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Public Opinion and the Senses of Humor

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Abstract

This research applies the notion of multiple “senses of humor” as an affective filter in the process of opinion formation. A probability sample of over 300 adults in a major metropolitan area responded to a CATI survey on a wide variety of topics. From a set of 16 sense of humor indicators, five orthogonal factors emerged--(1) Mean-spirited humor, (2) Visual/verbal humor, (3) Stupid/absurd humor, (4) Social humor, and (5) Satire/death humor. Indexes created from the factors were found to be correlated with public opinion indicators in various ways, after controlling for social locators and media habits. Additionally, using cluster analysis on the five “senses” of humor, eight clusters representing particular public were derived. These clusters significantly discriminated a number of social locators, media habits, and public opinion responses.

Public Opinion and the Senses of Humor

Introduction

Public opinion.

Conceptualizations of what constitutes “public opinion” make various distinctions: between basic values and transitory preferences; between organized and unorganized opinions; between the public and private expressions of opinions; between an aggregate, socially controlling force and a collection of individual opinions (Jeffres, 1997). Conceptualizing public opinion as an aggregate, organized, public mechanism of social control engages the theoretic perspectives of the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1989) and hegemony (Beniger, 1987). According to such a view, “[p]ublic opinion is based on the unconscious striving of people living in a social unit to arrive at a common view, at the kind of agreement which is required to act and, if necessary, to make decisions” (Noelle-Neumann, 1989, p. 4).

A countering view, that which embraces the individual’s values and preferences, which acknowledges unorganized, private, collective and potentially diverse opinions, is less satisfying to the political scientist, the media scholar examining the audience at large, or the social organizer attempting to identify a specific public. Yet to ignore individual differences is to miss an opportunity to identify important filters through which individuals process information about current social events in the formation of opinions. Such filters may be primarily cognitive in nature (Price, 1988), or affective in tone (Feldman, 1987), or set in a social context (e.g., “climates” of opinion as articulated by Jeffres, 1997).

One affective filtering mechanism, as yet little examined, involved the individual's preferences in viewing the world through *humor*. There is little in life about which humans do not seek humorous interpretations. Current events seem particularly prone to filtering through various "senses of humor"--note the popularity of political humor (e.g., jokes about President Clinton, Monica Lewinsky, O.J. Simpson), including the rise of such forums as the program "Politically Incorrect".

The sense of humor construct.

In order to examine the role that humor appreciation may play as a filter of current events information in the formation of opinions, we need to develop a clear understanding of the structure of the individual's humor appreciation. Generally, social and behavioral researchers have demonstrated commitment to individualized conceptual definitions of the appreciation of humor. Berlyne (1972) stated that because humor could be aroused in a single person, the "primary significance [is not] a social one" (p. 51). On the other hand, Fine (1983) argued that humor *must* be considered in its social context, as a part of a social relationship. Zillmann and Cantor (1972) noted that *disparagement* is a key variable in determining whether humor is appreciated or not. Scogin and Pollio (1980) showed that most humor is "directed at some specific person" with a "*deprecating* tone" (Pollio, 1983, p. 219). For Bateson (1953) and Koestler (1964), humor resulted from the rapid transfer of a logical pattern from one *cognitive framing* to another. These particularized presentations sometimes have bordered on the pedantic, with little acknowledgment of alternative conceptual definitions.

Indeed, one laudatory attempt at conceptualizing and operationalizing sense of humor as a *multidimensional* construct has limited its view to the realm of social humor only, and almost entirely to the case of the individual as *source* of humorous communication (as opposed to responder to potentially humorous stimuli) (Thorson & Powell, 1993a; Thorson & Powell, 1993b). Few other sources have

demonstrated an attempt to incorporate multiple functions for humor appreciation or multiple types of humorous stimuli. McCullough (1993) began her cross-cultural examination of humor with a two-dimensional typology of humor as resident in the stimulus (i.e., ten television commercials presented to college students in the U.S. and in Finland). She concluded that the two dimensions extracted from previous work--aggressive/sexual humor and nonsense humor--were "too simplistic" and did not "fully represent the humor perceptions of the students of either nationality" (p. 1280). McCullough's factor analytic approach added the dimensions of "gentle make fun" and "less aggressive/surprise" to the original two for the U.S. sample. Eshleman and Neuendorf (1989) reported a fairly comprehensive review, identifying two types of humor appreciation with an individual-level locus, and four types of humor appreciation within social contexts. They declined to attempt a typology of humorous stimuli, rather casting their conceptualization in terms of templates via which the individual might view a stimulus with humor potential. This leaves open the possibility of individuals holding diverse "senses" of humor, consisting of profiles varying the degree to which the templates are employed.

Based on these works and a thorough examination of the literature on humor, a likely set of such humor "templates" could be forwarded: (1) cognitive bisociation, an appreciation of the humor in stimuli via dual framing (as in puns, double entendres, and absurd visual juxtapositions; Bateson, 1953; Freud, 1960; Schultz, 1976), which is dependent on a close understanding of the culturally determined multiple meanings of symbols; (2) physiological arousal and response, which situates the humor appreciation either at a pleasant level of arousal with concurrent physical response ("arousal boost," Berlyne, 1969; Berlyne, 1972), or at the resolution following an unpleasantly high level of arousal which is given release in a punchline or catharsis ("arousal jag," Maase, Fink, & Kaplowitz, 1985); (3) social/functional, which examines the role of humor as a social currency for the creation and maintenance of social relationships and

the regulation of distance in those relationships (Chapman, 1983; Lamaster, 1975); this includes humor as a mechanism in reference group affiliation (Pollio, 1983); and (4) disparagement, where humor is used either as a source of social power in the establishment of a “pecking order” (Fry, 1963) or as an attack to situate the target in a “one-down” position (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976). The first two conceptual categories correspond basically to humor appreciated at the “individual level,” while the latter two describe humor that demands appreciation in a social context (even if that social context is the vicarious experience of watching fictional social interactions in a film or sitcom, for example; Eshleman & Neuendorf, 1989).

There is an inherent mismatch in the clear documentation (and occasional acknowledgment; e.g., Ruch & Hehl, 1983) of humor as a multifaceted construct, and repeated attempts at *measuring* a singular “sense of humor.” Martin and Lefcourt’s (1984) Situational Humor Response Questionnaire is a 21-item index that measures propensity to laugh. Their Coping Humor Scale is a seven-item scale measuring relative value placed on humor as an adaptive mechanism; Zillmann, Rockwell, Schweitzer, and Sundar’s (1993) adaptation of the CHS expands the set to 18 items. Svebak’s (1974) Sense of Humor Questionnaire, designed to measure two constructs, the ability to perceive humor and the value placed on humor by the individual, is evaluated by others as actually measuring an “anti-humor” response (Thorson & Powell, 1993a). Thorson and Powell (1993b) have distinguished between humor generation and humor appreciation, although they focus almost exclusively on the former, attempting only humor appreciation indicators that relate to appreciation of comics and comedians. Other efforts to measure sense of humor have relied on an unidimensional, normative approach--i.e., efforts to tap a “good” sense of humor (Craik, Lampert, & Nelson, 1996; Herzog & Karafa, 1998).

Research questions.

The research reported upon in this manuscript attempts to bring to bear a wider variety of humor

appreciation and humor preference types in the measurement of the sense of humor--or rather, the “senses” of humor. Based on extant analyses, we assume a multidimensional trait construct for these “senses,” with the possibility of single-dimension and multiple-dimension humor preference profiles for a given individual (Neuendorf & Skalski, 2000).

Additionally, we are motivated in this research by an as-yet untested proposition: That the extent to which two individuals’ humor profiles match will be a strong determinant of their interpersonal relationship potential--how well they will get along, work effectively together, etc. This has important implications for expressions of both private and public opinions.

Given the exploratory nature of this investigation, we offer two guiding research questions:

RQ1: Does the multidimensional trait construct “sense of humor” bear a relationship to the valences of expressed public opinions?

RQ2: Are sense of humor “profiles,” detectable by clustering individuals, related to the valences of expressed public opinions?

Methods

In the spring of 1999, a probability sample of residents of a major metropolitan area in the U.S. Midwest responded to an omnibus CATI survey. The sample of 321 adults was 60% female, with a median household income of \$20,000 to \$30,000 and a mean age of 41.6 years, and was composed of 32.3% college graduates, 45% Democrats (or “leaning” toward Democrat), 24% Republicans (or “leaning” toward Republican), 30% self-designated “liberals,” and 32% self-designated “conservatives”.

Included in the instrument were measures for a wide variety of **social locators**: Age (in years), marital status, level of education achieved, racial/ethnic background (dummy coded for non-white status), political affiliation (a 5-point scale ranging from “strong democrat” to “strong republican”),

liberalism/conservatism (a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly conservative” to “strongly liberal”), household income, and gender (dummy coded for femaleness).

Using an 11-point Likert-type response scale (0=strongly disagree, 10=strongly agree), the following **public opinion** items were presented in the questionnaire:

Bill Clinton is doing a good job as president.
 Michael White is doing a good job as mayor of Cleveland.
 Bill Clinton should have been removed from office.
 There has been too much media coverage of the Clinton impeachment process.
 There has been too much media coverage of Monica Lewinsky.
 I believe that O. J. Simpson is innocent of murder.
 Abortion should remain legal.
 I am concerned that I will get AIDS.
 The government should guarantee health care to all Americans.
 We need more government controls over who can purchase guns.
 Affirmative Action is still necessary to help minorities and other groups.
 I have been discriminated against because of my race.
 I think African Americans are discriminated against in the workplace.
 I think African Americans have less opportunity for education than do other Americans.
 I suffer from information overload much of the time.
 The Internet will change the world for the better.
 The Internet violates people’s right to privacy.
 The Internet will provide me with lots of information I need.
 The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum has had a major impact on improving Cleveland’s image.
 The Drew Carey Show has had a major impact on improving Cleveland’s image.

A set of 11-point Likert-type items tapped the respondents’ multifaceted **senses of humor**. These 16 items were primarily culled from earlier work (McGoun & Neuendorf, 1995; Neuendorf & Skalski, 2000), supplemented with several items added specifically to tap social humor functions not well measured in previous attempts (i.e., “I like to give my friends a hard time by joking,” “I use humor to lighten things up,” and “I use humor to get to know people better”).

To measure the respondents’ levels of state **depression**, the 20-item CESD Scale (Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale; Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1991) was utilized. The

standard technique of straight additive index construction was employed, with a resultant Cronbach's alpha of .85.

Based on previous research (Neuendorf, 1998), ten items were included that measure the construct of **wallowing**, the tendency to seek mood-congruent, sad media content (e.g., weepies or melodramas) under conditions of state depression. A summative index of the ten items was constructed, with a Cronbach's alpha of .74.

Standard measures of **media exposure** were included in the survey--hours of television watched yesterday, hours of radio listening yesterday, newspaper readership during the last week (in days), number of magazines read regularly, number of books read in the past six months, number of videos viewed in the past month, number of movies watched at the theater in the past month. Measures of adoption of a number of **newer media technologies** were also included--frequency of email usage in the last week, hours of Internet use in the last week, and home access to each of the following: a VCR, a CD player, a DVD player, a laserdisc player, a camcorder, cable TV, a satellite dish, a cell phone, and a computer. Open-ended items tapped respondents' **favorite TV show and movie** of all time, each of which was coded for whether the content was (1) comedy or not, (2) a weepy/melodrama or not, and (3) containing graphic violence, "light" violence, or no violence. Two additional open-ended items asked for respondents to indicate the funniest movie or TV show they had ever seen, and to describe their "favorite type of humor".

Two questions tapped the respondents' **orientations toward Digital Television**: (1) "In your own words, can you tell me--what do you know about DTV, that is, Digital Television?"--Responses to this open-ended query were coded in the following manner: 0=Does not know, 1=Knows at least some correct information, -1=Reports incorrect information; and (2) "On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means not at all, and 10 means a great deal, how eager are you to get DTV?"

Results

Constructing the indexes measuring “senses of humor”.

The set of 16 sense of humor items was submitted to a principal components factor analysis using the latent root criterion with orthogonal rotation. (Oblique rotation resulted in very similar findings, and so a judgment was made to retain the orthogonal solution for the sake of parsimony.) Five factors resulted, capturing 63% of the total variance of the pooled items, as displayed in Table 4. Indexes of these five independent dimensions, or “senses of humor,” were constructed via factor scores. The five resultant indexes are: (1) Mean-spirited humor, with primary loadings for measures of appreciation for sexist, racist, sexual, and sick humor; (2) Visual/verbal humor, an index tapping appreciation for humor in symbolic (nonverbal and verbal) stimuli, with primary loadings for measures of affinity for sight gags, slapstick, bloopers, and jokes that involve wordplay; (3) Stupid/absurd humor, with primary loadings for measures of appreciation for the humor in absurdity, stupidity, and accidental events; (4) Social humor, with primary loadings for the items “I use humor to lighten things up” and “I use humor to get to know people better;” and (5) Satire/death humor, with primary loadings for items measuring liking of satire and humor about death.

It is worth noting that the five dimensions include humor appreciation types that are situated primarily within the individual (visual/verbal, stupid/absurd, and satire/death factors) as well as types that are dependent on the context of social relationships (mean-spirited and social factors).

Correlating senses of humor and public opinion indicators.

Table 2 displays all zero-order correlations and two different sets of partial correlations: (1) controlling for social locators (i.e., age, education, income, gender (female), race/ethnicity (non-white), marital status (married), political ideology (liberalism), and political party affiliation (Republicanism)), and

(2) controlling for social locators and media habits (i.e., TV viewing, radio listening, newspaper readership, magazine readership, book reading, video viewing, and theatrical movie attendance).

The various orthogonal senses of humor are moderately and significantly related to specific public opinion indicators in a number of cases. The index for mean-spirited humor, representing the first factor, is positively related to support for Clinton and support for abortion rights, and negatively related to support for government-guaranteed health care and Affirmative Action, and to believing the Internet will change the world for the better, even after controlling for a host of social locators and media behavior patterns ($p < .10$).

The partial correlations with these stringent controls are displayed in the second part of Table 2: Appreciation for visual/verbal humor (symbolic stimuli as humorous) is positively related to a reported belief that O.J. Simpson is innocent of murder, to the opinion that the Internet will provide lots of information that we need, and to a belief that the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame and Museum has improved the image of the city of Cleveland (after social locator and media controls). A preference for stupid/absurd humor is negatively correlated with an approval rating for the job President Clinton is doing, and with the opinion that Simpson is innocent. An appreciation for social-level humor is related to greater agreement with statements that deem excessive the news coverage of Clinton's impeachment and of Monica Lewinsky, with the statements "I suffer from information overload much of the time," "The government should guarantee health care to all Americans," "The Drew Carey Show has had a major impact on improving Cleveland's image," "The Internet violates people's right to privacy," and (seemingly contradictory) "The Internet will provide me with lots of information I need". Finally, an attraction to humor about death and satire is related to less support for President Clinton and for Affirmative Action.

Also, of particular interest are the seven public opinion items related to more than one type of

humor preference. Given the orthogonal structure of the senses of humor factoring, this complex set of relationships reveals a special importance of the sense of humor construct as a filtering template for certain public opinions. Indeed, further analyses (described below) discover significant discrimination for these seven--and one additional item--by sense of humor "clusters".

Profiling sense of humor clusters.

Using the five factor-based indexes of the senses of humor, an agglomerative cluster analysis was conducted, using Ward's method and squared Euclidean distances. Based on a scree-type visual analysis of distances used in the agglomeration schedule, an eight-cluster solution was selected. Differentiated significantly by all five senses of humor, these **sense of humor clusters** successfully differentiated many other variables--social locators, media habits and new technology adoption measures, and psychological variables such as state depression. The results of this profiling process (as recommended by Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995) are shown in Table 3.

Profiling was also conducted using the sense of humor clusters and the 20 public opinion indicators. Eight of these were significantly discriminated by the clusters, as indicated in Table 4.

While many demographic, media, and mood-related variables were significantly discriminated by humor clusters, non-significant differences obtained for the following variables: Income, liberalism/conservatism, political affiliation, daily TV viewing, daily radio listening, magazine readership, book readership, theatrical movie attendance, Internet use, home access to certain technologies (VCR, CD player, cable TV, cell phone, computer), knowledge level about DTV, favorite movie is a comedy, and violence in favorite TV show. Twelve of the 20 public opinion measures were not significantly discriminated by the clusters.

The following sections describe each cluster in terms of humor preference and other significant

variables--notably, the public opinion indicators--displayed in Tables 3 and 4.

Cluster 1--“Low” Humor. Cluster 1 is a relatively small group of 20 individuals. This cluster has negative means on *all five humor appreciation dimensions*, suggesting a very low (or no) sense of humor. Across all clusters, Cluster 1 is third lowest on both social and satire/death humor, second lowest on absurd/stupid humor, and lowest on visual/verbal humor--over twice as low, in fact, as the next closest cluster. The sense of humor that this group is highest on, mean-spirited humor, still has a negative mean. Based on these findings, cluster 1 will be referred to as the “low humor” cluster.

The low humor cluster shows significant differences from the other seven clusters on several additional variables. Individuals in the low humor cluster are the most likely to be non-white and second-least educated. They watch the least number of videos, are the least likely to own a camcorder, and are least eager to get digital television (DTV). They are also the second most depressed group. In terms of media content preferences, the low humor group enjoys TV comedy the least and violent movies the second least. They enjoy weepies/melodramas on television the most and weepy/melodrama movies the second most.

In terms of expressed opinions about public issues, this cluster matches the classic liberal profile--supportive of the current Democratic President and favoring government intervention in health care, gun control, and Affirmative Action. They are the most anti-Internet of any group, endorsing the belief that the Internet violates people’s privacy and not believing that the Internet will provide them with a rich supply of information they need. These somewhat socially marginalized individuals apparently find little to laugh about in society (they are the most likely to feel that O. J. Simpson is innocent of murder) and look to government rather than free enterprise (e.g., the Internet) for assistance.

Cluster 2--“Middle of the Road” Humor. Cluster 2 consists of 44 individuals. This cluster has

negative means on four out of the five humor dimensions. Compared to other clusters, this group is lowest on absurd/stupid humor and close to the middle (near fourth or fifth) on the other four types of humor. Thus, this group will be called the “middle of the road humor” cluster.

Across all clusters on other significant variables, individuals in the “middle of the road” humor cluster read a newspaper the second highest number of days and are least likely to have a laserdisc player and a satellite dish. Looking at TV show preferences, this group is second most likely to choose a weepy/melodrama for favorite television show.

This cluster is also “in the middle” on public opinions. They are second-highest on rating the need for government-guaranteed health care; otherwise, their public opinion ratings are near the overall averages.

Cluster 3--“Sick” Humor. Cluster 3 is the largest of the eight groups, with an n of 71. Compared to other clusters, individuals in Cluster 3 enjoy mean-spirited humor the most and satire/death humor the second most. They fall near the middle on the other three humor dimensions. Since this group likes both mean humor and humor about death, it will be referred to as the “sick” humor group.

The “sick” humor cluster, compared to other clusters, is the second youngest, most likely to be male, and most likely to be white. Thus, this cluster reflects the humor and other preferences of young, white men. They are eager to get DTV and third most likely to use media for wallowing. When it comes to favorite movies, this group likes weepies/melodramas the least and violent films the most.

With regard to public opinion, this group could be characterized as “nay-sayers”. They are distinctively low on five of the eight public opinion items displayed in Table 4. They are stereotypically conservative; they are least likely of any group to support universal health care and to agree that the Internet violates people’s privacy. They generally are less supportive of gun control and Affirmative

Action.

Cluster 4--“Social Levels” of Humor. Cluster 4 is comprised of 66 individuals. Across all clusters, Cluster 4 appreciates mean-spirited the second most and social humor the most (more than twice as much as the next nearest cluster). This group does not like satire/death humor (second lowest mean), and only moderately enjoys visual/verbal and absurd/stupid humor. Thus, the group seems to be primarily interested in mean-spirited and social humor. In light of the four humor “templates” described earlier in this paper, Cluster 4 seems to exemplify the two social-context categories of humor: *social/functional* humor corresponds to the “general” social humor factor and its component variables, and *disparagement* humor parallels most of the variables in the mean-spirited humor factor. In particular, the item “I like to give my friends a hard time by joking” (see Table 4) is an example of disparagement; other examples include racial/ethnic joke and sexist jokes, which are types of humor designed to put certain groups “in their place”. Since this cluster overlaps with the social level humor template posited earlier, it will be called the “social levels of humor” group.

Compared to other clusters on significantly different variables, Group 4 is lowest of all groups in age and education and its members are least likely to be married. Individuals in this group read newspapers the least number of days and watch the most videos. They are most likely to own *all of the technologies* with significant differences in ownership (DVD player, laserdisc player and satellite dish), except for a camcorder, which they are second most likely to own. They are also the most eager to get DTV. Clearly, this a group heavily enamored video technology, which is shown both in their video viewing habits and hardware ownership. This group is also second most likely to use those various technologies for wallowing and is the *most depressed* of all groups. As for content preferences, this group indicates the second-highest preference for violent movies.

The opinions of the members of this group are a surprising mix of a certain optimism (high scores on “The Internet will provide me with lots of information I need” and “The Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame and Museum has had a major impact on improving Cleveland’s image”) and concern for the needy (showing strong support for universal health care and Affirmative Action). In spite of a high level of depression, this is a very future-oriented, perhaps idealistic, group.

Cluster 5--“Individual Levels” of Humor. Cluster 5 consists of 20 individuals. Compared to the other clusters, this group favors both visual/verbal humor and absurd/stupid humor second most, and its members are highest in appreciation of satire/death humor. The group somewhat enjoys social humor and dislikes mean spirited humor the second most. Essentially, this group heavily favors three types of humor: visual/verbal humor, absurd/stupid humor, and satire/death humor. In light of the four humor templates forwarded earlier, the preferences of this group coincide with the two types of *individual-level* humor: The dimensions *cognitive bisociation* and *physiological arousal and response*. Visual/ Verbal humor can be both bisociation (e.g., puns) and arousal (e.g., slapstick). Absurd/stupid humor and satire/death humor can be both individual types of humor as well: there can be absurd visual juxtapositions that cause bisociation, for example, as well as outrageous satire that causes arousal. Given the wide-range of individual humor types this cluster encompasses, it will be called the “individual levels of humor” group.

Looking at the eight clusters in terms of other significantly different variables, the “individual levels” group is second-most likely both to be male and to be white. Individuals in this group read the newspaper more days than any other group, watch the second highest number of videos, and are the second least depressed. They are also the most likely to cite a comedy as their favorite television show.

The public opinion orientations of this group are conservative, and with the exception of their view of the Internet (they’re highest on “The Internet will provide me with lots of information I need”), they are

quite negative in tone. They are the least likely to believe in O. J. Simpson's innocence, and the least supportive of both gun control and Affirmative Action.

Cluster 6--“Not Mean Spirited” Humor. Cluster 6 is comprised of 52 individuals. Compared with the other clusters, this group likes both absurd/stupid humor and satire/death humor (the third most) and likes social humor somewhat. The group does not like visual/verbal humor (second overall in dislike) and dislikes mean-spirited humor more than any other group. Thus, this cluster will be called the “not mean-spirited humor” group.

Among the other significantly different variables across clusters, the “not mean-spirited group” is the most educated and least likely to have a DVD player. Individuals in this group are the most likely to be wallowers and like violent films the least. Overall, they seem to be the most sensitive of the eight clusters.

In their public opinions, these individuals do not vary substantially from the overall average, except in two cases. They are the second-least support of Clinton as President, and the second-least likely to believe that O. J. Simpson is innocent.

Cluster 7--“Absurd/Stupid” Humor. Cluster 7 is the smallest of the eight groups, with an n of 16. The group dislikes social humor and satire/death humor more than any other group moderately dislikes mean-spirited humor. The group somewhat likes visual/verbal humor and enjoys absurd/stupid humor more than any other group. Thus, this cluster will be called the “absurd/stupid humor” group.

Compared to the other clusters, the “absurd/stupid humor” group is the most female and second most likely to be non-white. Individuals in this group are high on technology ownership-they are second most likely to own a satellite dish and Laserdisc player and most likely to own DVD player and camcorder. They are also *not* wallowers, as they have the lowest mean on wallowing across the eight clusters. When media content choice is examined, this group prefers weepies/melodramas on film but not on television (they have the high and low means, respectively, in that category).

The public opinions of this group are distinguished by relatively high support for government-guaranteed health care, and a relatively strong belief that the Internet will provide them with lots of useful information. They are the group that is most impressed with the Rock Hall's impact on Cleveland's image.

Cluster 8--“Visual/Verbal” Humor. Cluster 8 consists of 32 individuals. This group heavily dislikes social humor and somewhat dislikes mean-spirited and absurd/stupid humor. The group somewhat appreciates satire death humor and enjoys visual/verbal humor more than any of the other seven clusters. Thus, this group will be called the “visual/verbal humor” group.

Across all clusters, this group is the oldest and most likely to be married. Individuals in this group are the *least* depressed and second-least wallowing. Thus, this group seems to have a happy mood state/temperament. The expressed public opinions of this group are “normal” (i.e., typical), right down the line.

Discussion

The process outlined in this paper relies upon a grounded-theory approach to developing an in-depth understanding of the humor appreciation process as it applies to media habits and public opinion expressions. It has been successful in confirming the notion that an expanded view of the human “sense of humor” is both valid and fruitful for predicting attitudes and behaviors. The process as executed meets the spirit of the *original* 1970's “uses and gratifications” notion of the active audience; in its basic form, the perspective demanded emergent constructs and operationalizations, rather than standard scales across needs and applications (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). The constructs developed here--and their measures--are peculiar to the realm of humor appreciation and are therefore rich in detail.

The research questions guiding this work asked whether the senses of humor were related to expressed public opinions, either in their original index form or via cluster analysis. Generally, the guarded

response to these questions, is “yes”. This study has shown the value of incorporating the specific affective filter of “senses of humor” when assessing public opinions. There is significant “added value” provided by an understanding of what humor preferences the individual holds.

This investigation has been less successful in discovering systematic mechanisms of sense of humor impacts on public opinion. The scattered significant correlations between senses of humor and public opinion indicators do not provide a coherent structure informing theory. Nor do the cluster profiles provide a definitive answer as to how the affective filter operates. That is, we did not find such clear-cut patterns as “all race-related public opinions are related to an appreciation of mean-spirited humor,” or “all technology-related public opinion indicators are correlated with a preference for symbolic (verbal/visual) humor”. The results are less well organized, and harder to interpret.

The present study provided general support for the expectations derived from past work on humor orientations, uncovering important linkages with media use and adoption repertoires (Lin, 1994). In particular, we find support for an oct-partite model of humor types by incorporating diverse measures of media use patterns, perceived gratifications and social locators.

Where investigations in the parallel area of audience uses and gratifications (e.g., Rubin & Bantz, 1987) have identified two types of commercial television audiences--ritualized (diffuse) and instrumental (goal-directed) viewers--the present study offers a more detailed range of media use orientations in the context of likely new media adopters. Also, like uses and gratifications research, we see that the audiences most strongly motivated by certain orientations are the most avid media adopters or users (e.g., Lin, 1994). In particular, the associations between “mean-spirited” and “stupid/absurd” humor preferences and technology ownership reinforce findings on cable adoption. For instance, cable adopters have been found to be less satisfied with traditional (lowest common denominator) broadcast fare and more interested in “cutting edge” cable fare (e.g., Atkin & LaRose, 1994; Neuendorf, Atkin, & Jeffres, 1998). The “mean-

spirited” humor orientation also includes several risqué (politically incorrect) humor contents. There are already non-mainstream cable programs and channels that meet these needs. We may expect that new media will continue to cater to fringe tastes. That dynamic might also help explain past findings with regard to the Internet, which has been found to serve as a depressant.

This study indicates the additional utility of using a “senses of humor” approach to marketing and audience studies. The present findings should help advertisers and other professional communicators to more effectively promote themselves in a rapidly changing and fragmenting media environment, as our typology of audience humor orientations allows marketers to more carefully segment the audience. Thus, much in the same way that earlier-studied psychographics have yielded dividends--relative to demographic and media use variables--in studies of product adoption, our own results give persuasive communicators some important affective characteristics to consider when creating programs and promotions. Such archetypes are useful for those seeking to target audiences or publics.

We find that in the process of identifying filters that are used by individuals to process information and form opinions, we are able to identify aggregate clusters with distinctive patterns of humor appreciation, as well as distinctive patterns of social locators, media habits, and expressed public opinions. Rather than supporting the view of public opinion as organized, aggregate, and quite public, this procedure and set of findings indicate a value to segmenting a population into discrete publics on the basis of social locators, media habits, and affective filters, in order to maximize the prediction of each public’s stance on issues of social importance.

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Table 1: Orthogonal Factor Analysis of 16 Sense of Humor Measures—General Population Sample

	----- Loadings -----					
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	
	Mean- Spirited humor	Visual/ Verbal humor	Stupid/ Absurd humor	Social humor	Satire/ Death humor	Comm.
“I like sexist humor”	.83	.10	.02	.02	.02	.72
“Something is funny if it ridicules certain racial or ethnic groups”	.75	.10	.00	-.12	.24	.65
“I like sexual humor”	.71	.31	.06	.17	.01	.63
“I like sick humor”	.68	-.08	.26	.22	.01	.63
“I like to give my friends a hard time by joking”	.53	-.02	.34	.49	.21	.64
“I like sight gags”	.24	.74	.17	.05	.03	.63
“I enjoy slapstick”	.19	.62	-.06	.13	.32	.54
“I find bloopers especially funny”	-.09	.59	.33	.21	.37	.56
“I like jokes that involve wordplay”	-.02	.50	.48	.07	.12	.50
“I find absurd things funny”	.20	.06	.66	.11	.37	.63
“I find it funny when people do stupid things”	.45	.03	.65	.18	-.11	.67
“Something is especially funny if it happens accidentally”	-.01	.26	.61	.07	.05	.45
“I use humor to lighten things up”	.11	.11	.12	.83	.03	.72
“I use humor to get to know people better”	.18	.21	.08	.76	.23	.72
“I like humor about death”	.35	-.06	.02	.03	.74	.69
“I enjoy satire”	.08	.30	.34	.34	.68	.69
Eigenvalue	4.90	1.87	1.20	1.10	1.02	
% of total variance	30.6%	11.7%	7.5%	6.9%	6.4%	

Table 2: Correlation Matrix—Five Sense of Humor Factors with Public Opinion Items.

Variable	r /pr ↘	Factor 1 Mean- Spirited humor	Factor 2 Visual/ Verbal humor	Factor 3 Stupid/ Absurd humor	Factor 4 Social humor	Factor 5 Satire/ Death humor
Clinton doing good job as President		.12* / .12*	.02 / .08	-.10 / -.10	-.04 / .01	-.19* / -.16*
Mike White doing good job as Mayor		-.09 / -.04	.04 / .02	-.03 / -.02	.05 / .07	.00 / .00
Clinton should be removed from office		-.14* / -.08	.05 / .00	.06 / .03	.03 / .00	.08 / .08
Too much coverage of Clinton impeach		.03 / -.04	-.01 / .02	.07 / .09	.11 / .13*	.02 / .04
Too much coverage of M. Lewinsky		-.03 / -.04	-.01 / .07	-.01 / .00	.17** / .18**	-.06 / -.03
Believe O.J. innocent of murder		.00 / .04	.10 / .13*	-.21** / -.21**	-.03 / .00	-.17** / -.06
Abortion should remain legal		.17** / .16**	.01 / .04	.02 / .03	-.03 / .00	-.03 / -.06
Concerned that I will get AIDS		.21** / .11a	-.01 / .01	-.02 / -.05	.05 / -.01	-.04 / .02
Gov. should guarantee health care		-.14** / -.18**	.09 / .11a	-.04 / -.02	.09 / .11a	-.15** / -.10
Need more gun control		-.10 / -.04	.00 / .04	.06 / .05	.01 / .04	-.14* / -.08
Affirmative action still necessary		-.16** / -.11a	.05 / .08	-.06 / -.06	.01 / .06	-.23** / -.15*
I have been discriminated against		.02 / -.03	-.01 / .02	-.05 / -.02	-.02 / .03	-.02 / .03
African Americans are discriminated		-.10 / -.07	.04 / .06	.07 / .08	-.04 / .00	-.03 / .02
Af.-Ams. have less education opps.		-.05 / -.01	-.01 / .01	.05 / .08	-.11 / -.07	-.02 / .01
I suffer from information overload		.02 / -.02	.02 / .02	.09 / .09	.14* / .14*	-.05 / -.05
Internet will change world for better		.05 / -.15*	.05 / .04	.11 / .09	.07 / .02	.07 / .00
Internet violates privacy rights		-.23** / -.05	-.06 / -.06	-.02 / .02	.07 / .15*	-.06** / -.09
Internet will provide lots of info.		.10 / -.10	.21** / .20**	.11 / .07	.20** / .17**	.00 / -.04
Rock Hall has improved Cle. image		.01 / -.02	.16** / .16*	.09 / .07	.09 / .08	-.17** / -.12a
Drew Carey has improved Cle. image		-.02 / -.03	.09 / .07	.09 / .07	.24** / .22**	-.02 / -.07

a - $p < .10$; * - $p < .05$; ** - $p < .01$

NOTE: pr is partial correlation controlling for **social locators**: age, education, income, gender (female), race/ethnicity (non-white), marital status (married), political ideology (liberal) and political party affiliation (Republican); $n=248$.

Continued. . .

Table 2: Correlation Matrix—Five Sense of Humor Factors with Public Opinion Items, Cont'd.

Variable	r /pr ↘	Factor 1 Mean- Spirited humor	Factor 2 Visual/ Verbal humor	Factor 3 Stupid/ Absurd humor	Factor 4 Social humor	Factor 5 Satire/ Death humor
Clinton doing good job as President		.12* / .11a	.02 / .08	-.10 / -.14*	-.04 / .02	-.19* / -.13*
Mike White doing good job as Mayor		-.09 / -.04	.04 / .02	-.03 / -.06	.05 / .08	.00 / .03
Clinton should be removed from office		-.14* / -.08	.05 / .00	.06 / .05	.03 / .00	.08 / .07
Too much coverage of Clinton impeach		.03 / -.05	-.01 / .01	.07 / .08	.11 / .13*	.02 / .05
Too much coverage of M. Lewinsky		-.03 / -.05	-.01 / .07	-.01 / -.02	.17** / .19**	-.06 / -.02
Believe O.J. innocent of murder		.00 / .03	.10 / .13*	-.21** / -.22**	-.03 / .00	-.17** / -.07
Abortion should remain legal		.17** / .15*	.01 / .03	.02 / .01	-.03 / .00	-.03 / -.05
Concerned that I will get AIDS		.21** / .09	-.01 / .00	-.02 / -.05	.05 / -.02	-.04 / .02
Gov. should guarantee health care		-.14** / -.19**	.09 / .10	-.04 / -.03	.09 / .12a	-.15** / -.10
Need more gun control		-.10 / -.02	.00 / .03	.06 / .05	.01 / .04	-.14* / -.09
Affirmative action still necessary		-.16** / -.11a	.05 / .07	-.06 / -.07	.01 / .04	-.23** / -.15*
I have been discriminated against		.02 / -.04	-.01 / .04	-.05 / .00	-.02 / .04	-.02 / .02
African Americans are discriminated		-.10 / -.07	.04 / .05	.07 / .09	-.04 / -.01	-.03 / .01
Af.-Ams. have less education opps.		-.05 / -.01	-.01 / .02	.05 / .10	-.11 / -.06	-.02 / -.01
I suffer from information overload		.02 / .00	.02 / .01	.09 / .10	.14* / .13*	-.05 / -.08
Internet will change world for better		.05 / -.15*	.05 / .03	.11 / .08	.07 / .00	.07 / .00
Internet violates privacy rights		-.23** / -.04	-.06 / -.07	-.02 / .01	.07 / .15*	-.06** / -.09
Internet will provide lots of info.		.10 / -.10	.21** / .19**	.11 / .07	.20** / .15*	.00 / -.05
Rock Hall has improved Cle. image		.01 / -.04	.16** / .15*	.09 / .05	.09 / .08	-.17** / -.10
Drew Carey has improved Cle. image		-.02 / -.05	.09 / .06	.09 / .05	.24** / .22**	-.02 / -.05

a - $p < .10$; * - $p < .05$; ** - $p < .01$

NOTE: pr is partial correlation controlling for **social locators**: age, education, income, gender (female), race/ethnicity (non-white), marital status (married), political ideology (liberal) and political party affiliation (Republican), and **media habits**: television viewing, radio listening, newspaper readership, magazine readership, book reading, video viewing, and theatrical movie attendance; n=240.

Table 3: Cluster Profiling.

Variable	Cluster (n)								F	Sig.
	1 (20)	2 (44)	3 (71)	4 (66)	5 (20)	6 (52)	7 (16)	8 (32)		
Mean-spirited humor	-.14	-.57	1.10	.61	-.72	-.94	-.54	-.38	55.61	.000
Visual/Verbal humor	-1.69	-.04	-.10	.24	1.01	-.65	.44	1.04	36.45	.000
Absurd/Stupid humor	-.63	-1.11	-.30	.41	.86	.75	.94	-.38	33.46	.000
Social humor	-.78	.29	-.21	.75	.35	.31	-1.20	-1.12	29.46	.000
Satire/Death humor	-.71	-.37	.69	-.79	1.05	.45	-1.26	.30	40.92	.000
Age	44.95	45.98	34.52	32.00	48.53	48.37	48.40	49.39	8.50	.000
Gender (female)	.75	.68	.32	.62	.45	.77	.88	.66	6.25	.000
Education	3.65	3.91	4.14	3.53	4.16	4.20	3.87	4.13	2.47	.018
Race (non-white)	.42	.09	.14	.23	.15	.19	.38	.16	2.20	.034
Marital status (married)	.45	.48	.41	.21	.45	.48	.38	.53	2.18	.036
Days read newspaper	3.58	4.61	3.93	3.19	5.50	4.08	3.56	4.13	2.11	.042
No. of videos watched	3.45	3.89	6.14	9.48	7.70	4.98	3.50	3.56	2.39	.021
Have DVD player	.15	.07	.13	.25	.11	.00	.25	.06	3.20	.003
Have laserdisc player	.05	.02	.10	.20	.11	.04	.19	.06	2.13	.040
Have camcorder	.15	.36	.56	.58	.37	.40	.63	.34	3.12	.003
Have satellite dish	.10	.00	.04	.17	.05	.06	.13	.00	2.51	.016
How eager for DTV	.79	2.10	2.99	3.29	1.53	1.71	2.27	2.13	2.43	.020
Depression index	34.57	27.67	31.51	39.04	22.42	27.17	26.17	19.39	3.28	.001
Wallowing index	29.73	27.28	33.06	33.37	29.33	34.87	26.91	26.94	2.25	.030
Favorite TV show is comedy	.27	.44	.63	.63	.83	.46	.64	.57	2.60	.013
Favorite TV show is weepy/melodrama	.47	.31	.15	.11	.11	.11	.07	.19	2.13	.041
Favorite movie is weepy/melodrama	1.15	.84	.43	.70	.89	.91	1.50	.87	3.41	.002
Violence in favorite movie (graphic)	.46	.63	1.07	1.00	.68	.36	.58	.74	3.69	.001

Red = high; Blue = low.

Table 4: Cluster Profiling on Public Opinion Variables.

Variable	Cluster (n)								F	Sig.
	1 (20)	2 (44)	3 (71)	4 (66)	5 (20)	6 (52)	7 (16)	8 (32)		
Mean-spirited humor	-.14	-.57	1.10	.61	-.72	-.94	-.54	-.38	55.61	.000
Visual/Verbal humor	-1.69	-.04	-.10	.24	1.01	-.65	.44	1.04	36.45	.000
Absurd/Stupid humor	-.63	-1.11	-.30	.41	.86	.75	.94	-.38	33.46	.000
Social humor	-.78	.29	-.21	.75	.35	.31	-1.20	-1.12	29.46	.000
Satire/Death humor	-.71	-.37	.69	-.79	1.05	.45	-1.26	.30	40.92	.000
Bill Clinton is doing a good job as President	7.67	6.45	5.81	6.83	5.37	5.29	6.38	6.66	2.21	.033
O.J. Simpson was innocent of murder	4.41	2.46	2.44	3.41	1.47	1.52	3.00	2.89	2.27	.029
The government should guarantee health care to all Americans	8.85	8.77	7.68	9.11	7.80	8.29	8.75	8.16	2.06	.048
There should be more government controls over gun purchasing	8.80	8.00	6.49	8.14	6.35	7.60	7.44	7.16	2.04	.050
Affirmative action is still necessary	7.68	6.32	5.24	7.13	4.65	6.63	6.27	6.39	3.26	.002
The Internet violates people's privacy	7.05	5.49	4.06	5.27	4.83	5.70	5.73	4.11	2.55	.015
The Internet will provide me with lots of information	5.42	7.40	8.04	8.49	8.95	7.71	8.47	7.53	3.83	.001
The Rock Hall has had an impact on improving Cleveland's image	5.87	6.59	5.97	8.13	7.25	6.86	8.25	6.97	2.51	.016

Red = high; Blue = low.