Exploring Relationships Among Values, Political Orientation, Media Use, and the Senses and Humor

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Abstract

This study extends research on humor reception by exploring how values, political orientation, and media use predict various senses of humor. Four distinct humor types are considered in this investigation—superiority/disparagement, incongruity, arousal/dark humor, and social currency. An online survey ($n = 288$) assessed preferences for these senses of humor based on human values (from Schwartz, 1992), political orientation (ranging from strongly conservative to strongly liberal), and media use (including traditional, interactive, and news media). Results of stepwise multiple regression analyses are discussed with attention toward the development of a multiple senses of humor scale for use in communication research spanning the levels of the discipline.

Exploring Relationships Among Values, Political Orientation, Media Use and the

Senses of Humor

On a Fall 2011 episode of *60 Minutes,* Steve Croft interviewed *South Park* and *Book of Mormon* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone and asked what the initial attraction was that got the award-winning comedy duo together. Parker's immediate reply was, "I just remember our senses of humor were just so similar that were would just crack each other up." This comment points to the importance of sense of humor in human relationships and, potentially, many other aspects of daily life. Given the pervasiveness of humor and comedy in modern society, the various "senses of humor" individuals hold may filter their perceptions of reality in profound ways. Research over the past decade has uncovered linkages between senses of humor and diverse phenomena ranging from enjoyment of specific film and television content (Neuendorf, 2007; Neuendorf & Skalski, 2000; Powers, Neuendorf, & Skalski, 2005) to public opinion (Neuendorf et al., 2011). It has also been proposed that senses of humor may help determine how well people get along interpersonally (Neuendorf & Skalski, 2000). Although preferences for humor types seem to have considerable potential as predictors of communication outcomes, questions remain about the structure of senses of humor, particularly their influences.

This study extends research on the senses of humor by exploring how values, political orientation, and media use might affect senses of humor. Four distinct humor types are considered in this investigation—superiority/disparagement, incongruity, arousal/dark humor, and social currency. This paper presents the results of a survey predicting preferences for these senses of humor as a function of human values (from Schwartz, 1992), political orientation (ranging from strongly conservative to strongly liberal), and media use (including traditional, interactive, and news media). Results are discussed with attention toward the development of a

multiple senses of humor scale for use in communication research spanning the levels of the discipline.

The Senses of Humor

Humor has been proposed as an important filter through which individuals view and cognitively process daily events and important issues (Martin, 2007). The interdisciplinary scholarly literature on humor has identified multiple ways in which we find stimuli funny— different independent mechanisms of humor apprehension. Distinct bodies of scholarly work exist that back each of these, providing both conceptual underpinnings of each mechanism and at least some empirical support for each (Martin, 2007). Most scholars tend to focus on only one mechanism, or privilege one mechanism over the others. We, on the other hand, contend that multiple mechanisms may come into play simultaneously when a receiver encounters a potentially humorous stimulus. Further, we believe that any examination of humor must begin with a comprehensive taxonomy of humor mechanisms. Recently, qualitative work inquiring into individuals' understanding of the deep meanings of the mechanisms of humor has validated a four-part dimensionality of these senses of humor (Neuendorf & Skalski, 2012).

The four independent mechanisms include, first, the function of *superiority*, as manifested by the *disparagement* of others (Neuendorf et al., 2011). Dating back to Aristotle (McKeon, 1941), laughter has been viewed as originating in malice. Seventeenth-century British philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1651/1981) reinforced the notion of humor as derived from a sense of superiority over others. Among other scholars, Freud (1960) recognized the aggressive basis of many jokes. The superiority mechanism also has been validated in the theoretic examinations of Gruner (1978) and the quantitative work of Zillmann and Bryant (1974; 1980; Zillmann & Cantor, 1976) and LaFave (LaFave, Haddad, & Maesen, 1976). Examples of this mechanism in

application include racist and sexist humor (Thomas & Esses, 2004), "putdown" humor, satire, sarcasm, self-deprecation, and the display of stupid behaviors.

A second humor mechanism is that of *incongruity*, a commonly studied type defined by the juxtaposition of inconsistent or incongruous elements. Reaching back at least to the work of the 19th century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (Martin, 2007), this notion was further elaborated by Arthur Koestler (1964), whose concept of bisociation describes the mental processes involved in the humorous resolution of incongruous stimuli (as well as the related processes of artistic creativity and scientific discovery). These theoretical approaches indicate that humor is experienced when two disparate perspectives are simultaneously experienced; the joy of humor derives from the "solving" of this incongruous puzzle. Empirical support for this mechanism of humor includes a series of studies by Shultz and colleagues (e.g., Shultz & Horibe, 1974) and others (Perlmutter, 2002; Vaid et al., 2003; Veal, 2004). Types of humor intended to activate an incongruity mechanism include wordplay (e.g., puns), "pure" visual incongruity, absurdity, and sight gags.

Third is the mechanism of *high arousal*, generally associated with *dark humor* applications. Early explications of this mechanism by writers/philosophers Immanuel Kant and Herbert Spencer (Spencer, 1860) emphasized the humor response as a release of pent-up psychological strain or tension. 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 resolution successfully reduces arousal to a pleasurable level once again. Arousal-provoking humor may be manifested in a variety of ways, such as dark or death-related humor, sick humor,

and sexual or naughty humor. However, recent work has identified sexual humor as no longer fitting with other high-arousal types among American research participants, most probably because its ubiquity has reduced its shock value (Neuendorf et al., 2011).

Finally, a fourth mechanism is that of *social currency*. Although less often acknowledged as an independent dimension of humor apprehension, social currency provides a unique and actually quite common mechanism. Social interaction humor has been studied as a means of building and maintaining relationships (e.g., Chapman, 1983; Fine, 1983; Lamaster, 1975). Further, humor may be experienced as the simple pleasure derived from playful interaction (Apter, 1982), the construction of a functional social hierarchy (Fry, 1963), or the establishment of a sense of group belonging or understanding (Dundes, 1987; Pollio, 1983). Particular behaviors meant to invoke this mechanism include the use of "inside jokes," joking to fit in, and parody (relying on a shared view of a known form, such as a film genre).

Research has confirmed that the four humor mechanisms seem to operate independently, suggesting that various combinations of preferences across the types can constitute Senses of Humor "profiles" that differ among groups (Lieberman et al., 2009; Neuendorf, Skalski, & Powers, 2004). Empirical inquiry has established the validity of a multi-dimensional approach to the measurement of Senses of Humor (SOH). Additionally, links between specific SOH profiles and media use patterns have been established (Neuendorf, 2007; Neuendorf & Skalski, 2000; Powers, Neuendorf, & Skalski, 2005), often related to demographic profiles, and research has found links connecting SOH to perceived quality of life (QOL; Neuendorf et al., 2000; 2011). Further, some evidence has been found of a relationship between SOH profiles and reactions to public events such as the O. J. Simpson murder trial and to public opinions regarding affirmative

action, treatment of immigrants in America, and same-sex marriage (Neuendorf et al., 1999; 2011).

Further, validation of the four mechanisms against popular mass media products (Neuendorf & Skalski, 2000) has established some criterion validation. For example, preference for disparagement humor was found to relate to greater enjoyment of the TV programs *The Simpsons*, *Late Night with David Letterman*, and *Hogan's Heroes*, and lesser enjoyment of the TV series *Full House*. Preference for incongruity humor was related to greater enjoyment of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* and *The Tracey Ullman Show*, and lesser enjoyment of *The Cosby Show*.

Values

Rokeach (1986) has defined a value as an abstract ideal that can be positive or negative and representative of a person's enduring beliefs regarding ideal modes of conduct. Values represent goals that serve as principles that transcend situations, and guide the actions and policies of individuals (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). Values vary in importance (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990) and are acquired through socialization and learning experiences (Schwartz, 1994).

According to Schwartz (1992; 1994), there are 10 values that are universal across cultures: (1) power (social status and control over people and resources), (2) achievement (personal success achieved through showing competence in adhering to social standards), (3) hedonism (pleasure and gratification), (4) stimulation (excitement and challenge), (5) self-direction (independent thinking), (6) universalism (understanding and tolerance for welfare of all people), (7) benevolence (preservation and enhancement of welfare of people one frequently contacts), (8) tradition (respect and acceptance of traditional customs and religion), (9)

conformity (restraint from actions that violate social norms), and (10) security (harmony and stability of society). These values are found to vary both across cultures and also across individuals within cultures.

Communication plays a key role in forming and reinforcing individuals' values (e.g., Besley, 2008). Studies in media effects, in particular, have established that the media can influence values (Besley, 2008; Tan, Nelson, Dong, & Tan, 1997). On the other hand, some research has also found that values can predict media use (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001) and preference (Ball-Rokeach, Grube, & Rokeach, 1981; Mahrt & Schoenbach, 2009). For instance, Sotirovic and McLeod (2001) showed that materialist values (striving for personal advancement) are positively associated with a preference to use entertainment television. Given the extant research establishing a link between communication and individuals' values, and the research on humor, our study adds to the current literature by examining the relationship between values and preferences for different types of humor.

Political Orientation

Political orientation serves as an antecedent for attitudes and opinions (Jaegar, 2008; Mcfayden, 1998), and mass communication-related behaviors, such as preferences to use particular types of media (Fox & Williams, 1974; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1984). Recently, the popularity of satirical news shows such as *The Colbert Report* and The *Daily Show with John Stewart* has stimulated research examining the role of political variables on the processing and effects of humor (e.g., Hmielowski, Holbert, & Lee, 2011; Holbert et al., 2007). A study conducted by Hmielowski et al. (2011) found that four variables predicted exposure to political satire: Age, exposure to satirical sitcoms, exposure to liberal programming, and an affinity for political humor.

Media Use

The effects that stem from uses of the mass media have been of concern to communication scholars for decades. For instance, theories such as Social Cognitive Theory have argued that violent media content can lead to imitative behaviors, embellishments on those behaviors, and arousal (Bandura, 2009). Bandura points out that people may actually lift restraints on behaviors previously deemed unacceptable if positive rewards arise or lack of punishment is the result of such behavior. Disinhibitory effects could then lead to people taking part in socially improper ways. Such disinhibitory influence could potentially apply to humor, so that what is considered to be appropriate in terms of humor responses could be in part determined by models presented in the mass media.

Another relevant theory is Cultivation, which posits that a skewing of audience perceptions of the real world towards that of the fantasy world offered by television might take place amongst heavier viewers of television (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002). For instance, due to the amount of violence portrayed in the world of television, heavier viewers of TV develop what Gerbner and colleagues call the Mean World Syndrome, the notion that the world is a much more dangerous place than it is in reality. Gerbner et al. state that this skewing of perception is in part due to the concept of mainstreaming, which occurs when television's constant presentation of a consistent set of attitudes, beliefs, values and practices differs from those in the real world, thus causing the attitudes, beliefs, values and practices offered by the fantasy world of television to override those that actually exist in society. Similarly, according to Kline (2010), if certain practices such as giving birth through the use of a midwife are belittled through the use of humor on television, opinions of the practice of midwifery may suffer amongst the general public. If attitudes, beliefs, values and practices can

all be skewed by television, it is possible that senses of humor can also be altered towards those presented on television. To date, this potential for change in senses of humor has not been widely studied utilizing these mass media theories.

Research Questions

The present study examines how media use, political orientation, and values predict various senses of humor. Given the lack of literature specifically addressing determinants of senses of humor, research questions instead of hypotheses are advanced in this study. The questions explore potential origins of humor preferences and attempt to get at theoretically important variables that may be associated with them. Each question addresses a different sense of humor and asks about its relationship to the predictor variables focused on in this research:

RQ1: How do values, political orientation, and media use affect preference for superiority/disparagement humor?

RQ2: How do values, political orientation, and media use affect preference for incongruity humor?

RQ3: How do values, political orientation, and media use affect preference for arousal/dark humor?

RQ4: How do values, political orientation, and media use affect preference for social currency humor?

Method

Study data were collected in the Spring of 2010 using an online survey. The instrument was administered to a sample of undergraduate students enrolled in Communication courses at a moderately sized, mid-western public university. The students received either course credit or extra credit for their participation. A total of 288 students completed the survey. The survey

included measures of values, political orientation, media use, and senses of humor, along with

several demographic characteristics.

Measures

Values. Values were measured using items from the Schwartz Values Survey, designed

to tap the 10 universal values. Participants were asked to rate the importance of each of a series

of items, representing a dimension of one of the values, on a scale ranging from 0 (not important)

to 7 (of supreme importance). Participants could also record -1 if they felt the item was opposed

to their values. Consistent with the Schwartz Values Survey, the number of items used to

measure each value varied as a function of the value's dimensionality. The first value,

conformity, was measured using four items, including "politeness" and "obedient." The second

value, *tradition*, was measured with five items, including "respect for tradition" and "devout."

The third value, *benevolence*, was measured using five items again, including "loyal" and

"honest." The fourth value, *universalism*, was assessed through nine items, including "equality"

and "a world a peace." The fifth value, *self-direction*, was measured with five items, including

"freedom" and "creativity." The sixth value, *stimulation*, was measured using three items,

including "an exciting life" and "daring." The seventh value, *hedonism*, was measured with just

two items, "pleasure" and "enjoying life." The eighth value, *achievement*, was measured

through four items, including "ambitious" and "influential." The ninth value, *power*, was

measured through five items, including "wealth" and "authority." The tenth value, *security,* was

again measured through five items, including "social order" and "national security."

The reliability of each dimension was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Three of the

scales had unacceptable reliabilities, based on the criterion of .70 or above—tradition ($\alpha = .62$),

hedonism (α = .62), and security (α = .66). Therefore, the decision was made to exclude these value dimensions from subsequent analyses. This left seven reliable values to explore for this investigation (followed by corresponding alphas): conformity (α = .71), benevolence (α = .83), universalism (α = .84), self-direction (α = .77), stimulation (α = .72), achievement (α = .85), and power (α = .71). The seven values scales were constructed via the mean score for each set of items.

Political Orientation. Political orientation or ideology was measured using a single item with five categories: strong conservative, conservative, middle of the road, liberal, and strong liberal. Participants rated their political orientation by choosing one of the five categories.

Media use. Items used to measure media use were divided in three sections tapping amount of traditional media use, interactive media use, and news media use. The traditional media use items asked about TV viewing yesterday, radio listening yesterday, number of magazines read regularly, newspaper readership in the past week, books read in the past six months, theatrical movies attended in the past month, and number of movies watched via DVD/video/DVR in the past month. The interactive media use items inquired about number of emails sent yesterday, minutes spent on the Internet yesterday, minutes spent social networking online yesterday, minutes spent playing video games alone, and minutes spent playing video games with others. Finally, the news media use items asked about minutes spent watching news (TV, online) yesterday, minutes spent listening to news (radio, online) yesterday, and minutes spent reading news (newspaper, magazine, online) yesterday.

Senses of humor. The Senses of Humor Scale, a 16-item, four-dimensional self-report scale, is derived from the series of investigations by Neuendorf, Skalski, and others (e.g., Neuendorf, 2007; Neuendorf et al., 2000; Neuendorf & Skalski, 2000; Powers, Neuendorf, &

Skalski, 2005). The scale includes Likert-type items tapping the Disparagement, Incongruity, Dark Humor and Social Currency dimensions of humor appreciation, measured on a 0-10 scale (with "0" indicating "strongly disagree" and "10" indicating "strongly agree"). Four items were used to measure each dimension. The items and their scale construction are described further in the results section below.

Demographics. Finally, a variety of social locator measures were included in this study. Participants were asked to indicate their biological sex, age (in years), marital status, income, religion, and race. Race and religion were measured with open-ended questions. Answers to the race question were coded into "white" or "non-white" for subsequent analyses. Answers to the religion question were coded into "religious" or "not religious" (i.e., not identifying with any religion) for subsequent analyses.

Results

A total of 288 respondents completed the online instrument. The mean age was 22.55 years old (*SD* = 5.94), and 56 percent of respondents were female. The vast majority were never married/not in a relationship (49 percent) or never married/in a relationship (45 percent), as expected with a student sample. The modal household income was less than $25,000 (33 percent), with 87 percent falling below $100,000. Thirty percent of respondents reported being non-white. In terms of political orientation, 6 percent said they were strongly conservative, 14 percent said they were conservative, 31 percent reported being middle of the road, 30 percent said they were liberal, and 18 percent said they were strongly liberal. Although these results are somewhat skewed, they still show a range of political orientations that are appropriate for testing the research questions in this study.

The 16 Senses of Humor Scale items were submitted to a confirmatory factor analysis, limiting the outcome to four orthogonal dimensions. Table 1 displays the results, with the expected patterns apparent, corresponding to the four theoretic dimensions of the senses of humor. Factor 1, titled Social Currency Humor, obtained high, clean loadings for the following items: "I find it amusing when others make reference to things I'm really familiar with," "I like humor that is shared by a group," "I find it humorous when I explore common knowledge or experiences with others," and "I like 'inside' jokes (jokes only certain people 'get')." Factor 2, Dark Humor, had the following high-loading items: "I like dark comedy," "I like humor about death," "I think it's funny when other people actually get hurt," and "I like gross-out humor." Factor 3, Disparagement Humor, had as high loaders the following items: "I like humor that puts down arrogant people," "I like humor that puts down stupid people," "I like humor that puts down other racial or ethnic groups," and "I enjoy humor that criticizes society." Finally, Factor 4, Incongruity Humor, had the following high loaders: "Unlikely events seem funny," "I think it's funny when things are combined in unexpected ways," "When something happens that is a 'one in a million' occurrence, I find it funny," and "I think incongruity is funny (i.e., when incompatible elements are put together)."

------ Table 1 about here ------

The communalities were acceptable, with a single value just below the standard criterion of .50. The four factors captured 59.18% of the total variance of the set of 16 measures. Standardized Cronbach's alphas ranged from .70 to .81, all within the range of acceptability (Bollen & Lennox, 1991; Clark & Watson, 1995). The resulting factor scores were retained as scales representing the four senses of humor dimensions.

Stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted to explore answers to the research questions. For each of the four senses of humor, the independent variables were entered in blocks in the following order: (1) demographics (sex, age, race, religion), (2) values (conformity, benevolence, universalism, self-direction, stimulation, achievement, power), (3) political orientation, (4) traditional media use (TV viewing, radio listening, newspaper reading, magazine reading, book reading, movie attendance, and home video viewing), (5) new media use (email, general Internet, social networking, video games alone, video games with others), and (6) news media use (watched news, listened to news, read news). Table 2 displays the zero-order correlations between each predictor variable and the four SOH factor-created scales.

------Table 2 about here------

Research question 1 asked about predictors of superiority/disparagement humor preference, and the stepwise multiple regression analysis results are shown in Table 3. The final model accounted for a significant proportion of variance, Adjusted $R^2 = .10$ ($F_{4,283} = 8.94$, $p < .001$). Significant individual predictors of preference for superiority/disparagement humor include femaleness ($\beta = -.20$, $p < .001$), valuing universalism ($\beta = -.29$, $p < .001$), and valuing achievement ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$). Age emerged as a near significant predictor ($\beta = -.11$, $p = .067$). These findings suggest that individuals who like superiority/disparagement humor tend to be male and young, and that they value achievement but not universalism.

------Table 3 about here------

Research question 2 asked about predictors of incongruity humor preference, and the stepwise multiple regression analysis results are shown in Table 4. The final model accounted for a significant proportion of variance, Adjusted $R^2 = .05$ ($F_{2,285} = 8.48$, $p < .01$). Significant individual predictors of preference for incongruity humor include valuing universalism ($\beta = .18$,

$p < .01$), and political orientation (liberalism) ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$). This set of findings suggests

that individuals who like incongruity humor tend to value universalism and be liberal in political

orientation.

------Table 4 about here------

Research question 3 asked about predictors of arousal/dark humor preference, and the

stepwise multiple regression analysis results are shown in Table 5. The final model accounted

for a significant proportion of variance, Adjusted $R^2 = .15$ ($F_{6,281} = 9.27$, $p < .001$). Significant

individual predictors of preference for incongruity humor include femaleness ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .05$),

being non-white ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .01$), valuing achievement ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .001$), valuing stimulation

($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$), and Internet use ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$). This set of findings suggests that

individuals who like arousal/dark humor are male and white, do not value achievement, value

stimulation, and are more frequent Internet users.

------Table 5 about here------

Research question 4, finally, asked about predictors of social currency humor preference.

Table 6 displays the results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis for this question. The

final model accounted for a significant proportion of variance, Adjusted $R^2 = .11$ ($F_{3,284} = 12.35$,

$p < .001$). Significant individual predictors of preference for social currency humor include

valuing self-direction ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$) and valuing stimulation ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .05$). This set of

findings suggests that individuals who like social currency humor strongly value self-direction

but not stimulation.

------Table 6 about here------

Discussion

The present study provides further confirmation of a multi-part senses of humor construction, consisting of superiority/disparagement, incongruity, arousal/dark, and social currency dimensions. We also demonstrate the distinct and multiple ways in which these senses of humor are related to antecedent variables. In general, individuals' humor preferences are predicted by demographics and social values, but not political orientation or media habits. These findings necessitate further discussion.

Predictors of Disparagement Humor Appreciation

Four unique predictors of superiority/disparagement humor preference emerged in this study. The variable was found to be positively associated with being male, white, and valuing achievement, and negatively associated with valuing universalism, defined earlier as understanding and tolerance for welfare of all people. This pattern of findings suggests that people who find putting down others funny value achievement through the diminution of others. They have a "bully" mentality, essentially. Given the historic position of power white males have enjoyed, it makes intuitive sense that this group would be more appreciative of superiority humor. Furthermore, recent social advances made by other groups have led to an "angry white male" phenomenon (Gutiérrez-Jones, 2001), and white males may now turn to racist, sexist, and other forms of disparagement humor to reinforce their diminishing position of privilege in society.

The findings for superiority/disparagement humor could also be flipped and viewed from the perspective of people who have less preference for this type of humor, i.e., those who do not value achievement, value universalism, and are non-white and female. These individuals are likely more sensitive to humor that puts down others, since they have a greater likelihood of having been a victim. This group simply does not find humor that puts down others funny. The

fact that universalism emerged as the strongest predictor of superiority/disparagement humor preference, and that it was a negative predictor, suggests that valuing the universal welfare of others is in direct opposition to laughing and joking at the misfortune of others. It points to an important, logical determinant of possessing a particular sense of humor or not.

Predictors of Incongruity Humor Appreciation

Only two unique predictors of incongruity humor preference emerged in this study—universalism again, only this time in a positive direction, and political orientation (liberalism). These findings make less intuitive sense than those for disparagement humor, perhaps, but we have some speculation about them. The first is that valuing universalism suggests being open and receptive to all types of people, and that this value leads to the appreciation of humor that deals with "the juxtaposition of inconsistent or incongruous elements," as people would be in a diverse society. The second interpretation deals with the positive relationship between liberalism and incongruity. Recent research shows that liberals have a higher need for cognition (Nowak, Hamilton, Atkin, & Rauh, 2010), and perhaps this leads them to appreciate incongruity humor more. Past work (Neuendorf et al., 1999) suggests that incongruity is the most "cognitive" of humor types, in support of this notion. This finding can be aligned with recent studies that have revealed that particular political variables play key roles in the uses, cognitive processing, and effects of political satire (e.g., Hmeilowski et al., 2011; Holbert et al., 2007). For example, Hmeilowski et al. (2011) recently found that exposure to liberal programming and affinity for political humor positively predicts exposure to political satire. Given our finding that being politically liberal is positively associated with preference for incongruity humor, it would be

interesting to explore whether this political orientation is related with an affinity for political humor and exposure to political satire.

Predictors of Arousal/Dark Humor Appreciation

More unique predictors of arousal/dark humor preference emerged in this study than for the other three types. The tendency was associated with being male and white, valuing stimulation but not achievement, and also more frequent Internet use. The finding that Internet use influences arousal/dark humor appreciation stands out here, considering it was the only one of fifteen media use variables to emerge as significant in the regression analyses, across all four humor types (or, in other words, 60 total opportunities). The earlier suggestion that frequent media use can influence behavior (Bandura, 2009) or perceptions (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002), in line with social cognitive and cultivation theories, only seems supportable for this one dimension of sense of humor, and we still cannot be sure of the causality of the relationship. A question begged is, does more frequent Internet exposure lead to the development of greater arousal/dark humor appreciation, or do people with arousal/dark humor appreciation seek it on the Internet? Regardless, the vast, unregulated content universe of the Internet would seem to have a rich supply of material that would appeal to someone with a preference for arousal/dark humor, including sexually explicit jokes, and graphic photos and videos. The fact that video game play (both solo and social) had zero-order correlations with appreciation of this type of humor, as seen in Table 2, shows a consistent pattern here, since video games also have highly arousing and dark content, like the graphic fatalities in the *Mortal Kombat* titles. These findings suggest that media use may not be wholly unrelated to sense of humor, though overall their influence seems quite weak.

The remaining predictors of arousal/dark humor preference reveal additional characteristics of individuals who prefer this humor type. Although being white and male emerged as a predictor of preference for arousal/dark humor, as with superiority/disparagement humor, valuing achievement was inversely associated this time, suggesting that these are not the same white males. Individuals who like arousal/dark humor may do so because they have not been successful or enjoy human failure (such as injury and death) rather than success. This finding provides support for the discriminant validity of the senses of humor. The final variable that related to arousal/dark humor appreciation, valuing stimulation, makes logical sense because stimulation would likely require some type of arousal, in line with predictions of scholarship on sensation seeking (Zuckerman, 1994).

Predictors of Social Currency Humor Appreciation

Only two unique predictors of social currency humor preference emerged in this study, valuing self-directedness (independent thinking) and, to a lesser extent, not valuing stimulation. This was the most difficult pattern of findings to interpret, but the strong association between self-directedness and social currency humor appreciation may be informed by some of the individual items used to measure these variables. Self-directedness consists of valuing things like curiosity and creativity, and preference for social currency humor involves being amused by inside-jokes and references to shared knowledge or experiences. Perhaps people who value self-direction appreciate social currency humor because it frequently involves creative references to shared culture. Social currency humor use, essentially, allows its proponents to be independent thinkers in a mutually rewarding way.

Implications for Political Orientation and Media Habits

Political orientation, found in other studies to relate to particular types of humor enjoyment, was predictive here only of incongruity appreciation. Zero-order correlations indicate that among this study's student sample, greater political liberalism is associated with greater appreciation of both incongruity and social currency types of humor, but in the latter case this relationship is eclipsed by other predictors related to political orientation (e.g., religiosity). Given the limited variance of the political orientation variable in a student sample (i.e., a liberal bias), this study most probably has not fully tapped the predictive power of political orientation.

Media habits are almost entirely non-predictive of senses of humor. It must be noted that most media measures in this study are medium-specific and content-free. However, the content-specific measures of news exposure (viewing, listening, and reading) do not serve as significant predictors, either. It may be that media use is not as strong of a predictor of senses of humor as it has been for other communication outcomes, or that the effects are driven solely by other, non-news genres, which deserve further inquiry.

Implications for Values and the Senses of Humor

Overall, the importance of social values in predicting senses of humor lends validity to propositions concerning humor preference. The multi-dimensional nature of the senses of humor is buttressed by the differential prediction of humor from Schwartz's social values. Values, which serve as guiding principles that transcend situations, seemingly serve as frameworks by which individuals gauge their humor responses. An examination of the correlation matrix (Table 2) reveals an interesting patchwork of relationships such that none of the Schwartz values relates to all of the senses of humor in the same way. No values relate to an "overall" sense of humor. For example, individuals holding a greater value of Universalism appreciate incongruity and social currency humor more, and appreciate disparagement and dark humor less. Those who

value Conformity more are more appreciative of incongruity humor and less appreciative of dark humor. And those who value Achievement to a great degree tend to enjoy disparagement and social currency humor, but not dark humor. The stepwise multiple regression analyses focus only on the significant *unique* contributors to the prediction of the four senses of humor, but even here we see both statistical significance and substantive discrimination. This study continues the process of developing a multiple-item, multiple-dimension senses of humor scale, which could be used to assess the relationships between the senses of humor and important variables at any level of communication, from interpersonal to organizational to mass.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study has a number of interesting findings, it also has several limitations that need to be addressed. First, the study used a student sample for convenience purposes, resulting in a restricted range in the age variable and other issues that could have impacted the findings. Although we do not expect the senses of humor to vary much across the life cycle or based on other differential characteristics between students and non-students, this research should be replicated with a non-student sample to be sure. Second, three of the Schwartz values that were measured did not form reliable scales, leaving questions about their influence on the senses of humor. Third, there are controversies surrounding the use of stepwise multiple regression. Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003) caution against the technique in most circumstances but also suggest that it is somewhat appropriate in predictive research, like the present exploratory study.

Given the changing media landscape resulting from the preponderance of new and emerging communication technologies, it is plausible that individuals' senses of humor are being affected by humorous media messages they are exposed to on the Web (e.g., via YouTube,

Netflix, Hulu, Facebook). Additionally, our survey did not contain measures for interpersonal sources (e.g., friends, family, etc.), and therefore we could not examine the influence of interpersonal communication on senses of humor. Future research could investigate the potential effects of more specific online sources of media and interpersonal sources on senses of humor.

It should also look at the role of specific types of media content in influencing senses of humor. As mentioned earlier, humor is not widely researched using mass media theories. However, if it is possible that the mass media and its presentation of violent content has the ability to alter an individual's behaviors or warp a person's beliefs about the world, might the media also have the ability to affect the senses of humor of audience members? Through the use of laugh tracks in television sitcoms, might viewers be prompted not only to laugh due to these audible cues, but also to be affected in terms of what they will find to be funny? For instance, Social Cognitive Theory argues that a person might lift previously learned restraints, or self-sanctions of certain behaviors deemed as inappropriate (Bandura, 2009). Thus, if a person believes that it is not proper behavior to laugh at the misfortunes of others, and initially resists disparagement humor, might s/he lift these previously learned restraints and begin to find the downfall of less fortunate characters on television funny, especially when the punctuation of the laugh track after a character fails signals that it is acceptable to find this more mean-spirited humor funny? Senses of humor might also fall victim to the effects of Cultivation. Might mainstreaming, as explained by Gerbner et al. (2002), alter people's perceptions of what is funny? If mainstreaming occurs, humor initially deemed inappropriate by viewers might seemingly become fair game as television repeatedly pushes the envelope. A test of this speculation awaits a study that incorporates media exposure measures of a detailed nature—for

example, measures of exposure to the disrespectful behaviors of "tween" comedies (Brown,

2011) or to comedies that ridicule a particular occupation (Kline, 2010).

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Table 1. Orthogonal Factor Analysis of 16 Senses of Humor Measures.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	
	Social Currency Humor	Dark Humor	Disparagement Humor	Incongruity Humor	Comm-unality
Item	Factor Loadings				
Reference to familiar things	**.82**	-.01	.10	.20	.73
Shared by a group	**.81**	.02	.08	.07	.66
Common knowledge/experiences	**.82**	.01	.08	.14	.59
"Inside" jokes	**.70**	-.04	.19	.07	.53
Dark comedy	.08	**.79**	.05	.11	.65
Humor about death	.11	**.73**	.24	.01	.61
Other people actually getting hurt	-.19	**.70**	.21	.01	.57
Gross-out humor	-.04	**.66**	.22	.18	.52
Put down arrogant people	.18	.04	**.74**	.18	.61
Put down stupid people	.06	.25	**.72**	.05	.59
Put down other racial/ethnic groups	.02	.30	**.68**	.02	.56
Criticize society	.25	.18	**.64**	.15	.53
Unlikely events	-.01	-.05	.10	**.82**	.68
Things combined in unexpected ways	.40	.00	-.01	**.69**	.64
"One in a million" occurrence	.17	.16	.06	**.69**	.53
Incongruity (incompatible elements)	.09	.22	.23	**.61**	.49
Eigenvalue (Initial)	4.33	2.61	1.46	1.07	
Eigenvalue (Rotated)	2.73	2.35	2.23	2.16	
% of total variance	17.08%	14.69%	13.92%	13.49%	59.18%
Cronbach's alpha for principal loading items (standardized)	.81	.75	.73	.70	
n	266	262	267	265	

Note. Factor analysis *n* = 251.

Table 2. Correlations Between Sense of Humor Preference Factors and Study Variables.

Block	Variable	Disparagement	Incongruity	Dark Humor	Social Currency
Demographics	Female	-.206**	.100	-.229**	.072
	Age	-.133*	-.050	-.099	-.002
	Non-white	-.044	.110	-.224**	.064
	Religious	-.029	-.112	-.138*	-.131
Values	Conformity	-.114	.151*	-.245**	.111
	Benevolence	-.088	.108	-.201**	.234**
	Universalism	-.211**	.227**	-.153*	.140*
	Self-Directedness	.009	.153*	-.120	.350**
	Stimulation	-.003	.174*	.036	.098
	Achievement	.021	.106	-.248**	.225**
	Power	.004	.056	.004	-.034
Political Orientation	Liberalism	-.109	.186**	-.006	.150*
Frequency of Traditional Media Use	TV viewing	.000	-.072	-.041	.069
	Radio listening	-.069	.003	.003	-.024
	Newspaper readership	.034	-.022	.001	.104
	Magazine readership	-.086	.023	.026	-.007
	Book readership	.054	.089	.004	.055
	Theatrical movie attendance	.009	.036	.024	-.044
	Movie viewing at home	-.014	-.048	.048	-.056
Frequency of Interactive Media Use	Email use	-.064	.040	-.080	.069
	Internet use	.068	-.069	.157*	-.005
	Social networking	.008	-.047	.114	.035
	Video gaming--solo	.098	-.091	.136*	-.009
	Video gaming—with others	.082	-.117	.129*	-.077
Frequency of News Media Use	Watching news	.038	-.020	.014	-.065
	Listening to news	-.005	-.062	.061	-.069
	Reading news	.025	.050	.014	.064

* - $p<.05$; ** - $p<.01$; *** - $p<.001$

Table 3. Stepwise Regression Predicting Preference for Superiority/Disparagement Humor.

Block	Variables in equation	Final Beta	R^2 Change
1: Demographics	Female	-.200***	.036***
	Age	-.105^{ns}	.021*
2: Values	Universalism	-.294***	.020*
	Achievement	.241***	.035***
3: Political Orientation			
4: Frequency of Traditional Media Use			
5: Frequency of Interactive Media Use			
6: Frequency of News Media Use			

Total Model
R^2 = .112
Adjusted R^2 = .100
$F_{(4,283)}$ = 8.937***

* - $p<.05$; ** - $p<.01$; *** - $p<.001$

Table 4. Stepwise Regression Predicting Preference for Incongruity Humor.

Block	Variables in equation	Final Beta	R^2 Change
1: Demographics			
2: Values	Universalism	.178**	.039***
3: Political Orientation	Liberalism	.132*	.017*
4: Frequency of Traditional Media Use			
5: Frequency of Interactive Media Use			
6: Frequency of News Media Use			

Total Model
R^2 = .056
Adjusted R^2 = .050
$F_{(2,285)}$ = 8.480***

* - $p<.05$; ** - $p<.01$; *** - $p<.001$

Table 5. Stepwise Regression Predicting Preference for Arousal/Dark Humor.

Block	Variables in equation	Final Beta	R^2 Change
1: Demographics	Female	-.137*	.043***
	Non-white	-.183**	.032**
	Religious	-.087^{ns}	.015*
2: Values	Achievement	-.302***	.022**
	Stimulation	.248***	.037***
3: Political Orientation			
4: Frequency of Traditional Media Use			
5: Frequency of Interactive Media Use	Internet use	.129*	.016*
6: Frequency of News Media Use			

Total Model
$R^2 = .165$
Adjusted $R^2 = .147$
$F_{(6,281)} = 9.270$***

* - *p*<.05; ** - *p*<.01; *** - *p*<.001

Table 6. Stepwise Regression Predicting Preference for Social Currency Humor.

Block	Variables in equation	Final Beta	R^2 Change
1: Demographics	Religious	-.086^{ns}	.014*
2: Values	Self-directedness	.390***	.087***
	Stimulation	-.153*	.015*
3: Political Orientation			
4: Frequency of Traditional Media Use			
5: Frequency of Interactive Media Use			
6: Frequency of News Media Use			

Total Model
$R^2 = .115$
Adjusted $R^2 = .106$
$F_{(3,284)} = 12.352$***

*- *p*<.05; ** - *p*<.01; *** - *p*<.001