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Humor Type, Source, and Perceived Job Satisfaction
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Abstract

The present study seeks to capture a larger picture of the dynamic nature of workplace humor by simultaneously assessing both the type and the source of the humor involved, and their effects on perceived job satisfaction. Based on the literature on in-group/out-group perceptions and incivility, two sources of humor (supervisor and co-worker) were examined in combination with two types of humor (affiliative and aggressive). Data for this vignette-based study were collected from undergraduate students. Results showed a significant effect for humor type on perceived job satisfaction, such that individuals exposed to affiliative humor reported higher levels of perceived job satisfaction than individuals exposed to aggressive humor. There was no support for the source of humor interacting with the type of humor on perceived job satisfaction. Future research should continue to explore the role that humor plays in the workplace by examining additional situational and social factors and by using data from actual organizations. Despite the subjective nature of humor, efforts to quantify humor and one’s sense of humor should also continue to be explored.
Chapter I

Review of the Literature

Humor is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, and its definition often varies with the context of the research domain (Cooper, 2005; Mesmer-Magnus, Glew, & Viswesvaran, 2012). Typically, any action, such as a joke, that can result in laughter or amusement in the workplace can be classified as workplace humor. Due to the interpersonal nature of humor, specifically in the workplace, humor can serve as an important communication tool in the mediating of workplace relationships (Al Obthani, Omar, & Bakri, 2013). Multiple definitions of workplace humor focus on the positive attributes or influences that can result from the use of humor. Unlike those definitions, the above definition (“any action…in the workplace”) does not explicitly include a positive component, which allows for the possibility for a negative impact as well as a positive impact that can be associated with humor. Similarly, the majority of research done on workplace humor has focused on positive humor and the outcomes associated with the different forms of positive humor (Cann, Watson, & Bridgewater, 2014; Lehmann-Willenbrock & Allen, 2014; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012).

The use of humor within the workplace can be beneficial in many ways (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). The potentially detrimental effects that the misuse of humor can have within the workplace, however, need to be explored. The purpose of this study was to examine different kinds of humor and the effect that type and source of humor have on perceived job satisfaction.
Variations of Humor

Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and Weir (2003) defined four dimensions relating to individual differences in the use of humor: affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating, and aggressive. Although these have been identified as general humor styles, there are additional specific types of humor that exist and play important roles in the workplace. In addition to the four styles proposed by Martin et al. (2003), other styles such as liberating, controlling, mild aggressive, and gallows humor will also be described (Lang & Lee, 2010; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006; Sliter, Kale, & Yuan, 2014; Vivona, 2014).

Styles of humor. **Affiliative humor** is characterized as good-natured inside jokes, practical jokes, and funny stories that can be specific to certain groups, with the purpose of bringing people together and amusing others. It increases the amount of interaction between individuals, lessens tension, and helps in building relationships (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Martin et al. (2003) found affiliative humor to be strongly related to extraversion and openness. An example of affiliative humor would be calling everyone in the department crazy for the number of new accounts they have recently brought in. Bringing in new accounts is a good thing and should be celebrated, but will also increase the workload of the employees. This humor was also positively correlated with cheerfulness, self-esteem, and psychological well-being and negatively related with depression, anxiety, seriousness, and bad moods (Martin et al., 2003).

This style of humor is primarily used to enhance social interactions and improve communication. Because the focus of the humor is on the similarities specific to the group, group members are able to identify more easily with one another, which increases communication. When used by a group member, a positive emotion component is displayed by the act of group association, which conveys trust and increases group cohesiveness (Romero &
Cruthirds, 2006). Similarly, when displayed by someone in a supervisory position, affiliative humor can aid in reducing perceived social distance from the supervisor to subordinates. Focusing on the humor allows the supervisor to be viewed as part of the group (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). When a group experiences stress, the application of affiliative humor can create a collective atmosphere and give the sense that the stressor is being shared by all the group members, which ultimately helps in the management of the stressor (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). In the workplace, this style of humor helps in the enhancement of social interactions, communication, group cohesiveness, reducing social distance, and stress management (Lang & Lee, 2010; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

*Self-enhancing humor* serves as a coping mechanism for stress and helps the individual regulate emotions and keep a positive outlook (Martin et al., 2003). It can be used to lighten uncontrollable stressful situations by joking about the circumstances. As the name suggests, self-enhancing humor in the workplace reflects the initiator’s intention to enhance his/her image relative to that of others (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). An example of self-enhancing humor would be laughing and commenting about most likely having to stay late due to heavy workloads and to order some late night Chinese food and bring in blankets and pillows. The employee will not sleep at the office, but is turning working late into a joke of a sleepover, whereas others may complain and be in a bad mood about working late. This type of humor typically involves making fun of the situation, and is not necessarily geared toward specific individuals. Martin et al. (2003) found self-enhancing humor to be positively related to extraversion, openness, cheerfulness, self-esteem, optimism, and psychological well-being, and negatively related to neuroticism, depression, anxiety, and bad moods.
Self-defeating humor involves individuals making fun of themselves to amuse others, and is used as a way of seeking acceptance. By being the butt of the joke, individuals can use self-defeating humor as a means of hiding underlying negative feelings (Martin et al., 2003). Romero and Cruthirds (2006) posited that individuals can use self-defeating humor to reduce their status level and appear more approachable to others within the workplace. Self-defeating humor has been considered positive as well as negative, depending on the literature in which it is referenced (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). The humor being considered positive or negative depends on other variables being assessed in a study. For example, there have been positive outcomes through the use of this humor on a group-level, such as communication, whereas negative outcomes have been found on an individual-level, such as self-esteem (Martin et al., 2003; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). An example of self-defeating humor would be an overweight individual joking about eating enough for two other employees. This can create openness for those in the audience of the comment, while also having a negative effect on the individual making the comment about their weight. Martin et al. (2003) found this style of humor to be positively related to neuroticism, depression, anxiety, hostility, and bad moods, and negatively related to self-esteem, psychological well-being, and intimacy.

Aggressive humor involves teasing, belittling, or bullying others (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). It can be used as a way to criticize and manipulate others (Martin et al., 2003; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Romero and Cruthirds (2006) suggested this type of humor was consistent with superiority theory, which argues that individuals make themselves feel better by putting others down in order to achieve or feel of higher status. Aggressive humor can alienate individuals in the workplace, undermine relationships, and could contribute to dysfunction (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). An example of aggressive humor is someone making personal
attacks on a co-worker about their competence due to their preference of a sports team. This style of humor was found to be positively related to hostility and aggression and negatively related to seriousness, relationship satisfaction, and interpersonal competence (Martin et al., 2003; Wisse & Rietzschel, 2014).

These four styles can be categorized in two different ways. The first distinction involves enhancement, referring to whether the humor is used to enhance the self (intrapersonal) or to enhance one’s relationships with others (interpersonal; Martin et al., 2003). Self-enhancing and self-defeating styles focus on the former as they are directed inwards towards the self, whereas affiliative and aggressive styles focus on the latter, directed outwards at others. The second broad distinction for the humor styles involves whether the humor is benign or detrimental. That is, it depends on whether the humor is accepting of the self or others or if it is done at the expense of the self or others (Martin et al., 2003). Using this categorization, styles that are relatively benign and benevolent include affiliative (to others) and self-enhancing (to self). The two styles considered injurious and detrimental include aggressive (to others) and self-defeating (to self). Affiliative and self-enhancing are generally characterized as positive styles of humor, being good-hearted, light, and beneficial in nature (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). Aggressive and self-defeating are generally characterized as negative styles of humor, being damaging, hurtful, and destructive in nature (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012).

These styles of humor have distinctions in how they can manifest within the workplace and have outcomes and attributes associated with each. Although there are distinct features between the different styles of humor, Martin et al. (2003) noted that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories. For example, generally harmless affiliative humor may include certain levels or segments of aggressive humor. It was also noted that the distinction between
benign and detrimental uses of humor may exist on a continuum rather than being dichotomous. For example, the inclusion of aggressive humor within affiliative humor may be viewed as more benign than the use of aggressive humor only, but less benign than affiliative humor used without the aggressive component. Classifying a comment as being benign or detrimental depends on the degree to which each humor is involved.

Martin et al. (2003) established the four main styles of humor and how the styles can be categorized dependent upon the target (intrapersonal or interpersonal function of humor) and the nature of the humor (benign and benevolent or detrimental and injurious). As noted previously, there are additional meaningful types of humor that can be found within the workplace.

Additional types of humor. Liberating humor is another type of humor that occurs within the workplace and has been found to be positively associated with organizational creativity (Lang & Lee, 2010). Liberating humor is described as a kind of humor that reduces old mindsets and adds new light and perspectives to often sensitive and socially taboo topics. This is achieved by the light and jesting nature of humor, which creates openness and appropriateness for comical statements or opinions that would not normally be disclosed in a traditional manner (Lang & Lee, 2010). By making extreme and sometimes radical comments, new avenues of thought can be identified and explored.

Controlling humor is similar to the aggressive style proposed by Martín et al. (2003). Controlling humor is described as comparable to aggressive humor, but serves the sole purpose of exerting subtle control over the target individual or group; whereas the use of aggressive humor could be due to different causes, such as a poorly thought out comment, or may be a result of an impulsive comment (Lang & Lee, 2010; Martin et al., 2003). This kind of humor also has
roots in superiority theory and is often expressed in the form of irony, satire, and sarcasm and is negatively associated with organizational creativity (Lang & Lee, 2010).

A distinct form of aggressive humor is **mild aggressive humor**, which is different from aggressive and controlling humor in that there have been more positive outcomes as a result of mild aggressive humor (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). It can be seen in the form of light teasing, which often gets the point across but without being too cruel. Mild aggressive humor often has positive undertones and therefore allows the underlying message to come across in a lighter manner (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

**Gallows humor**, also known as dark or sick humor, is a type of humor that has been researched in careers that expose employees to traumatic stressors, such as danger, accidents, and death (Sliter et al., 2014). Common positions that utilize gallows humor include fire fighters, police officers, and emergency response teams. This type of humor is characterized by making fun of what emotionally threatens people, with the purpose of shifting attention away from the current stressful or dangerous circumstance (Vivona, 2014). Vivona found that the use of gallows humor in crime scene investigations reduced stress and helped navigate through psychologically threatening situations. Sliter et al. (2014) found similar results such that firefighters used this humor as a buffer between traumatic stressors and burnout and PTSD symptoms.

Liberating, controlling, mild aggressive, and gallows humor can also be categorized using the two distinctions proposed by Martin et al. (2003): enhancement of the self or others and nature of the comment, benign or detrimental. Using the first categorization, gallows humor focuses on enhancing the self, as it is commonly used as a coping mechanism, whereas liberating, controlling, and mild aggressive humor are directed outwards at others. The second
categorization, the nature of the comment, is harder to distinguish among these types. Generally, liberating, gallows, and mild aggressive humor can be considered benign, and have positive outcomes associated with the use of each. Although on the surface level the comment itself may not appear to be positive (e.g., a dark joke about the death of someone), the associated outcomes (reduced stress of the traumatic situation) are positive. Controlling humor can be seen as negative and is categorized as having a detrimental and injurious nature, as the sole purpose is to exert control over the targeted group. Unlike the previous four styles of humor (affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating, and aggressive), the categorization of these four additional types of humor is not as clearly defined and may involve a more pronounced subjective component.

As the existing research indicates, many variations of humor can be found within the workplace (Lang & Lee, 2010; Martin et al., 2003; Mesmer-Magnus, 2012; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Many of these types manifest themselves in specific ways and have associated outcomes (e.g. stress management, positive outlooks) within the workplace (Martin et al., 2003). Figure 1 displays the eight types of humor discussed in the current paper and summarizes the nature of the humor (positive or negative), major identifying characteristics, and the associated impact that the use of a particular kind of humor has been found to have. As the exchange of humor typically involves more than one individual, exploring not only the type of humor but also the position and perspective of other individuals involved in the exchange would be valuable.

**Humor Source**

Existing research has paid little attention to how organizational outcomes function when supervisors and co-workers show support for the use of humor, but are also the source of both positive and negative types of humor. “Sources of humor,” “humor source,” and “initiator” are often used synonymously.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Styles</th>
<th>Positive/ Negative</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Major Impacts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affiliative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Good-natured inside jokes, practical jokes, funny stories</td>
<td>Enhances social interactions, communication, group cohesion, stress management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Enhancing</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Jokes focused on stressful situations, keeping light perspective/outlook</td>
<td>Coping mechanism for stress, stress management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Defeating</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Making fun of one’s self, being the “butt of the joke”</td>
<td>Reducing perceived social status, increase approachability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Harsh teasing, belittling, bullying</td>
<td>Criticize and manipulate others, alienate individuals, undermine relationships, contribute to dysfunction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Harsh irony, satire, and sarcasm, similar to aggressive</td>
<td>Sole purpose to exert subtle control over target/group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild-Aggressive</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Light teasing, often with positive undertones</td>
<td>Gets underlying purpose across without being cruel or a “put-down”, allows truths or critiques to be expressed in a lighter manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberating</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Off-the-wall or radical comments, creates openness and appropriateness</td>
<td>Increase organizational creativity, exploration of new avenues of thought, lighten taboo/sensitive topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallows</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Making fun/light of emotionally threatening topics (e.g., death)</td>
<td>Reduces stress, helps navigate through psychologically threatening situations, coping mechanism</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Figure 1.* Summary of humor variations, characteristics, and impacts in the workplace.
Over time and through interactions, individuals become familiar with others’ senses of humor. According to Martin et al. (2003), a sense of humor refers to a personality trait that is relatively stable over time and can involve cognitive ability, behavioral patterns, temperamental, and attitudinal components. Researchers noted that there are many conceptualizations of sense of humor, varying with the context, the measurement being used, and the research question of interest (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012).

A commonality among the various conceptualizations of sense of humor is the individualized component. A comment or joke may be humorous to one individual but offensive or tasteless to the next person. Similarly, what may be acceptable for one person to comment or joke about may not be acceptable for another. Perceptions of appropriateness of a humorous comment can depend largely on the initiator as well as the target audience, and may reflect real or perceived group membership. Humor may also reflect group norms, which will be discussed in a later section.

**In-group and out-group perceptions.** What is deemed appropriate for certain individuals to say but not others may result from membership in either an in- or out-group. According to the self-categorization theory (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994), self-categories are cognitive groupings of self and other stimuli due to similarities or differences among the focal characteristic. These social self-categories make up an individual’s social identity. Social categorization creates an in-group, comprised of those who share the same social characteristic, and an out-group, who are dissimilar on the characteristic (Turner et al., 1994). In- or out-group memberships can result in blurred boundary lines of acceptable targets for humor. Employees may view themselves and co-workers as sharing an in-group if, for example, they have the same level within the organization’s hierarchy, interact on a regular basis or share
similar tasks or projects. Supervisors may be perceived as out-group members, as they have higher status and authority, interact less frequently or in a different fashion, and have different tasks/projects.

How humor is received may depend on if the humor source belongs to an in- or out-group in relation to the target. Cann et al. (2014) found that out-group humor, specifically negative humor directed towards management, was associated with policy or procedure dissatisfaction, and higher levels of negative humor were negatively related to global job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and perceptions of fair treatment. Although it is possible that negative humor is used in response to different circumstances, the presence of negative humor in general has a negative effect on important organizational outcomes, including job satisfaction (Avtgis & Taber, 2006; Cann et al., 2014). The impact that negative humor has on an employee’s job satisfaction, regardless of the underlying cause, may vary depending on the group membership of both the target and the source of the comment.

In a study examining pro-norm and anti-norm deviance for in- and out-groups, Abrams, Marques, Bown, and Henson (2000) found that deviance in the direction of group norms (pro-norm) was regarded positively and as typical, whereas anti-norm deviance from in-groups was viewed negatively. Humorous comments among co-workers may be viewed as a common exchange between the employees. However, an employee not taking part in the general humor exchange may be viewed negatively, since they belong to the in-group but are going against the norm. Platowa et al. (2005) found that individuals actively pay attention to who is laughing and will also laugh only when they hear a fellow in-group member laughing. A humorous remark from a co-worker may be acceptable and cause others to join in laughing, whereas the same comment from a supervisor may not elicit laughter. However, laughter can occur for different
reasons if, for example, the intent of the comment and the appropriateness of laughter is clear to the audience, which is not always the case.

An individual can belong to multiple in-groups (Turner et al., 1994). Even within the workplace, an individual can have multiple group affiliations. An employee may feel membership to a specific group, such as working in a particular department, or a general group, such as sharing the same gender or ethnicity. Although there are multiple in-group associations an employee can have, for the present study the focus will solely be on group membership in regards to the supervisor and co-worker distinction, with co-workers defining a broad “in-group” from which supervisors are excluded based on power differential.

In general, Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2012) found that a positive sense of humor is associated with good physical and mental health, effective coping with workplace stress, and can support functioning at work. However, the impact that a humorous comment can have on an employee may depend on the source of the humor (for example, whether it comes from a co-worker or a supervisor) and may also depend on the membership of in- or out-groups for both the source and target.

**Leadership and humor.** To better gauge how humor is experienced by employees as part of the working environment, Cann et al. (2014) proposed the idea of humor climate. Humor climate attempts to capture the larger picture of humor exchange, assessing not only the kind of humor used but additional characteristics of the environment in which it occurs. Within the humor climate, there are two different kinds of support for humor, supervisor and co-worker support. Supervisor support exists when supervisors are perceived to approve and support the use of humor in the workplace, whereas coworker support is the perceived support from coworkers in the use of humor in the workplace (Cann et al., 2014).
Cann et al. (2014) found that when there were high levels of positive humor and supervisor support, there were higher levels of job satisfaction, commitment, and other specific job aspects. Negative humor within the group and negative humor towards management were negatively correlated with ratings of the job (e.g., satisfaction, commitment). These results demonstrate that supervisor support may play a significant role in employee receptiveness to humor. In a qualitative New Zealand-based study, Holmes and Marra (2006) examined the ways in which leaders successfully use humor. Results showed that effective leaders used humor to strengthen social cohesion between team members, build good rapport, stimulate innovative thinking, and generate ideas.

According to Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2012), a leader’s sense of humor can influence some of the same work-related outcomes for employees, in addition to the employee’s own behavior. Mesmer-Magnus et al. conducted a meta-analysis on positive humor and found that a leader’s sense of humor was related to an enhancement of subordinate job performance, increased job satisfaction, improvements in work-group cohesion, and perceptions of leader effectiveness.

Wisse and Rietzschel (2014) conducted a study focusing on how humor affects the relationship quality between leader and follower. Results showed that followers’ affiliative and aggressive humor styles predicted the perceived quality of supervisor relationship. Specifically, individuals who used humor to amuse others liked their leaders more, had more respect for their leaders, and were more willing to contribute to mutual goals (Wisse & Rietzschel, 2014). Interestingly, results showed no evidence for the influence of a leader’s humor style on followers’ perceived relationship. That indicates that it may be the followers’ own humor style, not that of the leader, that affects the relationship perception between follower and leader.
Vecchio, Justin, and Pearce (2009) examined the relationship between leaders and followers within the education domain. The researchers found that principals’ use of humor was positively correlated with teacher job satisfaction. Results also showed an interaction between use of humor and use of contingent reward, such that principal performance ratings were lower when there was a combination of low humor and low uses of contingent personal rewards.

Differences in the reception of humor may cause serious concern for organizations. Organizational outcomes, such as job satisfaction, can be jeopardized by the differences in impact that a humorous remark can have, varying by humor type and source. Although an environment may possess high levels of both supervisor and co-worker support for the use of humor, there may be additional factors or a combination of factors that take precedence over the supportive climate when interpreting the comment.

**Perceived Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is commonly understood as a work-related attitude reflecting how an employee views aspects of the job, including but not limited to co-workers, supervisors, the working environment, and the organization itself (Diestel, Wegge, & Schmidt, 2014). Job satisfaction is heavily researched, as it is positively related to important organizational outcomes, such as commitment, attendance, job performance, and negatively related to turnover (Aamodt, 1999).

There are multiple ways to measure employee job satisfaction. Global measures of job satisfaction assess overall job satisfaction and often include one item. Wanous, Reichers, and Hudy (1997) conducted a meta-analysis examining the correlations of single-item measures of global job satisfaction with other measures of job satisfaction and despite the reputation of
having low reliability, results showed that the use of a single-item was an acceptable measure of global job satisfaction.

Unlike global measures that result in overall satisfaction, facet measures involve subsections or specific factors that contribute to overall job satisfaction. The scores on the individual facets are summed for a final score of job satisfaction. The most commonly used facet measure of job satisfaction is the Job Descriptive Index (Kinicki, McKee-Ryan, Schriesheim, & Carson, 2002). The JDI contains five facets: satisfaction with work, supervision, coworkers, pay, and promotion. The number of facets included in other facet satisfaction assessments varies, but facets involving supervisors and co-workers are typical.

Supervisors are an important factor to examine within the workplace in relation to job satisfaction. They can influence the work environment, have the ability to elicit changes, and provide meaningful feedback to employees (Okediji, Etuk, & Nnedum, 2011). Co-workers also play an important role in job satisfaction. This is due to the frequent interactions that occur between co-workers. Okediji et al. (2011) found distress or conflict from co-workers led to increased job stress, and as a result, decreased job satisfaction. Okediji et al. (2011) also found perceived co-worker involvement and supervisor support had significant and positive effects on employee job satisfaction. Results also showed a significant interaction such that when perceived co-worker involvement and supervisor support were high, a higher level of employee job satisfaction was achieved than accounted for by either variable alone.

Although it has been established that job satisfaction is positively related to critical organizational outcomes, such as commitment and job performance, it is also important to examine the antecedents of job satisfaction (Aamodt, 1999). One of the researched topics related to job satisfaction is the occurrence of incivility.
Incivility. The incivility literature may shed light on the negative relationship between aggressive humor and job satisfaction. Andersson and Pearson (1999) define incivility as “low-intensity, deviant behavior, with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect” (p. 457). A key component in defining incivility involves ambiguous intent. With the intention of the source being unclear, the recipient is left to decide if the action was on purpose or by accident. With aggressive humor, the targeted employee may be unsure if the comment was supposed to be hurtful or not. The comment could have been a misunderstanding or poorly communicated, rather than intentionally harmful. However, the actual intent is unknown to the targeted employee.

Cortina, Magley, Williams, and Langhout (2001) examined incivility in the workplace. Cortina et al. found that one-third of the powerful individuals within their sample (public-sector) engaged in uncivil acts. Incivility was negatively related to job satisfaction and job withdrawal, and was associated with greater psychological distress. More frequent incidences of incivility were associated with employees being less satisfied with all components of their employment, including the job, supervisors, co-workers, pay and benefits, and promotion opportunities (Cortina et al., 2001). The negative effect that aggressive humor has on job satisfaction may be due to the humor being perceived as uncivil behavior. With potential ambiguity, aggressive humor can be received and can influence job satisfaction in different ways.

Avtgis and Taber (2006) investigated humor in a print media organization and found that aggressive humor was significantly and negatively related to job satisfaction and positively related to job stress. Contradicting results from other studies (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012), when examining affiliative humor, they found that it was not significantly related to any of the variables (job stress, job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment).
Ghosh, Reio, and Bang (2012) examined turnover and the fluctuation of turnover intentions based on incivility from a supervisor or a co-worker. Results showed that supervisor incivility had a significant direct, positive effect on turnover intentions. Co-worker incivility did not have a significant effect on turnover intention, although it did have an indirect effect through supervisory incivility. This provides support that actions can be received and can have different effects on the target, based on the source.

Given that supervisors are one of the main information sources available to employees, Ghosh et al. (2012) noted that it is extremely important for supervisors to establish a relationship of mutual respect with subordinates. A major determinant of employee turnover is job satisfaction. Based on the results of Ghosh et al. (2012), job satisfaction would also likely fluctuate depending upon the source, either supervisor or co-worker, of an action. Examining if differences in impact on employees exist for other workplace interactions would be a beneficial avenue to explore (Ghosh et al., 2012).

**Conclusion**

Examining if the source of humor, from either a co-worker or a supervisor, plays a significant role in the reception of the different kinds of humor and their combined effects on perceived job satisfaction would be worthwhile. By capturing a larger picture of the humor exchange and simultaneously assessing both the type of humor and the source of the humor involved, additional patterns may emerge in the dynamic nature of workplace humor.

The literature suggests a large number of types of humor exist (see Figure 1) and including all of them in a single study is impractical. As such, it is necessary to restrict further discussions to a subset of these types. For the present study, two types of humor were examined: affiliative and aggressive. Positive, affiliative humor was chosen as it typically pertains to a
specific set of individuals, members of a common group (e.g., departments, offices), and has been shown to have a positive influence on multiple organizational outcomes (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). Aggressive humor was chosen because of the negative influence it can have within an organization (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). In an effort to contribute to the research on humor in the workplace, the current study examined the differences in perceived job satisfaction between aggressive and affiliative humor and between two sources of humor, supervisor and co-worker.
Chapter II

Rationale and Hypotheses

Affiliative humor has been found to positively relate to extraversion and openness as well as self-esteem, psychological well-being, and cheerfulness (Martin et al., 2003). Within the workplace, affiliative humor can enhance social interactions, communication, and group cohesion, reduce social distance, and aid in stress management (Lang & Lee, 2010; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

Aggressive humor has been found to be positively related to hostility and aggression and negatively related to relationship satisfaction and interpersonal competence (Martin et al., 2003; Wisse & Rietzschel, 2014). Within the workplace, aggressive humor can alienate individuals, undermine relationships, and not only produce negative outcomes, but also prevent additional positive outcomes from occurring (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Drawing from the incivility literature, there is the possibility of ambiguous intent to harm associated with the use of aggressive humor, leaving it up to the recipient to determine the true intention of the comment. As incidences of incivility increase, employees potentially become less satisfied with multiple components of their employment. Based on the existing literature of affiliative and aggressive humor, the following is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a main effect for humor type on perceived job satisfaction such that individuals exposed to affiliative humor will report higher levels of perceived job satisfaction than individuals exposed to aggressive humor.
Within an organization, interactions take place between individuals of different statuses. Depending on the source of the humor comment and its target, it can be perceived in various ways and ultimately lead to different outcomes. The difference in perception may depend on in- and out-group membership of the source and the target involved in the exchange (Turner et al., 1994). The supervisor can be seen by the subordinate as part of the out-group, which may make certain humorous comments have a different impact on the subordinate than if they were to come from a member of the in-group, such as a co-worker.

Affiliative humor from a supervisor can reduce the perception of their status, making them appear more approachable to subordinates, and the comment will be viewed as consistent with the norms of their subordinates (Abrams et al., 2000; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). By being perceived as part of the group and not solely as an authority figure, supervisor use of affiliative humor should result in higher perceived job satisfaction than affiliative humor from a co-worker.

Aggressive humor may be considered a form of incivility, making the targeted employee unsure of the true intention of the comment and source (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Acts of incivility do not always have the same effect on an employee, varying upon the source and the often times the target. Incivility from a supervisor is positively and significantly related to employee turnover intentions, whereas incivility from a co-worker is not (Ghosh et al., 2012). As job satisfaction is an established determinant of turnover (Tan & Akhtar, 1995) and likely fluctuates in a similar manner as turnover intentions, supervisor use of aggressive humor should be associated with lower levels of perceived job satisfaction than aggressive humor from a co-worker.
Based on the positive nature of affiliative humor and the negative nature of aggressive humor, perceptions of in- and out-groups, specifically between co-workers and supervisors, the following is hypothesized, and is depicted in Figure 2:

*Hypothesis 2: The source of humor will interact with the type of humor, such that affiliative humor from a supervisor will result in higher perceived job satisfaction than affiliative humor from a co-worker, and aggressive humor from a supervisor will result in lower perceived job satisfaction than aggressive humor from a co-worker.*
Figure 2. Hypothesized interaction between source of humor and type of humor on perceived job satisfaction.
Chapter III

Methods

Participants

Participants were recruited from the psychology participant pool at Xavier University. Based on a power analysis for a $2 \times 2$ between-subjects factorial analysis of variance, a minimum of 180 participants (45 per group) was needed to have .80 power to detect a medium effect size with an alpha level of .05 (Cohen, 1992). In total, 245 participants took the study. After removing participants who failed the two manipulation check items ($n = 6$) and participants who did not complete the entire study ($n = 26$), the final sample size was 213 (across conditions, sample sizes ranged from $n = 48$ to $n = 59$). Undergraduate participants learned of this research opportunity through postings on research bulletin boards and online through participant pool announcements, for which the study was titled “Interpersonal Relationships within the Workplace.” To be included in this research study, participants needed to be at least 18 years old.

Of the 213 participants, 174 were female (81.7%) and 39 were male (18.3%). The modal participant age range was 18-22 ($n = 207, 97.2$%). Three participants ranged from 23-27 years of age (1.4%), one participant ranged from 28-32 years of age (0.5%), and two participants indicated that they were 33 years of age or older (0.9%). Participants identified racially as the following: White ($n = 179, 84$%), Black/African American ($n = 8, 3.8$%), Asian ($n = 8, 3.8$%),
Hispanic/Latino (n = 8, 3.8%), multi-racial (n = 6, 2.8%), American Indian/Alaskan (n = 2, 0.9%), Indian (n = 1, 0.5%), and Arab (n = 1, 0.5%).

Class standing of the participants was representative of first-years/freshmen (n = 41, 19.2%), sophomores (n = 56, 26.3%), juniors (n = 73, 34.3%), and seniors (n = 41, 19.2%), with 2 identifying as other (0.9%). All university colleges were also represented in the sample; College of Arts & Sciences (n = 76, 35.7%), College of Social Sciences, Health, & Education (n = 105, 49.3%), and Williams College of Business (n = 32, 15%).

Participants reported a substantial amount of work experience, with 202 indicating that they had worked for pay (94.8%). Only 11 participants reported that they had no previous work experience (5.2%). Total months spent working varied (1-6 months, n = 16; 7-12 months, n = 26; 13-18 months, n = 19; 19-24, n = 20; 25+ months, n = 121), and 115 participants indicated that they were currently employed and working for pay (54%). Work experience was gained from a variety of different industries (administrative, n = 14, 6.6%; customer service, n = 41, 19.2%; entertainment/recreation, n = 12, 5.6%; food service, n = 48, 22.5%; retail/sales, n = 21, 9.9%). Other reported industries and positions included caregiver/babysitter, education, government/military, non-profit, research/science based, and technology. Demographic items are included as Appendix A.

A thorough history of the participant’s work experience was an important component of the study as it helped establish external validity. By ensuring participants had work experience, the participants were able to successfully envision themselves in the situational vignette and respond appropriately.
Measures

**Sense of humor.** The 21-item Situational Humor Response Questionnaire (SHRQ; Martin & Lefcourt, 1984) was used to capture participants’ situational sense of humor. This questionnaire was chosen to measure sense of humor using situational items as it paralleled the situational vignette. Items in SHRQ were created for college students, with the first 18 items specific to a university-culture. A sample item was, “If you were watching a movie or TV program with some friends and you found one scene particularly funny, but no one else appeared to find it humorous, how would you have reacted most commonly?” The last three were general self-report items on sense of humor. Items were answered on 5-point scale in an alphabetical response format such that responses ranged from a (*I would not have been particularly amused*) to e (*I would have laughed heartily*). Responses were adapted to appropriately fit each item by changing one or two of the words (e.g., *I would have laughed heartily with the person, I would have laughed heartily much of the time*). Items were summed to create the total score. Higher scores indicated a higher sense of humor. Information about how the SHRQ was obtained is included as Appendix B.

The SHRQ has been validated for both males and females, with slightly stronger validity for males. The SHRQ also focuses on behaviors associated with humor and not on a particular humor theory (Martin & Lefcourt, 1984). Internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and validity were established through three different validation studies, using observational data gathered during interviews with participants, peer ratings of participant sense of humor, a measure of positive mood, and reported wittiness of impromptu comedy skits (Martin & Lefcourt, 1984). Estimates of reliability range from $\alpha = .70$ to .83 and test-retest reliability after a 1-month period.
was .70 (Martin & Lefcourt, 1984). In the present study, the reliability was $\alpha = .70$, which is consistent with prior research.

**Situation recall.** The study included a qualitative component to further gauge humor preference and sense of humor of participants. The item asked the participant to describe a situation that they found to be funny and explain why they found it humorous (“Please take a moment to recall a humorous situation or something funny that happened to you within the past month. Briefly describe the situation that you found to be funny. Why was this funny to you?”). The maximum response length was 2000 characters. After participants responded to this item, the following page contained one additional item that asked participants to rate whether the situation they described was positive or negative on a 5-point scale, with a response range of 1 (*Negative*) to 5 (*Positive*). These items are included as Appendix C.

**Perceived job satisfaction.** The dependent variable of interest in this study was perceived job satisfaction. Participants were asked to answer two items on perceived job satisfaction from the perspective of the employee in the vignette (“Overall, how satisfied do you think you would be with this job, based on the interaction described?” and “Overall, how satisfied do you think you would be working with Pat, if this were your job?”). Note that because Pat’s role was different across conditions (supervisor vs. co-worker), the conceptual meaning of the question changes from “Satisfaction with supervisor” to “Satisfaction with co-worker.” These are treated as distinct constructs in later portions of the present study. The perceived satisfaction items used a response scale ranging from 1 (*Very Dissatisfied*) to 5 (*Very Satisfied*). Wanous et al. (1997) found the use of single items to be acceptable measures of global job satisfaction. For this study, the use of a global measure of job satisfaction was more appropriate than a facet measure due to the limited information given by the situational vignette.
Participants completed the perceived job satisfaction measures after reading the manipulation component (vignette) of the study. To test hypotheses 1 and 2, the overall job satisfaction item was used.

**Procedures**

The present study was submitted to Xavier University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and received approval for Exempt status. The IRB approval letter is included as Appendix D. There was minimal risk involved with participation in the study. The participant’s name and professor were collected in a separate survey so that credit could be awarded without the identifiers being linked to responses. Other than the described demographic items, there was no potentially identifying information collected in the main survey. The data for the study were collected online using Qualtrics. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the four vignettes using the random assignment function through Qualtrics.

**Manipulation.** Vignettes were used to capture each of the four possible conditions, to one of which each participant was randomly assigned. All variations placed the participant in a workplace as the main employee of the vignette. Each vignette involved the main employee being the target of one of two types of humor, affiliative or aggressive, and came from one of two sources, either co-worker or supervisor. In each vignette, the source of the humor comment had an androgynous name (Pat). This was done to minimize the effect of source gender on the participant’s responses. After reading the vignette, participants completed the perceived job satisfaction items from the perspective of the main employee.

Following the perceived job satisfaction items, participants answered the items on the SHRQ and completed the humorous situation recall items. Demographic and work history items were collected next. Participants then answered information questions from the vignette, such as
what was discussed between the employee and the source and the position held by the source. These items served as manipulation checks to ensure participants were actually reflecting on the vignette as they answered the perceived job satisfaction items and to ensure general attentiveness while completing the study. Participants had to correctly answer at least one of the two manipulation check items about the vignette (what was discussed and the position held by the source) in order for their data to be included in the analyses. Participants were asked to report the perceived gender of the androgynously named humor source (Pat) and to rate Pat’s comment on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (harsh) to 5 (Good-Natured). The vignettes are included as Appendix E. Manipulation check items are included in Appendix F.

Deception. Participants were informed from the study announcement and in the beginning of the actual study that the purpose was to examine dynamics of interpersonal relationships within the workplace. This minor deception allowed the true purpose of the study, examining the impact that type and source of humor can have on perceived job satisfaction, to remain unknown and not jeopardize the validity of the data. Additionally, the measures that were included in the study involve interpersonal relationships, making the deception unlikely to be identified by participants upon completing the perceived job satisfaction items.

Before beginning the study, participants had to read and agree to an Informed Consent document (see Appendix G), which included the purpose of the study, the different components included in the study, researcher contact information, and an estimated completion time. Taking into account the SHRQ, vignette, perceived job satisfaction, free response, and demographic items, the estimated time for completion of the study was 15 minutes.

Sequence. After participants read the vignette, the two items on perceived job satisfaction were completed. The participants then answered the SHRQ, the humorous situation
recall, demographics, and work history. Next, participants answered the manipulation check items, which ensured the appropriate information gathered from the vignette was used to answer the perceived job satisfaction items. To receive participation credit, participants then had to report their name, professor’s name, and course for which they would like to receive the participation credit. This information was collected in a separate survey that was linked from the main survey, making participant information unable to be tied to data.

Participant data were not analyzed if they did not complete the entire survey or if they incorrectly answered both of the manipulation check items. Other than the demographic previously mentioned, no personally identifying information was collected with the data, allowing participants to remain anonymous to researchers. Additionally, settings were adjusted so that no IP addresses or other identifiers were reported to the researcher by Qualtrics.

The present study finished by revealing the true purpose to the participants and requesting participants not to share the actual purpose with others. Participants were also given the option to print a record of participation for their own personal keeping. Additional information was provided to participants such as how to contact the researcher with any questions or concerns about the study. A copy of the debriefing form is included as Appendix H.
Chapter IV

Results

Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were tested using a 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial analysis of variance. The overall job satisfaction item served as the dependent variable for these hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 proposed a main effect of humor type on perceived job satisfaction. Consistent with existing literature (Cann et al., 2014; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012), it was hypothesized that the use of an affiliative humor comment would result in higher levels of perceived job satisfaction and the use of an aggressive humor comment would result in lower levels of perceived job satisfaction. Results showed a significant difference in perceived job satisfaction in the hypothesized direction, such that participants exposed to affiliative humor reported significantly higher levels of perceived job satisfaction \( (M = 3.42, SD = 0.87) \) than participants exposed to aggressive humor \( (M = 2.64, SD = 0.91) \), \( F(1, 211) = 39.62, p < .001 \). The effect size for humor type was large \( (\eta^2 = .16; \text{Green & Salkind, 2013}) \). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed an interaction between type of humor and source of humor, such that affiliative humor from a supervisor would result in higher perceived job satisfaction than affiliative humor from a co-worker, and aggressive humor from a supervisor would result in lower perceived job satisfaction than aggressive humor from a co-worker. The hypothesized interaction was not significant, \( F(1, 209) = 0.35, p = .55 \). The source of the comment (co-worker or supervisor) did not significantly interact with type of humor to affect perceived job
satisfaction. The average perceived job satisfaction from individuals exposed to affiliative humor from a co-worker was $M = 3.46$ ($SD = 0.87$) and from a supervisor was $M = 3.38$ ($SD = 0.88$). The average perceived job satisfaction rating of individuals exposed to aggressive humor from a co-worker was $M = 2.75$ ($SD = 0.94$), and the average for those exposed to the same comment but from a supervisor was $M = 2.52$ ($SD = 0.88$). The condition means are plotted in Figure 3. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

The source of humor was also isolated to explore its potential main effect on perceived job satisfaction; this yielded non-significant results, $F(1,209) = 1.53, p = .22$. Because there was no significant difference in SHRQ scores across the four conditions $F(1, 209) = 0.23, p = .63$, SHRQ scores were not used as a covariate when testing Hypotheses 1 and 2.

**Exploratory Analyses**

In addition to testing the two hypotheses, several exploratory analyses were conducted. These included determining if there were any significant effects of participant gender on key variables, significant correlations, or other relationships among the variables.

An independent-samples $t$-test was conducted to see if there was a significant difference in perceived job satisfaction based on the gender of the participant. Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances was significant, indicating a violation of the homogeneity of variance assumption. Using the $t$-value obtained when equal variances are not assumed, there was no significant difference between males and females and their ratings of perceived job satisfaction, $t(68.86) = 1.26, p = .16$.

Another independent-samples $t$-test was conducted to evaluate if there was a significant difference in participants’ satisfaction ratings for working with Pat based on participant gender.
Figure 3. Plotted condition means of perceived job satisfaction.
Results showed no significant difference between males ($M = 2.90, SD = 0.91$) and females ($M = 2.56, SD = 1.01$) on satisfaction ratings for working with Pat, $t(211) = 1.93, p = .06$.

Perceptions of Pat’s gender were then explored. Of the 39 male participants, 32 perceived Pat to be male (82.1%), two perceived Pat to be female (5.1%), and five were undecided (12.8%). Of the 174 female participants, 133 perceived Pat to be male (76.4%), 32 perceived Pat to be female (18.4%), and 9 were undecided (5.2%). In total, 165 participants perceived Pat to be male (77.5 %), 34 as female (16%) with 14 undecided (6.6%).

A follow up independent-samples $t$-test was run to examine if the harshness ratings of Pat’s comment significantly differed based on participant gender. Results showed no significant difference between males ($M = 2.90, SD = 1.14$) and females ($M = 2.63, SD = 1.13$) on their ratings of Pat’s comment, $t(211) = 1.34, p = .18$.

Participant gender differences on SHRQ scores and humorous situation ratings were also evaluated by independent-samples $t$-tests. For SHRQ scores, there was no significant difference between males ($M = 55.62, SD = 8.46$) and females ($M = 56.65, SD = 7.65$), $t(211) = -0.75, p = .45$, indicating that males and females did not differ on the SHRQ. For the humorous situation that participants reported and then rated in terms of being a positive or negative experience, there was also no significant difference between males ($M = 3.72, SD = 1.00$) and females ($M = 3.94, SD = 1.06$) and their rating of the recalled situation, $t(211) = -1.21, p = .23$.

Correlations among the variables were also explored, and the correlation matrix can be found in Table 1. From the correlations produced, there are several significant correlations worth examining and will be discussed in Chapter V.
Table 1.

Intercorrelations and Reliabilities of Key Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2a</th>
<th>2b</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Overall Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a. Overall Pat Satisfaction (Supervisor)</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.80**</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2b. Overall Pat Satisfaction (Co-worker)</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Pat's &quot;Focus&quot; Comment</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>.66**</td>
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<td>4. Total SHRQ Score</td>
<td>56.46</td>
<td>7.79</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>(.70)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>5. Humorous Situation Rating</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Age</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Number of Jobs</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<td>8. Number of Months Working</td>
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<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.20*</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.57**</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Hours Worked Per Week</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>25**(-)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).
* . Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Overall Pat Satisfaction (Supervisor) is based on n=106, Overall Pat Satisfaction (Co-Worker) is based on n=107.
Hours Worked Per Week Based on n=115, n=58 (2a), n=57 (2b).
Overall, results of the present study provided strong support for Hypothesis 1 such that positive affiliative humor resulted in higher ratings of perceived job satisfaction than negative, aggressive humor. The data showed no support for Hypothesis 2, which proposed an interaction between humor type and humor source. In addition to testing the two hypotheses, multiple analyses were conducted to examine gender differences and significant correlations among the variables.
Chapter V

Discussion

The present study added to the literature on workplace humor by examining the effect that comments using positive, affiliative humor as opposed to negative, aggressive humor can have on perceived job satisfaction. The source of the humor comment was also examined to explore how different sources, either co-worker or supervisor, can further affect perceived job satisfaction. This study revealed several interesting findings, including support for Hypothesis 1, a lack of support for Hypothesis 2, a high proportion of female participants, and multiple significant correlations.

Contributions

Data showed support for Hypothesis 1. As existing literature indicates (Cann et al., 2014; Martin et al., 2003; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012), positive humor and negative humor can have different effects on individuals in the workplace. In the present study, affiliative humor resulted in significantly higher levels of perceived job satisfaction than aggressive humor. Participants exposed to an affiliative humor comment reported higher levels of perceived job satisfaction, from both a co-worker and supervisor, than did individuals who were exposed to an aggressive humor comment.

Hypothesis 2 stated that the source of humor would interact with the type of humor, such that affiliative humor from a supervisor would result in higher perceived job satisfaction than affiliative humor from a co-worker, and aggressive humor from a supervisor would result in
lower perceived job satisfaction than aggressive humor from a co-worker. Although there was no significance obtained for humor source or the interaction of humor type and humor source on perceived job satisfaction, the means from the different conditions are worth examining. The average perceived job satisfaction from individuals exposed to affiliative humor from co-workers was $M = 3.46 \ (SD = 0.87)$, whereas the average for those exposed to the same comment from a supervisor was $M = 3.38 \ (SD = 0.88)$. Affiliative humor from a co-worker resulted in slightly higher, albeit not significantly, perceived job satisfaction ratings than did the comment from a supervisor. The differences in perceived job satisfaction translate to a less than small effect size ($\eta^2 = .002$; Cohen, 1988)

The average perceived job satisfaction rating of individuals exposed to aggressive humor from a co-worker was $M = 2.75 \ (SD = 0.94)$, whereas the average for those exposed to the same comment but from a supervisor was $M = 2.52 \ (SD = 0.88)$. Mean ratings of perceived job satisfaction were lower when the comment came from a supervisor in both affiliative and aggressive conditions and also translated to a less than small effect size ($\eta^2 = .015$; Cohen, 1988).

These differences may be due to the equal status that is shared or perceived to be shared among co-workers. Additionally, participants may have been less susceptible to the negative effects of aggressive humor when it came from a peer (co-worker) than when it came from a supervisor. Similarly, participants may have perceived the co-worker as belonging to their in-group, whereas the supervisor and exchange described were continuously perceived as belonging to the out-group. Out-group exchanges are associated with formal authority, low trust, support, and rewards, and have been found to result in higher turnover and lower satisfaction and performance from subordinates (Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989).
Regardless of the reason for lower ratings of perceived job satisfaction, supervisors should be cautious when exhibiting humor and making humorous comments to subordinates. For both aggressive as well as affiliative humor, the subordinate may perceive the comment to be ridiculing in nature, as it is coming from the supervisor and therefore authority figure, which can lead to lower ratings of perceived job satisfaction. In this case, trying to make any kind of humorous comment may be more detrimental to subordinates’ job satisfaction than making no comment at all.

An interesting and unexpected finding was the composition of the sample itself. The sample contained a high proportion of female participants (81.7%), which is different from the proportion of female undergraduate students at the university where the study was conducted (53%; Xavier University, 2016). An explanation for the high volume of female participants may be the study announcement used to recruit participants. The advertised title of the study was “Interpersonal Relationships within the Workplace.” With the title and potential intimate connotations with the word “relationships,” male students might have felt less inclined/attracted to participate. Additionally, throughout data collection, this study was one of 24 other on-going studies. With the opportunity to participate and receive research credit from the other studies, male participants may have targeted studies they found more appealing. This finding may imply that researchers should be cautious and cognizant of the title that they choose to advertise their study, so as not to inadvertently bias their sample.

The SHRQ and the humorous situation recall and rating items were included in the study as a way to gauge participants’ sense of humor. The resulting correlation between the two was low and non-significant. This weak correlation may be due to the fact that participants did not interpret every SHRQ item as describing a humorous situation, which would reduce their overall
SHRQ score. Additionally, the response options may not have accurately represented the reaction the situation would have elicited for the individual. The average rating of the situational recall was 3.72 ($SD = 1.00$) for males and 3.94 for females ($SD = 1.06$), indicating that the situations were generally viewed as being good-natured. Additionally, participants were able to report on any situation that they found humorous, and were not confined to rating the situation described in the SHRQ items.

Pat was perceived to be male by 77.5% of the sample ($n = 165$). The ratings of satisfaction in working with Pat did not significantly vary from male ($M = 2.90, SD = 0.91$) to female participants ($M = 2.56, SD = 1.01$), $t(211) = 1.93, p = .06$. Although this finding indicates that participants’ gender and perceptions of Pat’s gender did not significantly impact ratings of satisfaction in working with Pat, participant gender did result in a small effect size ($d = .34$; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2011). Additionally, despite attempts to make the source androgynous, subtle wording and the description of Pat’s behavior (e.g., always smiling and laughing, comment of needing to show more focus) may have led the majority of the participants to perceive Pat as male.

There are multiple significant relationships that emerged among the variables in this study. The significant correlation between participants’ SHRQ score and their rating of Pat’s comment on needing more focus indicates that the higher the participant score was on the SHRQ, the more positive and good natured Pat’s comment was perceived, $r(213) = .15, p = .03$. Further, Pat’s comment was highly correlated with overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with Pat. Participants who viewed Pat’s comment more positively and good natured had higher ratings of job satisfaction and satisfaction in working with Pat, in both supervisor, $r(106) = .63, p < .001$ and co-worker positions, $r(107) = .66, p < .001$. The correlations between overall job
satisfaction and overall satisfaction with Pat as a supervisor was $r(106) = .80, p < .001$, and as a co-worker, $r(107) = .64, p < .001$. The high correlation between overall job satisfaction and overall satisfaction with Pat as a supervisor indicates that they are not necessarily distinct from one another.

These strong correlations between ratings of Pat’s focus comment, perceived job satisfaction, and satisfaction for working with Pat demonstrate the impact that a single comment can potentially have on important employee attitudes. Those who viewed Pat’s comment as more good-natured reported higher ratings of job satisfaction in addition to being more satisfied in working with Pat, at least as described in the vignette. As employees are faced with the decision to stay with or leave an organization, even a subtle comment may have a significant impact in their satisfaction, and ultimately the choice they make.

Aggressive humor, which can manifest in less-intense and subtle forms, can have a large impact on important outcomes, as the data in the study show in relation to perceived job satisfaction. Andersson and Pearson (1999) posited that the majority of workplace aggression often comes in such subtle and passive forms. Despite being less intense in nature, these aggressions can still play a significant impact on important outcomes, as was demonstrated in perceived job satisfaction ratings. In addition to job satisfaction, Cortina et al. (2001) reported studies that found incivility and aggression to have a negative influence on the recipients’ organization citizenship behavior, organization commitment, and satisfaction with co-workers and supervisors, and an increase in absenteeism and turnover rates. With the amount of impact that an individual’s attempt at making a joke can have on a co-worker or subordinate, humor may be best to avoid in certain situations.
Overall satisfaction with Pat as a supervisor was significantly negatively correlated with the number of months participants had worked, \( r(106) = -.20, p = .05 \). As the participant gains more work experience, there may be assumptions or stereotypes that they have regarding the role of a supervisor. By having more work experience (e.g., months spent working), a participant may have developed expectations about how a supervisor should act and interact with their subordinates. If Pat violated the assumptions or behaved in a way that went against what the participant has experienced or how the participant expects a supervisor to behave, lower satisfaction with Pat is one predictable outcome.

SHRQ scores were also significantly and positively related to the number of different jobs held, \( r(213) = .15, p = .03 \). As an individual gains job experience in different workplaces, they may encounter more situations and be able to see the humor in a variety of different settings. Whether holding more jobs improves a person’s sense of humor, whether having a strong sense of humor predisposes individuals to change jobs more frequently, or whether some other factor accounts for the relationship, must be left for future research to examine.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is not without its limitations, and despite the growing number of articles on humor (Mendiburo-Seguel, Paez, & Martinez-Sanchez, 2015), specifically in the workplace (Cann et al., 2014; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012), there are still multiple avenues that would be beneficial for future research to explore. Limitations and future research directions include continuing attempts of developing ways to quantify humor and sense of humor, examining other organizational in-group and out-group memberships and additional factors that may influence the perception of humor (e.g., job insecurity, organizational culture), investigating other types of humor, and increasing the use of data from actual organizations.
One of the major limitations of the present study is that vignettes cannot capture the unique relationships that often form between co-workers and supervisors or co-workers within the workplace. In a similar vein, the relationship between any supervisor and subordinate or co-worker and co-worker is unique and may have a different dynamic than other relationships.

However, the benefit of using a vignette in the study combats the mentioned drawback in that it allowed the participants to experience and report their perceived job satisfaction based on the same example, rather than pulling from variations of their own personal experiences. By using the same example, with the only variations due to the manipulation of the two independent variables, the influence of confounding variables was limited and allowed the results to be interpreted confidently. Future research should aim to use data from employees of actual organizations. Further elaboration of this research avenue will be revisited when the limitation of the current sample is discussed.

Another limitation comes from the subjective nature of humor. Although two measures were used to gauge humor preference of individuals, the SHRQ (Martin & Lefcourt, 1984) and the qualitative item and associated rating, it is possible that these do not fully capture individual opinions towards humor. This is a potential limitation, as personal preference as well as individual and situational differences may also have influenced participants’ responses.

Although the SHRQ was originally developed for college students and describes situations that are encountered in a university-like setting, using the SHRQ as a tool to measure sense of humor is a potential limitation of the study. The SHRQ focuses on behaviors and was not developed based on the theory of humor. Created in 1984, some of the descriptions of the situations seem dated, such as referring to grades as marks or standing in-line fixing computer errors. Additionally, because it was created for traditional college-age students, scores on the
SHRQ may not be interpreted in the same way across different age groups. There is also an increase in non-traditional students among college populations (Caruth, 2014), and creating items that are not focused solely on the typical college-aged student would be advantageous. Although the sample in the current study reflected traditional-age college students, the SHRQ might not work as well with other student samples.

Despite the subjective nature of humor, efforts at quantifying humor and one’s sense of humor should also continue to be explored. Existing humor literature identified a lack of consistency in defining the construct of humor (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). To combat this inconsistency, researchers should re-examine the specific context in which they are examining humor and tailor it to the situation. By providing clear and specific operational definitions, the ambiguity of how humor is being defined and assessed in each study will be minimized. As previously mentioned, there is a strong need for situational factors to be taken into account in order to fully capture the nature of humor and more accurately assess humor as it happens in reality. Creating a scale that will measure an individual’s sense of humor needs to be further explored and should be based on an actual theory of humor. In a similar vein, the SHRQ should be updated with situational items that reflect today’s reality and that can be generalized to a wider demographic range (e.g., technology, family, careers).

That only one specific group membership was examined is another limitation of this study. At any given point, an individual will have multiple group affiliations, some more specific or pronounced than others (Kassin, Fein, & Marcus, 2011; Turner et al., 1994). Within the workplace, supervisor and co-worker group membership is only one of the many possible groupings. Membership in other groups that were not explored may have more or less of an impact on job satisfaction. Future research should investigate additional group affiliations that
are common within the workplace (e.g. specific departments within an organization) and if different in-groups yield similar results.

In addition to the source of humor involved, future research should continue to explore the role humor plays in the workplace by examining additional situational and social factors and by using data from actual organizations. Lehmann-Willenbrock and Allen (2014) discovered that humor patterns, rather than individual humor attempts, were connected to team performance, as measured by supervisor ratings of team effectiveness. Humor patterns are sequences of behavior brought on by the humor, such as additional humorous remarks in a row after the initial humorous comment. Lehmann-Willenbrock and Allen also found that the team-level job insecurity climate played a role in team performance such that there was a positive relationship between humor patterns and team performance in situations of low job insecurity only and not for situations in high job insecurity. This provides support for the assertion that additional work-related factors (e.g., job security, culture of the organization, sources of humor) need to be taken into account to fully understand the effects of humor within the workplace.

Although there were only two types of humor examined in this study, future research should investigate the other types of humor and the impact comments can have in organizations. Additional trends in the humor used and different organizational outcomes (e.g. organizational commitment, counterproductive citizenship behaviors) may emerge.

An additional limitation of this study comes from the composition of the sample, college students from a private, Jesuit university. Although the study collected work history information which indicated that participants had work experience ($n = 202, 94.8\%$) in a variety of industries, the work environments that college students have been employed in may be restricted. However, information about specific jobs held was not collected in the present study. As such, the results
may not be generalizable to high-status and prestigious jobs; however, results should at least be reflective of entry level jobs, which are positions that are likely to employ college students and recent college graduates.

Future research should also make attempts to study humor in actual organizational settings. In the sample used in the current study, small mean differences were found in perceived job satisfaction between supervisor and co-worker conditions. By using actual employees of an organization, robust effects may be found in the impact that source of humor has on job satisfaction. The lower ratings of perceived job satisfaction for supervisor humor found in the present study may translate into even lower ratings when the sample consists of employees in actual organizations. These lower ratings could be explained by the literature of destructive leadership (e.g., Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

In a meta-analysis by Schyns and Schilling (2013), destructive leadership is defined as a “process in which over a longer period of time the activities, experiences and/or relationships of an individual or the members of a group are repeatedly influenced by their supervisor in a way that is perceived as hostile and/or obstructive” (p. 141). Schyns and Schilling reported multiple articles that found destructive leadership to be negatively related to job satisfaction. Because a component of destructive leadership involves ridiculing followers (in this study, humor towards subordinates), lower job satisfaction and less enjoyable work experiences could have resulted (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

Additionally, perception is a key component of destructive leadership; that is, it matters how the subordinate perceives the leader’s behavior, and in this study, how they perceive the supervisor’s comment. With humor being the subjective construct that it is, differences in the perception of the comment and its influence on attitudes can vary among subordinates in an
organization. Despite a supervisor having good intentions with a humorous comment, it ultimately depends on how the subordinate perceived the comment.

Despite these potential limitations, results of the present study are still a beneficial addition to the workplace humor literature, and identifying the study’s shortcomings helps pave the road for the future research. As the results indicate, the use of different types of humor can have a major impact on employee attitudes, specifically perceived job satisfaction, and further exploration is warranted.

Conclusions

This study adds to the humor literature by providing support for the different types of humor and the impact that they can have within the workplace. Participants exposed to positive humor reported significantly higher levels of perceived job satisfaction than individuals exposed to negative humor. This implies that negative humor, regardless of the source from which it comes, has a negative influence on perceived job satisfaction. Before incorporating humor in the workplace, employees should be cautious and evaluate additional factors, including the individuals who might be affected by the comment. What may be viewed as appropriate or friendly to one individual may be received differently by another.

The impact that a humorous comment can have on an individual may simply boil down to how the recipient of the remark perceives it. With the ambiguous intent associated with workplace incivility, there is also a great deal of ambiguity in evaluating humor (e.g., Was Pat joking or being serious? Was Pat trying to be harsh or good-natured?), and consistent with incivility, the recipient is left to decide how to evaluate and react to the comment (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). It is this perception of the comment that will ultimately determine how much impact the comment will have. Despite the lack of support in the present study for the source of
humor having an influence on perceived job satisfaction, interpersonal relationships and membership to different social groups should also be considered before making witty or amusing remarks to individuals within the workplace.
Chapter VI

Summary

Humor is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, and its definition often varies with the context of the research domain (Cooper, 2005; Mesmer-Magnus, Glew, & Viswesvaran, 2012). Typically, any action, such as a joke, that can result in laughter or amusement in the workplace can be classified as workplace humor. Due to the interpersonal nature of humor, specifically in the workplace, humor can serve as an important communication tool in the mediating of workplace relationships (Al Obthani, Omar, & Bakri, 2013).

The use of humor within the workplace can be beneficial in many ways (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). The potentially detrimental effects that the misuse of humor can have within the workplace, however, need to be explored. The purpose of this study was to examine different kinds of humor and the effect that type and source of humor have on perceived job satisfaction.

Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and Weir (2003) defined four dimensions relating to individual differences in the use of humor: affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating, and aggressive. Although these have been identified as general humor styles, there are additional specific types of humor that exist and play important roles in the workplace; however, the focus of the present study was affiliative and aggressive humor.

Affiliative humor is characterized as good-natured inside jokes, practical jokes, and funny stories that can be specific to certain groups, with the purpose of bringing people together and
amusing others. Martin et al. (2003) found affiliative humor to be strongly related to extraversion and openness. This humor was also positively correlated with cheerfulness, self-esteem, and psychological well-being and negatively related with depression, anxiety, seriousness, and bad moods (Martín et al., 2003).

This style of humor is primarily used to enhance social interactions and improve communication. When used by a group member, a positive emotion component is displayed by the act of group association, which conveys trust and increases group cohesiveness (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). In the workplace, this style of humor helps in the enhancement of social interactions, communication, group cohesiveness, reducing social distance, and stress management (Lang & Lee, 2010; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

*Aggressive humor* involves teasing, belittling, or bullying others (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). It can be used as a way to criticize and manipulate others (Martin et al., 2003; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Aggressive humor can alienate individuals in the workplace, undermine relationships, and could contribute to dysfunction (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). This style of humor was found to be positively related to hostility and aggression and negatively related to seriousness, relationship satisfaction, and interpersonal competence (Martin et al., 2003; Wisse & Rietzschel, 2014).

How humor is received may depend on if the humor source belongs to an in- or out-group in relation to the target. Perceptions of appropriateness of a humorous comment can depend largely on the initiator as well as the target audience, and may reflect real or perceived group membership. What is deemed appropriate for certain individuals to say but not others may result from membership in either an in- or out-group.
Differences in the reception of humor may cause serious concern for organizations. Organizational outcomes, such as job satisfaction, can be jeopardized by the differences in impact that a humorous remark can have, varying by humor type and source. Job satisfaction is commonly understood as a work-related attitude reflecting how an employee views aspects of the job (Diestel, Wegge, & Schmidt, 2014). Job satisfaction is heavily researched, as it is positively related to important organizational outcomes, such as commitment, attendance, job performance, and negatively related to turnover (Aamodt, 1999).

**Rationale and Hypotheses**

Affiliative humor has been found to positively relate to psychological well-being and cheerfulness (Martin et al., 2003). Within the workplace, affiliative humor can enhance social interactions, communication, and group cohesion, reduces social distance, and aid in stress management (Lang & Lee, 2010; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

Aggressive humor has been found to be positively related to hostility and aggression and negatively related to relationship satisfaction and interpersonal competence (Martin et al., 2003; Wisse & Rietzschel, 2014). Drawing from the incivility literature (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999), there is the possibility of ambiguous intent to harm associated with the use of aggressive humor, leaving it up to the recipient to determine the true intention of the comment. As incidences of incivility increase, employees potentially become less satisfied with multiple components of their employment. Based on the existing literature of affiliative and aggressive humor, the following is hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 1: There will be a main effect for humor type on perceived job satisfaction such that individuals exposed to affiliative humor will report higher levels of perceived job satisfaction than individuals exposed to aggressive humor.*
Affiliative humor from a supervisor can reduce the perception of their status, making them appear more approachable to subordinates, and the comment will be viewed as consistent with the norms of their subordinates (Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Henson, 2000; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). By being perceived as part of the group and not solely as an authority figure, supervisor use of affiliative humor should result in higher perceived job satisfaction than affiliative humor from a co-worker.

Aggressive humor may be considered a form of incivility, making the targeted employee unsure of the true intention of the comment and source (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Acts of incivility do not always have the same effect on an employee, varying dependent upon the source. Incivility from a supervisor is positively and significantly related to employee turnover intentions, whereas incivility from a co-worker is not (Ghosh, Reio, & Bang, 2012). As job satisfaction is an established determinant of turnover (Tan & Akhtar, 1995) and likely fluctuates in a similar manner as turnover intentions, supervisor use of aggressive humor should be associated with lower levels of perceived job satisfaction than aggressive humor from a co-worker.

Based on the positive nature of affiliative and negative nature of aggressive humor, perceptions of in- and out-groups, specifically between co-workers and supervisors, the following is hypothesized:

_Hypothesis 2: The source of humor will interact with the type of humor, such that affiliative humor from a supervisor will result in higher perceived job satisfaction than affiliative humor from a co-worker, and aggressive humor from a supervisor will result in lower perceived job satisfaction than aggressive humor from a co-worker._
Methods

Participants were recruited from the psychology participant pool at a small, private university. A total of 213 participants completed the study and passed at least one of two manipulation check questions.

Of the 213 participants, 174 were female and 39 were male. The modal participant age range was 18-22 ($n = 207$). Participants identified racially as the following: White ($n = 179$), Black/African American ($n = 8$), Asian ($n = 8$), Hispanic/Latino ($n = 8$), multi-racial ($n = 6$), American Indian/Alaskan ($n = 2$), Indian ($n = 1$) and Arabian ($n = 1$).

Only 11 participants reported that they had no previous work experience. Work experience was gained from a variety of different industries, such as administrative, customer service, entertainment/recreation, food service, retail/sales, caregiver/babysitter, education, and government/military.

Measures

**Sense of humor.** The 21-item Situational Humor Response Questionnaire (SHRQ; Martin & Lefcourt, 1984) was used to capture participants’ situational sense of humor. This questionnaire was chosen to measure sense of humor using situational items as it paralleled the situational vignette. Items in SHRQ were created for college students. Items were answered on a 5-point scale in an alphabetical response format such that responses ranged from a (I would not have been particularly amused) to e (I would have laughed heartily). Responses were adapted to appropriately fit each item by changing one or two of the words (e.g., I would have laughed heartily with the person, I would have laughed heartily much of the time). Higher scores indicated a higher sense of humor.
**Situation recall.** The study included a qualitative component to further gauge humor preference and sense of humor of participants. The item asked the participant to describe a situation that they found to be funny and explain why they found it humorous. After participants responded to this item, they answered one additional item that asked them to rate whether the situation they described was positive or negative on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Negative*) to 5 (*Positive*).

**Perceived job satisfaction.** The dependent variable of interest in this study was perceived job satisfaction. Participants were asked to answer two items on perceived job satisfaction from the perspective of the employee in the vignette. Participants completed the perceived job satisfaction measures after reading the manipulation component (vignette) of the study. To test hypotheses 1 and 2, the overall job satisfaction item was used.

**Procedures**

IRB approval was obtained prior to the onset of data collection. Other than the demographic items, no potentially identifying information was collected. The data for the study were collected using Qualtrics.

**Manipulation.** Vignettes were used to capture each of the four possible conditions, to one of which each participant was randomly assigned through Qualtrics random assignment function. All variations placed the participant in a workplace as the main employee of the vignette. Each vignette involved the main employee being the target of one of two types of humor, affiliative or aggressive, and came from one of two sources, either co-worker or supervisor. After reading the vignette, participants completed the perceived job satisfaction items from the perspective of the main employee.
Following the perceived job satisfaction items, participants answered the SHRQ and completed the humorous situation recall items. Demographic and work history items were collected next. Participants then answered information questions from the vignette. These items served as manipulation checks to ensure participants were actually reflecting on the vignette as they answered the perceived job satisfaction items. Participants had to correctly answer at least one of the two manipulation check items about the vignette (what was discussed and the position held by the source) in order for their data to be included in the analyses. Participants were asked to report the perceived gender of the androgynously named humor source (Pat) and to rate Pat’s comment on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (harsh) to 5 (Good-Natured).

Results

Hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 were tested using a 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial analysis of variance. The overall job satisfaction item served as the DV for these hypotheses. Hypothesis one proposed a main effect of humor type on perceived job satisfaction. Consistent with existing literature (Cann et al., 2014; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012), it was hypothesized that the use of an affiliative humor comment would result in higher levels of perceived job satisfaction and the use of an aggressive humor comment would result in lower levels of perceived job satisfaction. Results showed a significant difference in perceived job satisfaction in the hypothesized direction, such that participants exposed to affiliative humor reported significantly higher levels of perceived job satisfaction ($M = 3.42, SD = .87$) than participants exposed to aggressive humor ($M = 2.64, SD = .91$), $F(1, 211) = 39.62, p < .001$. The effect size for humor type was large ($\eta^2 = .16$). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed an interaction between type of humor and source of humor, such that affiliative humor from a supervisor would result in higher perceived job satisfaction than
affiliative humor from a co-worker, and aggressive humor from a supervisor would result in lower perceived job satisfaction than aggressive humor from a co-worker. The hypothesized interaction was not significant, $F(1, 209) = 0.35, p = .55$. The source of the comment (co-worker or supervisor) did not significantly interact with type of humor to affect perceived job satisfaction. The source of humor was also isolated to explore its potential main effect on perceived job satisfaction; this also yielded non-significant results, $F(1,209) = 1.53, p = .22$.

Because there was no significant difference in SHRQ scores across the four conditions $F(1, 209) = .23, p = .63$, SHRQ scores were not used as a covariate when testing hypotheses 1 and 2. In addition to testing the two hypotheses, several exploratory analyses were conducted. These included determining if there were any significant effects of participant gender on key variables, significant correlations, or other relationships among the variables.

**Exploratory Analyses**

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate if there was a significant difference in participants’ satisfaction ratings for working with Pat based on participant gender. Results showed no significant difference between males ($M = 2.90, SD = .91$) and females ($M = 2.56, SD = 1.01$) on satisfaction ratings for working with Pat, $t(211) = 1.93, p = .06$.

Perceptions of Pat’s gender were then explored. Of the 39 male participants, 32 perceived Pat to be male (82.1%), two perceived Pat to be female (5.1%), and five were undecided (12.8%). Of the 174 female participants, 133 perceived Pat to be male (76.4%), 32 perceived Pat to be female (18.4%), and 9 were undecided (5.2%). In total, 165 participants perceived Pat to be male (77.5 %), 34 as female (16%) with 14 undecided (6.6%).

A follow up independent-samples t-test was run to examine if the harshness ratings of Pat’s comment significantly differed based on participant gender. Results showed no significant
difference between males ($M = 2.90, SD = 1.14$) and females ($M = 2.63, SD = 1.13$) on their ratings of Pat’s comment, $t(211) = 1.34, p = .18$.

**Discussion**

The present study added to the literature on workplace humor by examining the effect that comments using positive, affiliative humor as opposed to negative, aggressive humor can have on perceived job satisfaction. The source of the humor comment was also examined to explore how different sources, either co-worker or supervisor, can further affect perceived job satisfaction. This study revealed several interesting findings, including support for hypothesis 1, a lack of support for hypothesis 2, a high proportion of female participants, and multiple significant correlations. In addition to testing the two hypotheses, multiple analyses were conducted to examine gender differences and significant correlations among the variables.

As existing literature indicates (Cann et al., 2014; Martin et al., 2003; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012), positive humor and negative humor can have different effects on individuals in the workplace. In the present study, affiliative humor resulted in significantly higher levels of perceived job satisfaction than aggressive humor. Participants exposed to an affiliative humor comment reported higher levels of perceived job satisfaction, from both a co-worker and supervisor, than did individuals who were exposed to an aggressive humor comment.

Hypothesis 2 stated that the source of humor would interact with the type of humor, such that affiliative humor from a supervisor would result in higher perceived job satisfaction than affiliative humor from a co-worker, and aggressive humor from a supervisor will result in lower perceived job satisfaction than aggressive humor from a co-worker. Although there was no significance obtained for humor source and the interaction of humor type and humor source on perceived job satisfaction, the means from the different conditions are worth examining.
**Future research.** Despite the growing number of articles on humor (Mendiburo-Seguel, Paez, & Martinez-Sanchez, 2015), specifically in the workplace (Cann et al., 2014; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012) there are still multiple avenues that would be beneficial for future research to explore. These research areas include further investigating negative types of humor and how their influence differs from positive humor, continuing attempts of developing ways to quantify humor and sense of humor, and increasing the use of data from actual organizations.

**Limitations.** One of the major limitations of the present study is that the vignettes do not capture the unique relationships that often form between co-workers and supervisors or co-workers within the workplace. In a similar vein, the relationship between any supervisor and subordinate or co-worker and co-worker is unique and may have a completely different dynamic than other relationships. However, by using the same example, with the only variations due to the manipulation of the two independent variables, the influence of confounding variables was limited and allowed the results to be interpreted confidently.

That only one specific group membership was examined is another limitation of this study. At any given point, an individual will have multiple group affiliations, some more specific or pronounced than others (Kassin, Fein, & Marcus, 2011; Turner et al., 1994).

Another limitation comes from the subjective nature of humor. Although two measures were used to gauge humor preference of individuals, the SHRQ (Martin & Lefcourt, 1984) and the qualitative item and associated rating, it is possible that these do not fully capture individual opinions towards humor.

An additional limitation of this study comes from the composition of the sample, college students from a private, Jesuit university. The results may not be generalizable to high status and prestigious jobs; however, results should at least be reflective of entry level jobs, which are
positions that are likely to employee college students and recent college graduates. Despite these potential limitations, results of the present study are still a beneficial addition to the workplace humor literature.

**Conclusions**

This study adds to the humor literature by providing support for the different types of humor and the impact that they can have within the workplace. Participants exposed to positive humor reported significantly higher levels of perceived job satisfaction than individuals exposed to negative humor. This implies that negative humor, regardless of the source from which it comes, has a negative influence on perceived job satisfaction. Before incorporating humor in the workplace, employees should be cautious and evaluate additional factors, including the individuals who might be affected by the comment. What may be viewed as appropriate or friendly to one individual may be received differently by another.

The impact that a humorous comment can have on an individual may simply boil down to how the recipient of the remark perceived it. With the ambiguous intent associated with workplace incivility, there is also a great deal of ambiguity in evaluating humor (e.g., was Pat joking or being serious? Was Pat trying to be harsh or good-natured?), and consistent with incivility, the recipient is left to decide how to evaluate and react to the comment (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). It is this perception of the comment that will ultimately determine how much impact the comment will have. Despite the lack of support in the present study for the source of humor having an influence on perceived job satisfaction, interpersonal relationships and membership to different social groups should also be considered before making witty or amusing remarks to individuals within the workplace.
References


Appendix A

Demographic Items

**Gender**
- [ ] Female
- [ ] Male
- [ ] Transgender
- [ ] Prefer not to Respond

**Age**
- [ ] 18-22
- [ ] 23-27
- [ ] 28-32
- [ ] 33+

**Race (Please choose one)**
- [ ] American Indian/Alaska Native
- [ ] Asian
- [ ] Black/African American
- [ ] Hispanic/Latino
- [ ] Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- [ ] White
- [ ] Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic
- [ ] Other (please specify): ______________

**Class Standing:**
- [ ] First-year
- [ ] Sophomore
- [ ] Junior
- [ ] Senior
- [ ] Other

**Based on your major, which college do you belong to?**
___ College of Social Sciences, Health, & Education (Majors: Athletic Training, Criminal Justice, Education, Early Childhood Education, Middle Childhood Education, Montessori Education, Special Education, Teaching Sciences, Health Services, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Psychology, Radiologic Technology, Social Work, Sport Management, Sport Marketing)


Are you currently employed/working FOR pay?
___ Yes
___ No

If yes, how any hours per week do you work?
___ 0-5
___ 6-10
___ 11-15
___ 16-20
___ 21-25
___ 26-30
___ 31-35
___ 36+

How many different jobs have you held (including your current position)?
___ 0
___ 1
___ 2
___ 3
___ 4
___ 5+

In total, how many months have you worked (adding up time from every job)?
___ 0
___ 1-6 months
___ 7-12 months
___ 13-18 months
___ 19-24 months
___ 25+ months (2+ years)

Which of the following industries best describe your overall employment experience:
___ Administrative
___ Customer Service
___ Education
___ Entertainment/Recreation
Please click the link below to be taken to another survey, where you can enter your name, your professor’s name, and the class to which you would like the participant pool credit to be applied. Because this information is being collected in a separate survey, I will not be able to connect your identity to any of your responses.

[LINK]
Appendix B

Situational Humor Response Questionnaire

The Situational Humor Response Questionnaire was retrieved from PsycTESTS.

Appendix C

Humorous Situation Recall

Directions: Please take a moment to recall a humorous situation or something funny that happened to you within the past month. Briefly describe the situation that you found to be funny. Why was this funny to you? Character Max: 2000

How would you rate the situation that you just described, in terms of the humor being a negative or positive experience?

1  2  3  4  5
Negative      Neutral      Positive
September 30, 2015

Logan Wikoff

Re: Protocol #15-027, Humor Type, Source, and Perceived Job Satisfaction

Dear Ms. Wikoff:

The IRB has reviewed the materials regarding your study, referenced above, and has determined that it meets the criteria for the Exempt from Review category under Federal Regulation 45CFR46. Your protocol is approved as exempt research, and therefore requires no further oversight by the IRB. We appreciate your thorough treatment of the issues raised and your timely response.

If you wish to modify your study, including the addition of data collection sites, it will be necessary to obtain IRB approval prior to implementing the modification. If any adverse events occur, please notify the IRB immediately.

Please contact our office if you have any questions. We wish you success with your project!

Sincerely,

Kathleen J. Hart, Ph.D., ABPP
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board
Xavier University
KJH/sb
Appendix E

Vignettes

In the following situation, picture yourself in the position of the employee described. Please take your time and read the situation thoroughly. Later in the survey, you will have to answer questions about the situation described.

You have been working at your new job for 4 months. You enjoy the work that you do and so far like the company you are working for.

Vignette #1: Aggressive-Supervisor
Your supervisor is Pat. Generally, you and Pat see each other when you have your weekly meetings. Arriving at the building one morning, you run into Pat and share the elevator ride up to your floor. The following exchange takes place during the ride:

You: Good morning, Pat!
Pat: Morning. Did you get the message about our new account?
You: Yes, I did! It sounds like something I may really be interested in.
Pat: I figured as much- I’m not saying you bite off more than you can chew, but sometimes you seem to have as much focus as a kindergartner on a sugar high– hey, look: shiny buttons to push! Pat smiles and points to the elevator buttons, laughing just a little too loudly.
Pat: Seriously, though- showing a little more focus would be good.

Despite Pat smiling and laughing as the elevator door opens, you aren’t quite sure how the “focus” comment was meant.

Vignette #2: Affiliative-Supervisor
Your supervisor is Pat. Generally, you and Pat see each other when you have your weekly meetings. Arriving at the building one morning, you run into Pat and share the elevator ride up to your floor. The following exchange takes place during the ride:

You: Good morning, Pat!
Pat: Morning. Did you get the message about our new account?
You: Yes, I did! It sounds like something I may really be interested in.
Pat: I figured as much- you’re crazy like the rest of us! Ha! Always going after the next new thing- hey, look: shiny buttons to push!
Pat smiles and points to the elevator buttons, laughing just a little too loudly.
Pat: A little more focus would be good for all of us, am I right?

Pat is still smiling and laughing as the elevator door opens. That’s kind of how Pat always is.
Vignette #3: Aggressive-Coworker
Pat is one of your coworkers. Generally, you and Pat see each other every day and have worked together on a few projects. Arriving at the building one morning, you run into Pat and share the elevator ride up to your floor. The following exchange takes place during the ride:

You: Good morning, Pat!
Pat: Morning. Did you get the message about our new account?
You: Yes, I did! It sounds like something I may really be interested in.
Pat: I figured as much- I’m not saying you bite off more than you can chew, but sometimes you seem to have as much focus as a kindergartner on a sugar high– hey, look: shiny buttons to push!
Pat smiles and points to the elevator buttons, laughing just a little too loudly.
Pat: Seriously, though- showing a little more focus would be good.

Despite Pat smiling and laughing as the elevator door opens, you aren’t quite sure how the “focus” comment was meant.

Vignette #4: Affiliative-Coworker
Pat is one of your coworkers. Generally, you and Pat see each other every day and have worked together on a few projects. Arriving at the building one morning, you run into Pat and share the elevator ride up to your floor. The following exchange takes place during the ride:

You: Good morning, Pat!
Pat: Morning. Did you get the message about our new account?
You: Yes, I did! It sounds like something I may really be interested in.
Pat: I figured as much- you’re crazy like the rest of us! Ha! Always going after the next new thing- hey, look: shiny buttons to push!
Pat smiles and points to the elevator buttons, laughing just a little too loudly.
Pat: A little more focus would be good for all of us, am I right?

Pat is still smiling and laughing as the elevator door opens. That’s kind of how Pat always is.
Appendix F

Manipulation Check

You and Pat discussed which of the following?

__The weather  __A new account  __Your weekend

Pat was your_________.

__Supervisor  __Co-worker

What gender did you perceive Pat to be?

__Male  __Female  __Undecided

How would you rate Pat’s comment about needing a little more focus?

1  2  3  4  5

 Harsh          Neutral    Good-Natured
Appendix G

INFORMED CONSENT

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Logan Wikoff through Xavier University. The purpose of the study is to examine aspects of interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

You will read a few paragraphs describing a situation and answer items based on your perceptions of the situation, as well as other short surveys. There will also be questions about your work history and demographic information. The study is expected to take a total of 15 minutes to complete, so you will receive 15 minutes of participant pool credit for taking part.

The surveys included in the study do not ask for your name; therefore your responses and all data collected will remain anonymous. Although I will collect your name, your professor’s name, and the course to which you would like to receive credit, I will do so in a separate survey. As such, your name will never be able to be connected to your responses. All analyses will be conducted at the group-level and only the researchers of the study will have access to your data.

There are no known risks associated with the study. Participation is completely voluntary and refusal to participate in the study will not influence any future services that you are entitled to from the University. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You have to be at least 18 years old to participate in this study.

By participating in the study, you will help us further the field of psychology and better understand workplace interpersonal relationships. If you have any questions at any time during the study, you may contact the principal investigator, Logan Wikoff, wikoffl@xavier.edu. You may also contact the research supervisor, Morrie Mullins at mullins@xavier.edu. Questions about your rights as a research subject should be directed to Xavier University’s Institutional Review Board at (513) 745-2870.

By clicking “Next”, you are indicating that you agree to the following statement: I have been informed about the research study, the associated risks and benefits, and have the opportunity to ask questions at any time. I freely give my consent to participate in this research study.
Appendix H

Debriefing Form

Thank you for participating in my study. The purpose of this study is to explore how humor can be received and influence job satisfaction in the workplace. I was unable to tell you the specific purpose of the study due to the potential influence it could have on your responses. In order for this study to add to existing humor research, the data being collected and analyzed must be valid and not therefore influenced by additional variables, such as knowing the purpose of the study in advance. As collecting valid data is critical to the study, I request that you please do not discuss the purpose of this study with anyone. Thank you again for helping further my research and the field of psychology.

For more information about the study or the results of the study, please contact the principal investigator, Logan Wikoff, wikoffl@xavier.edu.