The Language of Laughter:

A Quantitative/Qualitative Fusion Examining Television Narrative and Humor

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Abstract

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Introduction

This study is interested in the reception of humorous media stimuli and how a variety of co-factors contribute to the process. A wide range of critical, more broadly qualitative, and quantitative epistemologies have in the past been brought to bear on these questions, but never in concert. This study will detail the case of a useful convergence of these approaches.

Using the classic American situation comedy, *The Andy Griffith Show*, as the source of experimental stimuli in a study of the effects of a laugh track on the reception and comic appreciation of television humor, this study takes a multifaceted approach to the analysis of this complex phenomenon. We began the study with an empirical, social scientific approach but upon examining the results, we recognized outcomes that might best be analyzed from a different perspective, leading us to a fusion of approaches. Normally separated by an epistemological divide, quantitative and qualitative/narratological methods are brought to bear in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of the material under study.

Ultimately, this piece embodies an integration of approaches that is not limited by artificial intra-disciplinary boundaries that exist more for the reification of fixed archetypes and are less concerned with ecological validity or the real dimensions of the problems of communication.

Humor Types and Audience Response

Four broad mechanisms of humor may be identified from the humor literature to date. Each of these four emerges from a literature that identifies the underlying assumptions of the particular approach to humor, and also provides a reasonable amount of empirical support for its existence (Martin, 2007). While most scholars writing within these literatures take the view that one particular mechanism is paramount (often to the exclusion of the other mechanisms), it is our view that multiple mechanisms are possible, and that these may come into play simultaneously when a receiver encounters a potentially humorous stimulus.

These four independent mechanisms are:

1. Superiority/disparagement: Among others, Freud (1960) recognized the aggressive basis in many jokes. As far back as Plato and Aristotle (Martin, 2007), laughter is seen as originating in malice. Seventeenth-century British philosopher Thomas Hobbes reinforced the notion of humor being derived from a sense of superiority over others. More recently, the superiority mechanism has been validated in work by the theoretic examinations of Gruner (1978) and the quantitative research of Zillmann and Bryant (1974; 1980; Zillmann & Cantor, 1976) and LaFave (LaFave, Haddad, and Maesen, 1976). Common applications of humor aimed at engaging this mechanism include racist and sexist humor (Thomas & Esses, 2004). Attempts to generate a superiority mechanism in response to potentially humorous stimuli include "putdown" humor, satire, sarcasm, self-deprecation, and the display of stupid behaviors.

2. Incongruity: The juxtaposition of inconsistent or incongruous elements is the focus of this oft-mentioned mechanism by which humor might be apprehended. Dating back to German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (Martin, 2007), this notion was further elaborated by Arthur Koestler (1964). His concept of bisociation is an attempt to explain the mental processes involved in the humorous resolution of incongruous stimuli, as well as the process of artistic creativity and scientific discovery (Martin, 2007). Briefly, these theoretic approaches indicate that humor is experienced when two disparate perspectives are simultaneously experienced; the joy of humor derives from the "solving" of the incongruous puzzle. Contemporary empirical support for this mechanism of humor include a series of studies by Shultz and colleagues (e.g., Shultz & Horibe, 1974) and others (Perlmutter, 2002; Vaid et al., 2003; Veal, 2004). Particular types of humor intended to generate an incongruity mechanism include wordplay (e.g., puns), "pure" incongruity, absurdity, and sight gags.

3. Arousal: Although early attempts to explicate this possible mechanism for experiencing humor emphasized the humorous response as a method of relieving pent-up psychological strain or tension (e.g., the works of writers/philosophers Immanuel Kant and Herbert Spencer; Martin, 2007), a later articulation by psychologist Daniel Berlyne (1972) posited two arousal-related processes—arousal boost and arousal jag. The arousal boost mechanism operates when a pleasurable increase in generalized arousal results from a humorous stimulus. The arousal jag mechanism comes into play when arousal passes an optimal level, and a punchline or other resolution successfully reduces arousal to a pleasurable level once again. Arousal-provoking humor may be manifested in a variety of ways, such as slapstick, dark humor, sick humor, and sexual or naughty humor.

4. Social currency: Although less often acknowledged as an independent dimension of humor apprehension, social interaction humor has been studied as a means of building and maintaining relationships (e.g., Chapman, 1983; Fine, 1983; Lamaster, 1975). Humor may be experienced as the pleasure derived from playful interaction (Apter, 1982), the establishment of a functional social hierarchy (Fry, 1963), or the achievement of a sense of group belonging or understanding (Dundes, 1987; Pollio, 1983). Particular behaviors meant to invoke this mechanism include joking to fit in, joking around socially, and parody (relying on a shared view of a known form, such as a film genre).

These broadly defined mechanisms may be found to manifest in a variety of ways in the mass media. Although some attempts have been made at typologizing mediated humor (e.g., Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004), there is no consensus as to the number or types of humor utilized in mass media products (Vandaele, 2002).

How receivers respond to stimuli with one or more specific types of humor potential has been the subject of countless empirical and critical scholarly investigations (Martin, 2007). And, the context of such humor exchanges has been frequently examined. In particular, the contagion effect of mirth behavior has been studied repeatedly. Some research has found the impact of others' mirth behavior to be limited to a social contagion enhancement of one's own mirth behavior, which does *not* extend to perceptual or affective responses to the humorous stimulus (Chapman, 1973; Devereux & Ginsburg, 2001; Leventhal & Cupchik, 1976; Neuendorf with Fennell, 1988; Platow et al., 2005). However, a social facilitation/situational cueing or conformity approach to

mirth often finds effects both on mirth behavior and on evaluative judgments (i.e., perceived funniness, enjoyment) stemming from live confederate laughers (e.g., Chapman & Chapman, 1974) or from recorded laughter (e.g., Fuller & Sheehy-Skeffington, 1974; Leventhal & Mace, 1970; Martin & Gray, 1996; Smyth & Fuller, 1972).

The Andy Griffith Show

The Andy Griffith Show premiered in October of 1960, as an early entry in CBS' rural programming strategy that featured the western dramas *Rawhide* and *Gunsmoke* and would grow to include other sit-coms with similar settings and/or themes including *Petticoat Junction* and *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Although Griffith claimed to only want to do the show for five years, its great popularity encouraged him to sign on for three additional seasons and the program is one of the few to cease production (at the end of the 1967 season) while still regularly topping the Nielsen ratings. Under the creative guidance of executive producer Sheldon Leonard and Griffith himself, the story of a small town sheriff, his young son, his fussy aunt, and (at least for the first five seasons) his comically hyperactive deputy has become one of the most enduringly popular series of all time with constant reruns beginning in the mid-sixties giving the show the unique status of never having been off the air in the forty years since it halted production of original episodes. Its popularity has spawned several books for the show's fans including Richard Kelly's *The Andy Griffith Show* (1994), and two by Ken Beck and Jim Clark, *The Andy Griffith Show Book* (2000) and *Mayberry Memories* (2000). While all three have solid information about the show's production, descriptions of the 235 episodes, and a bounty of trivia, there is almost no analysis of the structure, aesthetics, or thematics of

the show. In fact for a program with so great a cultural impact, surprisingly little serious analysis has been written about it. The sole recent critical essay published in a scholarly journal is Don Rodney Vaughan's "Why the Andy Griffith Show is Important to Popular Cultural Studies," an informative article that at least attempts to discuss the program in serious terms and works to understand its enduring appeal to audiences. Vaughan contends that,

> with the plethora of television shows that focus on strife, sex, greed, and anxiety, the *Griffith Show* is a noticeably needed alternative, an alternative viewers never tire of. The values that *The Andy Griffith Show* communicated are really what persons are hungering to embrace – for example, living a happy life and being a channel of happiness to others, caring about persons (even if they rub us the wrong way sometimes), contributing to the overall good of the community, giving a helping hand, accepting people, and making a difference in someone's life. (p. 420)

On the whole, as should be evident from the above passage, Vaughan's analysis is heartfelt but fairly superficial, and his apology for the lack of racial diversity in Mayberry is unconvincing, but his desire to engage the thematic structure of the show is admirable. To be sure the values that Vaughan references have kept the program alive in the pages of Christian oriented newspapers with the *Christian Science Monitor* and *Christianity Today* running fairly regular features on the show even asking the question in multiple headlines "What Would Andy Do?" While our focus in this study is more on the narrative dynamics of television humor and the function of the laugh track in the situation comedy, it also gives us the opportunity to contribute to the literature on this most worthy and critically neglected television series.

Hypothesis and Research Questions

Based on past work on humor and social facilitation, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Those subjects viewing a television episode that is accompanied by a laugh will find the content more humorous than will those who view the episode without the laugh track. They will also find the presentation more enjoyable.

Based on the assumptions of narratology and empirical formalism, the following research question is forwarded:

RQ1: Does the specific episode of a series make a difference with regard to audience responses, and does episode interact with the presence or absence of a laugh track in the production of audience responses? In particular, do viewers perceive important differences in humor types across episodes of the same situation comedy?

Following the traditions of narratology and empirical formalism:

RQ2: How might critical theories help explain any significant differences between episodes?

Quantitative Method

The Experiment. A posttest-only experimental design was employed for the study of the presence or absence of a laugh track in sitcom episodes. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of eight experimental conditions: Laugh track or no laugh track for each of four episodes of the classic sitcom, *The Andy Griffith Show*. Viewing took place in an experimental lab in the *** Research Center at *** University. This study attempted to execute a laugh track study with greater ecological validity than past studies with the use of a professional laugh track and the application to multiple episodes of a series.

Subjects. Undergraduate students (n=114) at a large Midwestern urban University were offered course or extra credit for participation in the experiment. Students were solicited within their classes. Viewing was conducted in small groups of between two and five subjects, with the subjects watching the stimulus on a 60-inch rear-projection television and seated in individual straightback chairs with cushioned seats. Subjects were situated between four and seven feet from the screen.

Conditions. The eight experimental conditions consisted of viewing one of the following versions of episodes of *The Andy Griffith Show*: *Opie the Birdman*, *Black Day for Mayberry*, *Opie's Ill-Gotten Gains*, or *Up in Barney's Room*, each with or without laugh track. The without laugh track episodes were discovered on an erroneously released version of the 1963-64 fourth season boxed DVD set released by Paramount Home Video (2005); the with laugh track episodes were located on a corrected replacement version of the same set. The with and without laugh track versions differed only in this regard—dialogue, sound effects, and music were identical.

Measures. The posttest questionnaire was comprised of measures of reactions to the content just viewed. Relevant to this analysis, this instrument included:

Overall perceived funniness—a single item measured how funny subjects felt the episode was, on a 0-to-10 response scale where 0=not at all funny and 10=extremely funny.

Total perceived funniness (measured over 20 specific humor points)—subjects were queried about 20 different humor points in the episode they viewed, using the same 0-to-10 response scale.

Overall reported enjoyment—a single item tapped subjects' enjoyment of their episode, with a 0-to-10 scale where 0=not at all enjoyable and 10=extremely enjoyable.

Types of humor evident in the episode—for each episode, 16 perceived humor measures were taken for each of six key humor points. Respondents were asked in a checklist format whether at each point they felt that the point was an instance of putdown humor, wordplay humor, slapstick, satire, sarcasm, joking around to fit in, joking socially, self-deprecation, incongruity, people doing stupid things, dark humor, sick humor, a sight gag, naughty humor, or parody. These humor types were generated as representing a broad coverage of the four essential humor mechanisms described above. Respondents could indicate the presence of more than one type of humor for each point.

Stimulus presentation characteristics—for each episode, six measures of levels of selected presentation characteristics were applied to each of the six key humor points. Subjects were asked to respond in a 0-to-10 Likert-type response format (0=strongly disagree, 10=strongly agree) the degree to which they felt each humor point was presented in a realistic fashion, was intentional, represented a rare event, was surprising, and was delivered in a dry fashion.

Identification with characters—for each episode, six measures of how much subjects identified with the sitcom characters in various ways were collected for each of the six key humor points. Using the same 0-to-10 Likert-type response format, subjects were asked to indicate whether they felt sorry for the character featured at that humor point, related well to the character, admired the character, felt superior to the character, and felt the character was like a friend.

Demographic indicators were also measured—income (indexed on a 6-category response scale), race (measured in an open-ended item and coded as white or nonwhite), gender, and age (in years).

A number of scales were constructed. For the 20 humor points, a total perceived funniness scale was constructed via straight addition. For types of humor evident in the episode, perceived stimulus presentation characteristics, and identification with characters, scores were summed across the six humor points.

Quantitative Findings

The 114 subjects were 53% female, 29% nonwhite, 92% U.S.-born, with ages ranging from 18 to 54 and a mean age of 25.6 years. With regard to income, 44% reported a family household income of under $25,000 annually, 19% an income of between $25,000 and $49,999, and 37% an income of $50,000 or more.

A check of comparability across the eight conditions revealed no evidence for concern over demographic biases in random assignment to cells—testing for differences by income, age, race (nonwhite vs. white), and age, there were no significant differences by the laugh track factor, and only one significant difference by episode (subjects who viewed episode #1 were a bit older). There were no significant interactions between the laugh track factor and the episode factor.

A two-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) model was used to test hypothesis H1, which predicted that those in the with-laugh track conditions would find the episode funnier and more enjoyable. As shown in Table 1, this hypothesis was not supported. However, in beginning to address RQ1, we may see that for all three dependent

indicators, there was a significant main effect for episode. And, for the total perceived funniness scale, there was a significant interaction between laugh track and episode, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

--Table 1 about here—

--Figure 1 about here—

Other findings also address RQ1, with an indication that, indeed, the particular episode often makes a difference in audience responses. Table 2 summarizes the pattern of significant and non-significant findings for the effects of the laugh track and episode factors, including both main effects and the two-way interaction, on a wide variety of dependent variables.

--Table 2 about here—

As may be clearly seen, the laugh track manipulation had essentially a null impact on perceived funniness, as well as the various perceived humor, context, and character identification variables. Again addressing RQ1, the impact of episode is overwhelmingly found to be significant across a wide variety of dependent measures. The interaction of the laugh track factor and the episode is significant in just a few instances.

Figure 2 further illustrates the seven types of humor that were perceived at significantly different levels by participants across the four episodes of *The Andy Griffith Show*. In the *Opie the Birdman* episode, the highest level of "Put-down humor" was perceived, while "sick humor" and "dark humor" were reported at very low levels, but at levels that were still much higher than that of the other three episodes. For instance, no "Dark humor" whatsoever was perceived in *Black Day for Mayberry*. "Slapstick" was at its highest in *Up in Barney's Room*, with *Opie the Birdman* also rating fairly high in

comparison with the two remaining episodes. "Satire" was reported as being presented to a far greater extent in *Black Day for Mayberry* versus the other three episodes, while *Opie's Ill-Gotten Gain* was found to contain the largest amount of "Joking to fit it." Both *Opie the Birdman* and *Black Day for Mayberry* were found to offer no instances of "Naughty humor," however, *Up in Barney's Room* and *Opie's Ill-Gotten Gain* were reported as having low levels of this humor type, with *Up in Barney's Room* offering a much greater amount.

--Figure 2 about here—

In Figure 3, we see the two humor presentation types, "Intentional humor" and "Dry delivery," that were found at significantly different levels in a comparison of the four episodes used as stimuli. "Intentional humor" is reported at high, and very similar levels in *Opie the Birdman*, *Black Day for Mayberry* and *Opie's Ill-Gotten Gain*, but at a much lower level in *Up in Barney's Room*. In the meantime, "Dry delivery" was found most prominently in *Opie the Birdman*, and much less so in the other three episodes.

--Figure 3 about here—

Figure 3 also shows the statistically significant differences perceived by participants in character identification. Participants most strongly related to the characters in *Opie's Ill-Gotten Gain* and related to characters the least in *Black Day for Mayberry*. Admiration for characters was reported at its lowest point in the episodes *Up in Barney's Room* and *Black Day for Mayberry*, while it was rated considerably higher in the other two episodes. Participants felt superior to the characters at high levels in all of the episodes, with the exception of *Up in Barney's Room*, where superiority over the characters was not reported strongly whatsoever. *Up in Barney's Room* also ranked

noticeably lowest in terms of those participants who viewed it feeling as if the characters were like friends to them.

In sum, the quantitative findings disclose a lack of direct effects of a laugh track on a range of audience responses. The episode is decidedly a significant factor in many audience outcomes, either as a direct (main effect) influence, or in interaction with the laugh track factor. All told, the quantitative findings confirm a view of distinctiveness of episodes.

Qualitative Method

When faced with the problem of the anomalous episode we discovered ourselves at the limits of our data set's ability to account for the individual differences that would explain why *Black Day for Mayberry* was not only better liked by the sample group than the other three episodes, but also why the laugh track had an opposite effect on both the audience's enjoyment and perception of humor in this episode. Noting that there were many distinctive responses to each episode not only alerted us to the idea that television programming cannot be adequately studied at the level of the series (as has traditionally been the case in both critical/cultural and social scientific approaches) and instead must be examined at the level of the specific episode, but also indicated the possibility that it was the story itself that was the salient distinction in this case. In order to undertake a comparative analysis of the four stories in the sample we turned to the critical methods of narratology, the structural study of storytelling that grew out of the formalist, semiotic approaches to language that emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Narratology takes many forms, but since Vladimir Propp's breakthrough work in *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), it has attempted to produce the most empirical

and complete analysis of storytelling possible given the subjective dimensions of the form. In his forward to the study, which focuses specifically on the Russian fairytale (or *skaz*) but is equally applicable to understanding all narrative construction, Propp writes "it is possible to make an examination of the forms of the tale which will be as exact as the morphology of organic formations" (p. xxv). By insisting that there is a science of storytelling that is as objectively explicable as the phenomena studied by the natural sciences, Propp sets forth a model for narrative analysis that approaches the subject with a precision unthinkable prior to his work. Central to Propp's model is the notion of *character function* which "is understood as an act of character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action," and he further explains that "functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale" and that "the number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited" (p. 21).

In addition to these character functions Propp identifies another basic component of stories which are those narrative developments such as an escape from pursuit or a material gain that he terms *moves*, stating that the "tale may have several moves, and that when analyzing a text, one must first determine the number of moves of which it consists … singling out a move is no easy matter but it is always possible with complete exactitude" (p. 92). In Propp's model the fundamental structure of every tale can be represented by a string of variables in which for example 'A' corresponds to the concept of villainy with further delineations offered by 'A^1' representing the villain's kidnapping of a person or 'A^3' indicating the villain's ruining of crops. In terms of moves '*a*' stands for a lack or insufficiency while ↑ is the departure or dispatch of the hero from home. From this lexicon of symbols Propp is able to represent the folktale as an equation of

functions and moves that can allow for empirical analysis and comparison. Because of the generally formulaic nature of the situation comedy Propp's morphology is extremely useful in examining the relations between variations of closely connected narratives, and so can be applied to the task of differentiating one episode of a television series from another.

Another valuable approach to narratology can be found in the work of Roland Barthes, whose analysis in *S/Z* (1970) relies not on character functions and moves but rather on the identification of a series of intersecting codes that work together to tell the story. In Barthes analysis of Balzac's story *Sarrasine* he identifies five such codes. The "hermeneutic" code (which he represents as HER.) which refers to "all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events that can either formulate the question or delay its response, or even, constitute and enigma and lead to its solution" (p. 17). The "semic" code (or SEM.) functions as a signifier of an object, a state of being, a person, an idea, acting as "a shifting element that can combine with other similar elements to create characters, ambiances, shapes, and symbols … it is the signifier par excellence because of its connotation" (p. 17). The "symbolic" code (or SYM.) indicates substitutions, variations, antitheses, and suggestions, while the "proairetic" codes represent the actions within the text and are represented in Barthes' formulation as (ACT.) The numerous codes of shared "knowledge or wisdom to which the text continually refers; we shall call them in a very general way *cultural codes* (even though, of course, all codes are cultural), or rather since they afford the discourse a basis in scientific and moral authority, we shall call them reference codes (REF.)" (p. 18).

According to Barthes "the five codes create a kind of network, a *topos* through which the entire text passes (or rather, in passing, becomes a text" (p. 20). This model differs from Propp's in that the purpose is "not to manifest a structure but to produce a structuration," (p. 20) or to examine the text as a process of coding and decoding that implicates both the author and the reader in the construction of meaning. For the four individual programs that make up our sample we can examine the intersection and overlap of codes to demonstrate the dramatically different construction of each, and this narratological model allows us again to undertake an empirical comparison the results of which can reveal the specific qualities that contribute to the uniqueness of each episode and the divergent quantitative findings.

A third approach to this type of analysis that will inform our findings comes from A. J. Greimas' essay "Elements of a Narrative Grammar" (1987) which brings together almost thirty years of research by this central figure in the development of a scientific narratology based on semiotics and structuralism. Greimas' work here might be viewed as a kind of synthesis of Propp and Barthes, as he states that "all grammars include, more or less explicitly, two components, a morphology and a syntax. The nature of the morphology is that of a taxonomy whose terms are interdefined, the syntax consists in a set of operational rules or else in a means of manipulating the terms of the morphology" (p. 309). The concept of morphology can be seen in Propp's detailing of all the possible moves and character functions within the Russian folktale while the notion of syntax might be understood (at least in one sense) through Barthes' interplay of codes that constitute the text.

Greimas connects the concepts of syntactic operation with syntactic practice,

pointing out that "logical operation is conceived as an autonomous metalinguistic

process, allowing the subject of the operation to be bracketed (or allowing the use of any

operator whatsoever), a practice, whether practical or mythical, implies an activity – a

human subject (or at least an anthropomorphized one: "the pencil writes")" (pp. 312-

313). These ideas come together in the "Narrative Utterance" represented by the

equation $NU = F(A)$ "in which the practice, as a process of actualization, is labeled

function (F) and in which the subject of the practice, as a potentiality of the process, is

designated *actant* (A)" (p. 313). This simple equation allows for a typology of narrative

utterances to be constructed which might take the form of $NU_1 = F$: confrontation

$(S \leftrightarrow S_2)$, $NU_2 = F$: domination $(S_1 \leftrightarrow S_2)$, or $NU_3 = F$: attribution $(S_1 \leftarrow O)$, indicating

respectively relations of contradiction, negation, and assertion. Though like Propp's

paradigm, Greimas' can be extraordinarily complex, these basic operations serve our

purposes of narratological analysis by enabling the construction of a comparative

grammar predicated on the notion of *The Andy Griffith Show* as, if not a language, then

certainly a representational system, the relatively fixed parameters of which allow for the

empirical modeling of narrative difference.

Qualitative Findings

Critical theories like narratology provide a set of tools for performing certain

operations on a text that uncover its fundamental formal structures leading to a more

profound and clearer understanding of the meanings circulating through the work under

examination. In considering *The Andy Griffith Show* and attempting to answer the

question of why in the laugh track study one episode, *Black Day for Mayberry*, stood out

significantly in terms of perceived humor and overall enjoyment and further why the consistent relationship seen in the other episodes between the laugh track and the sense of the episode's funniness was inverted in this case, an analysis of the narrative differences between the episodes could be illuminating. By using the models outlined by Propp, Barthes, and Greimas described in the above section we will demonstrate how the distinctive narratological qualities of *Black Day for Mayberry* might account for these differences in response.

Analyzed in Proppian terms of character function and narrative moves, *Black Day for Mayberry* stands out very clearly from the other three episodes in the sample. While Andy is rarely the focal character in early episodes of the show his function as authority figure is so constant as to be a (if not <u>the</u>) defining feature of the series, but even within this function there are degrees of variation. In all the sample episodes Andy functions as disciplinarian and also as the dispenser of wisdom and rewards, which might be coded according to Propp's model as A^1 = Andy as Law, A^2 = Andy as giver of wisdom, and A^3 = Andy as giver of rewards. *Opie's Ill Gotten-Gains* and *Opie the Birdman* focus character function A^1 within the family as it is Opie who is subject to Andy's authority, while in *Up in Barney's Room*, Barney becomes the object of Andy's authority until the end when Andy and Barney arrest Mr. Fields, a con man who has stolen Mrs. Mendelbright's (Barney's landlady) life savings.   In *Black Day for Mayberry* function A^1 is intensified as Andy is initially charged with providing security for a U.S. gold shipment coming through town and then must stand up to the Federal Government, chasing down and intercepting an armored car that has driven away with Barney trapped inside it. In this way Andy becomes the law, not just in his family or even in the

protection of one citizen, but rather as the defender of the town and the integrity of the cast. His function is enhanced by the heightened tension and importance of the conflict, the shifting of the oppositional terms from his own son to an itinerant con man to the U.S. government, and the bravery, strength, and cunning he must bring to bear in order to enforce the rule of the law.

There are a greater number of *dramatis personae* in the show (fifteen credited characters as compared with five in *Opie's Ill-Gotten Gain*s, six in *Up in Barney's Room,* and four in *Opie the Birdman*), and so a higher number of character functions that intersect to create a more complex story structure. The number of narrative moves in this episode is also greater, as Barney's "investigation" into Mayberry's security, the spread of the information through the town, the town's carnival atmosphere as the gold shipment approaches, the arrival of the gold shipment, Barney's discovery that there is no gold on the truck, Barney's kidnapping by the federal officials and his subsequent rescue by Andy produce an escalation of dramatic situation and a breadth of action that is far beyond that of the other episodes in the sample. A Proppian diagram of *Black Day for Mayberry*'s morphology would thus be both longer and denser than the contained scopes of *Opie's Ill-Gotten Gains* or *Opie the Birdman*, in which the action is confined to a relatively few locations with only a handful of narrative moves.

This quality of greater narratological richness is also revealed when *Black Day for Mayberry* is subjected to a Bathesian analysis focusing on the fundamental codes outlined in *S/Z.* The sample audience perceived a high degree of satirical humor in this episode (1.17 as compared to .25 in *Opie the Birdman*, .41 in *Up in Barney's Room*, and .66 in *Opie's Ill-Gotten Gain*s). Satirical humor, unlike the other designated comic categories

requires some external reference point and so implies the necessity of a more extensive cultural (or REF.) coding, and certainly the signifiers of the Federal Government, wealth, Mayberry as a placed judged by outsiders as culturally and geographically insignificant, the duplicity of politics, and the peculiarities of the townspeople are all elements peculiar to this episode within the sample. In fact of the four episodes in the study it has by far the most far-reaching set of cultural connections, requiring the audience to contextualize the action within a broader representational world, producing an effect that is less insular than in the other three.

While *Opie's Ill-Gotten Gains* adds Opie's teacher (Helen Crump) and his school to the series' central locations (Sherriff's office, Taylor house, Mayberry sidewalks) and characters (Andy, Barney, Opie, Aunt Bea), and Up in Barney's Room adds Mrs. Mendelbright and Mr. Fields as well as several spaces within Mrs. Mendelbright's house, there is simply a demonstrably higher density of semic (SEM.) coding in *Black Day for Mayberry* than in the other episodes. Leon, the young boy played by Clint Howard, Gomer Pyle (Jim Nabors), who would go on to star in a show of his own, the hotel Barney spies on during his "investigation," Barney's detective disguise, the narrative (if not physical) presence of Juanita, Barney's girlfriend to whom he reveals the secret of the gold shipment, the gas station/truck stop, the alleged gold truck, these are but a few of the narrative elements that make up the constellation of signifiers that constitute the semic code of the episode. When this extensive network of signifiers is compared with that of *Opie the Birdman*, which features the three previously mentioned central locations and four main characters, adding only the slingshot, the birds, and the cage, the complexity of the signifying schema in *Black Day for Mayberry* becomes quite clear.

A similar condition can be noted at the level of the hermeneutic codes (HER.), as the questions of why the two government agents want to see Andy gives way to questions about the impact of Barney's inability to keep the gold truck a secret, the responses of the townspeople to this big event, the conflicts surrounding the public reception of the supposedly secret truck, the mystery of why there is no gold in the truck when Barney is locked in the back, and the conflict surrounding Barney's kidnapping. Not only are there more questions raised by this episode than any of the others in the sample, but the nature of the questions is both broader and more dramatic than whether Opie will be able to care for the baby birds in *Opie the Birdman* or when the secret regarding Opie's report card will finally emerge in *Opie's Ill-Gotten Gains*. In this way *Black Day for Mayberry* gives the audience more cues to work with in order to construct a complex and engaging narrative, and so may contribute to the explanation of the audience's greater enjoyment of this episode.

Turning to the model offered by Greimas and focusing the analysis on the three sample narrative utterances he provides in the section on Narrative Units and referenced in the methods section above, we can see a clear pattern emerging as to the comparative qualities of the episodes. If we use the narrative grammatical equation $NU_1 = F$: confrontation ($S \leftrightarrow S_2$), then we can see that the problem of the leaked secret of the gold shipment and Andy's conflict with the treasury agents who have kidnapped Barney is of a higher intensity level than the corresponding conflicts in the other three episode, Opie's efforts to care for the birds in *Opie the Birdman*, Opie's struggle with his conscience in *Opie's Ill-Gotten Gain*s, or Barney's disagreement with Mrs. Mendelbright in *Up in Barney's Room*. In terms of Greimas' second formulation, $NU_2 = F$: domination

($S_1 \leftrightarrow S_2$), again Andy's triumph over the federal authorities and rescue of Barney must be seen as a greater achievement than the capture of the con man, Mr. Fields, in *Up in Barney's Room*, Opie's release of the birds in *Opie the Birdman*, or Opie's higher grade on his math test in *Opie's Ill-Gotten Gains*. Similarly the acclaim earned by Andy for his besting of the government agents as represented by the narrative grammatical equation $NU_3 = F$: attribution ($S_1 \leftarrow O$), is again of a higher order than the return of Barney to Mrs. Mendelbright's house, or the praise earned by Opie for his improved grades and his fine care and subsequent release of the orphaned birds.

Regardless of the qualitative method employed, *Black Day for Mayberry* stands out as a distinctive episode among the sample group with a greater number of character functions and narrative moves, a higher density of information working as story codes, and a measurably more elaborated narrative grammar. The degree of narratological distinction between the four episodes is quite remarkable given the widely accepted notion that television series work out of a generally fixed set of formal and expressive possibilities leading to the idea that there is relatively little variation between episodes of a given series. Our findings appear to demonstrate that far from there being a fundamental similarity between the episodes of a given program, each one must be considered unique for the purposes of analysis, and that whereas a subjective dimension to audience response might be in place, there is again more variation based on episodic distinction than previous models would suggest.

Conclusion

The outcomes of this multi-track investigation have implications for *all* media scholars, regardless of chosen epistemology or methodology. The integrity of the short-form narrative demands a close read or specific ideographic inspection, in addition to any aggregated or summative examination.

It would seem that the commodity model has failed television studies. A focus on the cumulative, incremental impact of television viewing (also criticized by Greenberg, 1988) has blinded social and behavioral scientists to the artistic, stylistic, and audience response differences inherent in the narrative and execution of the individual TV episode. In this way, we unfairly and misguidedly devalue the smallest unit of the television product. This has deleterious potential for any survey, content analysis, or critical analysis that emphasizes the series over the episode, and for any experimental investigation that utilizes only a single "exemplifying" episode.

Table 1. Two-way ANOVAs for Main Dependent Measures			
Dependent Variable	Means	F	Sig.
Overall perceived funniness			
Main effect – Laugh track		F(1,106)=0.00	p=.99
Main effect – Episode		F(3,106)=3.52	p=.02
Opie the Birdman	3.61		
Black Day for Mayberry	5.63		
Opie's Ill-Gotten Gains	4.68		
Up in Barney's Room	3.69		
Interaction of Laugh track & Episode		F(3,106)=1.82	p=.15
Total funniness (sum of 20 items)			
Main effect – Laugh track		F(1,106)=0.16	p=.69
Main effect – Episode		F(3,106)=5.32	p=.002
Opie the Birdman	69.66		
Black Day for Mayberry	104.89		
Opie's Ill-Gotten Gains	84.62		
Up in Barney's Room	63.94		
Interaction of Laugh track & Episode		F(3,106)=3.06	p=.03
[See Figure 2]			
Overall enjoyment			
Main effect – Laugh track		F(1,106)=0.25	p=.62
Main effect – Episode		F(3,106)=3.44	p=.02
Opie the Birdman	5.11		
Black Day for Mayberry	6.36		
Opie's Ill-Gotten Gains	5.70		
Up in Barney's Room	4.28		
Interaction of Laugh track & Episode		F(3,106)=0.83	p=.48
a - .05< p<.10, * - p<.05, ** - p<.01			

Table 2. Significances for Main Effects and Interaction on Dependent Measures			
Dependent Variable	Laugh Track Factor	Episode Factor	Interaction of Laugh Track and Episode
Overall perceived funniness	ns	*	ns
Total funniness (sum of 20 items)	ns	**	*
Overall enjoyment	ns	*	ns
Types of humor (each a sum of 6 items)			
Putdown	ns	*	ns
Wordplay	ns	a	ns
Slapstick	ns	*	ns
Satire	ns	*	ns
Sarcasm	ns	ns	ns
Joking to fit in	ns	**	ns
Joking socially	ns	a	ns
Self-deprecation	ns	a	ns
Incongruity	ns	ns	ns
Absurdity	ns	ns	ns
Stupid things	ns	ns	ns
Dark humor	ns	**	*
Sick humor	ns	**	ns
Sight gags	ns	ns	ns
Naughty humor	ns	*	ns
Parody	ns	ns	ns
Stimulus Presentation Characteristics			
Realistic	ns	ns	ns
Intentional	*	*	ns
Rare event	ns	ns	ns
Surprising	ns	ns	ns
Dry delivery	ns	*	a
Identification with Characters			
Felt sorry for character	ns	ns	ns
Related well to character	ns	*	*
Admired the character	ns	*	ns
Felt superior to character	ns	*	ns
Felt character was like a friend	ns	*	ns
a - .05< p<.10, * - p<.05, ** - p<.01			

Figure 1.
Significant interaction of laugh track factor and episode on total perceived funniness scores (across 20 comic points)

Main effect for laugh track: ns

Main effect for episode: $F(3,106)=5.32$, $p=.002$
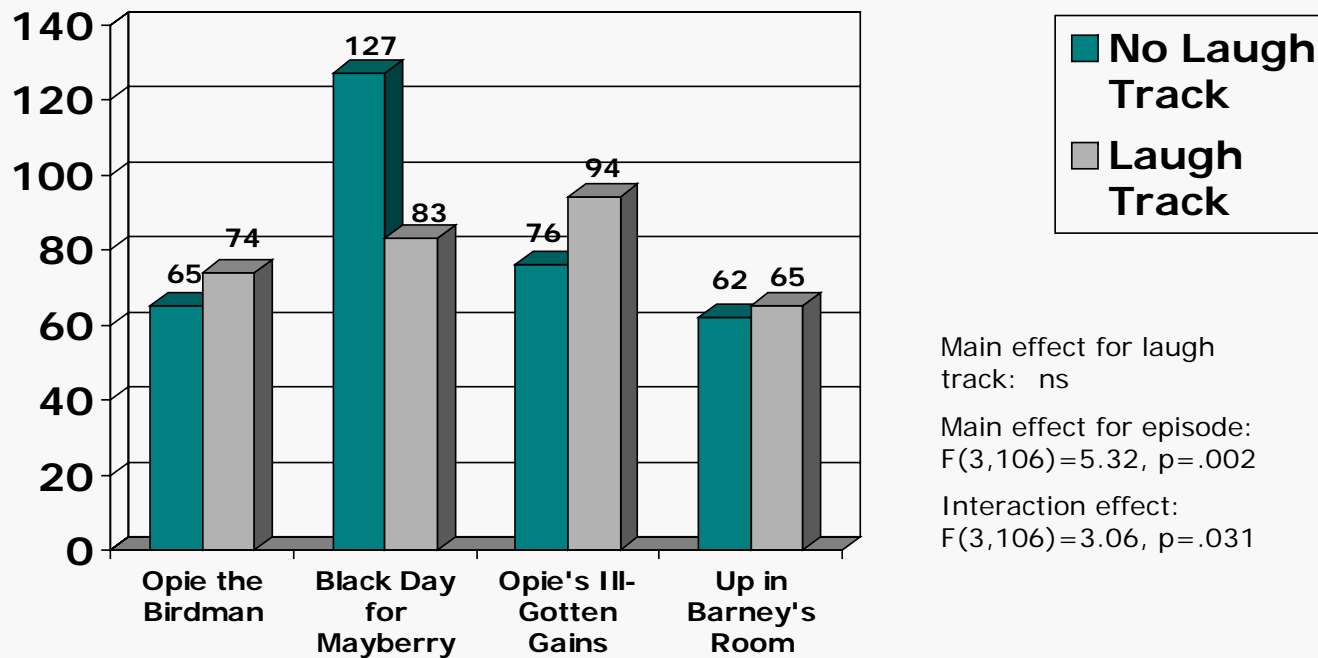
Interaction effect: $F(3,106)=3.06$, $p=.031$

Figure 2.
Perceived humor types by episode

Note: All seven humor types shown in this figure differ significantly by episode (p<.05); nine other humor types did not differ significantly by episode.

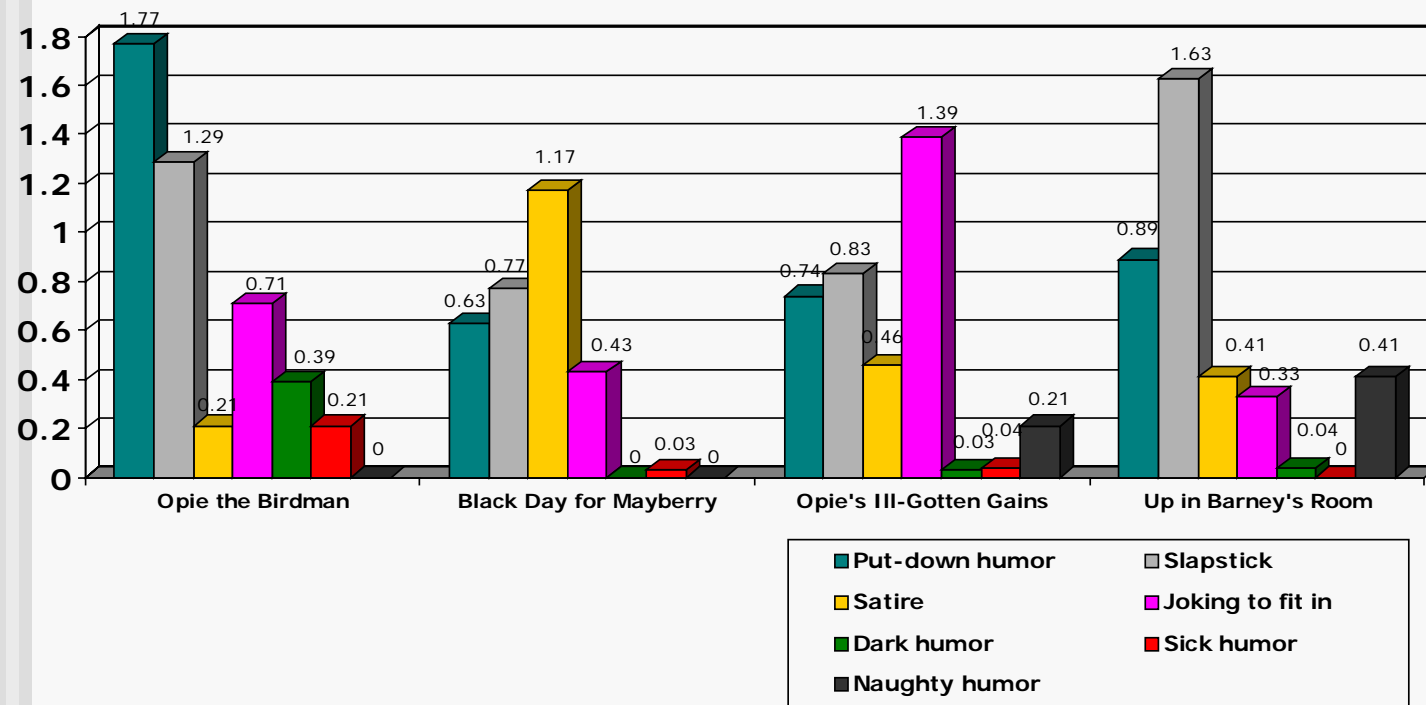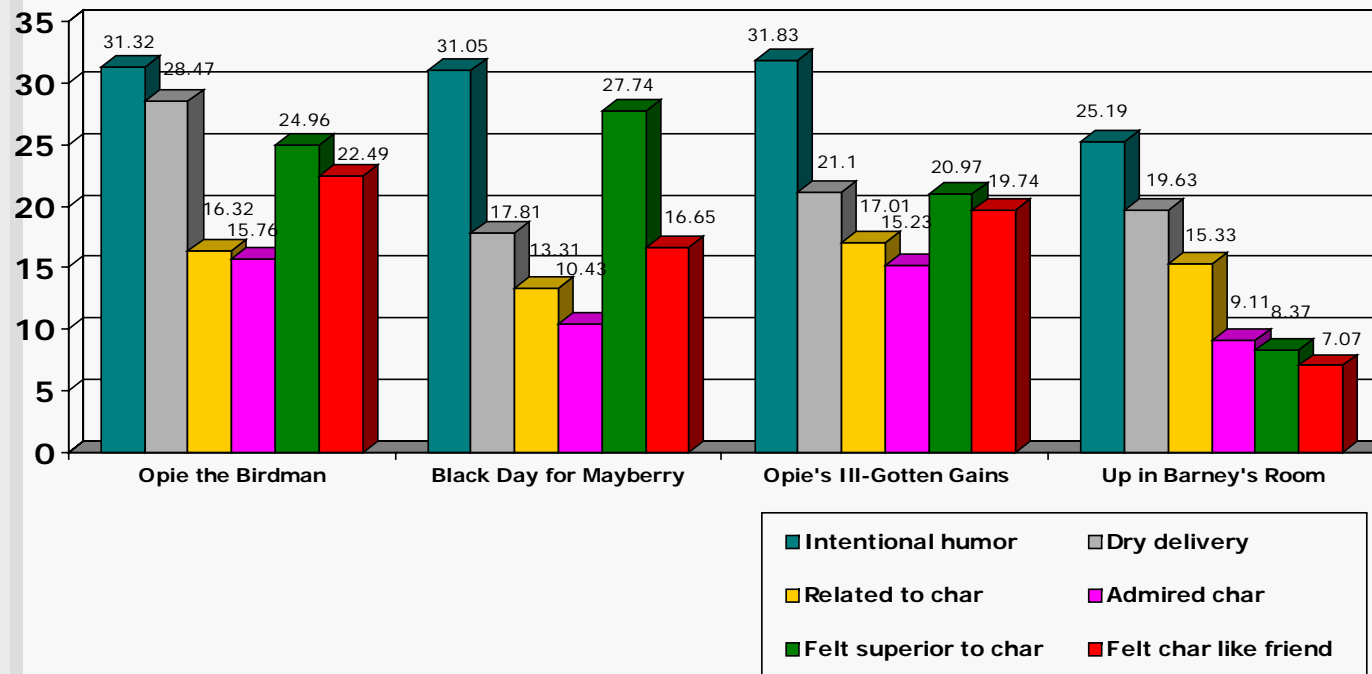|	Put-down humor	Slapstick
	Satire	Joking to fit in
	Dark humor	Sick humor
	Naughty humor	

Figure 3.
Humor stimulus presentation characteristics and character identification by episode

Note: All presentation types and character identification types displayed in this figure differ significantly by episode ($p<.05$); three other presentation types and one other type of character identification did not differ significantly by episode.

Legend:
- Intentional humor
- Dry delivery
- Related to char
- Admired char
- Felt superior to char
- Felt char like friend

Opie the Birdman: 31.32, 28.47, 16.32, 15.76, 24.96, 22.49
Black Day for Mayberry: 31.05, 17.81, 13.31, 10.43, 27.74, 16.65
Opie's Ill-Gotten Gains: 31.83, 21.1, 17.01, 15.23, 20.97, 19.74
Up in Barney's Room: 25.19, 19.63, 15.33, 9.11, 8.37, 7.07

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