Humor Use and Family Satisfaction: A Cross Cultural Approach

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ABSTRACT

Humor has long been acknowledged as a useful tool in communicative contexts within romantic, friend, and professional relationships. However, research has yielded minimal empirical evidence regarding how humor is employed within a family. This study investigates the use of humor in familial interactions to determine whether it contributes to a higher degree of familial satisfaction. Additionally, the trends and differences among the various cultures' use of humor are examined. A total of 395 students at a large Southwestern university responded to a Likert-type questionnaire regarding the role of humor in their family as it relates to their familial satisfaction. A correlation analysis of these constructs indicated that a higher degree of humor use within familial interactions correlated positively with higher levels of satisfaction. More importantly, MANOVA and post hoc analyses revealed significant differences in humor due to ethnicity.

Introduction

Families represent the first exposure to communication a person encounters. A child learns various socialization tools such as conversing, competing, negotiating and compromising from interactions with parents and siblings. Likewise, a person may also learn how to be affectionate, loving and humorous from family members (Golish, 2003). In adulthood, these tools quite often serve as a gauge to determine communication competency, a characteristic of humor which can be considered a learned characteristic (Parks, 1994). Researchers found support for this notion concluding that humor is not innate, but rather a learned skill that can be refined and applied in various life situations (Ziv, 1984). Humor use may also influence the level of satisfaction experienced within a family.

Of these communicative behaviors learned through interacting with family members, humor is an important skill which to a large extent, is trivialized. However, humor represents a communicative talent that can be used in almost every encounter with anyone from any race. The study of humor is not as contemporary as some may believe. In fact, scholarly research on humor dates back to some of the earliest rhetoricians such as Aristotle and Plato

(Zijderveld, 1983). Despite humor's long history, it remains one of the most abstract topics in communication.

Academic research has made some significant advances toward understanding the boundaries, functions and consequences of humor (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991). Humor has a positive impact on an individual's ability to cope with various life situations such as stress (Martin & Lefcourt, 1983), and is positively associated with creativity and intimacy (Hampes, 1992, 1993). Sternberg (1987) defined intimacy as closeness and connectedness, representing an emotional component of love and Hampes (1992) hypothesized "that a high level of intimacy is associated with a high level of humor" (p. 127). This association between humor and intimacy suggests that humor is influential in the perception of relational satisfaction that interactants experience.

There have been many studies of humor, sense of humor, and measurement of humor (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991; Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1995; Martin & Lefcourt, 1984; Throson & Powell, 1991). There has also been research on humor as a stress reducer (Krokoff, 1991), a moderator of conflict (Young & Bippus, 2001), a component of social attraction (Wanzer, Booth-Butterfiled & Booth-Butterfiled, 1996), and as a marital aid (Ziv & Gadish, 1989). Results from these studies suggest humor has a positive effect on people's lives. Flora and Sergin (1998) indicated people prefer to interact with socially competent individuals. It has been argued though, that to consider humor a social skill places a peculiar label upon it because it is more often considered a personality trait or talent. Perhaps this is because humor has not yet been considered a social necessity, rather an exceptional ability not everyone possesses. One of the positive effects of humor is a satisfying relationship (Mierop, 1999).

It has been argued that humor is an important variable to be examined when exploring relationship satisfaction (Ziv & Gadish, 1989). Many dimensions of relational satisfaction and humor have been observed, however, Thorson and Powell (1991) indicated that humor is a multidimensional construct with a number of associated behavioral responses. Fitzpatrick (1993) proffered that research within the field of communication has been hampered by "a limited number of relationships and a small number of communication behaviors" (p. 120). In sum, these differing positions warrant future examination of humor.

Humorous behavior is important in helping humans adjust to a variety of situations. It has only been within recent years that humor and families have been investigated (Caughlin, 2003; Vangelisti, Crumley, & Baker, 1999). Very little attention has been devoted to studying humor within familial interactions from an intercultural standpoint. Additionally, the bulk of humor use in families has mainly focused on its occurrence and not how it affects family members' satisfaction (Vangelisti et al., 1999). Therefore, a strong rationale exists for further research of humor among families within the area of intercultural communication.

General Importance of Humor

Humor has been identified as "the most ubiquitous of human social behaviors" (Cheatwood, 1983, p. 325) and a unique form of social activity "widely recognized and admired in social life" (p. 327). Occurring in all stages of interpersonal relationships from initial relational development, to relational maintenance, to terminating stages of relationships (Wanzer et al., 1995), humor is a phenomenon unique to humans (Kane, Suls, & Tedeschi,

1977). It is also an essential factor to communication satisfaction (Graham, 1995). As Foot (1986) suggested, "functionally, there are few more useful social skills than humor" (p. 358).

Humor is an important skill that enables individuals to achieve interpersonal goals, and "has the ability to improve the quality of life" (Graham, Papa, & Brooks, 1992, p. 164). Humor has the ability to integrate or bridge multiple perspectives (Meyer, 1997), and has been recognized as a coping mechanism for managing unfortunate life experiences (Barbato, Graham, & Perse, 1997). Humor also tends to operate as an "ice breaking" tool for soothing discomfort and for entertaining people (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991). Humor has been known to be persuasive (Foot, 1986), and negative forms of humor are associated with perpetuating dominance (Crawford & Gressley, 1991). Humor also has been associated with interpersonal attraction (Wanzer et al., 1995).

In the development of interpersonal relationships, decreasing personal distance through the use of humor influences interpersonal attraction (Graham, Papa, & Brooks, 1995), in that "to occasion laughter through humor and wit, is to invite those present to come close" (Coser, 1960). Sharing humor in relationships promotes friendship by fostering intimacy allowing for expression of common feelings, and reducing tensions (Foot, 1986). Hays (1989) found the most highly correlated variable in evaluations of relationship progression to be the levels of relaxation and fun partners experienced.

Linsk and Fine (1981) indicated that humor appreciation involves both perception, in that the receiver must be able to comprehend the meaning of the humor, and evaluation, so that its comic worth can be judged. Wanzer and colleagues (1996) suggested that in viewing an interactant as humorous, a person becomes more attractive. Responses from observers to humorous messages are characterized as positive and desirable, indicating that perceptions of humor contribute to its success with targets (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfiled, 1991). Additionally, those with a "good sense of humor" are perceived as more socially sensitive (Kane et al., 1977), and behaving in a humorous manner is perceived as a positive communication characteristic.

Conceptualizing & Defining Humor

Humor has been conceptualized in a variety of ways. Although research has produced over 100 documented theories of humor (Gruner, 1978), one problem still persists. Because humor is so multidimensional, researchers have failed thus far to capture its true essence so that a single theory can be applied to many contexts (Foot, 1986). Indeed scholars have posited many useful definitions related to its various functions. However these definitions are worded, humor is commonly thought of as an element that may produce the communicative response of laughter or amusement. Ziv (1984) divided humor into two parts, creativity and appreciation. Creativity pertains to understanding relationships "between people, objects, or ideas in an incongruous way," whereas appreciation refers to the "ability to understand and enjoy messages containing humor creativity" (Ziv, 1984, p. 111).

Within the realm of communication, scholars have defined humor in similar ways. Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) defied humor as "intentional verbal and nonverbal messages which elicit laughter, chuckling, and other forms of spontaneous behavior taken to mean pleasure, delight, and/or surprise in the targeted receiver" (p. 206). These researchers imply that humor is the sequential product of a message from a sender to a receiver.

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Humor has also been defined as a method used to achieve interpersonal goals. Wanzer et al. (1996) associated humor with "maturity, health, coping and social competence" (p. 43). This interpretation reveals humor as a behavior strictly used for achieving interpersonal goals, an approach, which has been used frequently in research. Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991) concurred in stating humor "generates support, approval and goal attainment" (p. 206).

Theoretical Conceptualizations of Humor

The numerous conceptualizations of humor prove its prominence in interpersonal behavior and its contribution to increased level of satisfaction among interactants. Research has yielded four significant theoretical perspectives that account for our basic understanding of humor. These perspectives are incongruity and developmental theories, superiority theories, arousal theories and psychoanalytic theories.

First, incongruity and developmental theories highlight the "absurd, unexpected and out-of-context events that serve as the basis for humor" (Foot, 1986, p. 356). Simply stated, humor is the result of discovering an incongruity in life, such as finding a pun in a statement.

Second, superiority theories are based upon the notion that "humor stems from the observation of others' infirmities or failures" (Foot, 1986, p. 357). For example, one may find humor in a downfall of an enemy or a clumsy incident such as slipping and falling down. In such an instance, the less friendly we are with a person, the more humor we will find in an episode in which he or she is a victim.

Third, arousal theories suggest that the initiation of humor promotes a physiological change, which influences the experience of amusement. Anticipation experienced from anxiously waiting for a punchline of a joke illustrates an example of this theory. This stimulation has been closely linked to both physical attraction and the maintenance of health. Research indicates that humor is indeed an antecedent of social attraction (Kane et al., 1977; Wanzer et al., 1996), increases personal liking (Derks & Berkowitz, 1989), and influences personal attraction (Graham, 1995). This amusement has also been noted to positively affect a person's health. Foot (1986) stated, "humor and laughter are desirable, if not essential for satisfactory mental health" (p. 376). Furthermore, some medical practitioners can measure the "effectiveness of their treatments by their patients' use of humor" (Graham et al., 1992, p. 165).

Finally, psychoanalytic theories are those which explain that humor is the outcome of repressed sexual and aggressive inclination held back by the prohibition of expression in society. This notion is congruent with the advances made by Freud (1905), who suggested humor serves to regulate sexual and aggressive desires. Foot (1986) argued, "few would dispute that humor provides an acceptable outlet for sexual and aggressive energy" (p. 376). Overall, these perspectives have provided a sound foundation for future exploration into humor.

Functions of Humor

Humor serves several social functions in communication; it assists people with tasks such as gaining information, de-escalating tense situations and maintaining relationships. First, humor can be used to seek information about others and ourselves. Baxter and Wilmot

(1984) explained that forms of joking represent a "secret test" strategy used to reduce uncertainty and gather information. Along with using humor to seek information about others, we can use humor to seek information about ourselves. Telling jokes, for example, allows us to gauge others' acceptance of us (Foot, 1986).

Humor plays a substantial role in the development and maintenance of relationships. It is present in all stages and forms of relationships, from interpersonal attraction (Graham, 1995) to marital satisfaction (Ziv & Gadish, 1989). Thus, it is believed that humor contributes greatly to people's experiences in relationships. Gauging others' acceptance of us can provide an accurate measurement of our communication competence, which is significantly used in maintaining relationships.

Another purpose of humor is to deny malicious intent. Kane et al. (1977) referred to this skill as "decommittment." Decommittment allows a person to save an uncomfortable situation, such as being caught lying, facing failure, or acting inappropriately by "proposing the past action was not serious, but was instead meant as a joke" (p. 14). Young and Bippus (2001) examined malicious intent by comparing humorous and non-humorous phrased comments that hurt recipients' feelings. Recipients reported humorous comments were less hurtful than non-humorous phrases. This study also reiterates the work of Graham et al. (1992) who explained, "individuals may veil socially unacceptable behavior behind the cloak of humor" (p. 164).

Closely related to denying malicious intent is mediating stressful situations. Martin and Lefcourt (1983) stated, "humor is a uniquely human strategy for coping with stress" (p. 153). Hampes (1992) also noted that humor aids in the long-term success within a relationship because it is a tool used to handle stress within the relationship. Relating to job stress, Krokoff (1991) found that couples use humor "to deal with troublesome issues of recurring disagreement when they are also having problems at work" (p. 20-21). Through laugher and joking, humans release anxiety, embarrassment, anger, hostility, and fear (Long, 1987), and are able to "make light of disappointment and chagrin [and] transform painful feelings" (Hoing, 1988, p. 61).

Hampes (1992) reviewed literature indicating that men and women both viewed caring as being associated with high level of sense of humor (also see Crawford & Gressley, 1991). Moreover, other literature reviewed by Hampes suggests that humor is a strong positive correlate "with the ability to establish deep affective relationships" (p. 127). Within his study, Hampes found that a strong relationship exists between intimacy and humor. To the extent that humor is a moderator of stress, and intimate relationships involve stress, the ability to successfully manage this stress would result in higher levels of intimacy.
The success of humor relies heavily not only on the person attempting to win a reaction from the target, but also, from the decoder who must interpret the message as the encoder intended. If this does not occur, the message may be seen as hurtful, sarcastic and inappropriate. Yet, if the message is decoded correctly, feelings of surprise, arousal, happiness and excitement may occur.

Clearly, humor functions in a variety of ways in social life. Humor serves as a mechanism for creating a relaxed atmosphere (Ting-Toomey, 1983), an ice breaker (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991), a tool for approaching sensitive subjects (Betcher, 1981), a stress reducer (Kramer & Kleiner, 1992; Krokoff, 1991), an attraction mechanism (Wanzer et al., 1996), and a compliance gaining tool (O'Quin & Aronoff, 1981). It has been associated with higher levels of intimacy (Hampes, 1992), and has also been associated with

enhanced problem solving and creativity (Hampes, 1992; Wilde, 1988). Many of the functions of humor mentioned herein serve to identify humor as one of the key factors in the quality of relationships (Wanzer et al., 1995), indicating that the perception of humor contributes to the overall satisfaction in relationships.

Family Communication

As mentioned earlier, humor communicated in families may have a substantial impact on members' satisfaction. Much of the research on families includes investigations of family communication patterns (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Yet, little research has devoted attention to humor use and familial satisfaction. Various types of families exist, and within these families lies a deep history of communicative behaviors. These communication patterns contribute largely to how member's of a particular family communicate with the outside world. Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990) defined a family communication environment as "a set of norms governing the tradeoff between informational and relational objectives of communication" (p. 524). Often the family environment can be classified into two divisions, concept-orientation, in which a child is encouraged to "develop and express autonomous opinions and ideas," or socio-orientation, which encourages a child to "conform to parental authority" (p. 524).

The way people describe their families also reveals important information regarding their satisfaction. Vangelisti, Crumley, and Baker (1999) for example, conducted an investigation of family stories. These authors noted that when people employ stories to describe their family, they "provide listeners with clues as to how they feel about their family members and what they think makes them 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' family interactions" (p. 336). Within these stories, communication standards are apparent. Caughlin (2003) defined these standards as an "individual's beliefs about what their relationship ideally should be like" (p. 5). Such illustrations that concern communication include openness and expression of affection. Additionally, Baucom, Epstein, Sayers, and Sher (1989) noted standards are "representations regarding rules for categorizing objects and events, and for taking actions to achieve certain goals" (p. 32).

Although sharing family stories is an accurate indicator of a family member's perception of his or her family, Vangelisti et al. (1999) also pointed out that different opinions regarding this issue exist. The first perspective claims that when high family standards exist, the members are relatively satisfied and happy in their relationship. Second, other perspectives assert that only certain standards are linked to high relational quality. This may be illustrated through intimacy. If a person regards intimacy as a very high standard, he or she may feel a higher relational quality within his or her family. Finally, the last perspective suggests that high relational standards may foster unrealistically high expectations that may actually lead to disappointment. These people may be less satisfied with their relationship because their standards are "too difficult to meet" (Vangelisti et al., 1999, p. 339). The conclusions of this study highlighted an important relationship between humor and satisfaction within familial interactions exists. Findings indicated that stories reflecting "care, togetherness, adaptability and humor were positively related to individuals' feelings about their family" (p. 353). This suggests that humor can contribute substantially to positive perceptions of a family.

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Individualistic/Collectivist Families in Communication

Although humor has been positively correlated with familial satisfaction, an additional dimension of cultural differences may impact a family's satisfaction and management of communicative behaviors, such as humor use. Scholars have identified a variety of differences that exist between cultures and organized them through the theoretical concepts of individualism and collectivism (Gudykynst & Nishida, 1994; Gudykynst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim, & Heyman, 1996; Triandis, 1995). Individualism usually emphasizes the importance of individual identity over the group identity. Individualism "promotes self-efficiency, individual responsibility and personal autonomy" (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 67), while collectivism emphasizes the "we" over the "I" and "promotes relational interdependence, in-group harmony, and in-group collaborative spirit (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 67). Some examples of individualistic cultures include many societies with European heritage, such as the United States, Australia, Canada, Germany, Sweden, France, and the United Kingdom (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Likewise, some collectivist cultures include Guatemala, Ecuador, Panama, Indonesia, Pakistan, Taiwan/China, Japan, and West/East African countries (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

The cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism influence the communication styles of individuals from different cultures. These two groups have been distinguished by their tendency to exhibit high-context and low-context communication styles (Gudykynst & Nishida, 1994). High-context communication is characterized as indirect, with much of the communicative code in the context and the relationship between individuals. Conversely, low-context communication is characterized as direct, with much of the content of the message in the explicit code (Hall, 1976). A low-context communication style could be viewed as more open, as much of the message is explicit and individuals using this style should be rated as having higher levels of self-disclosure. Conversely, high-context communicators could be viewed as exhibiting lower levels of self-disclosure due to the closedness of their indirect communication.

People in individualistic cultures have been identified as low-context communicators, while people in collectivist cultures have been identified as high- context communicators (Gudykynst et al., 1996). Examples of cultures which employ high-context communication include Japan, China, Mexico, Nigeria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea (Ting-Toomey, 1999), whereas examples of low-context communication cultures are the United States, Germany, Switzerland, Canada and Australia. The differences between theses two types of cultures represent a strong factor in the current study. If cultures value openness and directness, humor usage may be more prominent, while cultures that do not encourage openness may view humor use differently. The rationale for this study then, is to determine if various cultures employ humor in their families and to what extent does their humor contribute to overall family satisfaction.

Based on the literature review on humor, family communication and intercultural communication the goal of the study is reflected in the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between perceived self humor use in family interactions and reported levels of satisfaction?

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RQ2: What is the relationship between perceived family members' humor use in family interactions and reported levels of satisfaction?

RQ3: Are there differences in reported humor use and satisfaction in family interactions between individualistic and collectivist cultures?

METHODS

Respondents and Procedures

Data were gathered from a convenience sample of 395 adult (18 years of age or older) students at a large Southwestern university. Demographically, respondents ranged in age from 18 to 57 years of age, with an average age of 19.7 years. Within the sample, 228 respondents were female (57.1%), and 167 were male (42.9%). Of the respondents, 68.6% reported living with both parents, 16.5% with their mothers, 3.8% with their fathers, and 11.1% with neither. In terms of siblings, 6.4% were an only child, 92.7% had siblings, while .9% did not respond. Respondents self-reported ethnicities were: 31.1% European American; 25% Asian; 2.8% African American; 31.8% Latino; and 2.4% Middle Eastern.

Measures

Three variables were operationalized through the questionnaire: own-humor, family members' humor (perception of other family members' humor use), and family satisfaction (perception of respondent's satisfaction within family interactions). More specifically, the study was designed to examine humor as a mechanism affecting familial relational quality, which would lead to higher levels of reported satisfaction within those families.

Own-Humor

The instrument employed to measure own-humor and family member's-humor included a 17-item, Likert-type questionnaire developed and adapted from Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield's (1991) Humor Orientation Scale which sought to develop an individual differences approach to the encoding of humor. The response format for these items was a six-point scale ranging from all of the time (1) to never (6). The own-humor scale was recorded such that the higher the mean, the more often the event occurred. A typical statement within this scale would include, "I regularly tell jokes and funny stories when I am with my family." Due to the negative nature of some questions (i.e., "Even funny jokes seem flat when I tell them"), responses for questions 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13, and 14 were negatively weighted in the analysis. The Cronbach alpha for these items was .87, indicating moderate to high inter-item reliability among these items.

Family Members'-Humor

The instrument employed to measure family members' humor included a 15-item, Likert-type questionnaire also developed and adapted from Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield's (1991) Humor Orientation Scale. The scale response format for these items was similarly a six-point scale ranging from all of the time (1) to never (6). The family members' humor scale was recorded such that the higher the mean, the more often the event occurred. A typical statement within this scale would include, "Being funny is a natural communication style within my family." Inter-item reliability analysis for these items revealed a moderate to

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high alpha coefficient ($\alpha = .88$). The scale was summed such that the larger the value of the scale, the greater the perceived humor in the family context.

Family Satisfaction Scale

Sixteen items constituted the family satisfaction scale, adapted and developed from Huston, McHale and Crouter (1986) who attempted to identify the changes in family satisfaction over time and observe how humor affected the relationships. The scale response format for these items was similarly a six-point scale ranging from all of the time (1) to never (6). The family satisfaction scale was recorded such that the higher the mean, the more often the event occurred, indicating greater quality within the familial relationship. A typical statement within this scale would include, "My family members do something nice for each other." The Cronbach alpha for these items revealed a very high inter-item reliability ($\alpha = .89$). The items were summed such that the greater the value of the scale, the greater the satisfaction with the family.

RESULTS

The first research question asked about the relationship between perceived self humor use in family interactions as it related to levels of family satisfaction. Bivariate Pearson correlations indicated a significant positive relationship between the own humor variable and family satisfaction ($r =. 36, p < .01$). This finding indicates as self-humor increases, perception of family satisfaction also increases.

The second research question sought to determine the relationship between perceived family members' humor use in family interactions and reported levels of satisfaction. Again, a significant positive relationship was observed ($r = .52, p < .01$). As family members' use of humor increased, family levels of satisfaction increased as well.

The final research question sought to reveal the differences in reported humor use and satisfaction in family interactions between individualistic and collectivist cultures. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was employed to assess this research question. The MANOVA indicated a significant difference due to ethnicity on all three variables ($F = 3.4, df = 12/1167, p < .001$, Pillai's Trace $= .10$). Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were then computed to find individual effects of ethnicity on humor and satisfaction. All three variables demonstrated a significant difference due to ethnicity (on own humor: $F = 7.5, df = 4/393, p < .001$; family's use of humor: $F = 5.7, df = 4/393, p < .001$; family satisfaction: $F = 2.4, df = 4/393, p < .001$). In short, it would appear that culture plays an important role in determining how humor use affects family satisfaction.

A Post Hoc Analysis using the LSD (Least Significant Difference) criterion was employed to understand the differences the various cultures reported. First, concerning own-humor, Asians perceived themselves more humorous than Europeans (Mean Difference $= -.39, p < .001$) and Latinos (Mean Difference $= -.36, p > .001$). Within family members' use of humor, Asians reported more use of humor within their family than Europeans (Mean Difference $= .44, p > .001$) and Latinos (Mean Difference $= -.27, p < .001$). Finally, the differences within family satisfaction revealed Europeans reported a higher level of satisfaction than Asians (Mean Difference $= -.31, p < .001$).

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DISCUSSION

The present study sought to determine whether self-perceived humor and humor used in the family increased levels of family satisfaction. The findings of this study suggest that humor indeed has a positive impact on the dynamic of a family's satisfaction.

Two findings within the data were particularly interesting. Although results revealed that Asians perceived themselves to be more humorous than Europeans, they did not report higher levels of family satisfaction than Europeans. This may be attributed to the different styles of communication found within these two cultures. Europeans are characterized as individualistic and use low-context communication, whereas Asians are typically defined as collectivist and employ high-context communication. Europeans tend to value openness and directness, which would suggest that humor use may contribute more importantly to their family satisfaction levels. On the other hand, Asians reported higher levels of humor use but lower levels of family satisfaction. This finding contradicts the correlation attained for our first research question and may be due to additional cultural restraints placed on family members in collectivist cultures. Additional responsibilities expected from family members (e.g., caring for elderly family members) may lead to decreased levels of satisfaction although higher levels of humor within familial interactions may be used.

Another interesting finding indicated that African Americans reported the lowest levels of own humor, family humor and family satisfaction. A possible explanation for this result may have been that African Americans represent a minority of students in this sample and thus were simply underrepresented.

In conclusion, this research has provided additional evidence of the importance of investigating the communication of humor within familial relationships. The contributions of this study revealed humor positively correlates with family satisfaction and can be used as a tool to enhance the quality of a family. Humor has been cited as being an important bond among relational partners (Betcher, 1981), and as providing a positive contribution to relational life (Ziv & Gadish, 1989). Identified as "the most ubiquitous of human social behaviors" (Cheatwood, 1983, p. 325), humor is widely admired in social life and has the ability to improve the quality of life. With continued research of humor in the familial context, we may reach a broader understanding of the multidimensional character of humor, along with the far-reaching effects of this behavior on social, family life, and culture.

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