Expanding Perceptions of African-Americans’ Political Habits: A Study of Expectancy Violation Theory and Humor

Master’s Thesis

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By

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Abstract

This research effort uses Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) (Burgoon, 1976) to explore the influence of humorous mass media messages on viewer perceptions of African-Americans’ political affiliations and behaviors. Initiated through existing work on parasocial relationships (Cohen, 2010) and advanced through the use of Semantic-Script Theory of Humor (SSH) (Raskin, 1985) in this thesis, EVT is established as a distinct and appropriate theory suitable for the study of mass communication influence. This study investigates the effects of EVT when the source is a member of a minority group (i.e., African-Americans) who violates an expectation in relation to an assumed political ideology. In order to violate expectancies, an experimental design offers a single message that is presented by either a conservative African-American comedian or a conservative white comedian (the control). Perceptions of African-American voting habits, assumptions concerning the political affiliations of African-Americans, cognitive engagement, source evaluations, and the perceived humor of the message are examined. Participants in the African-American comedian group are posited to shift toward seeing African-Americans as more diverse in their voting habits and political identification. This same group is also expected to find the message more humorous, have more thoughts and counterarguments relative to the message, and rate the source of the message more favorably than those in the control condition. Results show that individuals find expectancy violations humorous, and sources of these messages more credible. Political ideology is also explored for its main effects on the dependent variables of interest and as a moderator of the stimulus manipulation.
Dedications

This thesis is dedicated to my loving family and friends for all of their inspiration, prayers, encouragement, and support:

My mother and father, Mary and Dean Walther; and

My grandmother and grandfather, Mickey and Tom Filicky
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

The integration of interpersonal and mass communication theory has been inadequate within the field of communication (Nabi & Oliver, 2010). Expectancy violation theory (EVT) offers an example of where possibilities exist for theory building of this kind, but which have not been realized to date. EVT has made a home within the interpersonal communication literature (Afifi, Metts, 1998; Burgoon, 1976, 1978, 1983; Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Burgoon, Stern, Dillman, 1995; Burgoon & Walther, 1990; Campo, Cameron, Brossard, Frazer, 2004; Duck, 1994; Guerrero & Bachman, 2010; McCornack and Levine, 1990), but the study of mass communication would be all the richer as a result of the inclusion of EVT within its fold. It has been shown that expectancy violations occur in mass media messages through processes such as the formation of parasocial relationships (Cohen, 2010). However, a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the full and proper expansion of EVT within mass communication is an integration that steps beyond the mere formation of personal relationships to include specific communicative acts (as detailed by EVT). For the purpose of the current study, EVT is examined relative to an expectancy violation provided by a stand-up comedian whose message focuses on the topic of politics. While this comedian may not be well known to the viewer, the nature in which the routine is presented creates a high likelihood for an expectancy violation. Therefore, this work will extend the use of EVT within the mass communication literature, beyond the rather limited, albeit important, focus on parasocial relationships. This study will focus on a specific message-source violation and the impacts of this violation on the perceptions of the political leanings of an important sub-population in American politics (i.e., African-Americans).
In addition, incongruity theories of humor, specifically the script-based semantic theory of humor (SSTH) indicates that mirth is often found when audiences are exposed to incongruities (Raskin 1985). These incongruities are conceptualized as conflicting frameworks within a given text (Attardo 1997, 2003; Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Giora, 1997; Raskin, 1985; Vaid, Hull, Heredia, Gerken, & Martinez, 2003). Like incongruities, expectancy violations are disparities between what is thought should or ought to happen, and what actually occurs or is offered within a message. Therefore, incongruities and expectancy violations may be used synonymously. According to SSTH, one way by which expectations may be violated is through the delivery of humorous messages. That is, a receiver will find a message humorous if the correct formula for incongruity is created due to examining the message in conjunction with the source.

For example, the comedian Sarah Silverman presents herself non-verbally as a sweet, young Jewish girl. However, during Silverman’s act, she often mocks bigotry by acting racist. “Silverman skips onto the stage and smiles innocently while telling vulgar jokes about AIDS, pornography, and the Holocaust” (Meyers, 2010 p. 64). Thus, the incongruity arises between the source (i.e., the sweet Jewish girl) and the message (i.e., the racist bigot). “The more innocent and oblivious her delivery, the more outrageous her commentary becomes” (Goodyear, 2005). This example demonstrates the manner in which incongruity theories of humor lay the foundation for which EVT may extend beyond parasocial relationships in the mass communication literature.

For the purpose of the current study, effects due to EVT will be studied in the context of a politically humorous message. Specifically, this study will examine various effects when the source is representative of a minority group and the comedian violates audience expectancies in terms of the messages he provides. In order to violate expectancies, an experimental design
presents a message that contains a politically conservative African-American comedian, Alfonzo Rachel, or a white conservative comedian (Jake Hanus’ portrayal of original act by Alfonzo Rachel comedian). According to SSTH, due to the incongruities (assumption of African-American as liberal Democrat, but message being offered is by someone who is a conservative Republican), audience members will perceive the Alfonzo Rachel message as humorous (more so than the control). In addition, this routine should lead to the African-American comedian being ranked higher in terms of source credibility, and perceived humor and source ratings should have an impact on perceptions of African-American political affiliations and behaviors (i.e., voting).

The following sections of the proposal detail pertinent research to the arguments being made in this work, and compare and contrast SSTH and EVT. This work also describes the manner through which SSTH offers a justification for the use of humor relative to EVT. In addition, this work will explore the potential direct and indirect influences of political ideology as a moderator of the main effects of the message manipulation. Further, the evaluation of the source’s and perceived humor are posited to influence of the process that leads individuals in the experimental condition to alter their perceptions of African-American political identification.

*Political Voting Patterns of African-Americans*

Racial polarization in American voting patterns (the difference between African-American support for Democrats and white support for Democrats) is the highest it has been since the 1984 election (Ansolabehere & Stewart, 2009). This is the result from not only the increased appeal of the Republican Party to whites, but also to the increased attraction of non-whites to the Democratic Party (beginning with the Voting Rights Act of 1965).
Furthermore, the perception of African-American voting habits is predominantly skewed toward The Democratic Party. In a pretest conducted in September 2010, respondents taking part in an on-line survey (\(N = 54\)) reported a mean perception that African-Americans vote for Democrats 73% of the time. These perceptions have a basis in real-world voting patterns. Scholars have found that a very solid majority of African-Americans consistently vote Democratic (See Abramson, 2002; Ansolabehere & Steward, 2009; McDermott, 2010). Figure 1 shows the percentage of white and African-American major party voters who voted Democratic in presidential elections from 1944 through 2002 (Abramson, 2002). African-Americans have consistently voted more democratic than whites in the every presidential election since 1944. Moreover, since 1960, the African-American vote for Democratic candidates has been exceeding high. This trend is especially prominent in recent elections. “The percentage of African-Americans voting for the Democratic presidential candidate rose from 88% in 2004 to 95% in 2008” (Ansolabehere &Stewart, 2009).

Thus, it is a fact that African-Americans tend to vote for Democratic candidates. Regarding further details related to the pretest conducted as part of this proposal process, additional questions assessed normative beliefs of African-Americans voting habits in the most recent presidential, Senate, and House of Representatives races. In each of these, the average was 60% or higher. Specifically, individuals believed 70% of African-Americans voted Democratic in the 2008 presidential election, 60% in the 2008 Senate race, and 60% in the 2008 race for House of Representatives. On average, they believed 73% of African-Americans are registered Democrats (and this is without asking e respondents to think about only those individuals who are registered to vote). These responses show that the prescriptive expectancy of most individuals is that African-Americans are liberal Democrats and African-Americans tend
to vote for Democratic candidates. Therefore, for the purpose of the current study, this perceived norm will be violated by presenting a stand-up comedian who explicitly describes himself as an African-American who is a conservative Republican, and deals squarely with the presentation of his political philosophy in his routine.

*Semantic-Script Theory of Humor (SSTH)/Perceived Humor*

Incongruity theories of humor posit that a message will be perceived as funny when there is a mismatch, or a disconnect, between the incoming information that one processes, and the information this person holds as their social norms (Young, 2006, 2008). More specifically, SSTH states that a joke may be composed of two distinct and incompatible scripts. According to Attardo and Raskin (1991), the punchline of the joke occurs when the listener switches from one script to the other by backtracking. This person then realizes alternative explanations and that this alternative interpretation of the joke was possible from the start, and thus finds the message humorous. The disconnect occurs between the real (i.e., factual) versus the unreal (i.e., imagined). Possible forms in which this may take place include good vs. bad, life vs. death, normal vs. abnormal, possible vs. impossible, and high status vs. low status. Berger and Wildavsky (1994) give the following example and explanation of an incongruent joke:

“A prestigious Talmudic scholar reaches retirement and a fete is held in his honor in the course of which he is praised from morning till night. As he leaves, late at night, a young man approaches the revered rabbi and says, ‘Great rabbi, your praises have been sung from morning until night. Is it enough’? The rabbi replies, ‘It is enough. But of my modesty, they said nothing’…For the incongruity theories, the difference between what the rabbi says at first- ‘It is enough’- and what he says in the punchline- ‘but of my modesty they said nothing’ (revealing his ego)- is what generates the humor” (p. 83).
For the purpose of the current study, a disconnect will take the form of the normal vs. abnormal in terms of the personal political beliefs and race of a comedian. What is expected is for the African-American comedian to be a liberal Democrat (see pretest results, as well as empirical evidence concerning African-American voting patterns). However, by presenting a conservative Republican African-American comedian (i.e., abnormal), the listener will backtrack, reanalyze, and find that what was considered normal could indeed take the opposite position from the beginning (i.e., African-Americans can be conservative Republicans), and, according to SSTH theory, they will find the message humorous.

Raskin (1985) would further categorize the current study as one that produces a switch in regular ambiguity. That is, the script “the African-American comedian is a liberal” is replaced with “the African-American comedian is a conservative.” This retroactive switch in ambiguity from the first to the second script is caused by incorrectly presupposing the African-American comedian is a liberal Democrat. Thus, the second script casts a shadow on the first, and introduces a new interpretation of the first script. The reaction to this switch is mirth (Attardo & Raskin 1991; Raskin 1985; Young, 2006).

*Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT)*

Expectancy violation theory posits that the way in which an individual will process information relies heavily upon that individual’s expectations of another’s behavior (Burgoon, 1993; Planalp & Rivers, 1996). Expectancies thus, over time, acclimate to various situations, and from these situations individuals learn to generalize behaviors and actions of others and respond accordingly. That is, expectancies within various social situations predict how individuals will respond to a particular situation (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Cohen, 2010).

Expectancies may be prescriptive or predictive. Prescriptive expectancies are ideas of
what events should occur, and predictive expectancies are ideas about an event once it begins to unfold (Berger et al., 2010). This study will focus on predictive expectancies. That is, audience members will have a prior idea of the way in which a political African-American comedic routine should unfold. “A belief stereotype that blacks are more liberal than whites has been extrapolated from their [African-American] voting behavior” (McDermott, 2010, p. 901). Therefore, the predictive expectancy is that African-Americans tend to vote and hold political tendencies with the Democratic Party.

Valence is another aspect of EVT. Message discrepancies are evaluated either with positive valence, if the interaction is evaluated as better than what was expected, or negative, if the interaction is evaluated as worse than expected (Burgoon et al., 1989; Houser, 2005; Hullett & Tamborini, 2001). Given the nature of the message in this study it is anticipated that participants will view the expectancy with positive valence. That is, the nature of the setting, a comedic message, will likely influence positive perceptions of the message. Here, reward value then determines the manner in which the viewer will evaluate the source of the message.

“Reward value refers to the degree to which the person who engaged in the unexpected behavior is regarded favorably or unfavorably” (Berger et al., 2010 p. 97). Furthermore, sources that are evaluated as holding more rewarding value are given more flexibility in terms of engaging in unexpected behaviors. These sources are better able to violate expectancies, yet still be evaluated positively (Berger et al., 2010). Thus, it is appropriate to use a source that is likely to violate expectancies in a positive way, for example telling several jokes, as this will increase their reward value. With this increased reward value, the African-American conservative Republican comedian’s message may be evaluated positively, even though they are violating viewers’ expectancies.
Burgoon emphasized that expectancies develop from the communicator characteristics, the relationship with the communicator, and contextual characteristics. The characteristics of the communicator may include demographics, personality traits, or biological sex (Johnson & Lewis, 2010). Therefore, manipulation of the race of the communicator will set the stage for a number of expectancies relative to the communicator’s characteristics. Taken together, those who view the African-American comedian will experience an expectancy violation.

Furthermore, expectancy violations cause individuals to highlight the violation, and make social evaluations of the violator (Burgoon, Birk, Hall, 1991; Floyd & Voloudakis, 1999). For the purpose of this study, these evaluations will be labeled a source evaluation. As stated above, due to the fact the message delivered by the African-American comedian has positive valence and the comedian has a higher reward value, this higher reward value will allow those in the experimental condition to appreciate the source more so than those in the control condition. Stated more formally:

\[ H1: \text{ Subjects in the expectancy violation condition will evaluate the comedian more favorably.} \]

Moreover, the context within which the experimental message is offered will enable us to further our understanding of EVT within a mass media framework. Cohen (2010) created various categories when studying EVT in relation to parasocial relationships. Moral, trust, and social violations were distinguished as the types of violations one may have in a given interaction. This study focuses on social violations. According to Cohen, people expect friends to comply with a code of social decency. This code consists of being friendly, polite and refraining from “making others feel small” (Argyle & Henderson, 1985) (p.70). However, the more voluntary, easily replicable, and self-supporting the friendship is, the more likely the relationship is to exhibit
expectancy violation damages (Blieszer & Adams, 1992; Cohen 2010; Jones & Burdette, 1994). This is important because the comedian present in the current study will be more likely to violate expectations because the interaction with the message will be voluntary, replicable, and free from external pressures to continue. Therefore, the context of violations through mass media messages is all the more ideal for an expectancy violation.

**Semantic Theory of Humor VS Expectancy Violation Theory**

The Semantic-Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) (Raskin, 1985) explains that humor rises from semantic incongruities. As Young (2006) states “philosophers from Aristotle to Kant have posited that humor stems from a twist or incongruity of some kind” (p. 221). That is, humor rises from the junction of two conflicting frameworks within a given text (Attardo, 1997; Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Giora, 1997; Vaid et al., 2003; Young, 2006). Thus, incongruities that arise from SSTH are bound to the message.

EVT is different, as the violations stem not from the message, but rather from discrepancies between the surrounding context and the source of the message. Individuals hold pre-existing mental expectancies about social interactions and individuals based on social norms and the traits of other persons (Burgoon et al. 1995; Burgoon & Hale, 1988; McPherson & Liang, 2007). Therefore, when these events do not unfold as expected, or the source does not align with one’s perceived expectancy, the individual will experience an expectancy violation.

Kant defines laughter as, “an affection arising from sudden transformation of strained expectation into nothing” (1790, p.177; Attardo, 1994 p. 48). Through this, Attardo (1994) illustrates and uses “strained expectancies” synonymously with incongruities. Thus, parallels between expectancy violations and humor have been connected throughout history. However, formal theories related to the former and the latter have yet to be linked in any formal sense.
Furthermore, McGhee (1979) offers a definition of (in)congruity that refers to “relationships between components of an object, event, idea, social expectation, and so forth…when the arrangement of the constituent elements of an event is incompatible with the normal or expected pattern, the event is perceived as incongruous” (as quoted in Attardo, 1994, p. 48). Therefore, according to McGhee, incongruities may be contained within the message itself (e.g., the Ribbi joke offered above) or the source-message relationship (e.g., Sarah Silverman). However, thus far humor research in communication has only discussed incongruities that are internal within a given message (e.g., Young, 2008). The current study focuses on potential source-message incongruity in relation to the effectiveness of humor. More specifically, this work examines a character that holds and expresses values that are perceived as unexpected, and how this affects the audience of the message. By examining the relationship of source-message as incongruent, work concerning incongruity and EVT may be bridged in a more meaningful way.

Focusing on EVT, audience members in the experimental condition will experience the expectancy violation and will thus rate the comedian as funnier than those in the control condition (in accordance with SSTH). As stated above, individuals find humor when the message and the source of the message are incongruent. Thus, the second hypothesis is presented:

\[ H2: \text{ Perceived humor will be higher for subjects in the experimental expectancy violation condition.} \]

*Information Processing*

Scholars have indicated that incongruity theories of humor contain a two-phase process that must take place in order for humor to emerge (Coulson, 2000; Coulson & Kutas, 2001,
Coulson & Williams, 2005; Wanzer, Frymier, & Irwin, 2009; Young, 2008). Individuals enter into social situations with a given set of expectations of behavior. The first phase of the process occurs when the perceived incongruity or inconsistency in the stimuli is recognized. That is, the first step is when the receiver of the message becomes cognitively aware that something occurs, but was not expected. Coulson (2000) would indicate that this is the first frame of the frame-shifting process. According to Coulson, the consumer of the message activates various aspects from his or her working memory in the first frame.

The second phase of the process occurs when the receiver accurately interprets the inconsistent stimuli, and thus finds mirth within the message. Coulson (2000) states that the second phase comes when the consumer shifts from the first frame to the second, in which information stored in long-term memory is activated. A situation is evaluated as funny when the receiver identifies inconsistencies with his or her expectations via this two-step process.

According to SSTH, incongruent messages not only provoke mirth, they also stimulate mechanisms of cognitive processing. In order to move from the first to the second step of the two-step process outlined above, cognitive processing is required (Coulson & Kutas, 2001; Kluender & Kutas, 1993; Young, 2008). In other words, to process a message and find the message humorous, one must evaluate the current message using his or her working memory, and then reevaluate their long-term memory due to irregularities. This re-evaluation requires much cognitive effort on the part of the receiver. Increased attention is not only found within the incongruity theories of humor. Work done in the same vein examining EVT has found similar results. According to EVT, people pay greater attention to a message when their expectancies are violated (Berger et al., 2010). Since individuals more closely attend to messages that are
perceived as humorous (due to expectancy violations), individuals in the expectancy violation condition will put forth more cognitive effort in order to make sense of the message.

Furthermore, Wantz et al. (2009) developed the Instructional Humor Processing Theory (IHPT), which states that appropriate types of humor generate positive affect, and this will lead to message elaboration by enhancing motivation to process. Working with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Wantz and colleagues demonstrate the way by which humor may be used to enhance message retention and learning via the central route of elaboration. Thus, individuals within the expectancy violation condition will be more motivated to retain information presented in the message if they find the message funny. Taken together, hypotheses four a and bare presented:

\[ H3a: \] Subjects in the expectancy violation condition will list more message-related thoughts.

\[ H3b: \] Subjects in the expectancy violation condition will generate more counterarguments.

\textit{Political Ideology}

The discussion outlined above has focused squarely on the potential for incongruity generated as a result of the message-source disconnect. However, it would be impossible to focus on the influence of this potential incongruity without also addressing the central individual-difference variable studied in political communication, political ideology (Domke, 2001; Hikel & Segal, 1973). The way in which people will react to the humorous messages being presented to them, both of which are espousing a conservative political ideology, will be directly influenced by the viewer’s own political ideology. In addition, political ideology can serve as a potential moderator of the main effects of message outlined above.
Those who hold beliefs parallel to the source of a message will be more likely to agree with the source. This is because we tend to agree and enjoy messages that are aligned with our own beliefs (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Knobloch-Westerwick, & Meng, 2009). On the other hand, those who do not agree with the political position of the comedian may disregard the message as a rare and strange occurrence. In addition, those who are not conservative will largely disagree with the message the African-American conservative comedian offers, and will experience little mirth from the message. Therefore, the following hypotheses are offered:

\( H4a: \) Political ideology will have a main effect on source evaluation in that conservatives will evaluate the source as being more credible.

\( H4b: \) Political ideology will have a main effect on perceived humor in that conservatives will rate the message as more humorous.

\( H5a: \) Political ideology will serve as a contributory-condition moderator of the main effect of the expectancy violation condition on source evaluation, in that conservatives who come into contact with the expectancy violation message will rate the source as all the more credible.

\( H5b: \) Political ideology will serve as a contributory-condition moderator of the main effect of the expectancy violation condition on perceived humor, in that conservatives who come into contact with the expectancy violation message will rate the message as more humorous.

There is also the issue of whether political ideology will impact the degree to which the comedic messages are cognitively processed. The degree to which conservatives will process the message more than others (i.e., moderates-liberals) is difficult to predict, nor is there enough
literature to warrant an assessment of political ideology as moderator of the influence of expectancy violation. Thus, the following two research questions are offered:

*RQ1*: What is the main effect of political ideology on information processing (i.e., thought listing and counterarguing)?

*RQ2*: What is the influence of political ideology as potential moderator of the effect of expectancy violation on information processing (i.e., thought listing and counterarguing)?

*Effects on Perceptions of African-American Voting Behaviors*

Due to the difference in ways in which the participants in the two conditions will process the respective messages, subsequent perceptions of African-American voting habits will be influenced. It is argued that the perceptions of those in the expectancy violation condition will have more diverse views of African-Americans in terms of political party affiliation. Due to the expectancy violation, the processing mechanisms, re-evaluation of previously held norms, and the evaluation of the source with high value, participants in the experimental condition will have a wider array of beliefs about African-American’s voting habits, political identity, and political ideology. This is an important outcome because more diverse views of African-Americans’ political identification and habits has the potential to lead to more diverse views of African-Americans overall. Thus, stereotyping and racism toward African-Americans and their political identification may ultimately diminish as a result of a mass media-generated expectancy violation.

First, source evaluations will be higher for those in the experimental condition because, as evidence shows, humor enhances source liking (Nabi, Moyer-Guse & Byrne, 2007). Second, message processing will influence African-American political identification such that the
individuals who are in the experimental condition and processing the message more deeply will have a more diverse view of African-American political identifications (i.e., overcoming stereotypical perceptions). Last, source evaluation will influence perceptions of African-Americans’ political identification for those in the experimental condition. That is, those who view the African-American comedian and evaluate him with high reward value will be more open minded, and evaluate all African-Americans’ as having a more diverse political identification than those in the control condition.

Because the message is inconsistent with individuals’ norms, individuals in the expectancy violation condition will process the message centrally. Individuals who process message more deeply are more likely to change their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Young, 2006). Thus, previous perceptions of African-Americans’ political identification will be more likely to change for those in the experimental condition. This leads to the following hypotheses:

*H6*: Perceived humor will have a direct and positive main effect on source evaluations.

*H7a*: Perceived humor will result in more diverse views of African-Americans’ political affiliations and behaviors.

*H7b*: Positive source evaluation will result in more diverse views of African-Americans’ political affiliations and behaviors.

*H7c*: Increased information processing will result in more diverse views of African-Americans’ political affiliations and behaviors.
Figure 1: Major Party Voters Who Voted Democratic for President, by Race, 1944-1992 (in percentages)

Number of:
- Blacks: (52) (17) (54) (60) (76) (54) (87) (138) (131) (105) (125) (122) (186)^*
- Whites: (1,558) (364) (1,127) (1,213) (1,345) (1,014) (816) (1,430) (1,450) (702) (1,220) (1,041) (1,194)^*

^* These numbers are weighted.

Source: Abramson et al.
Chapter 2: Method

Design
A $2 \times 2$ (condition: African-American source, white source) × (Conservatives, Other [moderates and liberals]) between-subject experimental design was created to assess the influence of these independent variables on perceived humor, thought processing, source evaluation, and perceptions of African-American political identities. Participants were undergraduates at a large Midwestern university enrolled in communication courses. Each student received extra credit for participating in the study. Data from 85 students was used for the purpose of the study.

Participants
A total of 119 students completed the survey. However, because the primary focus of this research centers on various perceptions whites hold of African-Americans’ relative to politics, only data from Caucasians was used. Therefore, the sample was reduced to 85 students (43 male, 42 female) between the ages of 18 and 54 ($M = 20.95, SD = 4.52$).

Stimuli/Procedure
All data were collected in March and April of 2011. The pretest, stimuli, and post-test were all distributed to participants via the personal computer in the program Qualtrics (See appendix) and took approximately an hour and 15 minutes to complete. Participants came to a lab where they were seated in a cubical with a personal computer and headphones. They were then given instructions explaining how to complete the pretest, watch the video, and finish with the posttest. All acts were completed in a single sitting.
A pretest took about 45 minutes to complete, and asked 57 questions about the participant’s own political ideology, party identification, media use, political efficacy, and basic demographic information. The participants also answered questions that were used to gauge their perceptions of African-American political affiliations and behaviors. For the purpose of the study, this has been established as *perceptions of African-Americans’ political identification*.

Next, partisans were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. Individuals in both conditions watched a 5-minute video of a conservative stand-up comedian. In the experimental condition, a clip of the African-American conservative comedian, Alfonzo Rachel, was shown. This clip was gathered from Alfonzo’s website, http://www.machosauceproductions.com/alfonzo. In the clip, Rachel explains why he is a conservative Republican. Through this explanation, Rachel outlines several of his ideals. For example, he states that he is a conservative Republican because he believes marriage should be between a man and a woman. In this clip, Rachel clearly explains his political identification multiple times and through his stances on multiple issues.

A control stimulus was created using Jake Hanus, a Caucasian actor. The clip that was created used the identical script, attire, background, and format as the video featuring Rachel. In addition, a pilot test \((N = 42)\) was constructed to ensure both comedians were equal on important variables concerning the experiment. The pre-test used the audio stream only, allowing for a better assessment of whether the primary message manipulation in the formal experiment will be the visual cue of skin color. The audio was streamed online and respondents answered a series

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1*Perceptions of African-Americans’ political identification* measures asked participants to indicate the percentage of African-American voters they believed voted for 1) presidential candidate Barack Obama in the 2008, 2) a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level Senate races, and 3) a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level House of Representatives races. Last, Participants indicated the percentage of African-American voters registered with the Democratic, Republican, and Independent parties.
of post-test questions. Specifically, no differences were found in perceptions of humor for the two audio clips ($M_{African-American}=4.86$ $M_{white}=5.22$, $p = .64$) or the source credibility of the source ($M_{African-American}=4.41$, $M_{white}=3.78$, $p = .14$). Therefore, it can be ascertained that any differences to be found in the formal experiment in terms of perceived humor and source credibility will be due to the primary visual cue (i.e. source race).

The computer program randomly assigned participants to one of these two stimulus conditions. Within the computer program, the five-minute clip featuring either the white or African-American comedian was played. Participants individually viewed the clip on their assigned computer.

Last, a post-stimulus questionnaire took approximately 25 minutes and asked 30 questions about the perceived humor of the message, source evaluation, depth of message processing, and perceptions of African-American political behaviors. To avoid priming in both the pretest and posttest, several questions about the voting patterns of several racial-ethnic minority groups were asked as well. For example, participants were asked questions about the voting habits, political identity, and political ideology of Asian Americans and Latinos, in addition to African-Americans.

Measures

Independent Variables

Condition. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. Forty-three individuals watched the African-American comedian, and 42 watched the white comedian.

Political ideology. Subjects were asked a series of pre-stimulus questions in order to tap into their political ideology. Specifically, individuals indicated their overall political ideology using a seven-point semantic differential scale (1 = extremely liberal, 7 = extremely liberal).
Those that scored four or lower were categorized as “moderate to liberal” and those who scored a five or higher were considered conservative. The 5-7 options were listed as (somewhat conservative), (conservative), and (extremely conservative). A dichotomous variable of political ideology was needed for this study to run the analysis of variance statistics (moderate to liberal = 47, conservatives = 38). Using this ordinal measure as nominal is not ideal (Hayes, 2005), but it was necessary due to the low party identification among subjects and the high number of subjects who did not identify themselves as either a Republican or Democrat.

**Outcome Variables**

*Message processing.* An open-ended question asked participants to simply list as many thoughts about the message as possible (Petty & Cacioppo, 1977). The more thoughts that participants answered on this question indicated deeper message processing. Two coders were used to make sure all thoughts were distinct and complete. These coders established inter-coder reliability at Krippendorf’s $\alpha = .98$; $M = 5.72$, $SD = 3.25$, $Sk = 1.04$, $Ku = 0.8$.

Likewise, an open-ended question asked participants to list as many arguments that opposed the arguments made by the source as they could. Again, solid inter-coder reliability for two coders was established (Krippendorf’s $\alpha = .92$), and coders counted the number of unique and complete counterarguments for each participant. Like thought listing, a higher number of counterarguments indicated more thorough message processing. The average for the number of counterarguments was much less than the thought-listing variable, and the number of answers was positively skewed ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.95$, $Sk = .72$, $Ku = 0.15$).

*Source credibility.* Three questions were used to measure the evaluation of the source using a semantic differential scale. Participants were asked to rate on a seven-point scale the degree to which they found the comedian to be *trustworthy/deceptive, likeable/unlikeable, and*
knowledgeable/uninformed (reverse coded). Higher scores indicate greater source evaluation. This proved to be a reliable scale, and thus the single index was created from these three items ($M = 3.92, SD = 1.64, \text{ Cronbach's } \alpha = .80$).

**Perceived Humor.** The variable was measured using three-item semantic differentials (Nabi, Moyer-Guse', Byrne, 2007). After viewing the clip, participants were asked to indicate how the message rated (1-7) along the following lines: *not humorous-humorous, not funny-funny,* and *not amusing-amusing.* The affirmative adjectives were each coded high. The index proved to be reliable ($M = 3.31, SD = 1.88, \text{ Cronbach's } \alpha = .92$).

**Perception of African-Americans’ political identification.** Questions asked about the participant’s beliefs and perceptions of African-American voting habits. Subjects were asked to indicate the percentage of African-Americans that they believed voted Democratic in the past presidential, U.S. Senate, and U.S. House of Representatives races. Furthermore, participants indicated the percentage (0-100%) of African-Americans that they believed to be registered Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. A single variable was created measuring the overall perception of African-American’s political identification by averaging the answers to the three variables dealing with the most recent elections and the question asking the percentage of registered Democrats ($M = 64.23, SD = 16.15, \text{ Cronbach's } \alpha = .91$).

**Analysis**

A series of and two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were run to address H1-H5b and RQs 1 and 2. The two independent variables reflected the experimental design (expectancy violation X ideology). The five outcome variables were source evaluation, perceived humor, thought listing, counterarguing, and perceptions of African-Americans’ political identification.
In addition, an OLS-based regression was used to test H6, along with H7a-H7c. In this regression the first block of predictor variables included the message experimental condition and the dichotomous political ideology created for the experiment. Source evaluation, perceived humor, and the two message processing variables were inserted in Block 2.
Chapter 3: Results

Manipulation Check

Expectancy Violation. Two items measured the extent to which participants experienced an expectancy violation. Participants indicated on a 7-point scale the degree to which they were surprised by the comedian (reverse coded, 1 = surprised, 7 = not surprised) and the extent to which they felt the comedian’s behaviors were expected (1 = expected, 7 = not expected) (Cronbach’s α = .87). A manipulation check indicates that the participants in the expectancy violation condition (the African-American comedian) were more surprised by the comedian than individuals in the control (MAfrican-American comedian = 4.67, Mwhite comedian = 3.19; F(1, 83) = 21.68, p < .001).

Source Evaluation

For the first hypothesis, a two-way ANOVA was used to test if those in the expectancy violation condition evaluated the source higher than those in the control condition. Indeed, a significant effect main effect of message condition on source evaluation was found, F(1, 81) = 7.32, p < .01). That is, those that viewed the African-American comedian rated the source as significantly more trustworthy, knowledgeable, and likeable than those who consumed the control stimulus (MAfrican-American comedian = 4.11, Mwhite comedian = 3.30), even though the two comedians delivered the exact same comedic material. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is supported.

Interestingly, participants’ political ideology had no main effect on source evaluation (Mmoderate to liberal = 3.48, Mconservative = 3.93; F(1, 81) = 2.16, p = .146). Thus, H4a was rejected.
However, the interaction of condition and participant ideology on source evaluation was found to be marginally significant, $F(1, 81) = 3.62, p = .061$. That is, moderate to liberals who viewed the White comedian evaluated him more negatively than moderate to liberals who viewed the African-American comedian. As illustrated in Figure 2, moderates/liberals who viewed the African-American comedian rated him highest on source credibility ($M_{\text{African-American comedian}} = 4.18$). On the other hand, moderate/liberals who viewed the White comedian gave the lowest rating for source credibility ($M_{\text{white comedian}} = 2.79$). Furthermore, conservatives in each condition did not significantly differ from one another on their evaluations of the source ($M_{\text{African-American comedian}} = 4.05, M_{\text{white comedian}} = 3.81$). Therefore source evaluation differed not as a function of political ideology, but as a combination of political ideology and the experimental condition in which participants were placed. Political Ideology is thus a moderator of the condition and source evaluation. Moderator variables address the question of ‘when’ an effect takes place (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In this case, when participants were in the White comedian condition and their political ideology was moderate-to-liberal, they had low source evaluations. However, when moderate-to-liberals viewed the African-American comedian, they evaluated the comedian as high as conservatives. This result indicates marginally significant support for H5a (stimulus manipulation X ideology interaction, with conservatives rating higher), but the group where the difference is found is with the moderates/liberals.

**Perceived Humor**

This two-way ANOVA test revealed that, indeed, those who viewed the African-American comedian perceived the clip to be funnier than those who viewed the white comedian ($M_{\text{African-American comedian}} = 3.80, M_{\text{white comedian}} = 2.68$). Therefore, a significant main effect of
condition on perceived humor was found, thus supporting hypothesis 2, \( F = (1, 81) = 8.19, p = .005 \).

Like source evaluation, political ideology had no main effect on perceived humor, \( F(1,81) = 2.14, p = .147 \). Thus, H4b is rejected. That is, moderate/liberals and conservatives did not significantly differ from conservatives in how humorous they found the clips (\( M_{\text{moderate to liberal}} = 2.96, M_{\text{conservative}} = 3.53 \)). However, a significant condition-by-political ideology interaction on perceived humor revealed that the combination of the condition participants were in and their political ideology predicted their perceived humor, \( F = (1, 81) = 4.9, p < .05 \). Specifically, conservatives in each condition were not significantly different from one another in terms of their perceived humor, \( F = (1, 40) = .217, p = .644 \) (\( M_{\text{African-American}} = 3.66, M_{\text{white}} = 3.41 \)). However, perceptions of the clips’ humor were significantly different between non-conservatives in the respective message conditions, \( F = (1, 41) = 9.20, p < .005 \). Specifically, subjects who were not conservatives and viewed the African-American comedian rated him significantly funnier than their peers who viewed the white comedian (\( M_{\text{African-American comedian}} = 3.41, M_{\text{white comedian}} = 1.96 \)). Moderate/liberals who viewed the African-American comedian clip rated him as funny as conservatives, but the moderate/liberals who viewed the white comedian had lower perceived humor than the other three groups (See Figure 3). Therefore, political ideology moderates the effect of expectancy violation on perceived humor, thus supporting H5b. However, the major difference is with the moderates/liberals (as with source credibility).

Message processing

A main effect of experimental v. control condition on thought listing was found to be approaching statistical significance, \( F(1, 81) = 2.94, p = .09 \). That is, those who were in the expectancy violation condition (\( M = 6.01 \)) listed more thoughts than the control condition (\( M = 25 \)).
5.12), however, significance test was slightly above the $p < .05$ alpha level established for this study. Thus, there is only marginal support for H3a. No significant main effect for condition on counterarguing was found, $F(1, 81) = .124, p = .73$. Hypotheses 3b was therefore rejected.

The two-way ANOVAs created to look at H3a and H3b were also used to answer both of this study’s research questions. In an attempt to answer the first research question, main effects of political ideology on information processing were reviewed. From this, it may be interpreted that political ideology does not affect thought listing ($F(1, 81) = 1.62, p = .207; M_{\text{moderate to liberal}} = 5.12, M_{\text{conservative}} = 6.01$). On the other hand, effects of political ideology on counterarguing is approaching statistical significance ($F(1, 81) = 2.98, p = .09; M_{\text{moderate to liberal}} = 2.97, M_{\text{conservative}} = 2.22$), with moderates/liberals being able to better counterargue the points raised in the message. Therefore, political ideology was found to affect counterarguing only, albeit slightly.

Political ideology did not moderate the effect of expectancy violation on message processing ($F_{\text{thought-listing}}(1, 81) = 1.65, p = .203 (M_{\text{moderate to liberal}} = 6.01, M_{\text{conservative}} = 5.12)$; $F_{\text{counterarguing}}(1, 81) = .000, p = .99 (M_{\text{moderate to liberal}} = 2.97, M_{\text{conservative}} = 2.22)$). Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the lack of condition-by-ideology interactions on message processing.

Perception of African-Americans’ political identification

In examining the influence of perceived humor on source evaluation, no significant effect was found, $\beta = -2.06 (t\text{-value} = -1.20), p = .236$. Though perceived humor for the two conditions was different; humor had no impact on evaluations of the source of the message. Therefore, H6 is rejected.

Perceived humor did not have a significant impact on perceptions of African-Americans’ political identification $\beta = -.206 (t\text{-value} = -1.19), p = .236$. However, the large negative beta weight suggests that perceived humor has the potential to increase perceptions of African-
Americans’ political identification such that the more humorous individuals perceive an unexpected message, the more diverse views they hold of the source. Therefore, while hypothesis 7a is rejected in this study, additional work containing a larger sample size is needed.

Using the same OLS regression outlined above, the influence of source evaluation on perceived African-American political affiliation and behaviors was examined. Unfortunately, no significant effect of source evaluation on perceptions of African-Americans’ political identification was found, $\beta = .116$ (t-value = .660), $p = .511$. Therefore, hypothesis 7b was also rejected.

In order to test the influence of information processing on perceptions of African-Americans’ political identification thought listing and counterarguing were examined within the regression equation. Neither thought listing ($\beta = -.146$ [t-value= -1.12], $p = .266$) nor counterarguing ($\beta = .078$ [t-value= .579], $p = .564$) had a significant influence on perceptions of African-American political identification. Thus, hypothesis 7c was rejected. However, like perceived humor, thought listing has a large negative beta weight, suggesting that a larger sample size might reveal that those who process the message more deeply will perceive the source as more diverse.

Unfortunately, as can be seen in Table 1, no variables significantly predicted perceptions of African-American political affiliation/behaviors. However, perceived humor and counterarguing appear that they could influence more diverse views of African-Americans. Specifically, the total variance accounted for by the equation was 4.2%, which is rather small. Additional work must be done in order to better predict this important democratic outcome.
Figure 2

Estimated Marginal Means of Source Credibility

Race of Comedian

Figure 3

Estimated Marginal Means of Perceived Humor

Race of Comedian
Figure 4

Estimated Marginal Means of Total number of thoughts

Race of Comedian

Figure 5

Estimated Marginal Means of Total Number of Counterarguments.

Race of Comedian
### Table 1

*Regression Model Predicting Perception of African-Americans' Political Identification*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>Standardized $\beta$ Coefficients</th>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Block 2</strong></td>
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<td>Thought Listing</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterarguing</td>
<td>.078</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Standardized beta weights are reported. * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$. Total $R^2\% = .042\%; N = 85.$*
Chapter 4: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of an expectancy violation in a humorous context. Specifically, implications of humorous messages in reducing prejudice and stereotypical thoughts of African-Americans were examined. Participants viewed a video clip of a comedian espousing a politically conservative ideology. The clip that initiated an expectancy violation featured an African-American conservative comedian (the experimental condition), while the other clip consisted of a white conservative comedian (the control condition) offering the exact same message. Overall, results suggest several main conclusions. First, this study demonstrates that EVT, which has largely been studied in the past within the interpersonal communication literature, can be made evident through mass media messages as well. In agreement with Cohen (2010), a mass media message was indeed able to violate audience expectations. This work reaches beyond previous studies in that this shows that previous knowledge of the source is not required to violate expectancies. Future mass media studies are thus ripe for the integration of EVT. For example, incorporating nontraditional characters in a traditional setting could be an opportunity for comedic occurrences within a program. Furthermore, showing characters in a non-stereotypical setting may be suitable for studying expectancy violations. For instance, homosexual male characters are typically shown in a feminine manner on television (Walters, 2001). However, EVT may be studied within programming that diverges from depictions of this kind.

Presenting the subjects in this study with a message that shows out-group members in a scenario that is not stereotypical could expand their perceptions. Unfortunately, the present
experiment only measured participants’ perceived view of African-Americans’ political identification directly after they viewed the message. Future research should impose a further delayed test asking the perceptions of African-American’s political identification a few days after exposure to the message. Therefore, lag effects could be examined relative to more diverse views of African-Americans’ political identification.

A second important conclusion is that individuals in the expectancy violation condition found the comedian to be significantly more likeable, knowledgeable, and trustworthy than those in the control condition. This is important because this study shows that even though an expectancy violation is committed, the source of this violation may still be evaluated in a positive manner. However, even though the current study found that expectancy violations enhanced source evaluation, the study did not find that source evaluation affected perceptions of African-American political identification. Therefore, effects of favorable thoughts toward the source must be further studied. Future studies could look at other possible effects of positive source evaluation such as identification with the source and subsequent attitudes toward those outside the viewer’s social group (i.e., out-group members). For example, Ortiz and Harwood (2007) found that the social distance between one’s own social group (i.e., their in-group) and those outside their social group (i.e., out-group members) decreased when viewers were exposed to a television show that featured positive contact between the two groups. Therefore, a future study could investigate the influence of a positive social situation created by EVT within a context featuring intergroup contact. Such a situation could be used as a means to reduce social distance between viewers and members of a minority group.

A third conclusion is that political ideology moderates the degree to which the audience evaluates the source. Moderates/liberals who viewed the African-American comedian rated him
as high as conservatives; however, moderate-to-liberals who viewed the white comedian rated him significantly lower on source evaluation. Future research should look at additional personal characteristics that could possibly affect the evaluation of the source of an expectancy violation. For example, characteristics including dogmatism, need to evaluate, and need for closure, are all personal characteristics that have been shown to influence attitudes (Perloff, 2010). Therefore, such personal characteristics should become a part of any study of expectancy violations and subsequent thoughts of the source. For example, those that are high in need for closure have a desire to obtain a definitive answer and experience discomfort with ambiguity (Holbert & Hansen, 2006; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). However, an expectancy violation causes a disconnect with what is known and what happens, therefore messages containing such ambiguity could cause some anxiety in those that are high in need for closure. This anxiety could result in a more negative rating of the source.

Other personal characteristics that were not addressed in this current study are racist and prejudice attitudes. These are highly sensitive topics that many will not readily admit to possessing. Therefore, a test measuring implicit attitudes is needed. The Personalized Implicit Association Text (PIAT) (Olson & Fazio, 2004) is a measure of implicit attitudes. In this test, individuals must make rapid decisions, which results in more spontaneous judgments of the attitude object (Eno & Ewoldsen, 2010; Olson & Fazio, 2009). These attitudes are relevant to the topic of the study at hand, and must be studied in the future. Implicit attitudes measures are important to the study of attitudes and race because these measures are free of social desirability concerns (Olson & Fazio, 2004).

Findings of this study were consistent with the SSTH (Raskin, 1985). In particular, those in the expectancy violation condition found the clip to be more humorous than those in the
control condition. That is, viewers found that the prescriptive expectancy violation of the conservative African-American to be funnier than the conservative white comedian. Political ideology was found to also moderate this effect. Specifically, while conservatives in each condition did not differ from one another in terms of their rating of how humorous they found the respective clips, subjects who were moderate-to-liberal and viewed the African-American comedian rated him significantly funnier than moderate-to-liberals who viewed the white comedian. Again, future research should look at personal characteristics outside of political ideology as potential influences of perceived humor. Such potential characteristics include the four dimensions outlined by Hmielowski, Holbert, and Lee (2011) of an individual’s affinity for political humor. Specifically these include: 1) pointing out or highlighting incongruent information, 2) humor contributing to peoples’ sense of superiority, 3) the use of humor to relieve stress or anxiety, and 4) the ability of humor to facilitate interpersonal relationships. The first dimension, highlighting incongruent information, could potentially have a powerful effect on the way in which individuals process humorous expectancy violations. For example, if an individual is more likely to highlight incongruent information, he or she will probably process such information more often, and thus will differ from someone who processes incongruent information less often.

The second dimension of humor contributing to peoples’ sense of superiority, could affect how individuals generally view outgroup members. Those that are higher in this dimension would be more inclined to use downward comparison when viewing outgroup members. Therefore, individuals high on this dimension could process humorous messages about outgroup members differently than those who are lower. The third and fourth dimensions, the use of humor to relieve stress or anxiety, and the ability of humor to facilitate interpersonal
relationships could also cause individuals to perceive outgroup members differently. Upon looking at the both dimension, perhaps those that are more likely to utilize humor to alleviate tension and in interpersonal relationships may do so in such a way that breaks down barriers between groups and encourages intergroup contact.

In terms of message processing, those in the experimental condition listed more thoughts than those in the control condition, but the two groups did not differ in the number of their counterarguments. Upon investigating political ideology, it was found that this important individual-difference variable did not affect thought listing. However, the effects of political ideology on counterarguing was approaching statistical significance. Taken together, mixed results were found relative to political ideology’s influence on message processing. Especially surprising is the fact that while political ideology has a large impact on outcomes in other fields such as public opinion (i.e., Jost, 2009), its influence in the context of the current study was minimal. This may be in part due to the fact that humor in the context of politics constructs a unique situation. LaMarre, Landerville, and Beam (2009) found that biased message processing occurs when individuals consumed political late-night comedy messages (i.e., The Colbert Report). Perhaps political ideology is not having a large impact on thought listing in the current study because individuals process the message in a biased manner. That is, both conservatives and moderates/liberals are interpreting the message to be congruent with their own beliefs (i.e., finding the message funny, but for very different reasons), and therefore, when asked to list thoughts, the amount of thoughts participants list does not differ as a function of their political ideology. However, because the message explicitly presents a conservative Republican, the moderates/liberals were highly motivated to counterargue in order to defend their interpretation of the message.
Mixed results relative to message processing is not surprising. Two competing hypothesis exist relative to this issue (see Moyer-Gusé, Mahood, & Brookes, in press). Extant research has shown that humor may hinder message processing by trivializing the importance, or acting as a “discounting cue” of underlying message content (Nabi, Moyer-Guse & Byrne, 2007). In the case of the current study, perhaps the participants did not prefer to counterargue and/or list relevant thoughts because the tone of the message was humorous, and therefore her or she utilized the “discounting cue”, and the message as “just a joke”. Therefore, he or she did not deeply process the message, but instead used the peripheral route of the ELM to process the message.

On the other hand, humor has been proven to bolster thought listing by attracting attention to the message while also reducing counterarguing (Young, 2008). Results from this study are in agreement with the first part of the Young’s findings in that the listing of thoughts for those in the experimental group were indeed higher. However, unlike what Young found, counterarguing only differed between groups once political ideology was examined as a moderator, and found only to be slightly significant. Therefore, counterarguing in particular must be further studied relative humorous messages. In this vein, future research could further explore the possibility of humorous messages as a means to reduce stereotypes and prejudice. As Young (2008) points out, although understanding a joke demands greater cognitive processing, this processing reduces one’s motivation and ability to counterargue. Individuals are thus more vulnerable to persuasion through humorous messages. Since this study replicated the first part of Young’s findings, future work must be done to demonstrate when humorous messages decrease counterarguing. Once this effect is established, the persuasive effects of the humorous messages can be further addressed.
Various forms of humor relative to cognitive process must also be studied. More generally, future work must be done in order to understand the cognitive processing of humorous messages. As suggested by Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) and Holbert, Hmielowski, Jain, Lather and Morey (2010), scholars must push beyond the study of humor as monolithic, and begin by breaking down and studying various forms of humor. Holbert et al. (2010) found that different types of satire (i.e., juvenalian versus horatian) produce quite varied effects on perceived humor and message processing. Furthermore, sarcasm is different from irony in that it has a biting element and is typically directed at a specific victim (Lee & Katz, 1998). Humorous messages differ as a function of the type of humor being utilized, and therefore, outcomes of such messages will vary as well.

Furthermore, the explicit one-sided political nature of the message in the current study is a substantively different form than that of which Nabi et al. (2007) and Young (2008) studied. Current work speaks to the complexity of humorous messages, and not only emphasizes the need to study various types but also the surrounding contexts in which humorous messages are presented. For example, both the message sidedness and the way in which individuals process satire, irony, and parody have the potential to produce an array of outcomes.

Furthermore, the content of the message matters in terms of its persuasive power. Relative to the message presented in the current study, future studies should create a humorous message containing a more explicit persuasive arguments relative to reducing prejudice and stereotypes. Perhaps then counterarguing would be significantly different between the two conditions if more explicitly persuasive messages were presented. This would provide a path through which Young’s hypothesis could be replicated.
This path of research has important societal implications. Messages like the one created for the purpose of this study may serve as a mechanism that decreases negative thoughts towards out-group members. Therefore, it is important that future research looks to the five core communication input variables (message, source, recipient, context and channel) in order to formulate the most influential message (Holbert & Tchernev, in press).

Much is raised above concerning source and recipient characteristics. Concerning message, considerations such as those outlined above are important. Specifically, the format and content of the message matters. For example, message sidedness is influential (Perloff, 2010). Individuals presenting a two-sided message with refutation offer arguments in favor of a particular point of view, give a small dose of the opposing side, and then refute the opposing point of view while highlighting why his or her point of view trumps the opposition. This message type can be contrasted with a one-sided message (e.g., as used in this study) and a two-sided message without refutation.

As stated above, the context in which the message is offered matters as well. That is, anything in the environment could potentially affect the way in which one interprets a message. We exist in a unique moment in time with the nation’s first African-American chief executive. Furthermore, environmental influences at the time the message is consumed also matter. For example, a person watching a message with other individuals (along with varied experience of in-group v out-group others) could differ in interpretations such as his or her perceived humor, source evaluation, and even the degree to which there was or was not an expectancy violation. Future studies must be cognizant of such contexts in their studies by looking at co-viewing experiences (Giles, 2002).
Last, the channel of the media could further alter various effects of the message. As can be seen from this study, the effects of the message differ from the audio-only pretest to the formal experiment that employed a visual component as well. Specifically, neither perceived humor of the clip nor source evaluation differed between the conditions in the audio-only pretest. Therefore, the visualization of the source in the current context mattered. Thus, expectancy violations vary as a function of the medium through which they are presented. Future research could look to alternative forms of humor media such as satirical newspaper (e.g., The Onion).

Weakening the arguments outlined above is the low level of perceived humor ($M = 3.31$). It is possible that those in the experimental condition felt that the comedian was moderately humorous, but those in the control condition found the comedian offensive (i.e., not humorous). This would account for differences in perceived humor. Future studies must pretest a stimulus that is high in perceived humor in order to ensure that the expectancy violations, in fact, lead to increased levels of perceived humor.

Furthermore, measures of the degree to which the audience found the material offensive must be added. This will help rule out alternative explanations, such as unpleasantness and psychological reactance experienced by those in the experimental condition. Psychological reactions that measure amounts of discomfort experienced by the audience include threat and anxiety levels. “There is some evidence that (perceived) threat … can prompt perceptual, affective, and behavioral responses designed to affirm individual identity or alternative identities and/or to use other compensation strategies” (Ellemers, Spears, Doosje, 2002 p. 172). Therefore, high levels of perceived threat can lead to in-group bias, and therefore, perceptions of the out-group will be more negative than one’s in-group. In the case of the current study, high levels of perceived threat could affect subsequent perceptions of African-Americans’ political
identification. Both the source’s race, as well as his political identification, could influence the receiver’s perceived threat.

Perceived similarity levels must also be measured. That is, the degree to which the participants felt they and the comedian are alike on such criteria as social class, physical appearance, and basic values must be measured. Individuals that perceive a source to possess a similar characteristic to their own will assume that the source will also share other similar characteristics (Appiah, 2004). This will lead to greater identification with the source (Feick & Higie, 1992). Huesmann, Eron, Klein, Brice, and Fischer (1983) found that individuals who are more likely to identify with media characters are more influenced by media content containing those characters. Therefore, the degree to which an individual identifies with the source could affect their perceived humor and their evaluation of the source. This could have further implications on their perceptions of the group in which the source belongs to.

Questions asking participants about their prior experiences and interactions with the targeted out-group must be asked in the future. Both quantity and quality of relationships with this out-group are important. For example, perhaps one has had many experiences with the out-group, but these experiences have been unpleasant. Perceptions of the out-group would be harder to alter for this individual than someone who has had only a few experiences with the out-group. An important element of changing perceptions of out-groups is the quality and quantity of experiences with the out-group (Schiappa, Gregg & Hewes, 2005). Therefore, controlling for these previous experiences is important in identifying any change in perceptions of the out-group.

Because more diverse attitudes of minorities will lead to a decrease in negative stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination, it is important for researchers to find techniques that
may be used to generate these broader, more nuanced perspectives (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). In the current study, the perceived humor of the clip did not significantly affect the perceptions of African-Americans’ political identification. However, the large beta weight in this study suggests that humor could be a potential area in which subsequent perceptions of the source of the message could be influenced. A larger sample size would help address this limitation of the current study. Research such as Finlay & Stephan (2000) has shown that “emotions and empathy are particularly effective at reducing prejudice” (as cited in Ellis, 2010, p. 302). Therefore, humorous messages are an ideal context to try to influence individual’s attitudes towards out-group members in a positive way. As illustrated above, this area of study has many questions yet to be addressed. However, it has made significant advancements in expanding the possibilities of expectancy violations generated through media content and the effects of violations of this kind on a wide range of outcome variables.
References


Blieszer & Adams, 1992


Appendix A

Political Mass Media Messages Pre-Stimulus Questionnaire

This questionnaire covers a wide range of topics. Please address each question to the best of your ability. Thank you for making the time to take part in this study.

Section 1. We are constantly made aware that not everyone holds the same opinions as our own on a given issue, and people vary in how they choose to deal with these differing opinions. Please rate your level of agreement with these statements as they pertain to you. Once again, we are using a scale that ranges from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

1. I prefer interacting with people whose opinions are very different from my own.

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2. When thinking about a problem, I consider as many different opinions on the issue as possible.

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3. I usually do not consult many different opinions before forming my own view.

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4. Even after I have made-up my mind about something, I am always eager to consider a different opinion.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7
Strongly Disagree  Somewhat  Neutral  Somewhat  Agree
Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Agree

Section 2. Listed below are a few questions about the government in Washington DC. If you know the answer to a particular question, please write in your response or circle the correct response in the space provided. However, we recognize that many people don’t know the answers to these questions, so if there are some questions you don’t know then please circle the “don’t know” response for that question.

5. Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Joseph Biden?
Answer: ________________________  Don’t Know

6. Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional? Is it the president, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?
The President  The Congress  The Supreme Court  Don’t Know

7. What percentage of votes in the United States Senate is required to override a presidential veto?
Answer: ________________________  Don’t Know

8. Do you happen to know which political party presently has more members in the United States House of Representatives?
Democrats  Republicans  Don’t Know

9. Which political party is more politically conservative than the other at the national level?
Democrats  Republicans  Don’t Know
**Section 3.** This section will ask you about your beliefs about the voting habits and tendencies of various races.

10. What percentage of African-American voters voted for then-Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election?

11. What percentage of African-American voters voted for a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level Senate races?

12. What percentage of African-American voters voted for a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level House of Representatives races?

13. Please indicate what you believe to be the percentage of African-American voters registered with the following political parties:
   
   Democrat ____________  Republican______________  Independent ____________

14. What percentage of Asian-American voters voted for then-Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election?

15. What percentage of Asian-American voters voted for a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level Senate races?

16. What percentage of Asian-American voters voted for a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level House of Representatives races?

17. Please indicate what you believe to be the percentage of Asian-American voters registered with the following political parties:

   Democrat ____________  Republican______________  Independent ____________

18. What percentage of Hispanic-American voters voted for then-Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election?
19. What percentage of Hispanic-American voters voted for a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level Senate races?

20. What percentage of Hispanic-American voters voted for a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level House of Representatives races?

21. Please indicate what you believe to be the percentage of Hispanic-American voters registered with the following political parties:

   Democrat ____________  Republican___________  Independent ____________

Section 4. This section asks you to provide some basic information concerning your media consumption.

22. How many hours of television do you watch during the course of an average weekday?

   Hours ____________ Minutes ________________

23. How many hours do you spend on-line during the course of an average weekday?

   Hours ____________ Minutes ________________

On a scale where 1 = ‘rarely’ and 7 = ‘all the time’ how often do you watch each of the following types of news media outlets? You also have the option of circling 0 = ‘never’ if you do not consume a particular news outlet. Please circle one number for each outlet.

   All the Time

   Never   Rarely

24. National Broadcast Network News    0    1    2    3    4    5    6

   7

   (e.g., NBC Nightly News)
25. National Cable TV News 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   (e.g., MSNBC, FOX News, CNN)
26. National Daily Newspaper 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
27. News-based Web Sites 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

On a scale where 1 = ‘rarely’ and 7 = ‘all the time’ how often do you watch each of the
following types of media outlets? You also have the option of circling 0 = ‘never’ if you do not
consume a particular outlet. Please circle one number for each outlet.

All the  
Never       Rarely
Time
28. The Daily Show w/Stewart 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
29. The Colbert Report 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Section 5.** This section will ask you questions about your interests in political issues.

30. Thinking about your local community, how interested are you in local community politics

1 2 3 4
Not at all  Slightly  Somewhat  Very
Interested   Interested   Interested   Interested

31. Thinking about your local community, how interested are you in local community affairs?

1 2 3 4
Not at all  Slightly  Somewhat  Very
Interested   Interested   Interested   Interested
32. How interested in national politics and national affairs?

1 2 3 4
Not at all Slightly Somewhat Very
Interested Interested Interested Interested

Section 6. This section will ask you to provide information about your political beliefs and identification.

33. Now thinking in terms of political issues, would you say you are

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Extremely Liberal Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Conservative
Extremely Liberal Liberal Conservative Conservative

34. Please circle the number that best reflects your political ideology on social issues (e.g., abortion, welfare):

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Extremely Liberal Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Conservative
Extremely Liberal Liberal Conservative Conservative

35. Please circle the number that best reflects your political ideology on economic issues (e.g., taxes, jobs):

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Extremely Liberal Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Conservative
Extremely Liberal Liberal Conservative Conservative

36. Are you a member of a political party?

Yes _______ (if YES, please go to question #21)

No _________ (If NO, please go to question #23)
37. Please check which political party are you a member of?

Democrat    
Republican    
Other    
(please list)

38. Please circle the number that best reflects the strength of your political party affiliation.

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<tr>
<td>Very Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Somewhat Weak</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Somewhat Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Very Strong</td>
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39. Do you consider yourself to be a political independent? (check one)

Yes   
No   

Section 7. This section will ask you questions about how you view yourself relative to politics.

40. I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics.

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<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Agree</td>
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41. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of important political issues facing our country

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42. I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people

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<td>Agree</td>
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43. I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.

1 2 3 4 5

Section 8. This section will ask you to provide information about your preferences of messages.

44. I appreciate political humor because it can reveal the weaknesses of our political leaders and institutions.

1 2 3 4 5

45. I appreciate political humor because it can make me feel more knowledgeable about politics.

1 2 3 4 5

46. I appreciate political humor because it can aid me in reinforcing my political beliefs.

1 2 3 4 5

47. I appreciate political humor when it makes me aware that our political system is dysfunctional.

1 2 3 4 5

48. I appreciate political humor because it can help me express my political opinions.
49. I appreciate political humor because it can reduce the anxiety I feel toward politics.

50. I appreciate political humor when it helps me make better sense of why our political system is dysfunctional.

51. I appreciate political humor because it can help me better cope with awkward situations.

52. I appreciate political humor because it can help me effectively criticize politics and politicians.

53. I appreciate political humor because it allows me to be friendly with people who hold political views that are different from my own.
54. I appreciate political humor because it allows me to form stronger bonds with people who hold similar political views as my own.

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Section 9. This section will ask you general questions about your demographics.

55. What race do you consider yourself? (check one)

African-American
Native American
Spanish or Hispanic Origin
Asian- or Pacific Islander
Non-Hispanic White
Multi-racial or mixed race

56. What is your age in years? ______________

57. What is your sex?
   Female   Male
Appendix B

Post-Stimulus Questionnaire

This questionnaire covers a wide range of topics. Please address each question to the best of your ability. Thank you for making the time to take part in this study.

Section 1. Please list all thoughts that presently come to your mind in relation to the message you just consumed.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 
9. 
10. 
11. 
12. 
13. 
14. 
15. 

Section 2. You have just consumed a message from a conservative Republican. Please provide as many reasons as you can think of that could be used to **OPPOSE** arguments made by this individual.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 
9. 
10. 
11. 
12. 
13. 
14. 
15. 
Section 3. This section will ask you about your reaction to the comedic clip you just saw. Please indicate on the scale below the way in which you felt towards the message and the comedian.

I found the comedian to be

1. Deceptive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Trustworthy
2. Unpleasant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Pleasant
3. Dishonest 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Honest
4. Insincere 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Sincere
5. Fair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unfair
6. Kind 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Cruel
7. Unlikeable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Likeable
8. Knowledgeable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Uninformed
9. Accurate 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Inaccurate
10. Certain 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Uncertain
11. Expert 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Ignorant
12. Competent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Incompetent
13. Aggressive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Meek
14. Bold 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Timid
15. Energetic 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Tired
16. Warm 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Cold
17. Open 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Defensive

The Comedian’s behavior was

18. Positive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Negative
19. Expected 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unexpected
20. Surprising 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not Surprising

Section 3. The following questions ask you about your reaction to the clip.

21. Funny 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not Funny
22. Amusing 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not Amusing
23. Entertaining

24. Humorous 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not Humorous

Section 4. This section will ask you about your feelings while watching the clip. 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 to
which you felt this way while watching the comedian. Use the following scale to record your answers.

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<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Very Slightly</td>
<td>A Little</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>Quite a bit</td>
<td>Extremely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ interested</td>
<td>___ distressed</td>
<td>___ irrational</td>
<td>___ alert</td>
<td>___ ashamed</td>
<td>___ inspired</td>
<td>___ nervous</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Section 5. This section will ask you about your beliefs about the voting habits and tendencies of various races.

25. What percentage of African-American voters voted for then-Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election?

26. What percentage of African-American voters voted for a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level Senate races?

27. What percentage of African-American voters voted for a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level House of Representatives races?

28. Please indicate what you believe to be the percentage of African-American voters registered with the following political parties:

   Democrat _____________ Republican _____________ Independent _____________

29. What percentage of Asian-American voters voted for then-Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election?
30. What percentage of Asian-American voters voted for a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level Senate races?

31. What percentage of Asian-American voters voted for a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level House of Representatives races?

32. Please indicate what you believe to be the percentage of Asian-American voters registered with the following political parties:

   Democrat ____________  Republican___________  Independent ____________

33. What percentage of Hispanic-American voters voted for then-Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election?

34. What percentage of Hispanic-American voters voted for a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level Senate races?

35. What percentage of Hispanic-American voters voted for a Democratic candidate in 2008 federal-level House of Representatives races?

36. Please indicate what you believe to be the percentage of Hispanic-American voters registered with the following political parties:

   Democrat ____________  Republican___________  Independent ____________