeur. It was quite annoying. But, I thought, okay, just forget it and just listen to your music and drive these girls to Mammoth. They finally fell asleep.

…

So I gassed up (and let me point out again – the passengers had yet paid or even offered to pay for gas at this point). And away I went – slowing way down every time I got into town. Eventually we got there, and they all got out of my car – *and let me point out again* [my emphasis] – no one thanked me.

…

So, I go upstairs right away and I apologize to them very nicely. And what happens? *I get ignored agai*n [my emphasis].

(Retrieved from: http://beachwhale.wordpress.com/2008/02/)

This example is drawn from a blog, which describes the poster’s bad experience with a group of female acquaintances whom she took on a snowboard tour in her car. In this case the targeted person did not let herself be victimised and the destructive ritual did not seem to have a devastating impact on her, perhaps partly because her relational history with “the normal” was short and partly because she was power equal with “the normal” (cf. Culpeper’s argument in the section above). However, example (7) neatly illustrates the importance of the practice of recurrence in meta-discourse: in this relatively brief section there are three references to the repeated nature of the abusive group’s not-responding; responding to the poster would have been the norm, in particular because she did a favour to the women.

*6.3.2.* Recurrent covert offence

Several researchers of impoliteness, most notably Kryk-Katovsky (2006) in her study on Early Modern English court trials, argued that impoliteness can operate on both overt and covert levels. Overt impoliteness is direct as it is formalised (e.g. swearing), while covert impoliteness is indirect. According to Kryk-Katovsky, in Early Modern English texts covert impoliteness is occasioned via three forms, namely various forms of address and other lexical items used in sarcastic ways, questioning strategies, and discourse markers such as *praythee*. Covert impoliteness can be captured in different settings. For example, Culpeper (2011a) cites the work of Holmes’ (2000) study on workplace discourse, in which jocular abuse “often functions as a covert strategy for face-attack, a means of registering a veiled protest” (Culpeper 2011a: 215).

Covert offence, in a similar way to some other forms of impoliteness that target the victim’s identity as a member of “the normal”, has the potential to become a ritual practice if it is repeatedly performed in a given group against the targeted victim, as the following extract from a newspaper illustrates:

**(9) WHEN does a practical joke cross the line to become bullying? This can be difficult to answer but the question should be one that businesses consider.**

[…]

Greg Robertson, general counsel for Harmers Workplace Lawyers says bullying behaviour can arise when *perceivably harmless jokes* [my emphasis] get out of hand.

“What may have started as a fairly innocuous jibe, when *repeated or spread across an organisation* [my emphasis] it can wreak havoc on the targeted individual,” he says.

(Retrieved from: http://www.theaustralian.com.au/battling-bullies-at-work/story-e6freqn6-1111117156319)

As the solicitor interviewed in this news article explains, what we define as destructive covert rituals such as jokes are dangerous because they are “perceivably harmless” (see example 10 below). Although it is generally argued that there is a delicate balance between ‘healthy’ and destructive teasing (see e.g. Lytte 2007), once an action is “repeated or spread across an organization” – i.e. when it undergoes ritualisation – it gains a clear destructive function.

In terms of practical function, the main difference between ritual practices of non-doing and covert ritual offenses is that the latter recurrently discredit the stigmatised person as one of “the normal” through making repeated soft attacks on her or him. It is again due to the recurrent performance value of the ritual practice that the victim is likely to realise their stigmatised position. In order to illustrate this point, let us refer to the following comic strip on workplace bullying:

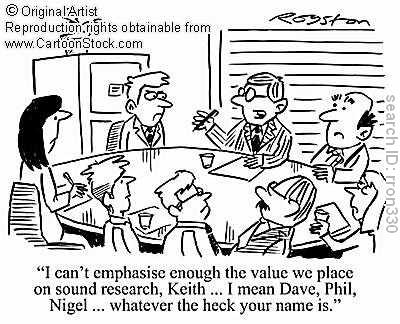


Illustration 6.1: Ritual unrecognition

Forgetting someone’s name could possibly be acceptable from a participant perspective in other contexts such as in a party at a large company where some people vaguely know each other. However, the situation is different in the case above, which represents a workplace meeting of a community of practice: in such a meeting, participants rightly suppose that their names are known by the others. Illustration 6.1 represents the ritualistic nature of the practice of intentionally ‘forgetting’ names. First, although it is not clear whether this imaginary situation is a recurrent case or not, since it has been drawn from a website which displays examples of workplace bullying it is evident that this is a schematic – i.e. at least potentially ritualistic – way to destruct one’s membership of the group of “the normal”. Secondly, the practice here has a strong potential to become ritualistic because it is the boss who makes use of it, i.e. a person with the institutional right to discredit the employee as one of “the normal”, as he animates the voice of the institution. Thirdly, the case above clearly reflects the performance value of the ritual. That is, instead of simply stating “Sorry, I forgot your name” the manager first makes a staged effort, by listing various possible names (“Keith, … I mean Dave, Phil, Nigel”). Making such an effort could perhaps be interpreted as a sign of goodwill in other cases, but in this interaction its destructive staged nature is clear, and it is made even more offensive by the explicitly rude utterance “whatever the heck your name is”.

In terms of in/directness covert offence is in between indirect non-doing and overt destructive rituals which will be analysed in the following section. That is, in this ritual practice there is a ‘visible’ act of recurrent covert offence, but this visible act is disguised as harmless, as the following example illustrates:

(10) at a staff night out and after dinner we went to a bar and the Principal said, ‘Come on, Trace, let’s find you a man.’ (Needless to say I am single);

(Retrieved from: http://www.sheilafreemanconsulting.biz/case-studies.htm)

Example (9) is drawn from an Australian school teacher’s description of how she was bullied in her workplace. The Principal’s utterance could represent ‘collegial’ teasing workplace humour, or jocular mockery as Haugh (2010) defines it. However, as it is part of the recurrent exclusion of the target from the group of “the normal”, she perceives the destructive function, that is she contextualises this performance. Yet, there is little that this person could have done, not only because the Principal holds institutional power in an educational institution, but also because this ritual is disguised as humour and protesting against it would further weaken the victim’s position, in a somewhat similar way with the phenomena studied in example (6) above and which will be raised again in the analysis of example (13). As Bloch et al. (2011) note about the act of abusive humour, jokes which disguise the hostile and punitive nature of the interaction make it difficult for the scapegoat to respond without demonstrating his or her ‘lack’ of humour.

*6.3.3. Recurrent reference to the stigma*

The most direct practice of destructive ritual is when the stigma is named. As research on this practice of destructive ritual has revealed, reference to stigma tends to operate through association, that is, there is an abstract stigmatised property which “the normal” name in the ritual act, and there is an associative relationship between this symbolic stigma and the victim’s actual stigma. This is illustrated in the following example:

(10) Bully: Y’alright, metal mouth?

Nerd: Yeah, just um … doing some homework.

Bully: So you gonna do my homework as well then?

Nerd: Um, I …

Bully: I said, are you gonna do mine for me then?

Nerd: You know I would, I’ve just got so much …

(*The bully grabs the nerd’s chair and pushes him against the wall.*)

(Retrieved from: http://www.scribd.com/doc/39648988/The-Bully-Script)

This short literary text depicts an interaction between a bully and the victim who is represented as an isolated person. The bully uses “metal mouth” to address the victim; this common form of address[[14]](#endnote-14) is a reference to the victim’s braces. It is obvious that the stigmatised property in this case is not so much the visible physical stigma (even though according to Goffman 1963 any visible handicap can become stigma) but its symbolic implication to the relational network. That is, braces combined with the victim’s ‘nerdy’ fondness to learn contradict the bully’s (and his relational network’s) ethos of ‘coolness’.

As research on direct destructive ritual illustrates, in the majority of cases ritual operates *vis-à-vis* association: 38 out of 52 cases concern an associated stigma rather than direct stigma as in the following text, which describes Prince Harry’s difficulties in the British army during his service in Iraq:

(11) Most people imagine that the life of a prince is quite privileged and pleasant, and although we’re sure Prince Harry has his fair share of royal privileges, he’s also gotten more than his fair share of taunting. The reason? His red hair. Although in America, red hair does not carry a stigma, in the UK, “gingers” like Harry are picked on for their colored hair and fair skin. Harry’s army pals frequently call him the “Ginger Bullet Magnet,” and have joked that they would buy ginger wigs to wear in Iraq, presumably to prevent insurgents from identifying the young prince.

(Retrieved from: http://www.onlinecolleges.net/2011/11/02/15-famous-successful-people-bullied-school/)

This text was found on a website which describes stories of various celebrities who suffered in-group abuse. Prince Harry’s situation is similar to that of a nerd in a school (cf. example 10): in a unit that fights on the frontline his privileged social position, which is open to imply a sense of ‘being spoilt’, contradicts the ethos of toughness. In his case the physical stigmatised property is his red hair and fair skin, which make him a “Ginger Bullet Magnet”, i.e. a soldier who is not good, and who has to be protected by his tough piers (hence the potentially offensive suggestion that the other soldiers “would buy ginger wigs to wear in Iraq”). The ritual nature of this offence is made clear by that author of this text, when they describe references to his “gingerness” as “frequent” ones.

However, association is not a precondition for direct destructive ritual practice to operate, as the remaining 14 cases in my dataset illustrate. Practically any property such as racial origin – or a physical property as in example (4) above – can become the subject of destructive ritual practices.

The present section has overviewed the three types of destructive relational ritual practices, which have different degrees of in/directness. The discussion has so far represented these practices from the victims’ perspectives, i.e. we have focused on their destructive effect. In what follows, let us examine the different perceptions from which destructive ritual practices can be described.

**6.4. Different perceptions of ritual practices**

As has already been commented upon in some detail, destructiveness is a relative value for two reasons. First, from a relational perspective the constructive function that destructive ritual practices potentially fulfil for “the normal” cannot be neglected. For instance, we could recall the following section of example (6):

4. [*ξve*Porta](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/39635/) (07-30-2011)

Who cares? They don’t have to talk to the random fanboys.  
Just kidding, it’s cause you’re Canadian.

5. [Wolfy](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/20955/) (07-30-2011)

Or it’s probably the Canadian thing.

While both turns 4 and 5 function as answers to the stigmatised person’s question, Wolfy also uses this response to express agreement with ξvePorta, i.e. the relationship between “the normal” is being enforced. And, relating becomes even more explicit in turns 10 and 11 of the same interaction:

10. [Flying Mint Bunny](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/40137/) (07-30-2011)

[…]I know I would ignore him after that..

11. [*Γ&#*Megalodon24](http://www.mariokartwii.com/users/40945/) (07-30-2011)

xD

Whilst this as a point does not need further explanation, it is pertinent to note that this constructive function also appears occasionally in meta-discourse on rituals. For example, a child who Menesini et al. (2003) interviewed about his leading role in abusive acts which are described as ritual in the present book noted that “I … feel great because I got the attention of other kids”.

Secondly, destructive ritual practices seem to occasion more diverse evaluations than their constructive counterparts. As section 6.4.1 will illustrate, destructive rituals are evaluated negatively both by the victim and also in public moral discourse. This is an important point to address here because in the anthropological literature, which does not concern itself with the destructive relational function of rituality (cf. Section 1), those ritual practices which have any potential destructive function, such as rituals of violence, are often approached from a diachronic perspective, as practices that are relationally constructive for the wider community in the long run. Although this is arguably an important point, the present study proposes a different uptake, by approaching destructive ritual practices from a ‘lay’ or community moral perspective, and focussing on the shame attached to these practices. Section 6.4.2 then approaches destructive ritual from the language users’ perspectives, and argues that a ritual practice occasions positive or negative evaluations depending on the evaluator’s relationship with the given act. It is obvious that for the stigmatised person these ritual practices are harmful, and therefore studying “the normal’s” evaluations is more interesting. As the discussion thus far has shown, for members of “the normal” destructive ritual practices do not imply negative meaning, as they confirm the ethos of a relational network. However, the wider (societal) moral refusal of these practices studied in 6.4.1 occasions awareness that such positive evaluations are likely to be contested by others. That is, the shame value attached to destructive practices makes evaluations ambiguous, and the same ambiguity can be observed in the evaluations of those who are semi-participants’ in a destructive ritual act.

*6.4.1. Public evaluation of destructive rituals*

Importantly, the potential constructive relational function of destructive ritual practices does not imply that they are similar to the constructive ritual practices studied in the previous chapters. In general, antisocial stigmatising is evaluated negatively by the public in various societies, due to which there are labels attributed to such practices such as ‘bullying’ in English, *ijime* in Japanese, *szivatás/csicskáztatás* in Hungarian, and so on.[[15]](#endnote-15) That is, whilst destructive ritual practices can occasion different evaluations, mostly depending on one’s relationship with the ritual, there is a general awareness about the moral inappropriateness of these practices. This is different from the evaluation of a constructive ritual, the practice of which is normative (it fulfils expectancies), i.e. it is unlikely that it is evaluated negatively, in particular by network insiders (see e.g. the case of ‘disarmed’ swearwords in Chapter 2 and 5, which are potentially offensive for network outsiders but harmless to network insiders).

Historians like Muir (2005) and anthropologists like Schmidt and Schröder (2001) argue that in certain places and times certain ritual acts – which are described in the present framework as acts with potential destructive function – such as rituals of violence were and continue to be socially approved. Yet, whilst these ritual acts, such as the public humiliation of a stigmatised entity, are potentially destructive, scholars usually focus on the fact that these ritual acts were/are socially constructive. For example, Muir (2005: 33) provides the following account on the activities of the so-called “youth abbeys”, i.e. gangs of young men in Medieval Europe:

The activities of youth-abbeys could be highly ambiguous. Providing a rite of passage through the “dangerous” years that licensed rowdiness and even legitimated certain forms of violence, the abbeys also enforced community moral standards (especcially with regard to sexual behavior) on others. In France they performed ritual charivaris and in Italy *mattinate* that humiliated couples whose marriages somehow failed to measure up to the community’s standards…

However, previous research also makes two further points. First, destructive ritual practices were and continue to be *endured* rather than *supported* by the public, especially by those in power within a society whose voice counts as ‘normative’. This is the reason behind the mechanism that certain abusive ritual practices, after some time, become prohibited and/or condemned. For example, in revisiting the history of “youth abbeys” above, Muir also notes that after the medieval period their activities were outlawed:

As authorities themselves abandoned ritual punishments, they became less tolerant of popular rites that led to disorder. Spaces and times that were once the priviliged place for the illicit gradually came under public regulation. The esplanades outside of town walls had been the locale for the brawls of youthful gangs and the turf of unregulated prostitutes who entertained clients in the full light of day. At night the streets of towns and citites became the dangerous territory of the young who escaped the control of adults and public authorities. […] Throughout the early modern period governmental authorities strove to transform all open spaces into public property […] Youth-abbeys […] were delegitimated in town after town. (Muir 2005: 147)

Secondly, it is also important to note that those historical destructive ritual practices which are documented in historical sources seem to function against individuals and groups that are stigmatised on a social level, i.e. they did not function in an arbitrary way. It can be argued that societies imposed and continue to impose *restrictions* on destructive ritual practices.

Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that both historical and intercultural sources suggest that people were and continue to be aware of the danger of what are defined here as destructive ritual practices in different periods and places. This is the reason various historical educational materials give instructions to the reader as to how to avoid a certain in-group practice transforming into a destructive ritual. For example, a historical Chinese textbook for foreigners cites the following dialogue, in order to illustrate the importance of the difference between a joke and ritual abuse:

(12) 說：我的兄弟。你委實生得標致。果然風流。真個可愛。想殺了我。

答：你果然有心想我。你實在有心想我。你一嘴都是胡說。花言巧語。假意兒。騙別

個罷了。你來騙我。

說：我果然想你。不是假話。我若是騙你。我就賭一個大大的咒。給你聽麼。

答：你賭來。

說：你聽著我賭得明明白白的。若是糊塗。一點都不算的。

答：好好。你就賭來。

說：我若沒有真心想你的。我那頭髮尾。登時生一個斗來大的疔瘡。永世不得收口。

流膿流血。爛到見骨。這個咒。大不大。狠不狠。

答：果然大。果然狠。這個咒。果然虧你賭。

說：不是。你教我賭麼。我就照你嘴。賭給你聽就是了。

答：你這個光棍好油嘴。我不和你講。我要回家去了。

說：給我留留麼。再坐一會兒罷。實在我真真捨你不得的。

答：你捨我不得。你這一條毛巾。送我做表記。肯不肯。

說：怎麼不肯呢。有更好的也肯。希在這一條毛巾。就不肯的道理。你要就拿去。

答：多謝多謝。

說：還有一句話講。方纔我有東西給了你表記。你如今有什麼東西回答我呢。

答：我是沒有什麼給你的。你若是不願意。你就把手巾拿回去罷了。誰要你的。

說：我的好兄弟。不要使性兒。會使性的人快老。我如今和你相量。你既沒有東西回答我。你把頭兒朝過來笑一笑。給我親個嘴兒就罷了。

答：噯呀。這個人好龌龊。把口水弄得人家滿嘴都是。

得罪得罪。好朋友玩。不要生氣。生氣就不好玩了。

我們後生的人。出來都是愛玩的。不曾見你這個人。玩得太刻薄了。

是我不著了。如今賠個罪兒。不要惱了。

*Statement:* You, young brother, are handsome, rich in talents and truly likable. I have missed your company.

*Response:* You truly thought of me?! You are speaking nonsense, with these blandishments and hypocrisy. Fool someone else but not me!

*Statement:* I truly was thinking of you, this is no lie. To prove that I do not try to fool you, I will take an oath in front of you!

*Response:* Take it then!

*Statement:* Bear witness that I make a clear oath. If it is unclear it shall not count.

*Response:* All right, all right. Make the oath!

*Statement:* If I did not truly think of you, let a huge furuncle grow atop my head in an instant! Let it never heal, let pus and blood flow from it, and let it rot until the bone is exposed! Is this oath big and ruthless enough?

*Response:* It is big, it is ruthless, but, after all, this oath is made merely by *you*.

*Statement:* But you bade me make the oath, I acted as you wished, and you were my witness!

*Response:* You, ruffian, are a glib talker, I will not speak with you, I want to go home.

*Statement:* Will not you stay for a while? Please remain seated. I truly loathe parting with you.

*Response:* If you really loathe to part, give me this towel as a token of our friendship, would you?

*Statement:* How could I refuse? If I had anything better I would also give it to you. How could I disagree to give you a towel! Take it if you wish.

*Response:* My sincere thanks, my sincere thanks.

*Statement:* But there is something: I just gave you a thing as a token of our friendship, so what do you give me in return?

*Response:* I don’t have anything for you! If you don’t like this, take your towel back! Who wants your things!

*Statement:* You, good brother, should not be headstrong. Those who are headstrong age quickly. Let me suggest this: if you have nothing to offer in return, turn your head and laugh at me, and give me a kiss.

*Response:* Ha, this guy really is filthy! Wants to spit his saliva into another’s mouth!

. . .

Do not take offence, do not take offence! When good friends mock each other you should not grow angry. If you get angry you spoil the game!

We youngsters enjoy jests, but I’ve never seen anyone who was as harsh in mocking as you.

I was at fault and I now apologise. Please do not be angry.

(Cited from Kádár 2011: 82-85)

This textbook dialogue which prescribed normative behaviour makes it clear that recurrent mocking should be disarmed by apologising, in order to prevent it developing into a destructive ritual practice.

To sum up, even though certain forms of rituals of violence were accepted in certain periods and places, we should be aware that destructive ritual practices *per se* were perhaps never formally endorsed in any society. Furthermore, if one observes morality books, behaviour manuals and other historical sources, as well as contemporary movements and legislations against destructive ritual practices it becomes evident that in normative public discourse, destructive acts are condemned. Thus, we can conclude that destructive ritual, when recognised as such, attracts negative public evaluation.

*6.4.2. Participant/onlooker perspectives*

The destructive character of a ritual becomes relative when one focuses on the perspective of participants and onlookers (i.e. people in the community who passively watch in-group ritual practices). “The normal” tend to reflect on their ritual practice positively (or, at least, non-negatively) both as the interaction is co-constructed and in retrospection, and onlookers who failed to restore the moral order by opposing the destructive practice, or who associate themselves with the ethos of the ritual practice, can also emphasise the ‘harmlessness’ of a given ritual practice.

In order to illustrate the interactional evaluations that a destructive ritual practice is likely to generate when it comes to “the normal”, let us examine the following online thread, from the online fantasy game website *League of Legends*. Prior to the interaction depicted here, there was an incident (described as a ‘locally-coded’ (in-group) racist slur by the stigmatised person, a Lithuanian, in turn 17 of example 13 below): the stigmatised person’s acronym was changed without his consent to one that he found insulting. As it becomes evident from the thread, although this person tried to protest and also requested other group members to use his proper acronym, this just led to a further destructive ritual about his name and personality. The present thread, which supposedly took place after he openly raised the possibility of taking legal advice, represents a noteworthy case. In the beginning of the interaction the destructive ritual continues, but when the stigmatised person (8 bit gunny is his new acronym, having changed it from ‘(31) Dogs’ i.e. the acronym the player found insulting. His original acronym was DogTrainer) joins in and posts some threatening messages, most of the attackers switch to the ritual of ignoring the stigmatised (cf. Section 6.3.1) but a member of “the normal” decides to ‘(re)interpret’ the ritual to the victim:

(13)

1. DD Seventh (13-04-2011)

I have recently seen a good DogTrainer, sadly he doesn’t like it when I call him DogTrainer.  
Hence I’d like some community ideas on a name to give to my DogTrainer.  
Ideas?

1. Vektro (13-04-2011)

Tron Day-ner(d)

1. x1ve (13-04-2011)

CatCooker. very chinese tho ^\_^

1. A Random Mop (13-04-2011)

PigPeddler  
RhinoRustler  
GoatGuardian

1. Pettzon (13-04-2011)

LiceBreeder

1. Moonwhisp (13-04-2011)

**Master’o’lol-thread**  
Or perhaps something more similar to DogTrainer:  
**PuppyConductor**  
And all this thread needs to win, is having a link to it’s inspiration. Sadly, that might be perceived as offensive by someone... http://euw.leagueoflegends.com/board/images/smilies/smile.gif

1. SHmklV (13-04-2011)

MrBiches

1. wlmins (13-04-2011)

PhallusMasseuse

1. 8 bit gunny (13-04-2011)

i like the last one - MrBiches

1. Moonwhisp (13-04-2011)

Really, well in that case.

I hereby dub thee: PhallusMasseuse. :P

1. 8 bit gunny (13-04-2011)

that’s not the one i liked

…

1. oneFive (13-04-2011)

how he leaves you with the name 31 dogs this is so funny haha anyways dude calm down dont you find it funny too ? if you sue them pls make a video documentation :\_)

1. 8 bit gunny (13-04-2011)

ill try to document as much as i can, i already sent multiple emails to different riot contact addresses and ill see witch one replies to me fastest

1. Moonwhisp (13-04-2011)

In your search for a new glorious nickname, I came up with another suggestion.  
You could be:  
TheArtistFormerlyKnownAsDogTrainer.  
Come on. What do you think? http://euw.leagueoflegends.com/board/images/smilies/smile.gif

1. 8 bit gunny (13-04-2011)

further mocking just provided me with further evidence, im not encouraging you, but thank you

1. Moonwhisp (13-04-2011)

Does this mean you seriously can’t see the entertainment value in this whole affair?  
I sincerely hope that’s not the case.  
…

1. 8 bit gunny (13-04-2011)

After the thread was closed, i didn't receive even single 1 reply in my ticket, they just ignore me, again. And i find as much amusement from being called “a dog”, as a black guy finds from being called “a niger”. Im curently discussing with my laywer, on what exactly did mister Serif meant by changing my name from DogTrainer, to 31 dogs, to me personaly it sounded like he was targeting Lithuanians as a bunch, saying that we are all dogs

(Retrieved from: http://euw.leagueoflegends.com/board/showthread.php?t=166637&page=3)

In turns 1-8 the ritual develops in a default manner, i.e. different members of the group post insulting comments as they play with the stigmatised person’s acronym. In turn 1 DD Seventh opens the topic as he refers to the victim’s recent protest (“sadly he doesn’t like it when I call him DogTrainer”) against changing the acronym “DogTrainer” to “(31) dogs”. This opening, which is a theatric (mimetic) performance, as all in-group members seem to know about this event, is an encouragement for other members of “the normal” to engage in the ritual practice. This is also reinforced by the style of the utterance, e.g. DD Seventh refers to the victim in a patronising form as “*my* [author’s emphasis] DogTrainer”. In response, various insulting proposals are suggested, perhaps most salient of which (from an analytic perspective) is that of Moonwhisp in turn 6 where he notes “And all this thread needs to win, is having a link to it’s inspiration. Sadly, that might be perceived as offensive by someone... http://euw.leagueoflegends.com/board/images/smilies/smile.gif”. This message:

* reflects the poster’s awareness that the stigmatised person openly protested previously against the stigma,
* represents the ongoing destructive ritual as a humorous one, and
* also positions the victim’s *anticipated* protest as invalid.

In turn 9 the stigmatised person joins the discussion. At first he seems to accept one of the derogatory acronyms “MrBiches” (that is Mr Bitches, a person who is bitching, i.e. complains without any valid reason). It might be that at this point he tries to join “the normal” in a self-mocking way in order to improve his in-group situation. But irrespective of the goal of this utterance it is just oil on the fire, and in the next turn Moonwhisp offers him *another* one of the offensive acronyms proposed before, “PhallusMasseuse”, i.e. he makes it clear that the stigmatised status is maintained. When the stigmatised person attempts to protest, his remark is not accepted.

The next point of particular analytic interest is what is denoted as turn 12 here: oneFive addresses the victim by proposing that he accept the offensive acronym: “how he leaves you with the name 31 dogs this is so funny haha anyways dude calm down dont you find it funny too ? ? if you sue them pls make a video documentation :\_)”. While this utterance seems to provide an opportunity to the stigmatised person to communicate with “the normal” and it includes an emoticon, in fact it simply encourages him to accept the stigma generated by the acronym without further protesting, and also it represents him as a person who overreacts to things – this is what Harré et al. (2009) call “negative positioning”. Furthermore, it mockingly refers to the victim’s previous or supposed intention to sue the gaming website, by proposing to make a “video documentation”. This is obviously not possible as it is an online interaction, i.e. the stigmatised person is positioned again as someone who ‘should not be taken seriously’ (unlike members of “the normal”). In turn, the stigmatised person responds in a menacing way, stating that he has already started to collect documents on the abuse he suffered.

This is a turning point, as from here “the normal” ignore the stigmatised person, maybe because they sense that this matter has turned serious, but it is more likely that they switch to the ritual practice of non-doing (see 6.3.1 above) – or perhaps both these motivations operate jointly here. However, a member of “the normal”, Moonwhisp, continues the interaction for a few turns. In turn 14 he attempts to disarm the in-group ritual practice, this time by proposing a less offensive acronym as in turn 10; note, however, that he continues to uphold the destructive discourse, as he represents the other’s complaint as “your search for a new glorious nickname”, i.e. he seems to position the other as a non-serious person. When in turn 15 the stigmatised person responds, Moonwhisp *evaluates* the group’s ritual practice as a humourous one, by posting “Does this mean you seriously can’t see the entertainment value in this whole affair?”. Following this, after a brief exchange Moonwhisp joins the others as he chooses to ignore 8 bit gunny, and the stigmatised person sends in two messages, which remain unanswered. His last message, in turn 17 is of interest because it represents the victim’s evaluation of the ritual practice, which unsurprisingly, entirely differs from that of Moonwhisp in turn 15.

To sum up, the present example illustrates that the evaluations which destructive rituals occasion, significantly differ from their constructive counterparts (see above), i.e. their performance is evaluated mainly depending on one’s interactional position. Putting it simply, in terms of participant perspectives, the evaluation which a ritual occasions seem to depend on whether one is the stigmatiser or the stigmatised.[[16]](#endnote-16) However, Moonwhisp’s evaluation in example (12) also illustrates that evaluations are influenced by the social shame that destructive ritual practices evoke – this awareness might be the reason behind the euphemistic labelling of the act.

It is pertinent to note that the practice of euphemistic labelling in terms of evaluation seems to be widespread. As was noted in the introduction to this chapter, destructive rituals can more often be captured in the form of retrospective accounts, than in ongoing (real time) interactions. Therefore, the evaluations the researcher is able to retrieve often represent the observer’s perspective because, in a sense, even those who originally participated in an interaction become semi-observers when they narrate and reflect on an event retrospectively. There is, however, a fundamental gap between the perspectives of those who participated in a ritual event – and who consequently represent an act from the insider’s (*emic*) perspective – and those who evaluate a ritual event from the outsider’s (*etic*) moral perspective (see Pike 1967 on this distinction, as well as previous chapters). The data studied suggests that network insider evaluations do not fundamentally differ, irrespective of whether they occur in interaction or in retrospective accounts, and they are equally positive and/or euphemistic. This is also supported by psychological research: for example, Bandura’s (1991) noteworthy study on aggressive children’s reasoning for recurrent (i.e. potentially ritual) abusive acts shows that they often label their acts in a euphemistic way (“Just a bit of fun”), quite similarly to what we could observe in example (12). This euphemistic labelling reflects awareness of the fact that their practices are regarded as morally unacceptable by the public.

Furthermore, onlookers – i.e. members of the in-group who do not actively participate in the performance of destructive ritual evaluations – also tend to evaluate these rituals euphemistically, as ‘harmless’. As the examples in Sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 illustrate, from an outsider perspective ritual stigma, especially its indirect forms, may seem to be less dramatic than, for example, swearing (although swearing itself can function as a ritual practice triggering stigma), and occasionally it requires some insider explanation to understand what is going on in a ritual act, as in the case of example (10) above. A possible harmless event can be devastating from the stigmatised in-group member’s *emic* (in-group) perspective. That is, it can work the other way around as, for example, in-group banter which could potentially harm the external observer but tends to be harmless for in-group members (see Culpeper 1996). Yet, despite the indirectness of these ritual practices, once outsiders understand their function they are likely to evaluate them negatively. However, the situation seems different in my data when it comes to onlookers who are passive insiders. This point can be illustrated by the following account provided by an acquaintance of mine:

(13) Amikor ezek történtek nem gondoltam volna, hogy amivel a srácok poénkodtak az *ennyire* megalázó neki. Csak amikor évekkel később e-mailben elküldött mindenkit a francba egy osztálytalálkozó előtt, akkor jöttem rá, hogy baromira utálta a helyzetet. … Pedig ezek csak kisebb szopatások voltak.

When these things happened I didn’t realise that the jokes made by these guys were *so* humiliating for him. Only when years later he sent the whole class to hell before an anniversary meeting did I realise that he hated this situation like hell. … Although these were just smallish slurs.

Such evaluations accord with that of active members of “the normal”, and they seem to be motivated by the awareness and anticipation that even being a passive onlooker is problematic if an event is morally objected to by the public. That is, people in retrospect may re-evaluate their historically-situated understanding of the given act, as might be the case in example (13). This is a tentative claim, which is only supported by the fact that outsiders react differently to such practices in retrospect.

To sum up, although members of “the normal” tend to evaluate their practices positively, these evaluations reflect some awareness of a wider negative social evaluation.

**6.5. Summary**

The present chapter has set out to examine destructive in-group relational rituals. It has been argued that examining these ritual acts is significant, not only because they have elaborate practices, as Section 6.3 illustrated, but also because the examination of destructive ritual practices brings the interactants’ perceptions and evaluations into relational ritual theory. In the case of constructive ritual acts evaluation is not so significant because these normative acts tend to accord with normative moral expectations within a group. Evaluation seems to become important when it comes to destructive rituals because of their dual characteristic, i.e. they perform a constructive relational function for “the normal” (i.e. they are perceived positively) and they are generally evaluated negatively in wider public discourse. These different perceptions are illustrated in Fig. 6.1:

**the stigmatised’s insider evaluation (negative)**

**“the normal’s” insider evaluation (positive & reflexive**)

Figure 6.1: Different perceptions and evaluations of destructive rituals

As this chapter has argued, although “the normal’s” evaluation – which can include the evaluation of both active performers of a ritual act and that of passive onlookers – does not take place in a vacuum but tends to reflect awareness of wider social evaluation of the act (arrows in Table 6.2 stand for this influence).

After having concluded the exploration of relational rituals by looking at both their constructive and destructive functions, in the following chapter we will summarise the framework elaborated in the present book, and propose some areas for future research.

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# Notes:

1. . Note that although ‘bullying’ is a colloquial word it is used as a technical term in some fields such as educational psychology. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. . See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Si-SvrweHqk [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. . And also because it can be supposed that the girl mentioned in this posting enjoys the support of the network: as the poster makes it clear she was previously bullied by others as well. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. . And some destructive ritual practices of ‘regulated’ nature reinforce(d) the dominating social ethos, see Section 6.4.1.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. . *Heti Válasz* XII (46): 28-29. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. . But then they are unacceptable and consequently ‘evil’ for other groups and societies which have different moral values – which illustrates the relativity of ‘evilness’ in terms of rituality. A nice example for the relativity of this phenomenon can be drawn from Bell’s book (1997: 129) who, along with Kennedy’s case, notes the funeral of Mao Zedong. This funeral (along with that of Stalin) is often represented in western public discourse as a symbol of tyranny, that is, it is evaluated negatively, while in China it is generally represented positively. This point illustrates that ‘public recognition’ (cf. Norbert Elias (1994 [2000]) is a problematic notion in terms of destructive rituality, in a similar way to a constructive one, as recognitions of ritual may differ across certain groups and networks within a society, and they can also differ across cultures. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. . This, however, does not mean that groups and public discourses are unanimous in the evaluation of rituals. See e.g. Brakke (2012) on the diversity of ritual norms. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. . ‘Covert’ would be an even better term here, but this label is reserved for certain types of constructive relational rituals, cf. Chapter 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. . The most typical ones are chatrooms of online game websites. Importantly, online virtual identities are real ones for netizens (see e.g. Thomas 2007), and so this multimodal online data type (cf. e.g. emoticons) seems to be suitable to represent the destructive effect of ritual practices in interaction. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. . Due to the repeated and stigmatising nature of destructive ritual practices, one can argue that they tend to be intentional. It is necessary to note that in the field of impoliteness research there is some disagreement as regards the usage of impoliteness (see Paternoster 2012 for an overview). Culpeper (2008) and Bousfield (2008) claim that ‘impoliteness’ describes intentionally face aggravating behaviour, while ‘rudeness’ refers to an unintentionally mismanaged level of politeness. However, Culpeper in a later study (2011: 79-80) modified this stance, claiming that intentionality is relatively unimportant in terms of evaluation, due to which this terminological distinction can be eliminated. Culpeper suggests using ‘impoliteness’, as it is more academic than ‘rudeness’. In the present chapter I will use ‘impoliteness’ partly following Culpeper’s suggestion, and partly because in the phenomena studied intentionality is present anyway, that is, the way in which ‘impoliteness’ is used here also accords with Culpeper (2008) and Bousfield (2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. . And, importantly, it does not have potential to become a ritualistic practice, at least in a relational sense, because the class obviously dislikes and fears Flats (others in the class move their desks away from the middle of the room). As the present chapter illustrates, a destructive practice can become ritual only if it animates the ethos of the network, which is not the case here. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. . This extract also illustrates that different types of destructive ritual practices can collaborate as the social action is realised. For example, the section “All other staff names on whiteboard in staff room and on work trays were in black, only mine was in red” makes it clear that the stigmatised person was not simply being ignored through the ritual practice of non-doing but also there were visible actions made against her.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. . Cf. example (7) in which the first section illustrates that the stigmatised person tried to dismiss non-doing, but it was recurrence that made her realise that non-doing is a mimetic act (i.e. ritual) targeted against her. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. . Arguably, this is a common abusive form, just as ‘four eyes’ (to refer to someone with glasses); one could argue that it is almost a cliché in some contexts. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. . Arguably, these labels describe different understandings of this phenomenon, but the analysis of this question is beyond the scope of the present work. An insightful pilot study on this topic was conducted by Smith et al. (2002). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. . It is necessary here to refer to Erving Goffman’s (1979, 1981) notion of “footing”, which means that participants in an interaction can take different positions. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)