

Exploring Workplace Humor Perception: The Influence of Personality and Demographic Factors

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Smith Global Leadership Scholars

by

Margaret Wishart

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GLS Faculty Advisor: Dr. Christina Hymer

THESIS/CAPSTONE ADVISOR SIGNATURE APPROVAL PAGE

University of Tennessee Haslam College of Business

Smith Global Leadership Scholars

As the faculty advisor for:

Margaret Wishart

I have read this paper and find it satisfactory.

Christina Hymer

Abstract

Humor plays an important role in enhancing workplace relationships, boosting morale, and creating a positive work environment. However, when humor is misunderstood or crosses boundaries, it can lead to workplace harassment. The perception of humor as harassment is subjective and varies depending on individual factors such as personality types and demographic characteristics. This study investigates how these factors influence the perception of harassment in the workplace. This study surveys 200 full-time employees, using a quantitative approach to measure their perceptions of four humor types – affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating, and aggressive. This research also explores how personality traits and demographic factors influence these perceptions. The results indicate that while no humor type was significantly more likely to be perceived as harassment than others, they were all more likely, on average, to be perceived as harassment than not. Personality traits such as conscientiousness and openness and factors like education and work modality had significant influences on how humor was interpreted. These findings suggest that organizations should consider these individual differences in the regulation of workplace humor to reduce the risk of harassment and maintain a positive, healthy work environment.

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Exploring Workplace Humor Perception: The Influence of Personality and Demographic Factors

Humor is defined as a “psychological response characterized by the positive emotion of amusement, the appraisal that something is funny, and the tendency to laugh” (McGraw, 2016) and it can be verbal, physical, or visual. Humor is present in most workplaces and can enhance working relationships, boost morale, and create a positive work environment. In the workplace, leaders and employees use humor to build teams, enhance communication, and create a sense of belonging (Hsiao et al., 2024). However, when humor is misused or crosses boundaries, it can result in negative outcomes such as workplace harassment.

Individual perception of humor refers to the ways in which individuals recognize, interpret, and respond to humorous stimuli (Martin et al., 2003), and is a determining factor in whether workplace humor is appropriate or not. Because humor is subjective, its perception can differ greatly between individuals. Personality, demographic characteristics, and personal experiences can influence how an individual perceives humor and when it is classified as harassment (Ng & Lee, 2024).

Workplace harassment can be defined as “interpersonal behavior aimed at intentionally harming another employee in the workplace” (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Due to its subjectivity, an instance of humor could be perceived as harmless by one person and harassment by another. Because of this, categorizing humor as harassment is about both the content of the humor and its perception by the recipient.

When humor is misperceived as workplace harassment, it can negatively impact both the employee and the company and lead to decreased productivity and increased turnover (Perry, 2024). The subjectivity of humor perception can be challenging for organizations as they aim to

establish a workplace culture that is safe and respectful for all. Understanding how humor perception varies by individual can reduce the risk of humor becoming harassment and ensure that employees feel psychologically safe at work (Brown & Woodfield, 2024).

The purpose of this study is to examine whether perception of humor as harassment varies across personality types and demographic backgrounds (Ng & Lee, 2024). This research aims to identify factors that impact the likelihood of humor being perceived as harassment by exploring how individuals with varying backgrounds and characteristics interpret different types of humor. The findings of this study can assist organizations in better understanding how to navigate humor to minimize the risk of harassment and promote a healthy work environment.

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. Are certain types of humor more likely than others to be perceived as harassment in the workplace?
2. Do individuals with different personality types perceive various types of humor differently?
3. Are there demographic differences that influence how humor is perceived as harassment in the workplace?

By exploring the way in which humor is perceived as harassment, this research addresses the importance of a psychologically safe work environment. Workplace harassment can lead to toxic work environments and cultures, which can negatively impact both the employees and their organization (Heymann et al., 2023). This study seeks to explore differences in the perception of humor types as harassment while considering the influence of demographic factors and personality types. This research aims to provide insights into how humor can be better managed in the workplace to ensure that it enhances the work environment rather than destructs it, helping

organizations identify potential risks related to workplace harassment and create policies that foster a safe and supportive environment for all employees.

Literature Review

Workplace Humor

Workplace humor is often seen as a crucial factor in establishing a sense of belonging in the workplace (Hsiao et al., 2024). It can facilitate connections and team cohesiveness by enhancing workplace communication and reducing tension, making employees feel more comfortable with one another (Brown & Woodfield, 2024). Workplace leaders can imbue humor within the organization's culture by being a positive role model, reducing tension, and enhancing confidence and motivation (Rosenburg et al., 2024). Humor is a tool that leaders can use to create a positive work environment that enables the formation of strong working relationships among employees (Hsiao et al., 2024).

Types of Workplace Humor

Humor can be conceptualized in many ways, and for the purposes of this study, Rod Martin's Humor Styles Questionnaire was used to assess it. Martin separates humor into two categories - adaptive and maladaptive.

Adaptive humor refers to humor that helps individuals cope with negative emotions by enhancing well-being. Within the adaptive category, humor can either be affiliative or self-enhancing. Affiliative humor is used to enhance one's relationship with others, while self-enhancing humor is used to enhance one's self-esteem (Martin et al., 2003).

Maladaptive humor refers to humor that is harmful and helps individuals cope with negative emotions in unhealthy ways or at the expense of others (R. Martin & Kuiper, 2016). Within the maladaptive category, humor can be either aggressive or self-defeating (R. Martin &

Kuiper, 2016). Aggressive humor refer to humor used to enhance the self at the expense of others and self-defeating humor is used to enhance relationships at the expense of oneself (Martin et al., 2003). It is likely that aggressive humor is the type that is most often perceived as harassment because it can put social relationships at risk, and it is recommended that people avoid using aggressive humor in the workplace (Ng & Lee, 2024).

Influential Factors

Many factors influence how people perceive humor, and these factors are important to consider in determining when workplace humor is being used appropriately. Demographic factors shape individual values, experiences, and backgrounds, which directly influence what they find humorous and what they find disrespectful (Ng & Lee, 2024). Gender is a major factor, because men's and women's reactions to humor significantly differ. These differences can cause serious disconnects when this occurs in a work setting (Wilson & Molleston, 1981). Workplace interactions that occur because of this disconnect can contribute to the persistence of gender inequalities that can be seen in the workplace (Ringblom, 2022). An example of this inequality is that women are also disproportionately exposed to harassment in the workplace, specifically sexual harassment (Gómez-González et al., 2023). Another major factor is the difference in humor perception depending on an individual's industry affiliation. Different industries have very different cultures and norms, which can make it difficult to assess when humor is taken too far.

Personality differences also play a significant role in humor perception because individuals with certain personality traits interpret and react to humor differently. Extraverted individuals tend to enjoy humor more because they gravitate towards positive emotional experiences (Martin, 2007). On the other hand, those with high neuroticism are more likely to be

offended by humor that does not bother others (Willis, 2011). Additionally, those with high levels of openness may be more comfortable with unconventional humor (Harrison & Macdonald, 2019). Overall, personality differences change the way humor is perceived and these differences should be addressed in researching the impacts of workplace humor.

Another factor to consider is workplace power dynamics. In combination with gender discrepancies and other factors, power dynamics in the workplace can impact the frequency of workplace harassment because of humor. The male dominance theory explains that oftentimes men maintain power in their place of work by using sexual harassment of others to protect their own position (Jayoung Song, 2023). This is consistent with sexual harassment of women being more common in male dominated workplaces (Kirkner et al., 2022), even to the point that certain women may refrain from entering that field at all out of discomfort or fear. In accounting, a predominantly male field, workplace sexual harassment may be one of the reasons that female partners in that field are scarce (Ngo et al., 2022). There are many factors that can influence the perception of humor in the workplace, and they should be considered to avoid workplace harassment when possible.

The “Dark Side” of Workplace Humor

Despite its benefits, workplace humor can have detrimental negative effects when taken too far. Humor can be expressed in different ways, many of which are nonverbal (Ringblom, 2022). Humor also occurs spontaneously most of the time rather than being methodically planned out (Martin & Kuiper, 2016). It can also be used to cover up unacceptable actions or words in the workplace by removing the element of seriousness (Brown & Woodfield, 2024). These factors can blur the lines between acceptable behavior and harassment, leaving no clear right or wrong way to use humor in the workplace.

Workplace Harassment

If left unchecked, workplace humor can easily turn into harassment and promote alienation in the workplace. One prominent form of harassment is the creation of a “hostile environment”, the standards for which have changed since the Civil Rights Act was first created in 1964 (Thomas, 2023). A “hostile environment” refers to one where demeaning behavior is present (Thomas, 2023). These environments must be regulated as such conditions are not appropriate in a workplace setting. Instead, the workplace should be a safe environment for employees to remain productive and fulfill the expectations of their role without major interruption. Workplace harassment is still prevalent today, despite it being a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

It is important to note that most harassment in the workplace is nonphysical (Ngo et al., 2022), which can make it difficult for workers to clearly determine what constitutes harassment and should be reported. This lack of clarity is one of the many reasons that workplace harassment goes severely underreported. Many people do not feel comfortable reporting harassment when it happens to them, an issue that has stalled progress towards eliminating workplace harassment.

There are many reasons that individuals decide not to report harassment at work, and according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), these reasons include fears of “disbelief, inaction, or social or professional retaliation” (Kirkner et al., 2022). Not reporting these instances can cause future problems because if these actions go unreported, those who harass others at work are never held accountable and the cycle keeps occurring. It is imperative that companies act when they receive a harassment claim as having policies in place is only successful if employees feel comfortable reporting an instance of harassment. In the case

of humor, this interpretation may be due to differences in humor perception (Gómez-González et al., 2023).

Conclusion

Workplace harassment is a well-documented issue with negative consequences for both individuals and organizations. Understanding how humor can contribute to workplace harassment is crucial for addressing this issue and creating healthy work environments. Harassment has significant effects on employee productivity and behaviors and can lead to the loss of millions of dollars a year for companies (Ngo et al., 2022), a hefty price to pay for something that can often be prevented if handled correctly. Absenteeism is another major issue that can be a result of workplace harassment experiences and can cost companies significant amounts of money (Heymann et al., 2023).

Because Title VII cannot cover all possible scenarios, it is often up to workplaces themselves to ensure that they are handling these issues in an effective manner. This highlights the importance of organizational responsibility in handling workplace harassment. Companies should properly handle the issue of workplace harassment because of its negative impact on both employees and the company as a whole, which can lead to financial burden through turnover and decreased productivity (Perry, 2024). It is important to protect all workers regardless of personal characteristics or work modalities (Runge, 2023). The mere existence of policies does not mean guarantee their effectiveness – they must be “comprehensive, clearly communicated, accompanied by training, and implemented in the way they are intended” (Perry, 2024). When policies are clear and enforced, they become effective.

Even when clear and enforced, organizational policies or programs that address workplace behavior, including humor, may not always apply uniformly or be effective for all

individuals. Since each person's thoughts and feelings differ so greatly from the next, it is difficult to regulate issues that relate to human morality (Martin & Kuiper, 2016). Humor is subjective, and what one person finds harmless, another may perceive as offensive. As a result, implementing policies that are both effective and inclusive can be challenging for organizations. The subjectivity of humor can make it difficult to regulate in the workplace, as it can be misperceived as harassment or used as a cover for inappropriate workplace behavior. Organizations must consider individual differences in perception to ensure that their policies are applicable and fair to all employees.

Policies that are more specific may be more likely to effectively combat workplace sexual harassment. Part 2 of the EMPOWER Act was a bill introduced in March 2019 that focused on nondisparagement or nondisclosure clauses that include workplace harassment (U.S. Congress, 2019). If passed, it would have made it unlawful to include and enforce these clauses in contracts as a condition of employment (U.S. Congress, 2019), encouraging employees who have experienced sexual harassment to report it without being afraid of losing their job. The bill would also require the EEOC to implement a confidential tip-line, training programs, and the spread of workplace harassment-related information (U.S. Congress, 2019). Although the bill has not progressed, it demonstrates a legal approach that could substantially decrease workplace harassment in the future.

This change is important because of the significant consequences harassment has on employee well-being and organizational success. Workplace leaders play a crucial role in establishing workplace culture, which is why research on leaders' use of humor is essential. Managers should consider how employees may perceive their humor and it may be best for them to avoid using aggressive humor in the workplace as it is more likely to be perceived as

inappropriate (Hsiao et al., 2024). Practical change may be possible through training leaders to understand how to use humor in the workplace in a way that is appropriate and facilitates cohesiveness rather than ostracism (Hsiao et al., 2024).

In summary, workplace humor can positively impact companies and employees by improving collaboration and promoting belonging but can be classified as harassment when taken too far. Individual perception of humor and humor type are major factors in determining whether an instance of workplace humor is considered harassment. This research seeks to address the likelihood of different types of humor to be perceived as harassment and how this perception differs by demographic and personality.

Methodology

This study aims to explore the relationship between personality types, demographics, and the perception of different types of workplace humor as harassment. This research uses descriptive statistics and regression analysis to explore how different humor types are perceived differently based on personality types and demographic characteristics. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how humor can be perceived as harassment by various individuals across differing work environments.

Research design

This study uses a quantitative research approach and analysis methods. This analysis focuses on identifying patterns and relationships in the survey responses through statistical methods. Using quantitative methods to find patterns in humor perception allows for an understanding of how varying types of humor are perceived differently by varying types of individuals. The primary research strategy is the distribution of a survey through Qualtrics, an online survey platform.

Participants

The population for this study includes 200 full-time employees employed in a variety of industries. A diverse sample is important in understanding how different demographic characteristics and personality types influence the perception of humor as harassment. Participants must be employed full-time and be over the age of 18.

This survey sought to include broad range of demographic characteristics to explore diverse perspectives on humor. Demographic questions covered age, gender, race, education level, industry, and work arrangements to capture a variety of perspectives on how humor is perceived as harassment across various groups. Participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online crowdsourcing platform that allows access to a large pool of participants.

Data collection methods

The data collection tool was an online survey administered through Qualtrics. The survey included the following key components:

- Demographic questions
 - Demographic questions were used to collect basic information such as age, gender, race, education level, industry, and work arrangements to classify participants and analyze patterns within different groups.
- 44-item Personality Index (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991)
 - This study utilized this personality inventory to assess the personality types of participants in 5 key areas: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.
- Perception of humor types

- The survey provided definitions of the four humor types determined by Rod Martin – affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating, and aggressive (Martin & Kuiper, 2016). Each definition was followed by a Likert scale to determine how likely respondents were to interpret each type of humor as harassment in the workplace.

Key variables

The dependent variable is the perception of humor as harassment, which will be measured through participants' responses to Likert scale items to determine how likely they are to interpret each type of humor as harassment. The independent variables include personality type, demographic characteristics, and the four types of humor (affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating, and aggressive).

Data analysis

This study used regression analysis to explore the relationship between the perception of humor in the workplace and both personality type and demographic backgrounds. Regression analysis allowed us to identify relationships between the variables and patterns within the responses.

Ethical considerations

This study complies with ethical guidelines concerning informed consent and anonymity. All participants received an informed consent form describing the purpose of the study, the anonymity of the study, the study's lack of risks, and how the data would be used. No personally identifiable information was collected. All responses were anonymous, and participants were made aware of the study's confidentiality.

Results

Below are the survey results based on this study's three research questions:

Research Question 1: Are certain types of humor more likely than others to be perceived as harassment in the workplace?

The analysis of the perception of humor as harassment based on humor type revealed a general pattern in the mean differences across the four humor types; See Table 1.

While there were no major differences found between the four humor types in terms of their likelihood of being perceived as harassment, all four types were more likely to be perceived as harassment than not, on average.

Research Question 2: Do individuals with different personality types perceive various types of humor differently?

The analysis of the relationships between Big 5 personality traits and workplace humor perception indicated that individuals with different personality types are likely to perceive workplace humor differently.

Self-defeating

A marginally significant negative relationship was found between conscientiousness and self-defeating humor perception (coefficient = -0.06, $p = 0.09$); See Table 2, suggesting that less conscientious individuals may be more likely to perceive self-defeating humor as harassment.

A marginally significant positive relationship was found between openness and self-defeating humor perception (coefficient = 0.04, $p = 0.09$), indicating that those who score higher in openness may be more likely to perceive self-defeating humor as harassment, but this relationship was not statistically significant.

Self-enhancing

A statistically significant negative relationship was found between conscientiousness and the perception of self-enhancing humor as harassment (coefficient = -0.08, $p = 0.03$); See Table 3. This indicates that those with lower conscientiousness levels were more likely to perceive self-enhancing humor as harassment.

A marginally significant positive relationship was found between agreeableness and the perception of self-defeating humor as harassment (coefficient = 0.07, $p = 0.06$). This implies that individuals who are more agreeable may be more likely to perceive self-enhancing humor as harassment, but this relationship was not statistically significant.

Aggressive

A statistically significant positive relationship was found between openness the perception of aggressive humor as harassment (coefficient = 0.06, $p = 0.02$); See Table 4. This implies that those who score higher in openness may be more likely to perceive aggressive humor as harassment.

A marginally significant negative relationship was found between extraversion and the perception of aggressive humor as harassment (coefficient = -0.08, $p = 0.07$). This indicates that those who are less extroverted may be more likely to perceive aggressive humor as harassment, but this relationship was not statistically significant.

Affiliative

A statistically significant negative relationship was found between conscientiousness and the perception of affiliative humor as harassment (coefficient = -0.08, $p = 0.02$); See Table 5. This indicates that those who are less conscientious may be more likely to perceive affiliative humor as harassment.

A statistically significant positive relationship was found between openness and the perception of affiliative humor as harassment (coefficient = 0.07, $p = 0.003$). This suggests that individuals who score higher in openness may be more likely to perceive affiliative humor as harassment in the workplace.

Research Question 3: Are there demographic differences that influence how humor is perceived as harassment in the workplace?

Self-defeating

A significant positive relationship was found between work arrangement and the perception of self-defeating humor as harassment (coefficient = 0.37, $p = 0.004$); See Table 6. This implies that individuals that are in more flexible work modalities (hybrid or remote) may be more likely to perceive self-defeating humor as harassment in the workplace.

A marginally significant positive relationship was found between education level and the perception of self-defeating humor as harassment (coefficient = 0.19, $p = 0.08$). This suggests that employees that have received more education may be more likely to perceive self-defeating humor as harassment in the workplace, but this relationship was not statistically significant.

A marginally significant negative relationship was found between an employee's level within their company and the perception of self-defeating humor as harassment (coefficient = -0.21, $p = 0.06$). This implies that employees that are in lower positions within a company may be more likely to perceive self-defeating humor as harassment in the workplace, but this relationship was not statistically significant.

Self-enhancing

A significant positive relationship was found between education level and the perception of self-enhancing humor as harassment (coefficient = 0.28, $p = 0.01$); See Table 7. This implies that employees that have received more education were more likely to perceive self-enhancing humor as harassment in the workplace.

A significant negative relationship was found between the number of direct reports an individual had and the perception of self-enhancing humor as harassment (coefficient = -0.03, $p = 0.002$). This indicates that employees with less direct reports may be more likely to perceive self-enhancing humor as harassment in the workplace.

Aggressive

A significant positive relationship was found between education level and the perception of aggressive humor as harassment (coefficient = 0.31, $p = 0.005$); See Table 8. This implies that employees that have received more education were more likely to perceive aggressive humor as harassment in the workplace.

A significant negative relationship was found between the number of direct reports an individual had and their perception of aggressive humor as harassment (coefficient = -0.03, $p = 0.001$). This indicates that employees with less direct reports may be more likely to perceive aggressive humor as harassment in the workplace.

Affiliative

A significant negative relationship was found between age and the perception of affiliative humor as harassment (coefficient = 0.03, $p = 0.050$); See Table 9. This indicates that younger employees may be more likely to perceive affiliative humor as harassment in the workplace.

A significant positive relationship was found between education level and the perception of affiliative humor as harassment (coefficient = 0.22, $p = 0.03$). This implies that individuals that have received more education are more likely to perceive affiliative humor as harassment in the workplace.

A significant negative relationship was found between the number of direct reports an individual had and their perception of affiliative humor as harassment (coefficient = -0.03, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that those with less direct reports are more likely to perceive affiliative humor as harassment in the workplace.

A marginally significant positive relationship was found between work arrangement the perception of affiliative humor as harassment (coefficient = 0.21, $p = 0.08$). This implies that workers in more flexible work modalities (hybrid or remote) may be more likely to perceive affiliative humor as harassment in the workplace, but this relationship was not statistically significant.

Discussion

This research study sought to explore how different types of humor are perceived as harassment and how this perception may be influenced by individual personality types and various demographic factors. While the results were not all significant, they provide valuable insights into workplace dynamics and identify factors that organizations may consider in the development of a healthy work environment.

Research Question 1: Are certain types of humor more likely than others to be perceived as harassment in the workplace?

This study's first research question explored whether certain humor types are more likely than others to be perceived as harassment in the workplace. The survey results revealed that none

of the humor types (self-defeating, self-enhancing, aggressive, and affiliative) were statistically significantly higher than the others in terms of perception as harassment. All types were, however, more likely on average to be perceived as harassment than not. This indicates a general impact of humor in the workplace, regardless of the type. Because workplaces differ greatly from one to the next, humor can be perceived differently in each individual work environment. The finding that any type of humor can be perceived as harassment if used in the workplace highlights the importance of setting clear expectations and guidelines regarding workplace humor within an organization's policies. Out of the four humor types, affiliative humor had the highest mean, suggesting that it was the most likely to be perceived as harassment. This is surprising because affiliative humor is intended to build positive connections, but some people may misinterpret affiliative humor as someone being overly friendly or condescending. Affiliative humor could still be invasive and make other employees uncomfortable depending on the context of its usage.

Research Question 2: Do individuals with different personality types perceive various types of humor differently?

This study's second research question explored how personality type influences humor perception in the workplace. Conscientiousness and openness were more likely than the other personality traits to impact humor perception. Those with high conscientiousness scores typically have a strong sense of respect for rules, norms, and details. This may be an explanation for why those with high conscientiousness scores were more likely to perceive humor types as harassment in some scenarios, but less likely in others. Individuals with high conscientiousness that were *more* likely to perceive humor as harassment are likely rule-focused and may be more sensitive to humor that they believe crosses boundaries in the workplace. On the other hand,

individuals with high conscientiousness that were *less* likely to perceive humor as harassment may want to ensure that they have all the details before jumping to conclusions and assuming an instance of humor should be classified as harassment. This could lead to them giving others in the workplace the benefit of the doubt because of their more calculated approach. There are many external factors that could cause a more conscientious individual to be more or less likely to perceive humor as harassment. Whether or not an individual's conscientiousness makes them more or less likely to perceive humor as harassment is likely determined by other factors such as their workplace's culture, their own cultural background, or other external factors.

Individuals with higher openness scores are typically more curious and are more willing to try new ideas. Like conscientiousness, these tendencies can cause employees with high openness scores to differ in their perception of humor as harassment depending on the individual and the context. Some individuals with high openness scores are focused on inclusivity and respect in the workplace, and they may be more likely to perceive humor as harassment based on that logic. Other more open individuals may appreciate humor because of its opportunity for creativity and new ideas, causing them to be less likely to see humor in a negative light and perceive it as harassment. Like conscientiousness, there are many external factors that could cause a more open individual to be more or less likely to perceive humor as harassment.

Research Question 3: Are there demographic differences that influence how humor is perceived as harassment in the workplace?

This study's third research question explored how demographic differences influence humor perception in the workplace. Education level, number of direct reports, and work modality were found to be the most likely factors to impact humor perception.

Higher levels of education frequently indicated a higher likelihood to perceive humor as harassment in this study. This may be due to a greater awareness of professional conduct in the workplace that could lead to higher expectations for behavior. This awareness may lead those with more educational experience to be more critical of workplace humor that they believe crosses a line and becomes unprofessional. Education may increase an individual's level of sophistication, making them less tolerant of workplace humor as a whole and therefore more likely to perceive it as harassment.

Like openness in the second research question, the number of direct reports caused people to be both more and less likely to perceive humor as harassment, depending on the individual and context. Some individuals with more direct reports may have more experience in using humor as a tool to create team cohesion. These individuals may feel more comfortable with humor usage at work and may be *less* likely to perceive it as harassment. On the other hand, some people with more direct reports may take a more serious approach to leadership and have a lower tolerance for the use of humor at work, making them *more* likely to perceive workplace humor as harassment. Whether or not an individual's direct reports make them more or less tolerant of workplace humor is likely due to other factors such as power dynamics, workplace culture or other contextual factors.

Finally, work modality frequently indicated humor perception, with more flexible work arrangements indicating a higher likelihood of perceiving humor as harassment. This may be due to miscommunications or disconnects that can occur because of a lack of face-to-face interaction at work. Humor could be more likely to be perceived as harassment in more flexible work environments due to the lack of context clues that are available in virtual settings. Because of the

growing popularity of flexible work arrangements, it is important to consider their effects on employees and their work environments.

It is important to consider the impact of these factors when exploring how humor is perceived in the workplace. The factors that were explored in this study significantly impact individuals' perception of humor in the workplace and whether it is deemed appropriate or considered harassment. By accounting for these factors, organizations can better understand humor perception and its complexity. Recognizing how individual employees perceive humor differently can allow organizations to effectively develop and maintain a healthy and productive work environment.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study examines the relationship between humor perception, personality traits, and demographic factors in the workplace. This study focuses on the likelihood that each humor type is perceived as harassment, depending on an individual's personality and demographic factors.

While no humor type was significantly more likely to be perceived as harassment, all humor types were, on average, more likely to be seen as inappropriate workplace behavior than not. This suggests that humor has the potential to create an unhealthy work environment if it is not regulated properly.

This study also reveals that personality traits, particularly conscientiousness and openness, are a factor in how humor is perceived. The perception of all four humor types were influenced by personality traits to some extent, suggesting that an objective approach to humor regulation may not be effective in workplaces with a variety of personality types represented.

Organizations must consider personality differences when creating a work culture that includes humor.

Demographic factors and other factors related to an individual's work environment were also found to influence how humor is perceived. Education level, work modality, and the number of direct reports were often found to indicate an individual's likelihood that they would perceive workplace humor as harassment. These results suggest that the management of humor in the workplace should be more tailored in diverse work settings, especially as trends in work modalities continue to evolve.

Overall, the implications of this study can assist organizations that aim to create and maintain a positive, healthy work environment. Understanding the factors that impact humor perception can help organizations create policies and programs that encourage appropriate humor usage to reap the benefits of workplace humor while minimizing the risk of workplace harassment.

This study has a few potential limitations. First, a sample size of 200 may not fully represent all workplace demographics. Next, responses may be influenced by personal biases or social desirability. Results also may not be generalizable to all workplaces given the variability in humor perception across cultures. Finally, this study is limited to full-time workers, which may also affect the generalizability of findings due to the exclusion of part-time employees. Future research should further explore the effects of humor in the workplace by considering additional factors such as cultural background, organizational culture or norms, and mental health impacts. Continuing research on the relationship between workplace humor and harassment can assist organizations in managing humor to ensure that it has a positive impact on the workplace rather than a negative one.

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Tables

Table 1

Humor Types

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Self-defeating	3.26	1.18	1	5
Self-enhancing	3.33	1.16	1	5
Aggressive	3.35	1.18	1	5
Affiliative	3.41	1.14	1	5

Table 2

Perception of Self-defeating Humor by Personality Type

Self-defeating	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P > t	[95% conf. interval]	
Extraversion	-.04	.04	-.95	.35	-.12	.04
Agreeableness	-.02	.04	-.61	.54	-.09	.05
Conscientiousness	-.06	.03	-1.72	.09	-.12	.01
Neuroticism	.03	.03	0.84	.40	-.04	.09
Openness	.04	.02	1.69	.09	-.01	.08

Table 3

Perception of Self-enhancing Humor by Personality Type

Self-enhancing	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P > t	[95% conf. interval]	
Extraversion	.02	.04	.45	.66	-.07	.11
Agreeableness	.07	.04	1.93	.06	-.00	.15
Conscientiousness	-.08	.03	-2.24	.03	-.15	-.01
Neuroticism	.05	.03	1.52	.13	-.02	.12
Openness	.02	.02	1.00	.32	-.02	.07

Table 4

Perception of Aggressive Humor by Personality Type

Aggressive	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P > t	[95% conf. interval]	
Extraversion	-.08	.04	-1.82	.07	-.17	.01
Agreeableness	.00	.04	.03	.97	-.07	.07
Conscientiousness	-.04	.03	-1.12	.27	-.11	.03

Aggressive	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P > t	[95% conf. interval]	
Neuroticism	.04	.03	1.31	.19	-.02	.11
Openness	.06	.02	2.35	.02	.01	.10

Table 5

Perception of Affiliative Humor by Personality Type

Affiliative	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P > t	[95% conf. interval]	
Extraversion	-.05	.04	-1.12	.26	-.13	-.03
Agreeableness	-.06	.03	1.80	.07	-.01	.13
Conscientiousness	-.08	.03	-2.45	.02	-.14	-.01
Neuroticism	.03	.03	.88	.38	-.03	.09
Openness	.07	.02	3.04	.00	.02	.11

Table 6

Perception of Self-defeating Humor by Demographic Factor

Self-defeating	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P > t	[95% conf. interval]	
Age	-.01	.01	-.81	.42	-.04	.02
Gender	.191	.21	.92	.36	-.22	.60
Race	.27	.24	1.13	.26	-.20	.75
Education Level	.19	.10	1.76	.08	-.02	.39
Level in Company	-.21	.11	-1.92	.06	-.43	.01
Direct Reports	-.01	.01	-.94	.35	-.03	.01
Industry	-.00	.05	-.05	.96	-.10	.09
Years in Role	-.01	.02	-.57	.57	-.06	.03
Work Modality	.37	.13	2.96	.00	.12	.62

Table 7

Perception of Self-enhancing Humor by Demographic Factor

Self-enhancing	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P > t	[95% conf. interval]	
Age	-.01	.01	-.97	.34	-.04	.01
Gender	.07	.22	.33	.74	-.36	.50
Race	.05	.25	.20	.84	-.45	.55
Education Level	.28	.11	2.51	.01	.06	.50
Level in Company	.01	.12	.13	.90	-.22	.25
Direct Reports	-.03	.01	-3.11	.00	-.05	-.01
Industry	.08	.05	1.51	.13	-.02	-.18

Self-enhancing	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P > t	[95% conf. interval]	
Years in Role	.04	.03	1.58	.12	-.01	-.09
Work Modality	.18	.13	1.39	.17	-.08	.44

Table 8

Perception of Aggressive Humor by Demographic Factor

Aggressive	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P > t	[95% conf. interval]	
Age	-.02	-.01	-1.17	.24	-.04	.01
Gender	-.32	.22	-1.48	.14	-.75	.11
Race	.03	.25	.14	.90	-.46	.53
Education Level	.31	.11	2.84	.01	.09	.53
Level in Company	.07	.12	.61	.54	-.16	.30
Direct Reports	-.03	.01	-3.36	.00	-.05	-.01
Industry	.06	.05	1.28	.20	-.03	.16
Years in Role	.04	.02	1.51	.13	-.01	.09
Work Modality	.07	.13	.53	.60	-.19	.33

Table 9

Perception of Affiliative Humor by Demographic Factor

Affiliative	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P > t	[95% conf. interval]	
Age	-.03	.01	-1.98	.05	-.05	.00
Gender	.11	.20	.54	.59	-.28	.49
Race	.37	.23	1.63	.11	-.08	.82
Education Level	.22	.10	2.26	.03	.03	.42
Level in Company	.04	.10	.41	.68	-.16	.25
Direct Reports	-.03	.01	-3.81	.00	-.05	-.02
Industry	.07	.05	1.45	.15	-.02	.16
Years in Role	.04	.02	1.67	.10	-.01	.08
Work Modality	.21	.12	1.77	.08	-.02	.44

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this survey!

This survey aims to explore how different types of workplace humor are perceived and whether they are likely to be seen as harassment.

In this survey, you will first answer a few demographic questions and then complete a brief personality assessment. After that, you will be provided the definitions of four types of humor and you will be asked to rate how likely you would be to perceive each type as harassment.

*This survey includes the Big Five Inventory (BFI-44), developed by John, Donahue, and Kentle (1991) to identify key personality traits. This is a tool used to evaluate five personality dimensions: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism.

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?
 - a. _____
2. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Non-binary
 - d. Other (please specify)
 - i. _____
3. How would you best describe yourself? Please select all that apply.
 - a. Asian or Pacific Islander
 - b. Black or African American
 - c. Hispanic or Latino
 - d. Native American or Alaskan Native
 - e. White or Caucasian
 - f. Other (please specify)
 - i. _____
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 - a. Less than high school
 - b. High school graduate or equivalent
 - c. Associate's degree
 - d. Bachelor's degree
 - e. Master's degree
 - f. Professional degree
 - g. Doctorate degree (please specify)
 - h. Other
 - i. _____

5. What is your current level within your company?
 - a. Entry-level
 - b. Mid-level
 - c. Senior-level
 - d. Executive/leadership
 - e. Owner/founder
 - f. Other (please specify)
 - i. _____
6. Are you a manager?
 - a. Yes
 - i. If "Yes", how many direct reports do you have?
 1. _____
 - b. No
7. In which industry do you currently work?
 - a. Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting
 - b. Mining
 - c. Construction
 - d. Manufacturing
 - e. Wholesale and retail trade
 - f. Transportation and utilities
 - g. Information/technology
 - h. Financial activities
 - i. Professional and business services
 - j. Educational and health services
 - k. Leisure and hospitality
 - l. Public administration
 - m. Nonprofit
 - n. Other (please list)
 - i. _____
8. How many years have you been in your current role?
 - a. _____
9. Which of the following options best aligns with your current work arrangement?
 - a. In office
 - b. Remote
 - c. Hybrid

Personality Inventory

Please read each statement carefully and rate how much you agree or disagree with it on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

"I am someone who..."

1. Is talkative
2. Tends to find fault with others
3. Does a thorough job
4. Is depressed, blue

5. Is original, comes up with new ideas
6. Is reserved
7. Is helpful and unselfish with others
8. Can be somewhat careless
9. Is relaxed, handles stress well
10. Is curious about many different things
11. Is full of energy
12. Starts quarrels with others
13. Is a reliable worker
14. Can be tense
15. Is ingenious, a deep thinker
16. Generates a lot of enthusiasm
17. Has a forgiving nature
18. Tends to be disorganized
19. Worries a lot
20. Has an active imagination
21. Tends to be quiet
22. Is generally trusting
23. Tends to be lazy
24. Is emotionally stable, not easily upset
25. Is inventive
26. Has an assertive personality
27. Can be cold and aloof
28. Perseveres until the task is finished
29. Can be moody
30. Values artistic, aesthetic experiences
31. Is sometimes shy, inhibited
32. Is considerate and kind to almost everyone
33. Does things efficiently
34. Remains calm in tense situations
35. Prefers work that is routine
36. Is outgoing, sociable
37. Is sometimes rude to others
38. Makes plans and follows through with them
39. Gets nervous easily
40. Likes to reflect, play with ideas
41. Has few artistic interests
42. Likes to cooperate with others
43. Is easily distracted
44. Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature

Workplace Humor

For the purposes of this survey, **workplace harassment** can be defined as “interpersonal behavior aimed at intentionally harming another employee in the workplace”. You will be given the definitions of four humor types and will be asked to rate how likely you would be to perceive each type of humor as harassment in a workplace setting.

Self-enhancing humor: the use of humor to enhance one’s self-esteem

- Based on the definition above, please rate how likely you would be to perceive this type of humor as harassment if used in the workplace.
 - Very unlikely
 - Unlikely
 - Neutral
 - Likely
 - Very likely

Affiliative humor: the use of humor to enhance one’s relationship with others

- Based on the definition above, please rate how likely you would be to perceive this type of humor as harassment if used in the workplace.
 - Very unlikely
 - Unlikely
 - Neutral
 - Likely
 - Very likely

Aggressive humor: the use of humor to enhance the self at the expense of others

- Based on the definition above, please rate how likely you would be to perceive this type of humor as harassment if used in the workplace.
 - Very unlikely
 - Unlikely
 - Neutral
 - Likely
 - Very likely

Self-defeating humor: the use of humor to enhance relationships at the expense of oneself

- Based on the definition above, please rate how likely you would be to perceive this type of humor as harassment if used in the workplace.
 - Very unlikely
 - Unlikely
 - Neutral
 - Likely
 - Very likely