

Ethnic Identification and the Perceived Humor and Rudeness of Ethnic Jokes

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the humor and offense within ethnic jokes. College students from introductory and intermediate communication courses at a large southwestern university were solicited to respond to a questionnaire containing three different sections. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) was employed to assess the degree of ethnic identity. The Humor Orientation Scale in the second portion measured sense of humor and the third section required the participants to rate ethnic jokes on funniness and rudeness targeted at Americans, Asians and Latinos. A MANOVA was used to discover any significant differences between the ethnic groups. Results indicated that people with high senses of humor showed less offense and more humor toward ethnic jokes. No significant findings were discovered regarding how ethnic groups perceived jokes directed toward their own cultures. Limitations and suggestions for future research are presented in the discussion section.

Two kids were talking in the playground. The first kid says: "My mom is from Ireland and my dad is from America, so I guess that makes me an Irish American." The second kid says: "Well, my mom is from Iceland and my dad is from Cuba, so I guess that makes me an ice cube" (Wiseman, 2002, p. 155).

Is this joke considered funny? Ethnic jokes, a form of humor, have been both accepted and widely used in America not only to distinguish cultural differences, but also to help people identify with their ethnic identity. For centuries, humor in the broadest sense has been conceived in every form imaginable. Ethnic humor, defined as humor in which "perceived behaviors, customs, personality, or any other traits of a group or its members by virtue of their specific sociocultural identity" are scrutinized, has cleverly found its way into mainstream American culture (Apte, 1987, p.180). Even more so, Apte (1987) suggested that various aspects of humor have become a core value in America. Often times, having a sense of humor is characterized by the ability to take a joke directed against oneself, which may or may not be

constrained by political correctness or cultural tolerance. Every culture in the world recognizes a sense of humor. Yet, humor has continued to manifest an elusiveness that no single culture can define.

Research has made significant advances toward defining the boundaries, functions, causes, and consequences of humor (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991; Martin & Lefcourt, 1984; Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield, 1995). Studies have explored humor in conflicts (Young & Bippus, 2001), as a tension reducer (Krokoff, 1991), as a determinant of social attraction (Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield, 1996), and as a tool in marriage (Baxter, 1992; Ziv & Gadish, 1989). Results from these investigations have demonstrated humor has a positive effect on people's lives. Humor has also been linked to increased communication competence (Parks, 1994), which is considered a valued and learned characteristic. Researchers have supported the importance of humor by concluding that humor is not innate, but rather a learned skill that can be cultivated and applied in different life situations (Ziv, 1984).

Encoding and decoding humor can be a complex process. The procedure may become even more complicated when an intercultural element is introduced to the equation. Research has supported the idea that intercultural differences dwell within humor (Wilson, 2003). Definitions of a humorous message or situation vary from culture to culture. Ziv (1988) argued, "the greatest differences among cultures should be found in the contents and situations of humor" (p. xi). Some explanations of the differences in humor in various nations can be found in their culture. Ziv (1988) pointed out for example, "one can find many jokes about drinking and fist fighting in Irish humor. Jokes on these topics are practically nonexistent in Israel" (p. xi). It is not only the language that creates variance, but history and cultural tradition as well. In sum, these different avenues humor research has taken warrant future examination of its use and interpretation. This study explored humor and ethnic jokes to determine which cultural types find different jokes funny and or offensive.

The proposed study examined three variables: ethnic identity, humor orientation, and the perception of different ethnic jokes. These variables were used to determine if their ethnic identity and humor orientation affects their perception of jokes toward and about other ethnicities. There were three distinct cultures targeted within the ethnic jokes; Americans, Latinos, and Asians. The reason these ethnicities were selected was because they were the most representative in the host college. Research in ethnic humor use is needed for several reasons. First and foremost, ethnic jokes are a common form of communication that deserves study even though they may be perceived offensive. Individuals need to understand the problematic nature of this form of communication in order to improve the way they use it to communicate.

Second, research continues to produce more findings on intercultural preferences and styles of humor. Although ethnic humor permeates our society, more research is needed as we continue to learn more about assimilation and multiculturalism. America is known as the great tapestry of cultures. Many members of these cultures have been forced to modify their traditions to accommodate assimilation to the American way of life. This may have a great influence on their frames of reference and preference regarding humor.

Finally, the development of research on humor calls for much more attention to the various humor theories. Jokes are merely one form of humor that represent incongruity and superiority. Exploring the impact a joke has on a culture may provide new information to enhance the existing theories on humor. Steve Allen (1974) once said, "The number of types

of jokes is limited only to the number of things there are to discuss in the world” (p. 19). Theoretically, then, jokes should address all aspects of life including ethnicity.

Ethnic Humor

Various cultures have come into contact with one another on every level: economic, war, peace, and migration. These intercultural encounters have contributed to our knowledge of other societies. Although the term ethnic humor may be recent in origin, “humor disparaging other groups is probably as old as contact between cultures” (Apte, 1985, p. 108). Until World War II, ethnic humor was not a topic of research due to the emphasis on American assimilation; it was not until the post-World War II era when countries gained independence that a wave of ethnic identity and cultural pride emerged (Apte, 1985). Although ethnic humor has become a part of mainstream American literature today, it was not widely used until the 1970’s, when it was also known as “race-conscious humor,” or “racial jokes” (Apte, 1985, p.110). Many forms of ethnic humor exist, jokes, riddles, rhymes, and proverbs. The form isolated in this study is ethnic jokes. There are many forms and uses of ethnic jokes. Ethnic humor mocks characteristics from dialect, to nonverbal gestures, and has even been used to enforce social norms (Ziv, 1988). However, the most common ethnic jokes tend to portray the target ethnic group as “stupid, ignorant, or unclean” (Apte, 1985, p. 115). A second type of ethnic joke involves “cross-cultural” insults, which target a number of ethnic groups simultaneously. This is manifested in the popular jokes beginning with, “A German, an American, and an Asian walk into a bar...” In these cases, the members of the targeted cultures are presented with a problem in which they respond by keeping true to stereotypes involving their behavior, action, attitude and verbalization. These stereotypes represent the persistent force driving many ethnic jokes. Folklorist Alan Dundes (1971) explained that stereotypical conceptions derive not from direct interaction with other cultures, but from folklore including songs, proverbs, and jokes heard throughout history. It is these stereotypes which have caused members of various cultures to be sensitive to their public image, especially the negative stereotypes ethnic humor is based upon (Apte, 1987).

In a multicultural society, ethnic humor is more prevalent in minority groups because their need for social cohesion is stronger. Majority groups who are not forced to choose between acculturation already maintain a strong sense of ethnic identity (Apte, 1985). For example, a minority group such as Latino immigrants must try to assimilate into the American way of life. Therefore, they will use ethnic humor as a means of trying to preserve their ethnic identity and traditions while this assimilation process takes place. Ethnic humor represents a way to maintain cohesiveness within their culture. Majority groups such as European Americans already have an extensive group to identify with simply because much of America was colonized by Europeans. Since Europeans already have a traditional foundation in America, they do not necessarily have to work as hard for cultural acceptance. However, not everyone considers ethnic humor funny and more importantly, some people find it offensive.

What is Funny?

So what is considered funny? While people have been laughing worldwide across cultures for centuries, it is yet to be discovered why people find things funny. MacHovec (1988) noted, “Humor is a multi-colored kaleidoscope of thought and feelings, times and places. What’s funny is a complex psychological-emotional phenomenon involving a great variety of interacting variables” (p. 3). Five interpersonal variables were characterized to

enhance a joke's effectiveness. First, the listener must be interested. MacHovec (1988) referred to a "dirty" joke being more interesting to most teenage boys than political jokes as an illustration. Second, the listener's opinions must not be too strong. If the encoder has serious feelings, there is a good possibility that the joke may "go too far" and will thus "go flat." Third, the feeling must flow naturally and must not be forced or artificial. Fourth, the punch line must be delivered cleanly and comprehensibly. Finally, the encoder should strive for optimal content, meaning only content to make the point should be used.

Superiority Perspective of Humor

The numerous perspectives of humor prove the prominence in interpersonal and social behavior. One such perspective of humor is known as superiority theory. Superiority theory is based upon the notion that "humor stems from the observation of others' infirmities or failures" (Foot, 1986, p. 357). This is the oldest known theory on humor, dating back to Plato (MacHovec, 1988). Superiority theory digresses us back to our primitive selves who found joy in defeating an adversary (Rapp, 1951). Humor as an expression of superiority can either "be a mechanism of control or a form of resistance" (Lynch, 2002, p. 426). MacHovec (1988) provided this insight on superiority theory, "it is negativistic and depressive, seeing humor as a malicious and destructive attack on the individual's dignity" (p. 34). He further added, "It denies positive aspects of sharing pleasure, empathy and emotional support" (p. 34).

Superiority theory in ethnic jokes is very prevalent. Berger (1987) agreed, "Humor from the superiority theorists, is always social or cultural and always involves comparisons of invidious nature" (p. 8). The trends in ethnic jokes involve making one culture seem superior by comparing or making fun of idiosyncrasies of other cultures including dialect and traditions. A joke to demonstrate this point is this:

A class of 5th grade students was sitting studying English in class. The teacher asked, "Can anyone use the words, green, pink and yellow in a sentence?" The African American child says, "The colors, green, pink and yellow are seen in the rainbow." An Irish child states, "My favorite colors are green, pink and yellow." The Mexican child says, "When the phone greens, I pink it up and say yellow."

This joke illustrates how some cultures may display a better comprehension of the English language and therefore are superior to other cultures. Likewise, this joke pokes fun at the Mexican American child who clearly displays a heavy accent and a misinterpretation of the English language. One might assume then from this joke that the African and Irish American children are superior to the Mexican American.

An important query remains: is the message being used in a negative or positive manner? In ethnic humor, one may be intentionally using humor as a disguise to offend another culture. Individuals who significantly identify with their ethnic group may find ethnic humor directed at their group offensive and not funny. Thus, the listeners' orientation toward the target of the humor should have an effect on the perception of the humor. The present study hopes to ascertain whether this is indeed the case.

It is suggested that ethnic humor research still deserves much attention. There is a need to understand how ethnic humor may be perceived as funny and or offensive. This leads to the following research questions:

RQ1: What ethnic jokes are considered humorous (funny)?

RQ2: What ethnic jokes are perceived to be the offensive or rude?

Ethnic Identity

Perceptions of the humor and offensiveness of ethnic jokes are influenced by a number of factors. It is proposed that one such factor is one's ethnic identification. Ethnic identity refers to the degree to which an individual is influenced by, committed to, and positively evaluates one's ethnic ingroup (Chung & Ting-Toomey, 1994; Kosmitzki, 1996; Tajfel, 1978). When ethnic identification is high, feel a greater degree of solidarity and dependence with their ethnic group. When these individuals are confronted with threatening communication from outgroup members (e.g., ethnic humor), they tend to perceive the communication negative and an instance of a divisive intergroup encounter (Abrams, O'Connor, & Giles, 2001; Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977). However, when ethnic identification is less, individuals are less dependent on their ethnic ingroup, feel less solidarity, and tend not to perceive threatening communication from outgroup members as instances of intergroup communication (Abrams et al., 2001; Chung, 2002). It would appear that the degree of one's ethnic identification would affect a person's sensitivity to and evaluation of ethnic humor. In the context of ethnic humor, we would anticipate that individuals who have high ethnic identification would evaluate ethnic jokes directed at their ingroup more negatively (i.e., less funny and more offensive) than individuals who have low ethnic identification. On the basis of this reasoning, two hypotheses are posited:

- H1: For jokes on one's own culture, those having a high ethnic identity will perceive ethnic jokes to be less funny and more offensive.
- H2: The greater one's own perceived humor appreciation, the funnier and less offensive ethnic jokes will appear.

Method

Respondents and Procedures

The 314 participants were students in introductory and intermediate communication courses at a large southwestern university who ranged in age from 18 to 53 with a mean age of 26.1 and were ethnically diverse. The sample, comprised of all those who completed usable questionnaires, included 110 European Americans (36.2 %), 108 Latinos (35.5%), 63 Asian Americans (20.7 %), 16 African Americans (5.3 %), and 7 Middle Eastern Americans (2.3 %). Of the population, 110 (36.2 %) were male and 194 (63.8%) were female. This gender and ethnic breakdown is consistent with the university's demography. Students were informed that the study concerned humor and ethnicity and involved them completing brief survey. Only one student declined to participate and a total of 10 surveys were discarded because they were incomplete which resulted in the valid number of questionnaires to the 304 total.

Measures

Several variables were operationalized through the questionnaire: ethnic identity, humor orientation or appreciation and reaction to ethnic jokes. The study was designed to examine the impact of ethnic jokes as they relate to sense of humor and ethnic identity.

Ethnic Identity. The instrument employed to measure ethnic identity was Phinney's (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) which consists of 14 items evaluating three aspects of ethnic identity: positive ethnic attitudes and sense of belonging (5 items); ethnic identity achievement (7 items); and ethnic behaviors and practices (2 items). In addition to self-ethnic orientation were six items, which assessed other-group orientation. These supplemental items were helpful by appraising one's social identity in a larger society, and

also proved as a contrast to balance the ethnic identity items. The scale response included a 4-point scale from (1) *strongly agree* to (4) *strongly disagree*. A final item included an open-ended question asking the participant to define with which ethnicity they most closely identify. Some exemplary items within this measure include, "I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me," and "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group."

Humor Orientation/Appreciation. The second instrument used to measure humor appreciation was Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield's (1991) Humor Orientation Scale, which assessed individual differences in the use of humor as a communicative device. This scale measures a person's sense of humor regarding what is perceived, appreciated or labeled as funny. This 17-item scale assessed the usage of humor in communication messages including statements such as "My friends would say that I am a funny person," "I tell jokes and stories well," and "Of all of the people I know, I am one of the funniest." Although the original scale response included 5 points from (1) *strongly agree* to (4) *strongly disagree*, for this study, the (3) *neutral* option was omitted to ensure forced response.

Stimulus Material. Finally, the third measure included a series of ethnic jokes. The use of these jokes attempted to gauge how funny or rude students perceived ethnic jokes. These jokes were derived from a number of books and Internet sites. There were a total of nine jokes. These nine jokes included three jokes each focusing on one of three different ethnicities: Asians, White Americans and Latinos. The jokes predominantly emphasized various cultural idiosyncrasies ranging from food, money spending to language. An example of one such joke is:

Mrs. Hildebrand instructed each of her second graders to use the word "choo-choo" in a sentence.

Little Jennifer said, "The choo-choo pulled into the station right on time."

Little Leroy said, "The choo-choo is going too fast."

Little Jose said, "You touch my Chevy and I will choo-choo."

The response included the participants to rate six multiple questions on a scale of 1- 4. These questions included (1) Very Funny to (4) Not Funny at All; (1) Very Offensive to (4) Not Offensive at All; (1) Humorous to (4) Not Humorous at All; (1) Rude to (4) Not Rude at All; (1) Witty to (4) Not Witty at All and (1) Insulting to (4) Respectful. These six items were broken down into two major categories of each joke, funny and offensive. The items assessing the funniness of the joke included the rating on funniness, humorousness and wittiness. The items assessing the offensiveness of the joke included the rating on offensiveness, rudeness and level of insult. The nine jokes were randomly distributed in the questionnaire.

Reliability

Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) were calculated for each measure; ethnic identity, humor appreciation, and the funniness and offensiveness of the jokes. Overall, reliability proved acceptable. Reliability of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) scale was ($\alpha = .75$). The Humor Orientation Scale (HOS) reliability was ($\alpha = .87$). The funniness of the nine total jokes was reliable at ($\alpha = .85$). Finally, the reliability of the offensiveness of the nine total jokes was ($\alpha = .86$). Given adequate levels of reliability, mean summed scores were computed for the humor and offensiveness measures, such that the larger the value on the measure, the more the attribute being measured.

Results

Research Question 1

The first research question asked what ethnic joke is considered the funniest or most humorous among college students. The extensive number of words employed today to refer to either oral or written humor, fails to provide a simple explanation of what is funny. However, related sample words such as comic, clown, pun, parody, mockery satire, wit, fool and ridicule may describe what is funny, but by no means define it (MacHovec, 1988). This study was devised to measure which ethnic joke was considered the most humorous. The means and standard deviations for each of the nine jokes are presented in Table 1. In an analysis of variance, there was a significant relationship between specific ethnic jokes and perceived humor of jokes ($F [8/2727] = 14.6, p < .001$). Specifically, some jokes about one ethnic group were considered funnier than others. Across all cultures, the funniest joke was ($M = 2.6, SD = .91$): "Why don't Mexicans BBQ? Because the beans keep falling through the grill." The second funniest joke was ($M = 2.5, SD = .97$): "When NASA first started sending up astronauts, they quickly discovered that ballpoint pens would not work in zero gravity. To combat this problem, White scientists spent a decade and \$12 billion to develop a pen that writes in zero gravity, upside down, under water, and on almost any surface including glass and at any temperature. The Russians used a pencil." The least funny joke across all cultures was ($M = 1.9, SD = .82$): "White Americans yell for speed laws that will stop fast driving, then won't buy a car if it doesn't go over 100 miles per hour."

The first research question sought to discover which joke was the most humorous among college students. Overall, the funniest joke concerned Mexicans and addressed their culture, namely their traditional food preferences. The least funny joke concerned White America and addressed capitalism and the extravagant time, money and effort used to produce a simple solution to a dilemma, which to some is typical of this culture.

Research Question 2

While the first research question sought to discover the funniest joke, the second research question sought to discover which joke was the most offensive. Like humor, defining what is offensive is based highly on individual perspective. Bergson (1975) once asserted that humor is related to aggressive motivation, which can also be thought of as intent to offend. Bergson (1975) also posited that in all laughter, there is an underlying intention to humiliate and correct our neighbor. This speculation may explain why offensive jokes are even conceived. The results showed a statistically significant difference in specific ethnic jokes in terms of their perceived rudeness or offensiveness ($F [8/2727] = 34.6, p < .001$). As noted in Table 1, jokes about one ethnic class were considered ruder than others. Across all cultures, the most offensive joke was ($M = 2.4, SD = .91$): "Why did the Mexicans fight so hard to save the Alamo? So they could have four clean walls to write on." The second most offensive joke was ($M = 2.3, SD = .84$): "If Asians are such technological giants, why do they still eat with sticks?" The least offensive joke across all cultures was ($M = 1.7, SD = .70$): "White Americans are the only people that have more food to eat than any other country in the world and more diets to keep them from eating it."

The second research questions sought to discover the most offensive joke among college students. Across all cultures, the most offensive joke related to the Mexican or Latino culture. This particular made reference to the "tagger" stereotype to which of all cultures Latinos are subjected. This joke more or less addressed deviant cultural practices widely known in the Latino culture. The second most offensive joke pertained to Asians and mocked the

inconsistency between being perceived as global technological giants, yet still using primitive forms of eating utensils.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics for Funniest Perceived Joke

Ethnic Joke	Humor		Offensive	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Choo-Choo joke (Latino/Mexican)	2.4	.82	1.9	.78
Asian going to dentist (Asian)	2.3	.87	2.3	.82
White American speed law/cars (White)	1.9	.82	1.7	.70
NASA joke (White)	2.5	.97	1.8	.78
Asian technological giants eating with chopsticks (Asian)	2.4	.93	2.3	.84
Mexican BBQ (Latino/Mexican)	2.6	.91	2.3	.83
Whites, too much food and too many diets (White)	2.2	.90	1.7	.70
Mexicans and the Alamo (Latinos/Mexican)	2.1	.89	2.4	.91
Mr. Wong and the optometrist (Asian)	2.4	.93	2.1	.76

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 predicted those with strong cultural identity will perceive ethnic jokes as less funny and more offensive. In examining the correlation between the two dimensions of perceived ethnic humor (rudeness/offensiveness and funniness), there was no significant relationship with one's own ethnic identity. In other words, there was no relationships between Asians and Asian jokes (Funny: $r = .03$; Rude: $r = .12$, ns), Latinos and Latino Jokes (Funny: $r = .03$; Rude: $r = -.08$, ns) and Whites and White jokes (Funny: $r = .06$; Rude: $r = -.06$, ns). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

However, it was interesting to discover how cultures perceived ethnic jokes directed toward their own cultures regarding funniness and rudeness. Among Asians, the funniest perceived joke was:

Mr. Wong goes to the optometrist to have his failing eyesight checked out. After testing Mr. Wong, the doctor tells him, "I am sorry Mr. Wong, you have a cataract."

Mr. Wong replies, "No I don't, I drive a Lincoln Town Car!"

The rudest Asian Joke according to Asians was, "If Asians are such technological giants, why do they still eat with sticks?" Interestingly, European/White Americans saw the same joke as both the funniest and most offensive. Regarding European/White Americans, this joke was the NASA joke. Finally, Latinos found the joke regarding questioning why Mexicans do not BBQ as the funniest, while the most offensive joke was the Alamo joke. Overall, Hypothesis 1 predicted that people with a strong ethnic identity would be offended by jokes toward their own culture. However, this was not supported by the results.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis predicted the greater one's own perceived humor appreciation, the funnier he/she will see the ethnic jokes. There was significance found in all four independent variables including humor appreciation, ethnic identity, ethnicity and joke type (Asian, Latino and White). Concerning humor appreciation, a significant relationship between ethnic humor was evident (Pillai's Trace = .005, $F [2/2517] = 6.73$, $p < .001$). In examining the correlation for this result, only one correlation was statistically significant, namely the correlation

between humor appreciation and perceived funniness/humor ($r = .143, p < .05$), suggesting the greater the perceived humor appreciation the greater the perceived funniness. No significant difference relationship was found for ethnic identity and the two dependant variables, funniness and rudeness/offensiveness. There was also a significant difference in ethnicities for ethnic jokes (Pillai's Trace = .014, $F [2/2517] = 17.67, p > .001$). For ethnic jokes and perception of ethnic humor, there was a significant difference (Pillai's Trace = .061, $F [4/5036] = 39.86, p < .001$). Overall, hypothesis predicted that the greater one's own humor appreciation, the funnier the ethnic jokes will be perceived. Based on these results, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Discussion

The present study set out to explore the perceived funniness and offensiveness of ethnic jokes directed towards three different cultures, Asians, Latinos and Whites. The primary assumption was that individuals with a strong ethnic identity would find ethnic jokes directed towards their own culture less funny and more offensive. The second major assumption was that individuals with high levels of perceived humor appreciation would have a better sense of humor regarding jokes directed towards their ethnic group and find the jokes funny and less offensive. Additionally, this study was designed to discover which of the given ethnic jokes were determined as most offensive and most funny.

Ethnic humor can provide much information about any given culture. What is considered nonhumorous in a culture can provide equal information about what is considered humorous. Boskin (1979) stated what is unlaughable in any culture "defines the holy, the irrelevant, and the unreachable" (p. 64). Simultaneously, Boskin (1979) added, what is laughable "serves as a powerful telescope into the values and attitudes of a society" which may not be deciphered from any other perspective (p. 64).

Ethnic humor is an essential part of expressive culture. Ethnic humor may be used to reflect a cultural group's perception and evaluation of other ethnic groups. Apte (1985) noted that once these evaluations are established, they become part of a cultural heritage and only change with significant historical events. The use, production and enjoyment of ethnic humor have been discussed extensively through previous research literature. Many theories have emerged to explain the persistence of ethnic humor. Among the many theories, those that assign both psychological and sociological functions withstand. The psychological functions of humor claim that ethnic humor serves the human need to vent aggression (Dundes, 1971). It is this aggression which is meant to inflict offense at members of other cultures. Boskin (1979) stated, "humor is thus one of the most effective and vicious weapons in the repertory of the human mind" (p. 28). Humor used as a weapon is chiefly based on the concept of stereotypes that was formulated by the journalist Walter Lippman (Apte, 1985). Apte (1985) described Lippman's definition of stereotypes as formulated mental pictures, which are "factually incorrect, are products of faulty reasoning, and persist even in the face of knowledge and education (p. 113). Stereotypes are important in ethnic humor because they are widely accepted and make up the assumptions necessary in ethnic humor (Apte, 1985). It is these stereotypes which provide material for ethnic jokes to derive. However, one must not forget the universal and prominent function of humor, which is entertainment and the truth is, many people indeed find ethnic jokes to be funny.

This study has provided evidence for a better understanding of how humor and ethnicity are related. Several findings were made in this research that impacts members of the field of communication and those who regularly engage in ethnic humor use. The most significant

finding related to humor appreciation while the least significant related to culture's views on ethnic jokes directed back at them.

Research Question 1 was posed to discover what ethnic joke was considered to be the funniest across all cultures. Across all cultures, the joke questioning "Why don't Mexicans BBQ? Because the beans keep falling through the grill," was found to be the funniest. Of the three chief theories of humor communication, this joke ties in with incongruity. One of the first philosophers to discuss incongruity theory was the famous Immanuel Kant (Wiseman, 2002). The reasoning behind incongruity is that people will laugh at things that surprise them because they seem out of the ordinary or out of place. Jokes that are inconsistent with one's expectations are often considered funny. For example:

So I went down to the local gym. I said: "Can you teach me how to do the splits?"

He said, "How flexible are you?"

I said, "I can't make it Tuesdays"

(Wiseman, 2002, p.116).

This is a sound illustration of an incongruous joke. When the question "How flexible are you?" was asked, the context was meant to imply how physically flexible can one stretch his/her body. However, the incongruous message emerged when the person posing the question thought flexible to mean the flexibility in one's schedule. With the funniest joke within this study, the incongruity appears in the punchline of the joke, "Because the beans keep falling through the grill." It is somewhat surprising and inconsistent with reason that anyone would attempt to place beans, which are a traditional Mexican food, on a BBQ grill. One can mentally picture at hearing this joke, how foolish it would be to try to BBQ beans. This may be one possible explanation of why this joke was considered to be the funniest. Concerning the Latino study population, it was gratifying to find that of the three Latino jokes, they also found this to be the funniest joke. This suggests that perhaps they have a good sense of humor about their own culture.

The second research question was posed to discover the rudest and most offensive joke of the nine total. The joke found to be the most offensive across all cultures was the joke which asked, "Why did the Mexicans fight so hard to take over the Alamo? So they could have four clean walls to write on." Several factors may be considered in deciphering why this joke was perceived as the rudest. First, this joke mocks a major historical event in United States and Latin history. Many lives were lost because of this battle. This joke mocks what some people consider a proud moment for Latinos. To compare to present day, it would be similar to a joke mocking the reasons why we are currently fighting the war in Iraq. Of the three major theories within humor research, this joke is congruent with the theory of superiority. The philosopher Plato first advanced superiority theory over 2,000 years ago (Wiseman, 2002). According to Wiseman (2002), Plato considered it wrong to find amusement in the maladies of another and laughing in these instances "involved loss of control that resulted in people appearing to be less than human" (p. 110). These types of jokes make people laugh because they make one feel superior to someone else and may make others appear "stupid because they made a stupid mistake or have been the hapless victim of unfortunate circumstance" (Wiseman, 2002, p.109). An example of a superiority joke would be:

A woman goes into a café with a duck. She puts the duck on the stool and sits next to it. The waiter comes over and says: "Hey, that's the ugliest pig I have ever seen."

The woman says, "It's a duck, not a pig."
 The waiter says, "I was talking to the duck"

(Wiseman, 2002, p. 110).

In this representation, the waiter is appearing to be superior to the woman first by speaking to an animal instead of her and insulting her appearance by calling her "the ugliest pig I have ever seen." The Alamo joke contains characteristics of a superiority joke by making fun of a historical event and additionally claiming that the true reason why Mexicans fought to take over the Alamo was not to gain cultural pride, but simply to deface it once it was acquired. Thus, making others feel superior to Mexicans by insulting and questioning their motives to take the Alamo. Likewise, the joke references the "tagger" stereotype associated with the Latino culture. "Tagging" or defacing a wall or building with spray paint is against the law and punishable by fines and jail time. To hastily generalize Latinos as "taggers" would suggest then that they are nothing but wrongdoers and inferior to law-abiding citizens. Interestingly, the Latino population within this study agreed that this was the most offensive joke as well. It was particularly interesting that overall, the perceived rudest and funniest jokes were both directed toward the Latino culture.

The first hypothesis predicted that those with a high degree of ethnic identity would perceive jokes directed towards their own culture as less funny and more offensive. The results testing this hypothesis indicated a lack of support. This perhaps may be attributed to measurement inadequacies. For example, the measure was directed only toward ethnic identity and could have been modified to include ethnic humor as well. Likewise, it may be due to the assimilation towards the American culture members of different ethnic groups strives to achieve. Perhaps the participants were afraid to admit the degree of ethnic identity they felt because they are in America now and perhaps feel more loyalty to American than they do their own native culture. Many participants may have been second or third generation immigrants who may not strongly identify with their culture.

The second hypothesis predicted that the greater one's own humor appreciation, the funnier and less offensive they would perceive the ethnic jokes. This hypothesis was supported. Essentially, those with a high overall sense of humor found the joke to be funny and less offensive. This may suggest that the strong overall sense of humor many participants disclosed prevented them from being too offended by the ethnic jokes. It might also be predicted then that those with strong levels of humor appreciation would not be offended by many if any jokes at all because a strong sense of humor may lead to a higher tolerance for offensive comments.

Future Directions

Present literature on humor provides evidence that ethnic humor and ethnic jokes permeates our society and is a widely understudied research topic. There is little doubt that research on humor and ethnicities has complimented the immeasurable amounts of knowledge already acquired on humor in general. However, this concept still deserves attention from communication scholars and research opportunities remain.

First, future research on ethnic humor should focus on a way to discuss such taboo topics and gain accurate responses to that of what is offensive. As Kreyche (1994) stated, many people have become overly sensitive when it comes to humor, "ready to charge bias, lack of respect, or harassment of some imagined type or another. Ethnic jokes used to abound and the ethnic group itself enjoyed them more than anyone" (p. 98). Humor was meant to entertain and amuse. Kreyche (1994) noted, "It is a truism that the person who can laugh at himself has

a firm grip on his world” (p. 98). How then, can we understand ethnic jokes if they cannot be studied without psychological stress or other impacts?

Second, the majority of scholarly research on ethnic humor, concerns how it is used in the United States among the multicultural society here. More research should be directed toward ethnic humor use in individual countries and then compared to its use in America. Only then, can researchers understand if a significant difference exists regarding its usage and discover whether those differences cause ethnic humor to be considered offensive or funny. For example, according to (Wiseman, 2002) who conducted a study in search of the world’s funniest joke, he identified the top joke of Belgium as “Why do ducks have webbed feet? To stamp out fires.” “Why do elephants have flat feet? To stamp out burning ducks.” This may not be considered funny in America.

Third, more research must be directed toward the joke tellers. Apte (1985) identified a fundamental dichotomy between joking and non-joking relationships. Joking relationships often appear in “kin” relationships, or those within a family. Additionally, the actual person delivering the joke has a major influence on how the joke is perceived. For example, if a Latino tells a Latino joke to another Latino, it may not be considered offensive. However, if a White tells a joke to an African American about African Americans, it might be considered very offensive and even racial. Research needs to explore which cultures are considered offensive to others, and when it is appropriate or inappropriate to deliver an ethnic joke and to whom.

Finally, while specific joke types (Asian, Latino, and White) were identified within this study, one possible future direction is to isolate specific types of ethnic jokes based on theories of incongruity and superiority. These theories represent a recurring theme in humor and contribute in some way to how humor is perceived. A joke representing one theory may influence a positive response or negative response. Isolating how each theory is represented an important area of future study.

In conclusion, this research has provided additional evidence of the importance of investigating how ethnic humor is used and perceived. As Kontorovich (1997) stated, “Jackie Mason lampoons Jews, Chris Rock mocks blacks, Margaret Cho pokes fun at Asians” (p. 46) because society recognizes the innate right of every person to create jokes about his or her own ethnic group. Kontorovich (1997) further explained the current system creates a rigid structure because ethnic jokes perpetuate divisions by “maintaining ethnic groups in their self-mockery monopoly” (p. 46).

Ethnic humor has been studied for centuries since the times of philosophers like Hobbes and Plato (Wiseman, 2002). Humor is a powerful behavior and is necessary to keep a positive outlook on life. However, when people strive for political correctness, a good sense of humor becomes insignificant. Ethnic humor is and will continue to be prevalent in our society. This study has contributed to understanding how ethnic identity ties into what is considered humorous within ethnic jokes. This study has demonstrated that indeed those with a good sense of humor can laugh at the most precarious issues such as those of ethnic jokes. The knowledge gained from this study is of importance not only on an interpersonal level but on a global level as well. With continued research, we may understand how to better communicate and express humor with cultures other than our own. After all, humor is a human characteristic and not just an American characteristic. To conclude, the old adage states, laugh and the whole world laughs with you, cry and you cry alone.

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