AGGRESSIVE HUMOR: NOT ALWAYS AGGRESSIVE

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ABSTRACT

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Humor is generally seen as adaptive. Research has found it is related to overall positive mood and psychological health (Martin, 2001). However, some types of humor, such as aggressive humor, can also be used to ridicule or belittle others (Martin et al., 2003). Aggressive humor has yet to be examined in different contexts in order to determine if there are positive consequences. The present study examines the role of context (friendship and non-friendship) in the perception of aggressive humor. Participants completed measures of mood, social intelligence, humor use, social dominance orientation and self-determination prior to viewing video clips of aggressive humor within friendship and non-friendship contexts and evaluating the perpetrator of the humor. Results showed that aggressive humor was viewed as more rude and hurtful when used in a non-friendship context. However, those who use aggressive humor in a friendship, rather than non-friendship, context were evaluated as having more social skills and awareness. Additionally, females who use aggressive humor were viewed as more rude than males, and males and females did not differ on this evaluation. Based on these findings, humor research should consider relationship context and gender of those engaging in the humor.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In our society, it is often stated that humor is “the best medicine.” There is a great deal of research on humor and its relation to our interpersonal relationships and wellbeing. Humor can be defined and operationalized in many ways. For instance, it can be a stimulus, such as watching a humorous video clip; a response, such as laughing or smiling; or a mental process, which refers to the perfection or creation of amusement (Martin, 2001). Humor can also be conceptualized in numerous ways. For example, it can be a cognitive ability that is represented by one’s skill in creating and recalling jokes (Martin, 2003). Humor can also be seen as an emotion-related temperament trait that is represented through a continuous positive mood (Martin, 2003). Sense of humor, on the other hand, is generally seen as a measurable trait that relates to amusement, laughter and teasing in behaviors, experiences, affects, attitudes and abilities (Martin, 2001).

Humor is largely viewed as being adaptive and healthy. In a review of the literature, humor has been found to be related to the control of pain and discomfort, muscle relaxation, positive mood and overall psychological healthy (Martin, 2001). While there are some inconsistencies in the research (discussed below), numerous studies have been conducted that exhibit positive outcomes related to humor use (Martin, 2001). In hostile or stressful situations, humor may produce a shift in cognitive appraisal, such
that the environment will be perceived as less threatening (Kuiper, Martin, & Olinger, 1993). Furthermore, controlling for number of experiences, individuals who were rated as having a higher sense of humor reported less stress and anxiety than those rated as having a lower sense of humor, suggesting that humor can facilitate adjustment and coping (Abel, 2002).

One focus in humor research is the association between laughter and stress in social interactions (Nezlek & Derks, 2001). Previous research has shown that laughter has a positive effect on interpersonal encounters and more specifically, shared laughter between strangers can eclipse the typical negative reactions to dissimilar strangers (Nezlek & Derks, 2001). Fraley and Aron (2004) showed that a shared humorous experience has a significant effect on the perceptions of closeness with a stranger. Moreover, this effect was mediated by diversion from the discomfort of the situations. These results suggest shared laughter leads to positive appraisals of interactions with others, which may form feelings of affiliation, and that humor may alleviate some awkwardness in social encounters. Additionally, to extend previous research on single events in a lab session, Nezlek and Derks (2001) had participants keep an interaction record to make note of their daily interactions with up to three other people at a time. Participants also completed measures for using humor as a coping strategy and psychological adjustment. Results showed that those who utilized humor as a means of coping with stress rated their social interactions as more enjoyable and felt more confident when interacting with others. Taken together, these results show that humor is generally utilized as a tool when navigating social interactions.
While these findings are indicative of general trends in the use of humor, it is important to consider the many faces of humor, including sarcasm and self-deprecating humor, when discussing the potential consequences of humor on social interactions and everyday issues. One’s sense of humor might be a coping strategy or defense mechanism. While humor is likely a strategy used to preserve a lighthearted outlook while experiencing stress or hardship (Martin & Lefcourt 1986, Abel, 2002), the effects or consequences of the humor may vary by humor type. Humor in general can be a tool to increase one’s confidence and ease tension in uncomfortable interactions, but depending on the humor style, the increase in confidence could be due to portraying oneself as dominant or in control, rather than simply making a joke of the situation. Thus, when humor incorporates derogatory statements, it becomes difficult to categorize, because it may be malicious or it may be “just a joke.”

**Humor Types**

Similar to other broad constructs in which subtypes are delineated, specific types of humor have been identified and examined. Using factor analytic studies, Martin et al. (2003) have broken humor into four major subtypes: self-enhancing, affiliative, self-defeating, and aggressive. Self-enhancing humor allows for individuals to keep a positive outlook by seeing humor in every day life and particularly while under stress. It suggests a proclivity to maintain a humorous outlook and the use of humor to regulate emotion. Because more positive appraisals are characteristic of self-enhancing humor, it is believed that this type of humor relates to humor being used a coping mechanism and is most consistent with the Freudian definition of humor as a healthy defense mechanism (Martin, Kuiper, Olinger 1993). Affiliative humor refers to a non-hostile humor that
enhances interpersonal relationships by affirming the self and others. Affiliative humor is typically related to extraversion, self-esteem, relationship satisfaction, as well as a predominantly positive emotions and moods (Martin et al., 2003). Self-defeating humor is used to amuse others and seek out acceptance by making fun of the self or letting others make jokes at the expense of oneself. This type of humor can result in negative feelings or a “class clown” role (Martin et al., 2003). Aggressive humor marks the propensity to use sarcasm, tease or humorously disparage others. Aggressive humor has been found to be positively related to measures of hostility and negatively to measures of seriousness, agreeableness and conscientiousness (Martin et al., 2003).

Using Martin’s four types of humor Kuiper et al. (2004) considered the relation between the four types of humor and wellbeing. Wellbeing was assessed by examining self-esteem (global and social), depression, anxiety, and positive and negative moods over the span of a week. Kuiper et al. (2004) hypothesized that the more “maladaptive” forms of humor (i.e., aggressive humor and self-defeating humor) would be less associated with humor as a coping strategy than the more adaptive styles (i.e., self-enhancing and affiliative humor). As predicted, self-enhancing and affiliative humor were significantly positively correlated with global and social self-esteem, and negatively correlated with depression, anxiety and negative affect. Interestingly, the results showed a distinction between the two negative humor forms. Self-defeating humor was significantly positively correlated with depression, anxiety and negative affect. Moreover, self-defeating humor was more negatively correlated with global self-esteem and social self-esteem than aggressive humor (Kuiper et al., 2004). Though Kuiper et al. (2004) and Martin et al. (2003) predicted aggressive humor to be negatively correlated with
wellbeing, their findings showed a weak \((r < .15)\), non-significant relation. More specifically, Kuiper et al. (2004) showed that aggressive humor was slightly negatively correlated with depression, anxiety and negative affect. Aggressive humor also had a small positive correlation with social self-esteem. In summary, self-deeating humor, rather than aggressive humor, has been shown to have an inverse relation to wellbeing. These results then suggest that the two styles are quite different, requiring more research on aggressive humor and self-defeating humor.

Although a great deal of research has examined more positive forms of humor (affiliative and self-enhancing humor), much less is known about the more “maladaptive” forms of humor (i.e., aggressive and self-deprecating humor). As there seem to be similarities among the various humor types, it is suggested that the difference between benevolent and hostile uses of humor be seen as a one of “degree, rather than dichotomy” (Martin, 2003, 53). For instance, self-deprecating humor could be viewed as an element of affiliative humor because one’s ability to make fun of oneself may result in the perception of being non-threatening to the group. Affiliative humor may use ridicule of the out-group in order to enhance cohesion of the in-group (Martin, 2003). Also, with self-enhancing humor, individuals may find amusement in thinking about or watching others fail. Interestingly, Martin (2003) separates aggressive humor from these more mild forms of humor by viewing aggressive humor as a type that can be damaging to important relationships.

Given the distinctions between these two “maladaptive” types, as well as the discussed overlap in humor types, it may be a mistake to group types of humor in terms of their adaptive qualities. There may be another factor that better delineates the types of
humor. Perhaps, the intention, rather than the result, of the humor is more important. Kuiper et al. (2004) suggests those who use aggressive humor are not necessarily concerned with pleasing others. However, this does not necessarily mean they are explicitly intending to harm the target. The intent of this type of humor has not been explicitly examined in other research. It may be that those who use this humor lack concern or empathy for the target, or, perhaps, they do not believe their target views the humor as hostile. As such, the title of “aggressive humor” would not be appropriate. Greater understanding of the intent and context of aggressive humor is needed to accurately understand its role in social interactions.

**Aggressive Humor**

Aggressive humor refers to the sarcastic and hostile uses of humor in which the self is enhanced by denigrating, deprecating, excessively teasing or ridiculing others (Martin et al., 2003). It does not refer to mere friendly joking, which tend to enhance cohesiveness in a group. Aggressive humor, instead, focuses on humor that is meant to “belittle others, albeit often under the guise of playful fun” (Martin et al., 2003). It is assumed that those who use aggressive humor likely use it as a tactic it to hurt or alienate others in a manipulative fashion. Some have proposed that aggression, behavior that is hurtful and has intent to harm (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), underlies the enjoyment of aggressive humor. For instance, one study found that the enjoyment of sexist humor was positively correlated with measures of sexual aggression (Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998). Those who use aggressive humor are perceived as lacking concern and respect for others because they use course and vulgar language as well as sarcastic and mean spirited techniques when making fun of others (Kuiper et al., 2004). An alternative explanation is
that aggressive humor is the result of a compulsion. As such, one finds it difficult to resist saying humorous things despite their potentially harmful effects (Martin et al., 2003). Regardless of the cause of the aggressive humor, research suggests that it serves as a divisive function and creates hostility toward the target, particularly if the target is a group (Ford & Ferguson, 2004). As such, the intent of the perpetrator, as well as the identity of the target, needs to be taken into consideration.

Just as there are many explanations for aggressive humor, there are many names for aggressive humor; each highlights a different aspect of aggressive humor. Ferguson and Ford (2008) studied aggressive humor under the name of disparagement humor, which involves humorous ridicule of another individual or social group. Using this definition to focus on the denigration of social group, Ferguson and Ford developed a model to explain the use of disparagement humor. According to Ferguson and Ford (2008), when there is an identity threat, an individual may respond to the threat with an expression of ridicule. If this disparaging humor results in positive distinctiveness of the individual or in-group, then those involved will experience amusement. Ferguson and Ford suggest that, ultimately, enjoyment of aggressive humor is mediated by self-enhancement through social comparison, rather than a vindictive or aggressive motivation. Ferguson and Ford (2008) explained the enjoyment of disparagement humor using multiple theories. For instance, they argued that downward social comparison was the driving force of the humor enjoyment and that it increased self-esteem. Affiliation might also be a reason to engage in this type of humor, because a person would experience an increase in self-esteem, if a group with which they are not affiliated were being ridiculed. Wolf et al. (1934) found partial support for people being more amused
when viewing the ridicule of the out-group. Ferguson and Ford (2008) also speculated that individuals engage in aggressive humor as a way of restoring positive distinctiveness, which is in line with social identity theory.

Given this framework that aggressive humor shows a drive for positive distinctiveness through social comparison, the prejudiced norm theory (Ford & Ferguson, 2004) argues that this type of humor could increase tolerance of discrimination against a target group. Ford and Ferguson’s prejudiced norm theory argues that engaging in humorous conversation creates levity and a non-serious mood. Because of this mood change, the communicators become implicitly aware that they should not be critical of any discrimination of the target. This newly formed norm in the conversation then allows for more internal tolerance of discrimination against the target (Ford & Ferguson, 2004). Reinforcing the prejudice at an individual level, as occurs in this situation, the cultural and societal prejudice is then maintained (Ford & Ferguson, 2004).

It is important to note that these researchers have developed a theory based on targeting an out-group, through such humor as sexist or racist humor. Indeed, aggressive humor has been suggested as tactic for establishing dominance, and it has been positively related to the endorsement of group dominance or hierarchy (social dominance orientation) (Hodson, MacInnis & Rush, 2010). However, the prejudiced norm theory does not explain what occurs when the target is an individual. This theory then represents a specific target (a group) and the findings may or not be able to be generalizable to other targets, such as individuals, especially those within an in-group (i.e., friends). It could be, in a dyad context, a norm of levity is still established. As mentioned before, aggressive humor was shown to be significantly negatively correlated with seriousness. However, in
a friend context, the element of prejudiced is removed due to the lack of an out-group. Therefore, the communicators remain internally tolerant of the “discrimination,” which is now occurring between friends within a non-serious context. This norm of non-seriousness or levity may be a characteristic that can result in the perception of aggression in some contexts (out-group) but not others (in-group).

In addition to the in-group/out-group context, researchers should also study how the use of aggressive humor varies by gender. It is generally accepted that males use aggressive humor more frequently than females (Martin et al., 2003); however, males have also been shown to use humor overall more often than females (Martin et al., 2003). Males especially indicate higher social uses for humor, particularly their reported ability to ease tense situations by making a humorous comment (Thorson et al., 1997). Additionally, aggressive humor has been shown to have more of a negative affect on women. For instance, Berkowtiz (1970) exposed female participants to aggressive humor or non-aggressive humor and consequently had them rate supposed job applicants. The participants exposed to aggressive humor rated the applicants more harshly than the participants in the control condition. The women’s negative reaction to aggressive humor may also related to the fact that, in general, women perceive more stress than males (Nezlek & Derks, 2001; Thorson et al., 1997) and a higher state of arousal due to stress may have implications on humor appreciation. Perhaps, it is more difficult for women to reach a norm of levity or change to a non-seriousness mood when they are aroused due to stress. Another theory might be that the norm of levity or non-seriousness is more expansive for men than women, and, as such, women may never take certain topics in a
non-serious fashion. Enjoyment of aggressive humor would then be contingent upon by
the ability to establish levity, which may vary by gender.

**Aggressive humor and control.**

Given that aggressive humor has been explained as a way to assert dominance and
maintain a social position (Ferguson & Ford, 2008), it has been studied within the context
of control. Weinstein et al. (2011), for example, primed participants’ motivation for
control or autonomy with a word scramble task. Autonomy words included such items as
*choiceful* and *opportunity* while the control motivation condition had words such as *must*
and *should*. Participants then watched comedic videos that were hostile (i.e., involved
injury or ridicule) or non-hostile (i.e., an individual depicting a humorous expression or
behavior). Results showed that those in the control motivation prime condition found the
hostile clips more humorous (Weinstein et al., 2011). These findings echo previous
research that showed control priming resulted in a greater sensitivity to threat, resulting in
lower self-regulation, which can lead to hostility (Weinstein & Hodgins, 2009).

Autonomy priming was shown to be associated with increased interpersonal self-
regulation, such that those primed with autonomy were less defensive and less hostile
when interacting in a dyad context (Weinstein & Hodgins, 2009). Moreover, the
motivation priming was moderated by the initial hostility levels of the participants;
participants who were hostile at the start of the study and then primed with control
motivation displayed increased hostility in implicit measures and found hostile humor
clips more enjoyable (Weinstein et al., 2011). These studies suggest that control and
autonomy may play a moderating role in regard to aggressive or hostile humor. Given that priming participants with autonomy or control alters self-regulation, it is likely that state levels of autonomy or control during an interaction will moderate enjoyment or participation in aggressive humor. Those who are high on autonomy may be more open and less defensive, and thus less likely to engage in aggressive humor, as compared to those who are low on autonomy. Instead, those who are low on autonomy (high on control) may be more likely to experience threat in a given situation, and therefore more likely to respond with aggressive humor, consistent with Ford and Ferguson’s (2004) theory.

In addition to being able to control one’s self, one’s interest in controlling others should also be considered. Specifically, one’s interest in dominating others or other groups would have implications on his or her behavior toward an outgroup or non-friend. Social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) refers to the desire that one’s in-group dominate or be of higher status to out-groups. SDO is indicative of one’s approach to intergroup relations, specifically whether equality or hierarchy of groups is preferred (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Thus, if hierarchy is preferred, one may be more likely to engage in aggressive humor if it is perceived that the ingroup status is being threatened, as Ford & Ferguson (2004) suggest.

As mentioned before, SDO was shown to be positively related to aggressive humor use (Hodson, MacInnis & Rush, 2010). However, as a caveat to Ford and Ferguson’s (2004) prejudiced norm theory, if SDO is low, one would be unlikely to engage in aggressive humor as a response to threat, because more equality between groups is desired, and
therefore strategies to sustain dominance of the outgroup or maintain superiority would be unnecessary.

Currently, a defined relationship between control and aggressive humor has not been established in a dyad context. Individuals with a control motivation would use this type of humor to achieve certain social goals because it is, as Ford and Ferguson (2004) suggested, a more socially acceptable way to aggress or serve a divisive purpose. However, this may not be applicable to an in-group context, particularly within a close-relationship dyad, because there would be an established cohesion, along with a desire to maintain the cohesiveness, rather than create discord. Due to the fact that individuals within a friendship dyad context should lack a desire to assert dominance over a close-other, it does not seem that control would play a role in the use of aggressive humor in this context. In contrast, out-group dyad contexts may involve the motive of control when using aggressive humor, in order to maintain social status or respond to a perceived threat or insult. The relation between control and aggressive humor use may be further qualified by gender, as men appear to use this type of humor more often.

Aggressive humor and Friends

There have been few studies relating friendship with aggressive humor, especially in regard to psychological research; however, there have been some studies performed within sociology and linguistics. Holmes and Marra (2002) examined humor use in a work context and friendship context. Overall, their results showed that more humor was used in the friendship context than the work context; however, when participants used humor in the work context, it was likely to be subversive. The researchers also found that whenever subversive humor was used, the target was an established member of the
group. Specifically in the friendship context, the authors found that those at whom the most abuse was directed were also the mostly highly integrated group members (i.e., they had been in the group the longest and saw each other the most often) (Holmes & Marra, 2002). Therefore it appears that even if this kind of humor is used less often in a friendship context, it marks security, a high status within the group. One can then suppose that if friends do engage in this type of humor, there may be a lack of aggressive intent due to the closeness of the relationship and a norm of levity has clearly been established within the friendship.

Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (2006) extend this idea further, speculating that “teasing” is more likely to be heard as amiable if it occurs in a playful context where the remark is identified as non-serious. For example, using sarcastic intonation, obvious exaggeration, changes in pitch and nonverbal displays (e.g., facial expressions) would indicate a norm of levity, much like that discussed in Ford and Ferguson (2004). These ideas can then be seen as support for Ferguson and Ford’s establishment of a state of levity. Specifically, the intonation and obvious exaggeration could be cues from the perpetrator that they wish to establish a state of levity and the target should interpret the discriminatory comments without seriousness.

Cameron et al. (2010) specifically evaluated humor usage of youth within their social contexts, particularly with close friends and family members. Youth were recorded one day to allow their interactions with others to be analyzed. The films showed that adolescents used a lot of sarcasm. The researchers admitted that sarcasm can be an aggressive form of humor, but based on the films, they assessed it as a way to traverse problematic social situations and it can “even serve positive functions,” such as
increasing affiliation (Cameron et al., 2010). Extended further, if sarcasm is a hallmark of aggressive humor, this study provides initial evidence for positive consequences of aggressive humor in contexts with close others.

As mentioned before, gender should also be considered when comparing friendships and humor usage. In a review of the teasing literature (Keltner et al., 2001) it was shown repeatedly that young boys tease far more often than girls. However, when men and women are studied in regard to their teasing insults, especially in romantic relationships, there appears to be no difference in the frequency of their teasing (Campbell et al., 2008). It does appear that men are more likely to view teasing as a positive experience that reinforces affiliation and liking. However, this could again relate back to the context of humor. Perhaps women require a closer relationship context, as seen in the romantic context, in order to view the humor as non-aggressive or harmful. As mentioned before, women typically perceive more stress than males in general, and therefore it may be that a less stressful context is also required in order for women to appreciate the humor. Given that women are using teasing insults as frequently as men in close relationships, such as romantic relationships, it could be that close relationships allow women to perceive less stress and, as a result, appreciate the insulting humor. In terms of Ford and Ferguson’s (2004) model, this would indicate that it is more difficult for women than men to reach a norm of levity, and requires a very close relationship in order for this norm to be established.

**Present Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the importance of context in the perception of aggressive humor, specifically within the contexts of friendship (in-group)
and acquaintanceship (out-group). Aggressive humor is less understood than the other types of humor, and the bulk of the research conducted has been correlational, with few significant findings. Moreover, aggressive humor has been shown in some research to have possible benefits, or fewer negative consequences than previously thought, particularly in less serious, lighthearted situations. Indeed, “sarcastic” humor may be a better label in a friendship context. By examining different relationships in which humor occurs, it can be determined if context has an effect on the perception of aggressive humor. It is possible that the perception of malicious intent may vary by context such that, when used by friends, aggressive humor can play an adaptive role. In a friendship context, features often associated with aggression, such as control or dominance, would not be expected. Because the word “aggressive” implies intent to harm (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), the current study will differentiate the labels “aggressive humor” and “sarcastic humor”. Sarcastic humor will refer to “aggressive humor” that lacks malicious intent, whereas aggressive humor will be used when referring to the construct being measured by the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ), which assumes an aggressive intent. The current study manipulated the target and perpetrator of a “humorous” interaction in order to establish an in-group or out-group context and then assess the perception of aggression by a non-biased other (the participant) in order to test the following primary hypothesis: The perception of aggressive intent will vary by context, such that exposure to sarcastic humor within an in-group context, rather than out-group context, will produce more positive evaluations of the perpetrator (i.e., viewed as less rude, less hurtful).
It was expected that the primary hypothesis would further be qualified by gender of the participant, gender of those engaging in the humor exchange, social competence, humor styles, social dominance orientation and autonomy. The following secondary hypotheses were also examined:

1. A participant gender (male, female) x video perpetrator gender (male, female) x context (ingroup, outgroup) interaction was expected for evaluations of the perpetrator, such that the most favorable evaluations would come from male participants, viewing male perpetrators in an ingroup context. Additionally, it was expected that male participants would evaluate male perpetrators most favorably. A main effect for perpetrator gender was also expected, such that men using sarcastic humor will be evaluated more positively than women, across contexts.

2. A participant gender (male, female) x video perpetrator gender (male, female) x context (ingroup, outgroup) interaction was expected for perceptions of the victim, such that female participants, viewing female victims in an outgroup context will perceive the most hurt. Further, it was predicted that women being victimized in an outgroup context would be perceived as being the most hurt. A main effect for context was also expected, such that victims in the outgroup context would be perceived as being more hurt than those in the ingroup context.

3. The perceived social competence of the perpetrator was predicted to vary by in-group and out-group context, such that those exposed to sarcastic humor in an out-group context would perceive the confederate as having less social competence, as compared to those exposed to sarcastic humor in the in-group context.
4. Positive affect will increase after exposure to sarcastic humor in an ingroup context, and decrease after exposure in an outgroup context. Increase in positive affect after exposure to aggressive humor will vary further by reported use of aggressive humor, as determined by the Humor Styles Questionnaire (Martin, 2003), such that enjoyment of the out-group humor will be related to more use of aggressive humor, while enjoyment of the in-group humor will report less use of aggressive humor.

5. Evaluations of the perpetrator’s humor use will vary by context, such that perpetrators in an outgroup context will be evaluated as using more aggressive humor (HSQ), as compared to perpetrators in an ingroup context.

6. Participants’ self-report of social dominance orientation (SDO) and autonomy will be predictive of their own use of aggressive humor.

7. Participant’s self-report of SDO and autonomy will be predictive of their perceptions of the perpetrator’s aggressive humor use.
CHAPTER 2
METHOD

Participants

Undergraduate students at the midsized, Midwestern, comprehensive university were invited to participate in the study for partial course credit in an introductory psychology course. Participants completed the experimental session in groups of 10 or less, and completed all measures during a single session. In total, 91 participants (31 women and 60 men) completed the study. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 23 ($M_{age \text{ women}} = 19.2, SD = 1.1; M_{age \text{ men}} = 19.5, SD = 1.2$).

Materials

Four video recordings were developed for this study. Two videos were made with two male actors: one video for the ingroup (friend) context, one video for the outgroup (non-friend) context. Two additional videos were recorded with two female actors. In both conditions, the script was the same, containing sarcastic comments about the target (Appendix A). In the outgroup condition, the demeanor and actions of the two actors indicated that they were not friends, whereas in the ingroup condition, the demeanor of the actors indicated that they were friends (i.e., more smiling, friendlier tone). Each group session was randomly assigned to view one of these four videos. Prior to watching the
video, participants were told about the relationship between the two actors. In the ingroup condition, participants were told “these two individuals have worked together in the lab for months and are friends,” whereas the outgroup condition was told, “these two individuals have not worked together in the lab and do not know each other well.”

The Positive and Negative Affectivity Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988) is a 20-item scale designed to measure individual differences in affectivity. The scale consists of two subscales, each containing ten adjectives that assess either positive or negative affectivity, such as excited, nervous, hostile. Participants indicated how much each adjective described his or her current mood on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very slightly or not at all, 5 = extremely) (see Appendix B). Participants were told to indicate how they felt “right now,” and they completed the measure before and after viewing the video. The current study had reliable Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for both positive and negative affective scales at both time points (positive affect $\alpha = .87$ at time 1 and time 2, negative affect $\alpha = .84$ at time 1, $\alpha = .79$ at time 2).

The Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ; Martin et al., 2003) is a 32-item scale, which assesses four types of humor: affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor, and self-defeating humor (see Appendix C for scale and subscales). Each subscale contains eight items. Affiliative humor refers to humor that is used to improve upon the quality of one’s relationships ($\alpha = .63$ for participant, $\alpha = .71$ for perceptions of perpetrator). Items that exemplify affiliative humor include “I laugh and joke a lot with my closest friends.” Self-enhancing humor is a non-hostile type of humor used to enhance the self ($\alpha = .74$ for participant, $\alpha = .82$ for perpetrator). Items characteristic of self-enhancing humor include “When I am feeling depressed, I can usually cheer myself
up with humor.” Aggressive humor is humor that is used to enhance the self at the expense of others ($\alpha = .50$ for participant, $\alpha = .80$ for perpetrator). Aggressive humor items include “If someone makes a mistake, I often tease them about it.” Self-defeating humor is humor used to strengthen relationships at the expense of self ($\alpha = .68$ for participant, $\alpha = .79$ for perpetrator). The self-defeating humor portion of the scale includes items such as “I often go overboard in putting myself down when I am making jokes or trying to be funny.”

The TromsØ Social Intelligence Scale (Silvera et al., 2001) is a 21-item scale designed to assess social competence. The scale has three subscales, seven items each: social awareness, social skills and social information processing (scale and subscales in Appendix C). Sample items from the social skills subscale ($\alpha = .74$ for participant, $\alpha = .81$ for perpetrator) include “I fit in easily in social situations” and “I am good at entering new situations and meeting people for the first time.” Sample items from the social awareness subscale ($\alpha = .52$ for participant, $\alpha = .53$ for perpetrator) include “I often feel that it is difficult to understand others’ choices” and “people often surprise me with the things they do.” Sample items from the social information processing subscale ($\alpha = .74$ for participant, $\alpha = .85$ for perpetrator) include “I know how my actions will make others feel” and “I understand other peoples’ feelings.” Participants indicated the degree to which the items describe them (1 = “describes me poorly, 7 = “describes me extremely well”). Participants completed the scale a second time, in regard to the perpetrator in the video (Appendix G).

The Social Dominance Orientation scale (Pratto et al., 1994) is a 16-item scale designed to assess one’s preference for group-based discrimination (Appendix F). Each
item presents a statement with which the participant rates their agreement on a Likert scale from ‘1’ to ‘7’ (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Sample items include “some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups” and “it’s okay if some groups have more of a chance in life than others”. Sample reverse-scored items include “group equality should be our ideal” and “we would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally.” In the current sample, the scale was shown to have good internal reliability ($\alpha = .87$).

The Self-Determination Scale (Sheldon & Deci, 1996) is a 10-item scale designed to assess the degree to which people function in a self-determined fashion (Appendix E). The scale consists of ten items, containing two subscales, five items each: self-awareness and perceived choice. Each item contains two statements and the participant reports which statement feels most true, on a 5-point scale (1 = Only A feels true, 5 = Only B feels true). Sample items for perceived choice include “I always feel like I choose the things I do” and “I sometimes feel that it’s not really me choosing the things I do,” whereas sample items for self-awareness include “My emotions sometimes seem alien to me” and “My emotions always seem to belong to me.” The scale showed moderate internal reliability in the current sample ($\alpha = .73$ for perceived choice and $\alpha = .64$ for self-awareness).

A measure was created for this study to check the manipulation of the friendship and non-friendship conditions, as well as to directly measure perceptions of the perpetrators’ behavior (Appendix H). The measure consisted of four items: “how well do you think the two researchers in the video know each other,” “how strong is the relationship the two researchers in the video share,” “what was your impression of the
researcher who walked in and stood on the left in the video,” and “how do you think the researcher sitting on the right in the video felt after their interaction?” Finally, a demographics sheet asked for participant’s sex and gender (Appendix J).

**Procedure**

During a single session, participants completed an initial packet of questionnaires about themselves, viewed a video recording of a scripted humorous exchange, then completed a second packet of questionnaires about those in the video, and finally completed a demographics sheet. The first packet of questionnaires assessed affect (PANAS), humor style (HSQ), social competence (Tromsø), social dominance orientation (SDO) and autonomy (SDS). Next, the participants were given an introduction to the video (determined by condition) and then watched the video. The second packet of questionnaires was completed after the video, and assessed the participant’s affect (PANAS), his or her perceptions of the perpetrator’s humor style (HSQ), the perpetrator’s social competence (Tromsø), and perceptions of the relationship between the target and perpetrator. The session ended after participants completed the demographics sheet and were debriefed.
A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to check the manipulation of ingroup (friend) and outgroup (non-friend) context. A relationship quality variable was created to assess the participant’s perceptions of the relationship between the two people in the video. Relationship quality was defined as the composite score of two questions: How well do you think the two in the video knew each other and how strong is the relationship that the two people in the video share? A significant difference occurred between conditions, $F(1, 83) = 28.26, p < .0001$, such that those in the ingroup condition ($M = 6.54$) perceived a stronger relationship quality between those in the video, as compared to those in the outgroup condition ($M = 4.34$). Given the extent to which gender differences are discussed in the aggressive humor literature, we also assessed whether participant gender or gender of the actors in the video had influence on the perception of (non)friendship. Neither participant gender ($F(1, 83) = .20, p = .65$) or gender of the actors ($F(1, 83) = .59, p = .44$) had a significant effect on perception of friendship. Thus, participants perceived different relationships based on aspects of the social exchange.

It was hypothesized that exposure to sarcastic humor in an ingroup (friendship) context, rather than an outgroup (non-friendship) context, would result in more negative
opinions (i.e., rudeness) of the perpetrator. This effect was expected to be further qualified by the participant’s gender, such that women, as compared to men, would evaluate the perpetrator more negatively (i.e., more rude). It was also predicted that the gender of the individuals in the video would have an impact on the perceptions of the perpetrator, such that women perpetrators would be perceived as more rude, as compared to male perpetrators. Therefore, a 2 (ingroup, outgroup) x 2 (male participant, female participant) x 2 (male video, female video) ANOVA was conducted, with the expectation that male perpetrators of sarcastic humor would have the least negative evaluations from male participants. Results showed no significant effects the three-way interaction, $F(1, 91) = .19, p < .66$, or any other interaction. However, a significant main effect for condition appeared $F(1, 91) = 16.14, p < .0001$, such that those in the outgroup condition reported that the perpetrator was more rude ($M = 4.57$), than those in the ingroup condition ($M = 3.51$). These results suggest that sarcastic humor in a friendship context is perceived as less rude than in a non-friendship context. A significant main effect was also shown for gender of actors in the video, $F(1, 91) = 6.08, p = .016$, such that the video with females actors was viewed as more rude ($M = 4.37$) than the video with males ($M = 3.72$). There was no main effect for participant gender ($F(1, 91) = .67, p = .41$). Taken together, these results suggest that women who engage in sarcastic humor, regardless of context, are perceived as more rude than men who engage in the same humor and men and women do not differ in their perceptions of this rudeness from sarcastic humor.

Similarly, it was proposed that exposure to sarcastic humor in an ingroup context would result in the perception that the victim felt less hurt by the humor. A 2 (ingroup, outgroup) x 2 (male participant, female participant) x 2 (male video, female video)
ANOVA was conducted to test the hypothesis that male participants evaluating male actors in an ingroup context would perceive the lowest level hurt feelings in the victim and female participants evaluating female actors in an outgroup context would perceive the highest level of hurt feelings. Main effects for participant gender and video gender were also examined to test the prediction that female participants would believe the victim was more hurt, and female victims would be evaluated as more hurt. Results showed no significant effects for the three-way interaction, $F(1, 91) = .03, p < .86$, or any other interaction. However, a significant main effect for condition was shown, $F(1, 83) = 4.91, p = .029$, such that the victim in a non-friend context was evaluated as being more hurt ($M = 3.54$), than the victim in an ingroup context ($M = 2.99$). No other main effects were significant. This indicates that the use of sarcastic humor is perceived as more hurtful in non-friend situations.

It was expected that positive affect would increase after exposure to sarcastic humor in an ingroup context, as compared to sarcastic humor in an outgroup context. This hypothesis was tested with a repeated-measures ANOVA. However, no effect of condition on affect was found, $F(1, 87) = .250, p = .62$. Participant gender and gender of those in the video were also included as covariates in the analysis, but neither showed any significant influence on mood $F(1, 87) = .68, p = .41$ and $F(1, 87) = .20, p = .66$, respectively.

A MANOVA was conducted to test the hypothesis that evaluations of the perpetrator’s humor usage, as determined by the Humor Styles Questionnaire, would be influenced by condition, participant gender and gender of actors. The initial MANOVA examined the four humor types (for the perpetrator) as dependent variables, and
participant gender, video gender and condition as independent variables. A significant multivariate effect was found for the four humor types in relation to condition, $F(4, 80) = 6.44, p < .0001$; Wilk’s $\lambda = .76$, partial $\eta^2 = .24$, and participant gender $F(4, 80) = 3.88$, $p = .006$; Wilk’s $\lambda = .84$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$ However, the main effect for gender of the actor in the video and all interactions were nonsignificant. The univariate tests for condition showed a significant effect using the Bonferroni adjustment only for affiliative humor, $F(1, 83) = 22.19, p < .0001$; partial $\eta^2 = .21$, and self-enhancing humor $F(1, 83) = 13.16, p < .0001$; partial $\eta^2 = .14$. The condition main effect was such that those in the ingroup condition reported the perpetrator used more affiliative humor ($M = 42.17$) and self-enhancing humor ($M = 35.04$) than those in the outgroup condition ($M = 32.86, 28.22$, respectively). The univariate tests for participant gender showed a significant effect after the Bonferroni adjustment on affiliative humor $F(1, 83) = 9.05, p = .003; \text{partial } \eta^2 = .10$, and aggressive humor, $F(1, 83) = .6.94, p = .01; \text{partial } \eta^2 = .03$. Women, as compared to men, reported that the perpetrator used more affiliative humor ($M = 40.49, 34.54$, respectively) and aggressive humor ($M = 46.94, 41.94$, respectively). Overall, the MANOVA results suggest that the sarcastic exchange in a friendship context was seen as containing more affiliative and self-enhancing humor than the non-friend context. Additionally, regardless of the context, men and women perceive humor differently; particularly women are more sensitive to the use of affiliative and aggressive humor.

A hierarchical multiple regression was used to test the relative influence of the participant’s social dominance (SDO) and autonomy (SDS-awareness and SDS-choice subscales) on their perceptions of the perpetrator’s aggressive humor usage. The aggressive humor subscale of the HSQ was used as the dependent variable. Variables that
explain the perpetrator’s humor usage were entered in two steps. Due to the collinearity of the humor styles (see Table 1), in step one evaluations of the perpetrator’s affiliative, self-defeating and self-enhancing humors were the independent variables, entered as a block in order to control for the other humor types. In step two the SDO, SDS-awareness, and SDS-choice were the independent variables. The results of step one indicated that the variance accounted for by the first three independent variables (affiliative, self-defeating, and self-enhancing humor use of the perpetrator) equaled 9.5%, which was significant, $F(3, 89) = 3.10, p = .03$. The results of step two accounted for addition variance of 4.5%, and this change in variance was significant, $F(4, 87) = 4.58, p = .03$. Social dominance was a significant predictor of perceptions of the perpetrator’s aggressive humor, $\beta = -.22, p = .03$; both SDS-awareness and SDS-choice were not significant, ($\beta = .13, p = .20$ and $\beta = .03, p = .78$, respectively). So, after controlling for the other humor styles, the influence of one’s own social dominance orientation had an effect on the perceptions of others’ humor use.

Table 1

*Correlations of the Perpetrator’s Humor Styles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Aggressive Humor</th>
<th>Affiliative Humor</th>
<th>Self-enhancing Humor</th>
<th>Self-defeating Humor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive Humor</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliative Humor</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-enhancing Humor</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.69**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-defeating Humor</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$
A hierarchical multiple regression was used to test the relative influence of the participant’s social dominance (SDO) and autonomy (SDS-awareness and SDS-choice subscales) on their own aggressive humor. Again, the SDO, SDS and the HSQ were used to assess social dominance, autonomy (SDS-awareness and SDS-choice) and humor usage, respectively. The aggressive humor subscale of the HSQ was used as the dependent variable. Variables to explain one’s own use of aggressive humor were entered in two steps. Due to the collinearity of the humor styles (see Table 2), in step one, self-report of affiliative, self-defeating and self-enhancing humors were entered in a block as independent variables. In step two, self-report of SDO, SDS-awareness and SDS-choice were the independent variables. The overall model accounted for 22.1% of the variance of aggressive humor usage. The results of step one indicated that the variance accounted for by the first three independent variables (self-report of affiliative, self-defeating and self-enhancing humor) was 7.2%, which was not significant, $F (1=3, 87) = 2.29, p = .08$. One’s social dominance accounted for an additional variance of 9.8%, which was significant, $F (4, 88) = 10.37, p = .002$. SDS-choice accounted for an additional 5.2% of the variance, which was significant, $F (5, 87) = 5.77, p = .018$. SDS-awareness did not significantly account for variance in one’s own aggressive humor use, and was dropped from the model ($\beta = .03, p = .79$). These analyses suggest that one’s own social dominance orientation and perceived choice were predictive of one’s use of aggressive humor.
Table 2

Correlations of the Participant’s Humor Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Aggressive Humor</th>
<th>Affiliative Humor</th>
<th>Self-enhancing Humor</th>
<th>Self-defeating Humor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive Humor</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliative Humor</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-enhancing Humor</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-defeating Humor</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = p < .05; ** = p < .01

It was hypothesized that the participant’s reports of the perpetrator’s social intelligence would be influenced by condition, participant gender and gender of actors. A MANOVA was conducted using the three factors of the Tromso as dependent variables, and condition, participant gender, and gender of actors as independent variables. It showed a significant multivariate effect condition on social intelligence factors, $F(3, 81) = 6.96, p < .0001$; Wilk’s $\lambda = .79$, partial $\eta^2 = .20$. The univariate tests for condition on social intelligence were significant after the Bonferroni adjustment for social skills, $F(1, 83) = 20.61, p < .0001$; partial $\eta^2 = .20$ and social awareness, $F(1, 83) = 8.15, p = .005$; partial $\eta^2 = .09$. Social skills and social awareness varied by condition such that those in the ingroup condition reported the perpetrator as being more socially skilled ($M = 28.40$) and more socially aware ($M = 28.03$) than the perpetrator in the outgroup condition ($M = 22.25, 22.97$, respectively). Participant gender and gender of the actors were not significant, nor were their interactions, suggesting that women and men do not differ in
how they perceive others’ social skills, nor are men and women perceived to have varying social skills due to their use of sarcastic humor. Instead, the use of sarcastic humor in an ingroup context is more indicative of social intelligence than the use of sarcastic humor in an outgroup context.

It was hypothesized that the participants’ perception of malicious humor of the perpetrator (as assessed by the Indirect Aggression Scale) would also be effected by condition, participant gender and video gender. However, no interactions emerged. Instead, there was a main effect for participant gender, $F(1, 82) = 9.52, p = .003$, such that female participants rated the perpetrator using more malicious humor ($M = 35.69$) than male participants ($M = 29.59$). These results echo the results for the aggressive and affiliative humor styles.

**Additional analyses.**

Because gender differences in the perception and use of aggressive humor were predicted, several additional correlations were also generated, in an effort to better understand the results. First, men’s self-report of aggressive humor was moderately and significantly correlated with their use of affiliative humor, $r = .32, p = .012$, whereas women’s use of aggressive humor was negatively correlated with their use of affiliative humor, $r = - .23, p = .20$, though not significantly. These two correlations are significantly different though, $Z = -2.45, p = .014$. Correlations between humor types for women’s own use were not significant, suggesting that they may differentiate humor types more than men. In general, men’s own use of aggressive humor and affiliative humor is positively correlated, whereas women who use one type of humor (affiliative or aggressive) are less likely to use the other.
Women in the friendship condition who were exposed to sarcastic humor evaluated the perpetrator’s humor use such that aggressive humor and affiliative humor were strongly significantly correlated, even after controlling for impressions of rudeness, \( r = .82, p = .0001 \), whereas women in the non-friendship condition perceived a small inverse relation between affiliative and aggressive humor, \( r = -.13, p = .69 \). These correlations were significantly different from each other, \( Z = 3.54, p < .0004 \). For men, perception of the perpetrator’s humor use in both the ingroup and outgroup condition showed a moderately significant correlation between affiliative and aggressive humor, \( r = .38, p = .04 \), and \( r = .35, p = .06 \), respectively. These two correlations were not different from each other, \( Z = .13 \). These correlations indicate that in the ingroup context, women saw aggressive humor as being strongly related to affiliative humor, whereas men reported a weaker relation between the two humor styles. Additionally, men and women differed on their evaluations of sarcastic humor in a non-friend context: men’s perception of affiliative and aggressive humor were related, whereas for women they were not.
CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION

The current study examined the role of relationship context in understanding aggressive, or sarcastic, humor specifically within the context of friendship (ingroup) and non-friendship (outgroup) interactions. It was expected that perpetrators in a friendship context would be more positively evaluated than perpetrators in a non-friendship context, specifically in regard to rudeness and social intelligence. The results of this study suggest that context of the humor exchange does play an important role in how the humor is perceived. Within a friendship context, perpetrators of sarcastic humor were viewed as less rude, as compared to those in non-friendship context. Moreover, targets of sarcastic humor within a friendship context were perceived as being less hurt in response to the humor. These findings are consistent with previous studies examining humor within a friendship context (Holmes & Marra, 2002; Cameron et al., 2010) that suggested sarcasm is commonly used in friendships and can even have positive outcomes. One such positive outcome could be that those who can successfully engage in sarcastic exchanges are seen as being more socially skilled, as the current study suggests. Here, perpetrators of sarcastic humor within a friendship context were seen as having more social skills and being more socially aware than perpetrators in an outgroup context. Thus, one’s ability to
use sarcasm among friends may influence others’ global assessments of one’s social abilities.

It was expected that context would have an effect on the perceptions of the perpetrator’s aggressive humor use, such that perpetrators in a friendship setting would be seen as using less aggressive humor, as defined by the HSQ. However, our findings do not support this prediction. Instead, evaluations of perpetrator aggressive humor use did not differ from friendship to non-friendship context. The overlapping or blurring of humor styles could partially explain this lack of a finding. As discussed earlier, aggressive humor can be used to increase affiliation (Martin, 2003). Another explanation could be that the videos all used the same script. Because the scripts did not vary, it may be that the evaluation of aggression was based only on literal content rather than context or intent. The intent of the humor, much the like assessment of one’s character, is determined by more than just words. This could explain why perceptions of “rudeness,” a more global evaluation of character, differed between friend and non-friend situations.

These inconsistent findings suggest that determining the intent of the perpetrator requires more direct questioning. The Humor Styles Questionnaire may be reliable for the words in the exchange, but not the intent of the words being used, which is necessary in order to call the humor “aggressive”. In the future, explicit questioning about the intent may be necessary, such as “do you think she or he was trying to be funny” and “do you think she or he was trying to be mean?”

Context did appear to affect another humor type, affiliative humor, though this effect was unexpected. In the present study, perpetrators of sarcastic humor in an ingroup context were perceived as using more affiliative humor. This finding suggests that
sarcastic humor in a friendship context may appear to spectators as a sign of a bond or affiliation. Again, this supports Holmes and Marra’s (2004) findings that the use of sarcastic humor is likely to take place in an established relationship. Participants could perceive more affiliative humor, because the actors were clearly identified as friends. Certainly, the context seems to alter the witness’s understanding of the humor exchange, such that friendship allows for the understanding that perpetrator may also be engaging in more friendly or less aggressive humor.

The current study also looked at gender differences in the perceptions of sarcastic exchanges. Interestingly, men and women spectators viewed the rudeness of sarcastic exchanges similarly. This appears to be in contradiction to research that has found that women respond more negatively to aggressive humor (Berkowitz, 1970), and specifically, when women are the targets of the humor (sexist humor) they evaluate the humor as less enjoyable, acceptable, and more offensive than men (Ryan and Kanjorksi, 1998). However, under circumstances in the current study, where women were third-party spectators, they did not view the harmfulness of sarcastic humor differently from men. Thus, although men use more aggressive humor than women (Martin, 2003), one cannot assume that it is because women find it to be more rude or offensive than do men. The findings presented here suggest that gender difference in aggressive humor use is not due to differences in the perception of the harmfulness or negative responses to such humor.

While men and women did not differ in their evaluation of how rude the perpetrator was, they did differ in their evaluations of types of humor used. When evaluating the perpetrator’s humor use, women saw more affiliative and aggressive
humor, regardless of context. These results suggest that even though men and women found the perpetrators to be similarly rude, women detected more humor usage. Thus, it may be that women are more sensitive to humor, but not as negatively affected as previously thought. In fact, some research has offered a theoretical basis for women discerning humor and men engaging in humor. Wilbur and Campbell (2011), for instance, suggest that men engage in humor in order to project other internal qualities that they possess, such as intelligence and creativity. Women, on the other hand, engage in less humor, but evaluate the men’s humor (Wilbur & Campbell, 2011). Indeed, Wilbur and Campbell (2011) offer a more evolutionary theory, explaining that women, as the sex who potentially invests more in a relationship, must judge the male’s humor in order to determine if they are a “fit” mate. While this explanation implies a sexual component to this trait, which would (potentially) not be required when evaluating same-sex perpetrators of sarcastic humor, it does offer an explanation as to why women distinguished humor styles more than men.

The current results also suggest that gender of the perpetrator influences how the sarcastic exchange is perceived. Women who engaged in sarcasm were viewed as more rude than men who engaged in the same sarcastic dialogue. As such, the results suggest that both men and women viewed sarcastic women more negatively than sarcastic men. Whereas some previous research has shown that men use aggressive humor more often than women (Martin et al., 2003), others suggest that women and men use similar levels of teasing in relationships (Campbell et al., 2008). However, neither studies comment on the acceptability of the humor, with the exception that Campbell et al (2008) discuss aggressive humor use during conflict as resulting in more distress. The current study
shows that sarcastic humor appears to be more acceptable to those witnessing an exchange between men, rather than women. It may be that that men use aggressive humor more often because women, aware of the potential for negative evaluations, limit their use of sarcastic humor. Given Wilbur and Campbell’s (2011) explanation that women are often evaluating humorous exchanges, they are likely more aware that the humor can be potentially harmful, or at least undesirable. As a result, it may be atypical for women, as compared to men, to use aggressive humor outside of an ingroup exchange. If that is the case, then viewing a woman using sarcastic humor with someone they do not know, as in the videos, may be perceived as more rude. Future research should continue to explore the difference between humor usage with a close other, as compared to an unknown other.

It was expected that positive affect would increase after viewing a sarcastic exchange between friends, but decrease after viewing the same exchange between non-friends. However, this was not the case. Typically, the benign humor styles (affiliative and self-enhancing) are associated with more positive affect, therefore sarcastic humor in an ingroup context was expected to have the same result (Martin, 2003). Perhaps the sarcastic exchange the participants witnessed was too mundane, and was not humorous enough to change mood. Also, because participants were not directly involved in the exchange, but were watching a recording, they may have been less affected by the humor. Mood may be more susceptible to change when the participant is involved in the humor.

It was also expected that one’s social dominance orientation (SDO) and autonomy would have an influence on the perceptions of the humorous exchange. Previous research showed a positive correlation between social dominance orientation and one’s own use of
aggressive humor (Hodson MacInnis & Rush, 2010), as well as an inverse relation between autonomy (low control) and the enjoyment of aggressive humor (Weinstein et al., 2011); however, these constructs had not been examined to determine whether they influence perceptions of others’ humor use. In the current study, only one’s own social dominance orientation was shown to be predictive of perceptions of others’ aggressive humor. Because the study did not require the participants to engage in the social exchange themselves, it could have diminished the relationship between one’s own autonomy and the perceptions of the scene watched. Indeed, when the relation between personal social dominance orientation, autonomy and personal humor styles was explored, both social dominance orientation and autonomy were predictive of self-reported aggressive humor use. Thus, it appears that one’s proclivity to maintain group-discrimination is associated with perceiving and using more aggressive humor, which supports previous findings in the literature (Hodson, MacInnis & Rush, 2010; Weinstein et al., 2011). The contribution of the current work shows one’s autonomy is only associated with personal humor use, rather than the perceptions of others’ humor use.

**Limitations**

One limitation to this study is the sample. While 93 participants were obtained, there were fewer women than men in the study, which may have contributed to the lack of gender differences in the current study. It could be that women and men do not differ in evaluations of sarcastic humor when context is added, or it could be that we did not have enough power to show the gender differences. With additional power, the predicted interactions between participant gender, perpetrator gender and context could emerge. Future studies should explore the interactions between victim, perpetrator and context. It
is clear that context of the relationship does influence perceptions of the exchange, but it is less clear when gender has an influence.

Due to using a scripted recording, there is also some concern about the believability of the videos. Even though participants recognized differences between the two relationship contexts, anecdotal information suggests that participants were aware or suspected that the video was a staged interaction. A few participants indicated after the debriefing that they did not believe the exchange was real. A lack of believability, may have contributed to a lack of change in mood. Additionally, the recordings varied in tone for the different conditions – the ingroup condition appeared more friendly, with the actors smiling and using exaggerated tone, whereas the out-group video was less amiable, with nonverbal cues such as eye-rolling and arm crossing. As discussed by Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (2006), nonverbal cues and tone are some of the many ways to signal that a statement is meant as a joke. Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (2006) suggest that changes in pitch and nonverbal displays, such as smiling and hand gestures, can establish a norm of levity or non-seriousness. As such, future studies should also control for these nonverbal cues that may contribute to the perception of friendliness.

An additional limitation of the current study is the low Cronbach’s alpha (.50) for the aggressive humor scale of the HSQ. Interestingly, the Cronbach’s alpha was higher when participants were reporting on perceptions of the perpetrator. It could be that there was low internal reliability due to a lack of context within the items (i.e., who the target of the humor was). As discussed earlier, this measure may be very useful for studying the words people use, but without context, it is difficult to determine if it is measuring an aggressive construct or a humor construct. Participants may be confused about what is
being asked of them. For instance, the item “if someone makes a mistake, I will often 
tease them about it” may be answered in reference to a friend or a complete stranger. 
Additionally, the item “when telling jokes or saying funny things, I am usually not very 
concerned about how people are taking it” could be read two ways: “I know my friends 
know I am joking” or “I do not care if I offend people.” Essentially, the items on the 
aggressive humor scale lend themselves to multiple interpretations, some of which are 
aggressive, while others are not. These multiple interpretations could then be contributing 
to the variance within each item of the aggressive humor scale.

The implication of this study is that humor, like most phenomena, cannot be 
studied in a vacuum. Instead, relationship context needs to be considered, especially 
when examining humor that has a specific target. The target should be identified, in 
regard to the perpetrator, as a close other or not, as it has implications on how rude the 
perpetrator is perceived by others. The current study showed that third-party witnesses 
viewed sarcastic humor as less harmful to the victim in an ingroup context. However, 
research should examine whether the target actually feels less hurt when a friend versus 
non-friend targets them. Witnessing the humor, as compared to being the target or the 
perpetrator, may have very different implications. As discussed before, when women are 
the targets, they respond more negatively to the humor, and this may also be the case for 
men. Thus future research needs to vary the target, while still maintaining their 
involvement in the humor.

While we found gender differences, such as women being perceived as more rude 
when they engage in sarcastic humor, it would be interesting to see if this would vary by 
the gender of the target. Mixed-gender interactions are not uncommon, and should be
explored, especially in the context of developing romantic relationships and friendships. For instance, if women are initially gauging and evaluating initial humor exchanges to determine the quality of a potential mate or friend (Wilbur & Campbell, 2011), they may change their humor use if the potential mate is deemed acceptable. Over the course of a relationship, women’s humor use likely evolves as they shed their role of “evaluator” and become a participant in the humor. Future research should explore the change in humor use over time, multiple relationship contexts, including same-gender and mixed-gender friendships and romantic relationships.

Overall, future studies should systematically examine the roles of context, gender and nonverbal cues in order to disentangle the influences of sarcastic humor. The present study highlights the need to investigate what it means to use “aggressive” humor. These context-specific factors influence whether or not the humor is viewed as hurtful by non-biased others. Researchers should be careful when using the label “aggressive” unless the intent of the humor is appropriately measured. Otherwise, even though the words may appear aggressive on paper, they may simply be two friends using humor they consider to be good-natured.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

VIDEO SCRIPT

Confederate: Hey.

Experimenter: Hey!

Confederate: Have you heard anything about the lab space?

Experimenter: No, I haven’t.

Confederate: Ugh, you’re killing me. I thought you were the brains of this project.

Experimenter: Yes, clearly it’s my fault that someone has the log book.

Confederate: Of course, it’s someone else’s fault.

Experimenter: Oh, you know what I mean.

Confederate: I do. Is there anything else I should do, since that seems to be going so well?

Experimenter: I’ll just let you know once I hear something. I’ll send out an email to everyone with instructions on the sign outs.

Confederate: Sure, because I couldn’t figure that out on my own.

Experimenter: Oh, come on.

Confederate: Just kidding, I’ll see you later or do I need instructions for that, too.
APPENDIX B

THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE AFFECTIVITY SCHEDULE (PANAS)

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then mark the appropriate answer in the space next to that word. Indicate to what extent you feel this way right now, that is, at the present moment. Use the following scale to record your answers.

1 = Very Slightly or Not at All  2 = A Little  3 = Moderately  4 = Quite a Bit  5 = Extremely

_____ 1. Interested  _____ 11. Irritable
_____ 2. Distressed  _____ 12. Alert
_____ 3. Excited  _____ 13. Ashamed
_____ 5. Strong  _____ 15. Nervous
_____ 7. Scared  _____ 17. Attentive
_____ 9. Enthusiastic  _____ 19. Active
APPENDIX C
THE HUMOR STYLES QUESTIONNAIRE

Below is a list of statements describing different reactions people have in every day context. Please read each statement carefully, and indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with it. Please respond as honestly and objectively as you can. Use the following scale:

1 = Totally Disagree    2 = Moderately Disagree    3 = Slightly Disagree
4 = Neither Agree nor Disagree     5 = Slightly Agree     6 = Moderately Agree
7 = Totally Agree

1. I usually don’t laugh or joke around much with other people.
2. If I am feeling depressed, I can usually cheer myself up with humor.
3. If someone makes a mistake, I will often tease them about it.
4. I let people laugh at me or make fun at my expense more than I should.
5. I don’t have to work very hard at making other people laugh—I seem to be a naturally humorous person.
6. Even when I’m by myself, I’m often amused by the absurdities of life.
7. People are never offended or hurt by my sense of humor.
8. I will often get carried away in putting myself down if it makes my family or friends laugh.
9. I rarely make other people laugh by telling funny stories about myself.

10. If I am feeling upset or unhappy I usually try to think of something funny about the situation to make myself feel better.

11. When telling jokes or saying funny things, I am usually not very concerned about how other people are taking it.

12. I often try to make people like or accept me more by saying something funny about my own weaknesses, blunders, or faults.

13. I laugh and joke a lot with my closest friends.

14. My humorous outlook on life keeps me from getting overly upset or depressed about things.

15. I do not like it when people use humor as a way of criticizing or putting someone down.

16. I don’t often say funny things to put myself down.

17. I usually don’t like to tell jokes or amuse people.

18. If I’m by myself and I’m feeling unhappy, I make an effort to think of something funny to cheer myself up.

19. Sometimes I think of something that is so funny that I can’t stop myself from saying it, even if it is not appropriate for the situation.

20. I often go overboard in putting myself down when I am making jokes or trying to be funny.

21. I enjoy making people laugh.

22. If I am feeling sad or upset, I usually lose my sense of humor.

23. I never participate in laughing at others even if all my friends are doing it.
24. When I am with friends or family, I often seem to be the one that other people make fun of or joke about.

25. I don't often joke around with my friends.

26. It is my experience that thinking about some amusing aspect of a situation is often a very effective way of coping with problems.

27. If I don’t like someone, I often use humor or teasing to put them down.

28. If I am having problems or feeling unhappy, I often cover it up by joking around, so that even my closest friends don’t know how I really feel.

29. I usually can’t think of witty things to say when I’m with other people.

30. I don’t need to be with other people to feel amused – I can usually find things to laugh about even when I’m by myself.

31. Even if something is really funny to me, I will not laugh or joke about it if someone will be offended.

32. Letting others laugh at me is my way of keeping my friends and family in good spirits.

Note:

Affiliative humor items: 1 (reverse scored), 5, 9, 13, 17 (reverse scored), 21, 25 (reverse scored), and 29 (reverse scored).

Self-enhancing humor items: 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22 (reverse scored), 26, and 30.

Aggressive humor items: 3, 7 (reverse scored), 11, 15 (reverse scored), 19, 23 (reverse scored), 27, 31 (reverse scored).

Self-defeating humor items: 4, 8, 12, 16 (reverse scored), 20, 24, 28, 32.
APPENDIX D

THE TROMSO SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE SCALE

Using the following scale, please indicate the degree to which each of the following statements describe you.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7

Describes me extremely poorly  Describes me extremely well

___ 1. I can predict other peoples’ behavior.

___ 2. I often feel that it is difficult to understand others’ choices.

___ 3. I know how my actions will make others feel.

___ 4. I often feel uncertain around new people who I don’t know.

___ 5. People often surprise me with the things they do.

___ 6. I understand other people’s feelings.

___ 7. I fit in easily in social situations.

___ 8. Other people become angry with me without me being able to explain why.

___ 9. I understand others’ wishes.

___ 10. I am good at entering new situations and meeting people for the first time.

___ 11. It seems as though people are often angry or irritated with me when I say what I think.
12. I have a hard time getting along with other people.
13. I find people unpredictable.
14. I can often understand what others are trying to accomplish without the need for them to say anything.
15. It takes a long time for me to get to know others well.
16. I have often hurt others without realizing it.
17. I can predict how others will react to my behavior.
18. I am good at getting on good terms with new people.
19. I can often understand what others really mean through their expression, body language, etc.
20. I frequently have problems finding good conversation topics.
21. I am often surprised by others’ reactions to what I do.

Note:

Social information processing items: 1, 3, 6, 9, 14, 17, 19.

Social skills items: 4 (reverse scored), 7, 10, 12 (reverse scored), 15 (reverse scored), 20 (reverse scored).

Social awareness items: 2 (reverse scored), 5 (reverse scored), 8 (reverse scored), 11 (reverse scored), 13, 16 (reverse scored), 21 (reverse scored).
APPENDIX E

SELF-DETERMINATION SCALE

Please read the pairs of statements, one pair at a time, and think about which statement within the pair seems more true to you at this point in your life. Indicate the degree to which statement A feels true, relative to the degree that Statement B feels true, on the 5-point scale shown after each pair of statements. If statement A feels completely true and statement B feels completely untrue, the appropriate response would be 1. If the two statements are equally true, the appropriate response would be a 3. If only statement B feels true And so on.

1.  
   A. I always feel like I choose the things I do.
   B. I sometimes feel that it’s not really me choosing the things I do.
   
   Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

2.  
   A. My emotions sometimes seem alien to me.
   B. My emotions always seem to belong to me.
   
   Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

3.  
   A. I choose to do what I have to do.
   B. I do what I have to, but I don’t feel like it is really my choice.
   
   Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

4.  
   A. I feel that I am rarely myself.
   B. I feel like I am always completely myself.
   
   Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true
5.  A. I do what I do because it interests me.
    B. I do what I do because I have to.

Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

6.  A. When I accomplish something, I often feel it wasn't really me who did it.
    B. When I accomplish something, I always feel it's me who did it.

Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

7.  A. I am free to do whatever I decide to do.
    B. What I do is often not what I'd choose to do.

Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

8.  A. My body sometimes feels like a stranger to me.
    B. My body always feels like me.

Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

9.  A. I feel pretty free to do whatever I choose to.
    B. I often do things that I don't choose to do.

Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

10.  A. Sometimes I look into the mirror and see a stranger.
     B. When I look into the mirror I see myself.

Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true
APPENDIX F
SOCIAL DOMINANCE ORIENTATION

Using the following scale, please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

_____ 1. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.

_____ 2. In getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups.

_____ 3. It’s OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others.

_____ 4. To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups.

_____ 5. If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems.

_____ 6. It’s probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.

_____ 7. Inferior groups should stay in their place.

_____ 8. Sometimes other groups must be kept in their place.

_____ 9. It would be good if groups could be equal

_____ 10. Group equality should be our ideal.

_____ 11. All groups should be given equal chance in life.
12. We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups.

13. Increased social equality is beneficial.

14. We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally.

15. We should strive to make incomes as equal as possible.

16. No one group should dominate in society.
APPENDIX G

THE TROMSØ SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE SCALE – PARTICIPANT’S EVALUATION OF PERPETRATOR

Thinking of the video you just watched, we would like you to rate these statements with regard to the individual who entered the room, began the conversation, and stood on the left side of the screen. Using the following scale, please indicate the degree to which each of the following statements describe the individual on the LEFT of the screen in the video you just watched.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7

Describe them extremely poorly
Describes them extremely well

___ 1. They can predict other peoples’ behavior.

___ 2. They often feel that it is difficult to understand others’ choices.

___ 3. They know how their actions will make others feel.

___ 4. They often feel uncertain around new people who they don’t know.

___ 5. People often surprise them with the things they do.

___ 6. They understand other people’s feelings.

___ 7. They fit in easily in social situations.

___ 8. Other people become angry with them, and they can’t explain why.

___ 9. They understand others’ wishes.
10. They are good at entering new situations and meeting people for the first time.

11. It seems as though people are often angry or irritated with them when they say what I think.

12. They have a hard time getting along with other people.

13. They find people unpredictable.

14. They can often understand what others are trying to accomplish without the need for them to say anything.

15. It takes a long time for them to get to know others well.

16. They have often hurt others without realizing it.

17. They can predict how others will react to their behavior.

18. They are good at getting on good terms with new people.

19. They can often understand what others really mean through expression, body language, etc.

20. They frequently have problems finding good conversation topics.

21. They are often surprised by others’ reactions to what they do.
APPENDIX H

IMPRESSION OF THE RESEARCHERS

Based on the interaction you saw between the two researchers in the video, please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. Circle your answer.

1. How well do you think the two researchers in the video know each other?

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not at all  Very well

2. How strong is the relationship the two researchers in the video share?

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not Strong at all  Very Strong

3. On the following scale, what was your impression of the researcher who walked in and stood on the left in the video?

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not Rude at all  Very Rude

4. On the following scale, how do you think the researcher sitting on the right in the video felt after their interaction?

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not Hurt at all  Very Hurt
APPENDIX I

THE HUMOR STYLES QUESTIONNAIRE – PARTICIPANT’S EVALUATIONS OF PERPETRATOR

Below is a list of statements describing different reactions people have in every day context. Before reading each item, please reflect on the video you just watched. Please read each statement carefully, and indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with it, in regard to the individual who entered the room, began the conversation, and stood on the left side of the screen in the video you just watched. Please respond as honestly and objectively as you can. Use the following scale:

1 = Totally Disagree       2 = Moderately Disagree       3 = Slightly Disagree
4 = Neither Agree nor Disagree       5 = Slightly Agree       6 = Moderately Agree
7 = Totally Agree

___ 1. They usually don’t laugh or joke around much with other people.

___ 2. If they are feeling depressed, they can usually cheer up with humor.

___ 3. If someone makes a mistake, they will often tease that person about it.

___ 4. They let people laugh at them or make fun at their expense more than they should.

___ 5. They don’t have to work very hard at making other people laugh—they seem to be a naturally humorous person.

___ 6. Even when they are alone, they are amused by the absurdities of life.
7. People are never offended or hurt by their sense of humor.
8. They will often get carried away in putting themselves down if it makes their family or friends laugh.
9. They rarely make other people laugh by telling funny stories about their life.
10. If they are feeling upset or unhappy, they usually try to think of something funny about the situation to feel better.
11. When telling jokes or saying funny things, they usually not very concerned about how other people are taking it.
12. They often try to make people like or accept them more by saying something funny about their own weaknesses, blunders, or faults.
13. They laugh and joke a lot with their closest friends.
14. Their humorous outlook on life keeps them from getting overly upset or depressed about things.
15. They do not like it when people use humor as a way of criticizing or putting someone down.
16. They don’t often say funny things to put themself down.
17. They usually don’t like to tell jokes or amuse people.
18. If they are alone and feeling unhappy, they make an effort to think of something funny to cheer up.
19. Sometimes they think of something that is so funny that they can’t stop from saying it, even if it is not appropriate for the situation.
20. They often go overboard in putting themselves down when making jokes or trying to be funny.
21. They enjoy making people laugh.
22. If they are feeling sad or upset, they usually lose their sense of humor.
23. They never participate in laughing at others even if all their friends are doing it.
24. When they are with friends or family, they often seem to be the one that other people make fun of or joke about.
25. They don’t often joke around with their friends.
26. They believe that thinking about some amusing aspect of a situation is often a very effective way of coping with problems.
27. If they don’t like someone, they often use humor or teasing to put them down.
28. If they are having problems or feeling unhappy, they often cover it up by joking around, so that even their closest friends don’t know how they really feel.
29. They usually can’t think of witty things to say when with other people.
30. They don’t need to be with other people to feel amused – they can usually find things to laugh about even when alone.
31. Even if something is really funny to me, they will not laugh or joke about it if someone will be offended.
32. Letting others laugh at them is their way of keeping friends and family in good spirits.
APPENDIX J

DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender:
    _______Male
    _______Female

Age: ________