CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHridge

JOKES AND JOKERS:
AN EXAMINATION OF FACTORS INFLUENCING HUMOR APPRECIATION

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology

by

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To Eva, with love
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ABSTRACT

JOKES AND JOKERS:
AN EXAMINATION OF FACTORS INFLUENCING HUMOR APPRECIATION
by
Michael Hirsch
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The present study examines reactions to brief, narrative jokes as a function of three dimensions: the sex of the subject, the sex of a hypothetical joke-teller, and the type of joke; either male-superior (a female character is the butt of the joke), or female-superior (a male character is the butt of the joke).

A series of studies by La Fave (1972) found that subjects preferred humor which esteemed a positively regarded reference group and disparaged a negatively regarded reference group. Based on these findings it was hypothesized that male subjects would prefer male-superior or jokes ostensibly told by a male joke-teller. Female subjects, by the same token, would prefer female-superior or jokes ostensibly told by a female joke-teller.
The humor stimuli (male-superior vs. female-superior), stimulus persons (male joke-teller vs. female joke-teller vs. sex of joke-teller unknown), and subject sex (male vs. female) thus comprise the twelve cells of a 2 x 3 x 2 factorial design. A total of 120 undergraduate students served as subjects.

The method consisted of preparing a booklet of seven jokes; three either male-superior or female-superior, and the remaining four jokes "neutral" (not sex-biased). Prior to each joke was a description of the joke-teller, corresponding to one of the experimental conditions. Each subject received a booklet and, as a cover story, was informed that these jokes had been elicited from other students who had served as subjects in an interview. Dependent measures consisted of rating scales which measured reactions to the joke and joke-teller.

Univariate analyses of variance on each outcome measure demonstrated a series of main effects for type of joke and sex of joke-teller. Over all conditions, female-superior jokes and female joke-tellers were preferred and given the highest ratings. In addition, a joke-teller sex by subject sex interaction indicated that male subjects behaved differently from female subjects as a function of whether or not the sex of the joke-teller was known. Also, a joke-teller sex by type of joke interaction indicated that subjects rated male-superior
and female-superior jokes differently depending on whether or not the sex of the joke-teller was known.

In discussing this study, it was noted that the female subjects behaved as the hypotheses predicted, while the male subjects did not. In many cases, males disparaged male-superior jokes and male joke-tellers as much, if not more, than female subjects.

In general, the data show that the sex of the joke-teller was a stronger predictor of humor preferences than the type of joke. Additionally, the two significant interactions are shown to be not a function of the joke-tellers' sex per se, but rather a function of whether or not subjects knew the sex of the joke-teller.

Finally, some methodological concerns were considered, and it was speculated that the scarcity of sex differences in this study could be attributable to the fact that the male and female subjects shared sexual attitudes so similar that the emergence of any strong, distinguishable male or female reference group or "identification class" was precluded.
INTRODUCTION

An Overview of the Psychology of Humor

Why do we laugh? At what do we laugh? What's funny? These are three rather innocuous questions. Or are they? These questions have been addressed by some of the world's most distinguished thinkers, from the ancient Greeks to contemporary social scientists and philosophers, who have yet, from a rigorously empirical standpoint, produced any satisfactory answer. To date, little is really known about the processes and functions of laughter and humor appreciation (and the relation between the two) relative to the occurrence of these behaviors in every human society. The bulk of the literature on humor and laughter theory still remains the writings of the older, "classical" theorists. These writers, from Plato to Freud, were generally philosophers, clinicians, or social critics, and therefore we are met head-on by a wealth of speculation and little empirical work. Most of the older theorists tried to account for all humor (which they failed to do) by specifying some type of humor, or citing certain jokes which happened to fit their theory. They examined this narrow range of phenomena in terms which defied any relation to general psychological principles, and precluded any attempt at oper-
ational definitions.

However, by no means are the notions behind some of the early theories obsolete. Several of these venerable relics have been snatched from the philosophical scrap-heap by contemporary social scientists, translated into modern scientific terms and subdivided into empirically manageable units. This seems rather optimistic, promising the generation of much fruitful research. But beware! The scientific study of humor, as a wise person once said, is no laughing matter. Methodological problems abound in humor research. Consider, for example, the problem of "external validity." There are no "standard measures" of humor. Most laboratory studies of humor utilize a list of jokes or series of cartoons which, though carefully pretested, were initially selected by the experimenter, and might possibly reflect his personal idiosyncrasies.

Consider also the nature of humor itself. Humor is an organismic variable; a "mental" experience, as La Fave (1972) pointed out. It is here and gone in a flash, before the experimenter has time to do a double take. The challenge thus is to find a way to unobtrusively measure the immediate experience of a subject perceiving humorous stimuli.

What about the dependent measure? The most common one is the paper-and-pencil rating scale. Yet, this meas-
ure is extremely obtrusive. Furthermore, the subject must retrospectively consider the humor he experienced. Could we simply observe the laughter of the subject? Not really. As Keith-Spiegel (1972) has noted, "...laughter may be forthcoming as a reaction to any sort of emotional state, not solely amusement..." (p. 17).

Situational variables in the lab plague humor research just as they do most all of experimental social psychology. Evaluation apprehension could be a problem. Perhaps the subject is too embarrassed to admit he likes a certain joke. If subjects are tested in groups, we must be cognizant of contagion effects. Sequence effects of joke lists ("fun-fatigue") might also present problems, not to mention the research setting, experimenter effects, and demand characteristics.

With all these problems to overcome, plus a 2,500 year backlog of nonscientific theorizing, is it really possible to generate valid research in the field of humor? The present author believes it is, if we utilize the strategy advocated by McGhee (1972) and other contemporary researchers. We must put an end to the generalized theorizing which characterized the older theories. As McGhee notes, "...global unidimensional theories have not achieved a sufficient level of differentiation to account for many important humor dimensions" (p. 62).

Instead, we must take a new approach; an approach
which lends itself to careful empirical testing, and an approach capable of stimulating further research. How can this best be realized? According to McGhee, by "...the development of alternative mini-theories designed to account for limited aspects of the total humor process" (p. 62). The wide range of mini-theories that humor researchers may be investigating today might ultimately be integrated into a much broader theory in the future. Empirical relationships will be established between each mini-theory and a valid general theory may then be developed.

To get an idea of how the aforementioned approach has been put to work in contemporary social psychological research in humor, as well as an idea of the range of variables currently under investigation, it is necessary to review some of the more recent studies. As we attain a feel for this research area, we will gradually narrow our focus of attention to the dimensions of humor relevant to the present thesis.

A study by Zigler, Levine, and Gould (1967) recognized the fallacy of assuming that humor is the result of a simple cause. While the older theories seek a single factor to explain humor and laughter, Zigler et al. point out that laughter and humor appreciation are the result of many causal factors. The authors bring our attention to one of them: cognitive factors. They cite
previous research to suggest that subjects will rate as most funny those humor stimuli making an optimum demand on their cognitive structures, while those stimuli offering too little or too much cognitive (intellectual) challenge will be rated lowest.

This mini-theory contends that "...the sheer pleasure of employing one's cognitive processes in relation to humor stimuli contributes to the experienced gratification" (p. 333). It was specifically hypothesized that children would rate as funniest those cartoons that were in the moderately difficult range of cognitive demand (i.e., the upper limits of their cognitive ability). The method consisted of presenting children of various ages with cartoon jokes which had been pretested to range from "easy" to "nearly impossible" on a scale of comprehension. The hypothesis was strongly supported. It was in the intermediate range of difficulty that the highest humor and preference ratings were given. In discussing this study, the authors claim to have isolated a phenomenon never before demonstrated in humor research:

The magnitude of the mirth response was found to depend upon the degree of cognitive congruence existing between the cognitive demand features of the humor stimulus and the cognitive resources of the individual. It is at the point where comprehending the joke taxes the individual's cognitive structure that the humor response is maximal (p. 335).

This point of maximal humor response is located in the
intermediate range of difficulty, with minimal response at the "easy" and "nearly impossible" ends of the scale.

Moving away from individual cognition into the more purely social realm, let us examine a 1970 study by Davis and Farina. These authors, like so many other social scientists who have examined humor with an empirical eye, begin with a critique of the older theories' futile attempt to explain all humor in a single stroke: "What is referred to as 'humor' appears to be a whole composite of different behaviors rather than a single one" (p. 175). One of these behaviors appears to be that of interpersonal communication. And thus begins an examination of the social communication function of humor. Parenthetically, we should note that most humor research views humor as a "depth" variable or personality characteristic. But since so much humor occurs in a group context, it is also important to lend research attention to humor as a group variable.

In the Davis and Farina study, male subjects were asked to rate either sexual or nonsexual cartoons. For subjects in an arousal condition, the experimenter was an extremely attractive and flirtatious female. In a nonarousal condition, the same experimenter acted and dressed in a more prim and proper manner. Finally, subjects could either communicate their humor preferences immediately and verbally to the experimenter ("communi-
ication condition"), or simply indicate their preferences on a rating scale and hand the scale in, unsigned, to the departmental secretary ("noncommunication condition"). It was hypothesized that "... subjects would use appreciation of sexual humor as a means of communicating sexual interest in the female experimenter" (p. 175). The results show a significant main effect for communication. That is, subjects, over all conditions, who had an opportunity to communicate their humor preferences gave significantly higher ratings than subjects who had no such opportunity to communicate. Furthermore, the highest ratings were given by subjects who could communicate their preferences for sexual cartoons to the attractive, flirtatious experimenter. The authors conclude that "... social variables play a role in humor appreciation, and, specifically, that a principle role of humor can be communication with another person" (p. 177).

In another study, Shurcliff (1968) examined arousal, or strong affect, in terms of the classical relief theory of humor. The relief theory, which dates from the seventeenth century, states that the function of humor is to release excess nervous energy, with laughter being the channel of least resistance for draining off this purposeless energy. We note that Shurcliff discards the archaic hydraulic analogy "nervous energy" in favor of postulating a relationship between humor and arousal.
Humor, says Shurcliff, is "...dependent on relief from a state of anticipated unpleasantness involving heightened arousal" (p. 360). The author hypothesized that the greater the subjects' anxiety prior to relief, the greater the subjects will rate humorous stimuli that resulted in relief.

Subjects were assigned to one of three anxiety conditions: low, moderate, or high. In the low anxiety condition, subjects were told they would have to handle an extremely docile rat. In the moderate condition, subjects were told they would have to extract blood from a rat. In the high anxiety condition, subjects were informed they would have to take blood from a rat that would probably try to bite them and escape. Subjects in all three conditions were then required to reach into the cage and take out the rat. The animal turned out to be a stuffed toy, and upon discovery of this hoax, the experiment ended. Subjects were then given a questionnaire in order to rate the "humorousness" of the incident. The high anxiety group gave the highest humor and surprisingness ratings, and the low anxiety group rated humor and surprise the lowest. It can be concluded, consequently, that certain types of humor involve relief from unpleasantly high states of arousal.

Turning to a different approach to humor, we will examine a recent theoretical proposal that has resulted
in the modernization of classic incongruity theory. However, a brief historical look at incongruity theory is indicated at this point.

Incongruity theory is one among several "conflict" theories of humor (Keith-Spiegel, 1972). The incongruity principle states that humor arises when two incompatible, disjointed, or incongruous cognitions are perceived in the same context. The first incongruity theory may be attributed to James Beattie (1776) as quoted in Piddington (1963).

Laughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblege, or as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them (p. 167).

In addition, Beattie drew a distinction between "natural" and "unnatural" laughter, noting that we often laugh "unnaturally" at things that are not humorous. Spencer (1860) also regarded incongruity as essential to laughter, and distinguished between "descending incongruity," in which something great becomes trivial, and "ascending incongruity," in which something trivial becomes great. The former results in laughter, whereas the latter produces wonder and awe.

How can the old incongruity notion be modified to fit an empirical framework? This question has been ad-
dressed by Jerry Suls in a theoretical paper (1972). The model he presents applies only to one dimension of humor: narrative jokes. Suls postulates a two-stage model of humor appreciation. In stage one of the perception of a joke, the perceiver experiences a sudden incongruity; his expectations are disconfirmed. In stage two, a problem-solving process has made the incongruity congruous and in addition, the perceiver has found a cognitive rule with which to reconcile the "punchline" with the body of the joke. Here is an example given by Suls to illustrate the two-stage process:

One prostitute said to another, "can you lend me ten dollars until I get back on my back?" (p. 83).

In this joke, the incongruity consists of the play on words, "get back on my back." We expected her to say, "get back on my feet," but this was disconfirmed. However, we then realize that prostitutes usually work on their backs, and have thus established a logic which reconciles this tagline to the context of the joke. This logic or cognitive rule is essential for humor. For example, if she had said, "get back on my hands," this would have been incongruous, but it would not have been a joke because there is no cognitive rule which permits us to "get it." In short, then, Suls' model states that an important factor in humor is "...the experience of an abrupt disconfirming incongruity which is reconciled
We might wonder how such an elaborate process can work, since from a phenomenological point of view, we usually "get" a joke instantaneously (or we don't get it at all). Suls' answer is that the process works rapidly, almost as rapidly as we can hear or read the joke. It is a basic perceptual-cognitive process.

Until this point, a brief (and by no means exhaustive) overview of the psychology of humor was presented in an effort to examine a diverse range of contemporary research, as well as to point out some of the methodological problems both unique to the area of humor, and in common with the whole of social psychology. Let us now direct our attention to a specific area of humor research and examine the series of studies upon which the present investigation is based.

Reference Groups, Identification Classes, and Humor Judgments

A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
Of him that makes it

Love's Labour's Lost Act V. Sc. ii

Shakespeare's observation is a precursor of a line of empirical research initiated by Lawrence La Fave (1961). This author reasoned that there is no such thing as an "absolute" or intrinsically funny humor stimulus. Working within that distinctive dimension of humor stim-
La Fave predicated his hypotheses on the grandfather of all humor theories, the superiority theory. For those unfamiliar with superiority theory, a brief historical sojourn is in order.

Superiority theory holds that we always laugh at the misfortunes or foolishness of others. Plato noted that the "ridiculous" arises out of a lack of self-knowledge on the part of the weak or powerless (i.e., the "know thyself" principle is violated). Aristotle went deeper than Plato, recognizing aesthetic principles. He saw the "ludicrous" as a "defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive" (as quoted in Piddington, 1963 p. 153).

Thomas Hobbes, in the seventeenth century, put forth a more "psychological" superiority theory. He maintained that when we see our superiority over others, we realize a "sudden glory" of our own eminence. Triumphant laughter is the result. Two centuries later, Alexander Bain described humor as arising from the degradation of the dignified, but stipulated that strong emotions must not be present. Bain combined this superiority notion with a relief theory, stating that after a victory over another we need, in effect, to "let off steam." This is accomplished through laughter. Henri Bergson (1911) saw laughter as a social corrective for foolish acts. Like Bain, Bergson emphasized that there can be no strong
emotions or feelings involved in laughter; "for laughter has no greater foe than emotion" (quoted by Piddington, 1963 p. 189).

Superiority theory, then, says that we respond with laughter at the perception of misfortunate or foolish others. In more specific terms, La Fave says that a "...'joke' is humorous to the extent that it enhances an object of affection and/or disparages an object of repulsion; unhumorous to the extent that it does the opposite" (La Fave, 1972 p. 198).

In social psychology, a working paradigm for this assumption may be found in reference group theory (Secord and Backman, 1964; Kelley, 1968). To use La Fave's terms, the "object of affection" may be defined as a positive reference group (+RG), while the "object of repulsion" is seen as a negative reference group (−RG). La Fave is postulating a "vicarious superiority theory" in which humor is produced as a function of the victory of an esteemed other over a disparaged other. This is an update of the Hobbesian individual superiority notion which views humor as the result of a victory of self over a disparaged other.

Now to consider La Fave's major hypothesis: "Jokes tend to be judged funny by Ss whose +RG is esteemed and −RG disparaged; to be judged unfunny by Ss whose +RG is disparaged and −RG esteemed" (1972, p. 198). The refer-
ence groups used in La Fave's original (1961) study consisted of three Christian religious denominations; Catholic, Baptist, and Jehovah's Witnesses. La Fave determined that all subjects belonged to one of these three reference groups, and moreover, were "loyal" members of the group. Loyalty to one's reference group is essential; mere public compliance without private acceptance could invalidate the entire reference group construct.

All subjects were presented with a standard list of jokes to rate, each involving a dialogue between a member of one religious group and a member of another. In the punchline of the joke, one member squelches the other, thus providing disparagement for the squelched religious group. In strong support of La Fave's major hypothesis, subjects rated as funniest those jokes in which their +RG was esteemed and their -RG disparaged.

It is important, in the consideration of this line of research, to examine the theoretical distinction between the concepts of reference groups and identification classes as discussed by La Fave. Kelley (1968) has observed that the term "reference" may have two different implications; either normative or comparison. The normative function implies identification with a certain class of attitudes and behaviors. The comparison function implies comparing the self with other group members. Comparison emerges as salient when the aggregate under
consideration possesses definite group properties, such as interaction and interdependence of members, common norms, beliefs, and values, and common goals (Gibb, 1969). The reference groups used in La Fave's original research (religious denominations) possess these attributes. However, it is possible to make ambiguous the concept of reference groups by labeling as reference groups those general aggregates with which a person might identify, but to which he might not necessarily compare himself. Examples of such identification classes would include males, females, agnostics, blondes, and people with I.Q.s ranging from 90 to 110. The important point here is that the identification class construct is just as valid as the reference group construct within the context of La Fave's hypothesis. This was made evident in another part of La Fave's original research in which the three religious groups were coalesced into a more general positive identification class; "Christian" (i.e., Christian attitudes). This +IC was then pitted against the negative identification class; "agnostics." The results again support La Fave's hypothesis. The "Christians" rated the agnostic-disparaged jokes significantly funnier than the Christian-disparaged jokes.

A study utilizing political party membership (Priest, 1966) as reference groups provides further support for La Fave's hypothesis. In an effort to conceptually rep-
licate the La-Fave study, and thus establish the generality of La Fave's hypothesis, Priest hypothesized that "...derogatory jokes about one candidate would be rated as funnier than jokes about the other candidate as a function of S's political party membership, such that jokes about the opposition candidate would be rated as funnier" (p. 600). The two candidates were Barry Goldwater, Sr. and Lyndon Johnson, and the experiment was run on election day of 1964.

Each subject received a booklet containing fifteen jokes; five anti-Goldwater, five anti-Johnson, and five neutral jokes. The subjects rated these for funniness on a nine point scale, and then filled out a questionnaire which assessed their political party preference and candidate preference, as well as their father's party and candidate preference. These four political affiliation variables correlated significantly, in the predicted direction, with the differential ratings given to the anti-Goldwater and anti-Johnson jokes. Priest's hypothesis was thus confirmed. The experiment was repeated during the 1968 presidential election with similar results. This study, then, lends some support to the generality of the reference group construct as a predictor of humor preferences.

Gutman and Priest (1969) found data analogous to the La Fave results, using a different methodology.
These authors sought to answer the question, "when is aggression funny?" and hypothesized that the perceived characters of the protagonists in an aggressive joke would significantly effect the funniness of the joke. More specifically, Gutman and Priest said that a good person's hostile act would be considered less hostile and more humorous than a bad person's hostile act, and that a victim who "deserved" to be the butt of a joke (a "bad guy") would elicit more humor than an undeserving victim.

Using aggressive jokes with one character an aggressor (A) and another character a victim (V), the authors varied the personal qualities of A and V, making A and V seem either socially acceptable (good) or socially unacceptable (bad). Thus, in a 2 x 2 factorial design, the humor conditions consisted of A good/V bad, A bad/V good, A good/V good, and A bad/V bad. The hypothesis predicts that if the victim is bad, then "getting what he deserves" in the punchline would justify the aggression and humor would be rated higher.

Jokes presented to reflect the victim-aggressor good-bad dimension were presented to subjects, who then rated them for humor, hostility in the punchline, justification of aggression, and social acceptability of A and V. The results support the specific hypotheses. The highest humor rating occurred in the aggressor good/
victim bad condition, with a decrease in rated humor in the A good/V good, A bad/V bad, and A bad/V good conditions, respectively. Hostility was perceived as highest in conditions in which one character was bad and the other was good—the cognitively balanced conditions (Heider, 1958). Apparently, the hostile behavior in the joke was more credible in such balanced states, and thus rated higher.

Finally, subjects rated aggression as justified only in the condition in which the victim was bad and the aggressor was good. This condition would analogously, in La Fave's formulation, be the condition in which the subject's negative identification class (the bad victim) "gets what he so richly deserves" at the hands of the subject's positive identification class (the good aggressor).

Recently, La Fave and his coworkers have performed a series of replications of La Fave's original 1961 research. La Fave, Haddad, and Marshall (1974) report research stemming from a student sit-in which occurred at the University of Windsor in 1969. Fifty students served as subjects; twenty-five favored the sit-in (the pro-occupiers), while twenty-five opposed it (the anti-occupiers). Here, La Fave et al. have used the more comprehensive identification class construct, in which a person identifies with an attitude, as opposed to the
more restricted reference group construct. (Recall from our earlier discussion of La Fave's original study that an identification class, though much more general than a reference group, predicted humor preferences as well as the reference group construct.)

Subjects were presented with a series of jokes, some constructed to disparage the sit-in, others constructed to esteem the sit-in. Once again, strong support was given to La Fave's hypothesis: subjects gave significantly higher humor ratings to those jokes which esteemed their positively valenced identification class.

In another study (La Fave, McCarthy, and Haddad, 1973) Americans and Canadians were used as identification classes. As in all their previous studies, steps were taken to ensure that all subjects were indeed "loyal" to their identification class. That is, all Canadian subjects were pro-Canadian and all American subjects were pro-American. The results again proved to be significant. However, while in La Fave's previous research all jokes bore out the hypothesis, in this study sixteen (of a list of twenty) jokes supported the prediction. La Fave was able to attribute this to a methodological error. The Americans, claim the authors, were not as pro-American as the Canadians were pro-Canadian.

A recent paper by La Fave, Billingsworth, and Haddad (unpublished) is the latest study to date in this series
of replications. The jokes constructed for this study were designed to either esteem or disparage women's liberation, or men and women in general. Here are two examples of the jokes used in this study. The first is anti-female and the second is anti-male:

(1) **She:** If women aren't the stronger sex, then why do they outlive men by five years?  
**He:** Because they don't have wives to nag them to death.

(2) **He:** Do you believe in Darwin's theory of evolution?  
**She:** No, I think it was a woman who made the first monkey out of man.

Fifty-six males and twenty-five females served as subjects. A booklet of twenty jokes (ten anti-male and ten anti-female) was given to each subject. When subjects completed rating the jokes, they filled out an information sheet in which was embedded the question asking subjects to indicate which sex they felt ought to control things; men, women, or both equally. Only male subjects who checked "men" or "both equally," and female subjects who checked "women" or "both equally" were included in the analysis. This procedure made sure that subjects did not regard their own sex as a negative identification class.

While most males (thirty-three of fifty-six) checked that men ought to control, not a single female checked that women ought to control things. Moreover, the female
subjects were selected from a population believed to be overwhelmingly in favor of the goals of women's liberation. Parenthetically, La Fave cites this as evidence against the myth of the "castrating" feminist.

It was concluded, then, that male subjects were at least moderately pro-male and female subjects were at least moderately pro-female. The results again confirmed La Fave's hypothesis: males reliably preferred anti-female humor over anti-male humor. The reverse was found for females. Even when the "both equally" males were compared with the "both equally" females (that is, all female subjects), the La Fave hypothesis was able to significantly predict humor preferences.

A recently published study by Priest and Wilhelm (1974) seems to support some of La Fave's findings in the area of "sexist" humor. These authors attempted to relate subjects' marital status and "self-actualization" scores to humor preferences. It was found that unmarried subjects, whether scoring high or low as self-actualizers, preferred humor which disparaged the opposite sex. Similar results were found for the married low self-actualizers. However, the married high self-actualizers, whether male or female, showed no significant differences in humor preferences.

The authors explain this finding in exchange theory terms, arguing that the married subjects enjoyed "mutual-
ly satisfying relationships" with their spouses, and therefore would enjoy sex conflict humor less. In addition, the married subjects who scored high on self-actualization were assumed to be low on authoritarianism and ethnocentrism, and thus eschew jokes disparaging "different" others.

The Present Study: A Theoretical Overview

The present study is based in part on the literature examined above. This experiment will utilize the identification classes of males and females, within the La Fave model. Again following La Fave, the stimulus material will consist of brief, narrative jokes designated as either "male-superior" or "female-superior." In a male-superior joke, a male character clearly squelches a female character in the punchline of the joke. In a female-superior joke, precisely the opposite is true; the female character squelches the male character. This study, then, will replicate some of the research of La Fave. However, the major purpose of the study is not to replicate previous research. Rather, this study will examine the effects of a dimension not considered in La Fave's work, namely, a hypothetical joke-teller. This stimulus person is either male or female, and is a person to whom the subjects can clearly attribute the jokes. The addition of the joke-teller variable puts this experiment into the realm of person perception, involving subjects' eval-
uations of both jokes and joke-tellers as a function of the interaction between the subjects' sexual identification class, the sex of the joke-teller, and the type of joke (male-superior or female-superior) told by the joke-teller.

One important reason for the addition of the joke-teller dimension is to better approximate "mundane realism" (Aronson and Carlsmith, 1968); to present to the experimental subject a situation he is more likely to encounter in the real world. In the typical humor study, the subject is usually handed a list of jokes to rate. But to whom does the subject attribute these jokes? Surely not the objective, detached experimenter. In "real life," when we hear a joke, we often have someone whom we give credit (or blame) for the joke, and by extension, motivation for telling the joke. In this regard, it seems intuitively plausible that jokes disparaging one's positive reference group may be perceived as hilarious, so long as the joke is told by (attributed to) a fellow member of the +RG, who is sanctioned by the group to tell such jokes. The same joke told by an "outsider" could be taken as a grave insult! This notion has found some theoretical expression in the psychoanalytic literature (Reik, 1954).

Additionally, the utilization of the joke-teller dimension may have the advantages of reducing defensive-
ness and evaluation apprehension on the part of the subjects. The subject will see himself as a judge of someone else's (the joke-teller's) joke and someone else's motives for telling the joke. Since the subject will not see the experiment as focusing directly on himself, he may be less likely to see the experiment as a test of his ability to "correctly" judge a joke. In other words, demand characteristics should, hopefully, be minimized.

Hypotheses

In general, male subjects will rate male-superior jokes funnier than female-superior jokes, and female subjects will rate female-superior jokes funnier than male-superior jokes. However, female subjects will rate as most humorous female-superior jokes told by female joke-tellers. Male subjects will rate as most humorous male-superior jokes told by male joke-tellers. By the same token, female subjects will rate as least humorous male-superior jokes told by male joke-tellers, and male subjects will rate as least humorous female-superior jokes told by female joke-tellers.

All subjects, male or female, who perceive a male joke-teller telling a female-superior joke, or a female joke-teller telling a male-superior joke will "restore balance" by readjusting their evaluations of either the joke or the joke-teller. For example, female subjects who perceive a female joke-teller telling a male-superior
joke should either rate the joke more positively ("if a girl tells it, it really isn't so bad"), or should down-grade the joke-teller ("any girl who tells such a joke must be a dummy").
METHOD

Subjects

Sixty male and sixty female undergraduate students enrolled at California State University, Northridge volunteered as subjects.

Procedure

All subjects were tested individually in the presence of one male experimenter. Each subject received a booklet of stimulus material consisting of seven jokes. Four of these were neutral, that is, jokes in which no sex conflict became apparent. The remaining three jokes were either male-superior or female-superior, corresponding to one of the cells of the design. Each subject, therefore, was exposed to three jokes corresponding to one of the experimental conditions. For half of the subjects within any one condition, the order of presentation of the jokes was reversed to control for sequence effects.

Instructions to subjects. Subjects were informed that the booklets contain jokes elicited from subjects (the joke-tellers) in an experimental interview. It was made clear that these jokes are jokes the "subjects" like very much. Subjects were then told that the purpose of the present study is to obtain judgments of these jokes,
as well as impressions of the people who told them. The following instructions were read aloud to each subject:

"We would like your help in judging some jokes told by CSUN students while serving as subjects in a recent experimental interview. Although not all subjects in this interview were able to think of a joke, most of them readily came up with a joke they liked very much. Your judgments of these jokes, as well as your impressions of the people who told them, will be of great help in understanding the psychology of humor."

At the end of the experimental session, the subject was informed of the true nature of the experiment. The subject was asked for his opinion of the study, and any questions he may have had were answered.

**Independent Variables**

**Humor stimuli.** The humor stimuli consist of two levels of narrative jokes. Included are (a) male-superior jokes in which a male character is esteemed and a female character is disparaged, and (b) female-superior jokes in which a female character is esteemed and a male character is disparaged. The three "critical" jokes to be used in the study are capable of role reversal. In other words, the same joke can be made either male-superior or female-superior, depending on whether a male or a female has been given the role of "victim." The three "critical" jokes appear in Appendix A.

**Stimulus persons (the joke-tellers).** Personal similarity (identification class) is established by describ-
ing the joke-teller (prior to each joke) as a CSUN student, either male or female, plus age. The joke-teller's first name is also given. Each joke, it should be noted, was told by a different joke-teller. The actual joke-teller descriptions used in the study appear in Appendix A. Control conditions were run along with the experimental conditions. In the control groups, neither the sex nor the name of the joke-teller is given; only age and occupation (CSUN student).

In sum then, the humor stimuli (male-superior vs. female-superior), stimulus persons (male joke-teller vs. female joke-teller vs. sex unknown), and subject sex (male vs. female) comprise the twelve cells of a 2 x 3 x 2 factorial design.

Dependent Variables

Ratings of the joke. On a paper-and-pencil rating scale, subjects rated (a) the funniness of the joke, and (b) the hostility of the joke, that is, to what degree the dialogue between the characters was perceived as hostile. In addition, subjects were asked whether they understood the joke, and if they ever heard it before.

Ratings of the joke-teller. On the same rating form, subjects rated (a) the sense of humor of the joke-teller, (b) whether they would want the joke-teller as a friend, (c) the emotional adjustment of the joke-teller, and (d) the intelligence of the joke-teller.
Posttest questionnaire. A posttest questionnaire was given in order to assess the subjects' attitudes toward their own and opposite sex. The questions explored acceptance of certain sexual stereotypes. This strategy should, hopefully, reduce statistical error by controlling for subjects who do not regard their own sex as a positive identification class. Only four female subjects (and no male subjects) were excluded from the analysis on the basis of this questionnaire. By strongly supporting some stereotypically male attitudes, these subjects, unlike the other female subjects, seemed to indicate a preference for the male identification class. This questionnaire, along with the joke and joke-teller rating scales, is shown in Appendix B.
RESULTS

In order to detect any consistent pattern of results, scores on each dependent measure for each joke were summed across jokes. In each reported instance of statistical significance, at least two of the three jokes are known to contribute to criterion variation. Thus, the argument that a significant effect is due solely to the idiosyncratic nature of one joke is discounted.

A multivariate analysis of variance formed the basis of decision making for the data. However, no multivariate effects proved significant. Each dependent measure was then examined separately, by way of a univariate analysis of variance, in order to determine which measures showed important group differences. Let us now look at each dependent measure in which significance was detected.

Variable 1: funniness of the joke. A significant main effect for type of joke was seen. Regardless of subject sex or joke-teller sex, female-superior jokes tended to be rated funnier than male-superior jokes. ($F = 4.07$, $df = 1/108$, $p < .05$). This main effect is shown graphically in Figure 1 and the results of the analysis of variance appear in Table 1. Note that a male-superior joke told by someone unidentified by sex received an extremely low rating relative to all other conditions. How-
Figure 1. Ratings of funniness for combined jokes.
very good

Joke-teller's sense of humor

very poor

Figure 2. Ratings of joke-teller's sense of humor for combined jokes.
Figure 3. Ratings of joke-teller's acceptability as a friend for combined jokes.
very well adjusted
6
5
4
3
2
1
0
very poorly adjusted

Joke-teller's emotional adjustment

male subjects female subjects

male-superior joke (male joke-teller)
female-superior joke (male joke-teller)

male-superior joke (female joke-teller)
female-superior joke (female joke-teller)

male-superior joke (control)
female-superior joke (control)

Figure 4. Ratings of joke-teller's emotional adjustment for combined jokes.
Figure 5. Ratings of joke-teller's intelligence for combined jokes.
Figure 6. Ratings of joke-teller's intelligence for combined jokes. Male-superior joke versus female-superior joke as a function of subject sex and joke-teller sex.
**TABLE 1**

Analysis of Variance for Variable 1: Funniness of the Joke

<table>
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<th>Source</th>
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<th>F</th>
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<tr>
<td>Joke-teller sex (A)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35.86</td>
<td>2.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of joke (T)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>72.07</td>
<td>4.07*</td>
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<td>Subject sex (B)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.00</td>
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<td>A X T</td>
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<td>A X B</td>
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<td>6.07</td>
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<td><strong>Full model</strong></td>
<td>108</td>
<td>17.70</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

*p < .05
TABLE 2

Analysis of Variance for Variable 2:
The joke-teller's Sense of Humor

<table>
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<th>Source</th>
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<th>F</th>
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<td>Joke-teller sex (A)</td>
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<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of joke (T)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>60.20</td>
<td>4.20*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subject sex (B)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.07</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A X T</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30.11</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A X B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24.32</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T X B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>0.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>A X T X B</td>
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<td>2.02</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full model</td>
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<td>14.33</td>
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</table>

*p < .05
### TABLE 3

Analysis of Variance for Variable 3: Acceptance of the Joke-teller as a Potential Friend

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<th>Source</th>
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<th>F</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Joke-teller sex (A)</td>
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<td>78.93</td>
<td>6.49*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of joke (T)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>78.41</td>
<td>6.44**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject sex (B)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.67</td>
<td>1.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>A X T</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32.93</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A X B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37.30</td>
<td>3.07***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T X B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A X T X B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full model</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>12.17</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01, **p < .025, ***p = .05
TABLE 4

Analysis of Variance for Variable 4: Joke-teller's Emotional Adjustment

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<th>Source</th>
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<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>6.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of joke (T)</td>
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<td>38.53</td>
<td>3.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subject sex (B)</td>
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<td>12.03</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A X T</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.13</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A X B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27.43</td>
<td>2.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>T X B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.53</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A X T X B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full model</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>11.87</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01
### TABLE 5

Analysis of Variance for Variable 5: Joke-teller's Intelligence

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<th>Source</th>
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<th>F</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joke-teller sex (A)</td>
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<td>55.81</td>
<td>5.63*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of joke (T)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.87</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject sex (B)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18.40</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A X T</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40.22</td>
<td>4.06**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A X B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19.31</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T X B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A X T X B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full model</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>9.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01, **p < .025
ever, a male-superior joke told by a person identified as female received about the same rating as female-superior jokes. As will be seen, an analogous pattern persists throughout the other measures.

Variable 2: joke-teller's sense of humor. Again, a main effect for type of joke was seen, such that joke-tellers, regardless of their sex, were given higher sense of humor ratings by both male and female subjects when the joke-teller told a female-superior joke. \( F = 4.20, df = 1/108, p < .05 \). Figure 2 illustrates this main effect and Table 2 presents the results of the analysis of variance.

Variable 3: acceptance of the joke-teller as a potential friend. The main effect for type of joke was once again seen. Tellers of a female-superior joke tended to be more acceptable as friends than tellers of a male-superior joke, regardless of the joke-teller's sex or the subject's sex. \( F = 6.44, df = 1/108, p < .025 \). The graph of this effect is shown in Figure 3. The results of the analysis of variance can be seen in Table 3. In addition, a significant main effect for joke-teller sex was seen. Regardless of subject sex and type of joke, subjects were more accepting of female joke-tellers than male joke-tellers. \( F = 6.49, df = 2/108, p < .01 \). Also, a joke-teller sex by subject sex interaction was seen, such that when the joke-teller's sex was not known, male
subjects gave higher ratings to joke-tellers than did female subjects. But when the sex of the joke-teller was known (the experimental conditions), female subjects gave higher ratings than male subjects. ($F = 3.07$, $df = 2/108$, $p = .05$).

**Variable 4: joke-teller's emotional adjustment.** As in variable 3, a main effect for joke-teller sex was seen. Regardless of subject sex and type of joke told, subjects attributed greater emotional stability to female joke-tellers. ($F = 6.32$, $df = 2/108$, $p < .01$). As can be seen in Figure 4, female joke-tellers received high positive ratings no matter what type of joke they told. The results of the analysis of variance are presented in Table 4.

**Variable 5: joke-teller's intelligence.** Once more, a main effect for joke-teller sex was observed. Regardless of subject sex and type of joke, subjects attributed greater intelligence to female joke-tellers. ($F = 5.63$, $df = 2/108$, $p < .01$). The graph of this main effect is shown in Figure 5. Table 5 shows the obtained $F$-values for the analysis of variance. Also, a joke-teller sex by type of joke interaction was detected, such that when the joke-teller's sex was unknown (the control conditions), subjects, regardless of sex, devalued the intelligence of tellers of male-superior jokes relative to tellers of female-superior jokes. No such trend was seen...
when the sex of the joke-teller was known to subjects. 

\( F = 4.06, \ \text{df} = 2/108, \ \ p < 0.025 \). This interaction may be 
visualized more easily by referring to the graph in 
Figure 6.
DISCUSSION

In general, the behavior of the female subjects seems to support the hypotheses. Females, in accordance with the identification class construct, rated female-superior jokes funnier than male-superior jokes, and held tellers of female-superior jokes in higher esteem than tellers of male-superior jokes. But turning to the male subjects, we are somewhat surprised to learn that they behaved almost exactly like the female subjects! This accounted for the lack of any significant effects for the subject sex variable.

What we have, then, appears to be an overall preference for female-superior jokes and an overall trend of sympathetic, positive feelings and attributes toward female joke-tellers, regardless of the type of joke they tell. A correlation matrix showed that variables 1 through 5 are highly intercorrelated (positively), a point that should be kept in mind throughout the balance of the discussion. However, variable 6 (hostility of the joke) was seen to be negatively correlated with the other measures. This variable is also the only outcome measure in which no significant effects were seen, although a nonsignificant trend indicated that both types of jokes were seen as less hostile when told by a female joke-
A better insight into these data is gained when we look at the two significant interactions. The first interaction was observed on variable 3, which measured the subjects' acceptance of the joke-teller as a potential friend. The interaction showed that male and female subjects behaved differentially as a function of which level of the sex of joke-teller variable was present (either sex known or sex unknown). Looking at the graph in Figure 3, we see that female subjects gave the lowest ratings to joke-tellers unidentified by sex and name, and gave the absolute lowest ratings to unidentified joke-tellers who told a male-superior joke. The male subjects, however, gave higher overall ratings to joke-tellers unidentified by sex and name, although, like the female subjects, gave tellers of female-superior jokes higher ratings than tellers of male-superior jokes.

Turning to the experimental conditions (sex and name of joke-teller known), we see that the situation is reversed. Male subjects gave lower overall ratings to joke-tellers whose sex and name they knew, although still giving relatively higher ratings to female joke-tellers. The female subjects gave higher overall ratings to joke-tellers whose sex and name they knew. The highest ratings were given to female joke-tellers, regardless of the type of joke they told. The next highest ratings
were given to male joke-tellers who told a female-superior joke, and the lowest ratings (in the experimental conditions) were given to male joke-tellers who told a male-superior joke. However, for females in the control conditions, note that even the teller of a female-superior joke was rated lower than all joke-tellers in the experimental conditions. It seems that, for some reason, when female subjects do not know the name and sex of the teller of any type of sex-biased joke, they tend to dislike that person, giving them the lowest ratings of friendliness. But when the female subjects do know the sex and name of the teller of any type of sex-biased joke (especially females telling a female-superior joke), they tend to like that person very much, giving them the highest ratings of acceptability as a friend.

Can we make sense of these results? Consider only the female subjects. The results appear to replicate the La Fave research: female subjects prefer female-superior jokes over male-superior jokes. In addition, the present research indicates that sex-biased jokes, whether male-superior or female-superior, are especially preferred by female subjects when the joke-teller is identified as a female.

Furthermore, knowledge of the sex of the joke-teller seems to be a more powerful predictor of humor preferences than knowledge of the type of joke: female subjects
gave higher ratings to females who told a male-superior joke than they did to males who told a female-superior joke. In general, what this could indicate (especially when we consider the fact that significance on measures of the joke-tellers was always stronger than significance on measures of the jokes), is that knowledge about a person who tells a joke is a better predictor of the listener's response than knowledge of the joke itself. It may be possible, at least for females, to predict a person's reaction to a joke knowing only that person's similarity to, or esteem for, the joke-teller. Knowing the joke itself may be considerably less important.

Another point of interest is noting that the control conditions in this study are the conditions which most closely approximate La Fave's experimental design (La Fave had no "joke-teller" variable), and differential ratings of the male-superior versus female-superior jokes were greatest in the control conditions. For example, female subjects in the control conditions who heard a joke-teller tell a male-superior joke gave the teller a mean rating of -1 on acceptance as a friend. But when a female-superior joke was told, the mean rating jumped to 2.1; an absolute difference of 3.1 scale points. In the male joke-teller conditions, this difference shrunk to 3.5 - 2.5 = 1.0 scale point. In the female joke-teller conditions, the difference was only 5.3 - 5.2 = 0.1 scale
points. What is happening here, perhaps, is that subjects who have little information about a joke-teller (i.e., do not know name and sex) turn more to the joke as the source of evidence as to whether or not they would want the joke-teller as a friend. However, when subjects have relatively more information about the joke-teller; when they know the joke-teller's sex and actually know his or her name, as was the case in the experimental conditions, subjects will rate friendliness toward the joke-teller based more on this information and will de-emphasize the joke itself as the criterion for rating friendliness. The result is that the absolute difference in mean ratings between male-superior joke conditions and female-superior joke conditions will be less when there is more information about the joke-tellers, as indeed the data show. (A future study could better explore this phenomenon by creating several "joke-teller information" conditions. For example, a no-information condition versus knowing only the joke-teller's sex and age versus a condition in which an entire biographical statement about the joke-teller is given.) It appears, then, that La Fave was wise in not having a joke-teller dimension: if you want to maximize your knowledge about how people react to jokes, it is best to eliminate any references or implications concerning the people who tell these jokes.
Let us now turn to the second interaction, which was observed on variable 5; subjects' impressions of the joke-teller's intelligence. The interaction is shown graphically in Figure 6. In this interaction, it is seen that subjects (regardless of sex) who read a male-superior joke and subjects who read a female-superior joke rate the joke-tellers differentially, depending on whether or not they know the sex of the joke-teller. For example, when subjects read a male-superior joke (which neither males nor females liked very much) told by someone whose sex and name is unknown, they tend to rate that person rather low on intelligence. But when that same male-superior joke is told by someone whose name and sex is known (especially if that person is a female) the ratings of intelligence take an impressive jump. This again illustrates a point we have already made: when we have little information about a person, and they engage in some behavior, such as telling a joke, we may use that behavior as the yardstick with which to judge them. And if the behavior is unpopular, such as telling a male-superior joke, we give them a low rating. On the other hand, when we know relatively more about a person who told a joke, such as the joke-teller's name and sex, we may judge their intelligence based on this information, and more or less ignore the fact that they engaged in a bit of bad behavior. Note that the lowest ratings of
intelligence in the experimental conditions were given by male subjects to male joke-tellers who told male-superior jokes. The highest ratings were given by female subjects to female joke-tellers who told male-superior jokes.

Now consider what happened when subjects read a female-superior joke; an apparently "good" behavior on the part of the joke-tellers. It did not make much difference whether subjects knew a little or a lot about the joke-teller; they were rated high on intelligence in either case. This is seen in the Figure 6 graph as a convergence of the control group and experimental group curves. The observed interaction is due to the fact that control group subjects rated tellers of male-superior jokes lowest on intelligence, and rated tellers of female-superior jokes quite high on intelligence. The experimental subjects did not behave this way. As a matter of fact, subjects who read a female-superior joke told by a female joke-teller rated intelligence a bit less than when the female joke-teller told a male-superior joke.

The Lack of Sex Differences in Humor Preferences: Some Implications for the Psychology of Humor

One of the important findings of this study is the lack of any clear-cut sex differences in humor appreciation, as evidenced by the absence of main effects for the subject sex variable. However, this lack of main ef-
effects may only indicate that there are, in the context of this study, no simple reasons why males and females might differ in humor appreciation. It is most likely that humor appreciation is multi-determined; the result of many variables working in certain combinations. The most fruitful approach, then, would probably be an examination of the higher-order interactions of many dimensions. But before we get too speculative, let us consider what a lack of sex differences in humor appreciation may actually imply. For one thing, the finding basically refutes much of the psychoanalytic literature dealing with sex and humor. Freudian theory holds that woman is essentially a humorless creature, the result of the uniqueness of her psychosexual development. Humor appreciation is thus a masculine trait, and those rare females having a "good" sense of humor or exhibiting an extraordinary comedic ability are simply manifesting that old Freudian affliction, penis envy. The present study, however, finds no evidence for concluding that women are less capable of appreciating certain types of humor than men.

A second implication also becomes evident; specifically, that earlier notions that certain sex-role attitudes dictate what males "should" laugh at and what females "should" laugh at may have been too simplistic. From childhood, it has been previously thought, we have
been taught that men should be aggressive, strong, and self-reliant, and therefore appreciate humor that is lusty, domineering, and aggressive in theme. In contrast, females are taught to be passive, gentle, and dependent, and thus find nonsensical, non-hostile, "silly" humor more to their liking. However, the lack of sex differences in this study may indicate that these earlier sex-role notions may be overextended. (Evidently, factors such as knowledge of the joke-teller must be considered before accurate predictions can be made.) This trend is also evident by the way female joke-tellers were rated. According to the stereotype, it is considered unfeminine for women to tell hostile or aggressive jokes. But when we look at the data, we see that female joke-tellers were better liked than male joke-tellers, and were seen as more intelligent and emotionally stable than their male counterparts. In short, as traditional sex-role behavior fades away, we will probably see the female joke-teller and the female sense of humor come out of the closet.

Summary

There appear to be four general findings:

1) La Fave's identification class hypothesis received some support, in that female subjects behaved as the hypothesis predicted, but male subjects did not. Males disparaged male-superior jokes (and the people
who told them) as much as females.

2) Measures of the joke-teller seem more reliable than measures of the joke itself. That is, knowledge of a person who tells a joke is a more reliable predictor of humor preferences than is knowledge of the joke. This was made strikingly evident in each of the five dependent variables in which significance was found. A male-superior joke told by a male (or sex unknown) joke-teller was seen as relatively less funny, and the joke-teller was rated lower on all dependent measures. But when the teller of a male-superior joke was identified as a female, the ratings of the joke and the joke-teller increased dramatically. Therefore, if we are studying only reactions to jokes, we should eliminate any reference to the joke-teller, as this would be a source of error.

3) Statistical interactions between groups were not a function of the subjects' sex or the joke-tellers' sex per se, but rather, were a function of whether or not a joke-teller's sex (and name) was known to the subjects, or to be more general, whether or not subjects possessed personal information about the joke-teller.

4) At a more sociological level, the scarcity of significant sex differences may be interpreted as a weakening of certain "sex-role stereotypes" dictating what
is "proper" behavior. This includes the sex-role stereotype dictating humor preferences.

Some comments on methodology. Several methodological concerns are worth mentioning here. First, a substantial part, though not most, of the criterion variation is due to the idiosyncratic nature of each individual joke. While a joke may be male-superior or female-superior, there may also be other, less obvious, dimensions that may account for observed variation and therefore be a source of error. Future humor studies await the development of standardized and reliable "humor stimuli."

Second, regarding this particular study, the attitude questionnaire given to all subjects revealed that the socio-sexual attitudes of both males and females were fairly similar, which is not too surprising in a population of college students. This may account for the fact that the identification class hypothesis did not predict the behavior of male subjects. Rather than belonging to a male identification class, the male subjects appeared to share, to a certain degree, the female identification class. A future study of this sort should make sure that males do indeed possess attitudes constituting a male identification class.

Lastly, there is some anecdotal evidence, such as subjects' reports during debriefing, that the manipulation of the stimulus person variable could have been
more powerful. An improvement of this manipulation might be the use of videotapes, in which a joke is told by a real person, as opposed to a joke told by someone merely described on paper.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

The Three "Critical" Jokes (each having a male-superior and female-superior version) and Descriptions of the Hypothetical Joke-tellers given for each Joke.

Joke 1

Joke-teller: Sharon, a 19 year old female CSUN student.

Joke-teller: Steven, a 19 year old male CSUN student.

Joke-teller: a 19 year old CSUN student.

Joke (female-superior version):

A guy said to his girlfriend, "Tell me, my darling, am I the first man you ever made love to?" And the girlfriend said, "Well, you might be. Your face looks very familiar."

Joke (male-superior version):

A girl said to her boyfriend, "Tell me, my darling, am I the first woman you ever made love to?" And the boyfriend said, "Well, you might be. Your face looks very familiar."

Joke 2

Joke-teller: Donna, a 20 year old female CSUN student.

Joke-teller: Robert, a 20 year old male CSUN student.

Joke-teller: a 20 year old CSUN student.

Joke (female-superior version):

A man and a woman meet on a narrow sidewalk. The man said, "I never make way for a fool." The woman said (after letting him pass), "Don't you? I always do!"

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Joke (male-superior version):

A man and a woman meet on a narrow sidewalk. The woman said, "I never make way for a fool." The man said (after letting him pass), "Don't you? I always do!"

Joke (female-superior version):

Wife: I'd love to run my fingers through your hair.
Husband: Sure! You're certainly affectionate tonight.
Wife: It's not that. I just washed my hands and can't find the towel.

Joke-teller: Susan, an 18 year old female CSUN student.
Joke-teller: Don, an 18 year old male CSUN student.
Joke-teller: an 18 year old CSUN student.

Joke (male-superior version):

Husband: I'd love to run my fingers through your hair.
Wife: Sure! You're certainly affectionate tonight.
Husband: It's not that. I just washed my hands and can't find the towel.
APPENDIX B
Rating Scales and Questionnaire

The following rating scales appeared after each joke:

1) How funny is this joke?
   very unfunny      very funny
   -4  -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3  +4

2) How do you rate the sense of humor of the person who told this joke?
   very poor        very good
   -4  -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3  +4

3) Would you want this person as a friend?
   definitely not    definitely yes
   -4  -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3  +4

4) Would you say this person is well adjusted emotionally?
   very poorly adjusted    very well adjusted
   -4  -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3  +4

5) What is your impression of this person's intelligence?
   not very intelligent    very intelligent
   -4  -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3  +4

6) Did you understand this joke? yes  no

7) Did you ever hear this joke before? yes  no

(The following scale appeared at the end of the booklet.)

Rate how hostile each joke seems to you.
   very unhospital        very hostile
   -4  -3  -2  -1  0  +1  +2  +3  +4

(Seven of these hostility scales, one for each joke, were given.)
Posttest Questionnaire

Please respond to the following statements. This questionnaire is completely confidential, so do not hesitate to answer according to the way you truly feel.

1) Women who enjoy "dirty" jokes are not very feminine.
   | strongly disagree | strongly agree |
   | -4    -3    -2    -1    0    +1    +2    +3    +4 |

2) Men are naturally more aggressive than women.
   | strongly disagree | strongly agree |
   | -4    -3    -2    -1    0    +1    +2    +3    +4 |

3) If I were born all over again, I would want to be the same sex I am now.
   | strongly disagree | strongly agree |
   | -4    -3    -2    -1    0    +1    +2    +3    +4 |

4) We need more women in government, politics, and industry.
   | strongly disagree | strongly agree |
   | -4    -3    -2    -1    0    +1    +2    +3    +4 |

5) Women should have the same rights and opportunities as men.
   | strongly disagree | strongly agree |
   | -4    -3    -2    -1    0    +1    +2    +3    +4 |

6) I shy away from men who are not masculine.
   | strongly disagree | strongly agree |
   | -4    -3    -2    -1    0    +1    +2    +3    +4 |