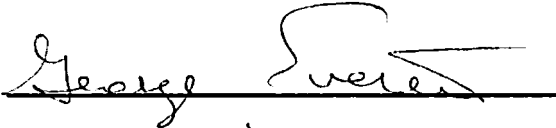


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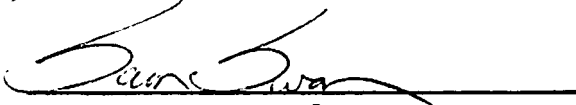
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Larry Zane Leslie entitled "Audience Perceptions of Five Types of Radio Humor." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Communications.


Michael W. Singletary, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:









Accepted for the Council:


Vice Provost
and Dean of The Graduate School

AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF FIVE TYPES
OF RADIO HUMOR

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Larry Zane Leslie

June 1986

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ABSTRACT

Humor, a natural part of the human environment, is all around us: from newspaper comics and television sit-coms to popular movies and the latest joke. Yet the phenomenon of humor on radio, i.e., humor used by air personalities, has remained largely unstudied.

Can the variation in listener response to radio humor be accounted for? The relationship of five demographic variables to five types of humor was tested by regression analysis. The intent was to learn the extent to which each variable contributed to appreciation of each type of humor.

One hundred sixty subjects were exposed to fifteen humorous radio segments. Subjects were students, club and church members, office workers, and industrial employees. Humor involved sexual, ethnic, and political themes, as well as material related to alcoholic beverages and body type.

Subjects were asked to rate their appreciation of each humor segment on a 100-point scale and then to assess the degree to which they liked the announcer's style or delivery on a 5-point Likert scale.

Mean humor appreciation scores ranged from 55.1 for alcohol humor to 38.2 for political humor. Mean announcer liking scores ranged from 3.2 for alcohol humor to 2.5 for sexual humor.

Regression analysis indicates that liking of the announcer's style or delivery was a highly significant contributor to appreciation of each of the five humor types; age was significant in humor with a sexual, ethnic, or alcohol theme. Gender was significant in ethnic humor only.

This research shows that appreciation of humor can be partially explained by selected demographics. Further research should refine variables used here and propose new variables, such as delivery techniques or personality traits.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

"George Bernard Shaw advised a writer on the subject of humor to go to a sanitarium, with the injunction, 'There is no more dangerous literary symptom than a temptation to write about wit and humor'" (Omwake, 1937, p. 688). Singer (1968) suggests that the "pleasurable nature of humor and its ubiquity in both interpersonal relations and the mass media make it a particularly intriguing phenomenon for study" (p. 1).

Observers of human behavior--anthropologists, sociologists, educators, psychologists, and others--have studied humor for several centuries. Almost everyone agrees that humor plays an important part in human communication. Some newspaper readers turn first to the comics page of their paper before moving on to the other news of the day. And who has not been on the receiving end of the latest joke? Individuals said to have a good sense of humor are usually well-liked by their peers. At group social gatherings, witty individuals often become the life of the party.

McGhee and Goldstein (1983) suggest that "laughter may somehow be important for our health and well-being. We

find laughter and humor almost wherever we find people engaged in social interaction" (p. v). Yet Morreall (1983) and Maase, Fink, and Kaplowitz (1984) point out that despite the interest in and social importance of humor, "we are no closer to developing a generalized theory of humor than we were in the first century AD when Quintillian complained that no one had explained what laughter was, though many had tried" (p. 80).

Levine (1956) notes that enormous amounts of money and effort go into the pursuit of laughter. This testifies, "if any testimony were needed, to the fact that the desire to laugh is a basic human craving" (p. 31). Since humor serves as a tension-release for most people, the capacity to laugh is directly related to the ability one has to adjust to life and the environment.

Berger (1976) explains humor and laughter in terms of messages and relationships. "When we laugh, we respond to messages given us--information of one sort or another" (p. 113). Humor establishes incongruous relationships among the elements of these messages. Such elements include persons, places, and things. These relationships, when presented suddenly, cause us to laugh.

In short, humor is all around us: from newspaper comics to popular movies to the latest joke to television programs. It seems to be a natural part of our environment. Learning to laugh, i.e., to appreciate and

respond to humor, is one of the first social skills a growing youngster acquires.

The mass media have certainly made effective use of humor. Humorous content is widespread in television programming, from news-information shows to religious programs. Numerous studies have examined the use of humor in magazines and newspapers, and some few studies have been done on television. However, much of the current humor research has concerned itself with one or more of the following: (1) the development of a sense of humor in children; (2) the cognitive processes involved in understanding and appreciating various types of jokes; (3) uses and effects of humor in various settings; and (4) joking in natural settings (Goldstein, 1976, p. 105). Flugel (1954) asserts that "a general feature of the literature is that few authors are satisfied with the formulations of their predecessors" (p. 709). This remains the case in spite of the fact that many of the same factors are mentioned repeatedly by successive authors, though often different names are applied and the focus shifted.

Yet with all this emphasis, the phenomenon of humor on radio remains largely unstudied. The psychological and sociological literature is filled with results of humor research. But this research has been largely a study of the visual aspects of humor, i.e., studies of various types

of cartoons or of oral jokes committed to paper. This is not really surprising because, as Omwake (1939) points out, "visual presentation facilitated comprehension of the jokes" (p. 103).

Researchers in mass media uses and effects have also concentrated on the visual aspect of humor. Radio humor, especially disc jockey humor, has been ignored, perhaps in part because it is totally auditory and lacks that visual component so important to the comprehension of jokes and, one would presume, the appreciation of the associated humor.

Humor is a major part of many radio programs. Announcers, in addition to reading the news and weather and noting the title of the next record, are encouraged to make themselves more attractive to the audience through humor. Announcers are careful to include humorous material on audition tapes. In other words, stations expect announcers to entertain, to become personalities. Humor seems to be an easy and effective way to develop rapport with the audience. Many announcers, therefore, make a regular practice of telling jokes, delivering witty one-liners, or satirizing someone or something in the news. A quick twist of the radio dial, at almost any time of day, will provide an example of this humor. Regardless of format, stations have apparently encouraged their announcers to entertain,

and although no one has specifically said "use humor to entertain," that has been the practice.

Statement of the Problem

As noted above, many radio stations consider the presentation of humorous material an important part of a radio show. A clever, funny radio personality attracts listeners. That appears to be the current thinking among many radio station general managers and program directors. However, we really know little about the presentation of humorous material on radio; we assume much. We assume, for example, that regardless of the type or content of humor, members of the audience will find the material funny, will continue to tune in, and will tell their friends about the program. In other words, we assume a match between the audience and the humor. Such assumptions are based more on intuition than on solid evidence.

Most empirical studies of humor relate to human behavior in general and have been done by sociologists and psychologists. These studies do not address themselves directly to either radio or television.

This paper proposes a study of audience perceptions of five types of radio humor. A number of research questions result:

1. What are the types of humor used by radio personalities?

2. What types are judged funniest by a particular audience? Least funny?
3. Can the variance in response to radio humor be explained by examining several independent variables, including age, sex, education level, and the like?
4. What percent of the variance is contributed by each variable?

Purpose and Need for the Study

The purpose of this study is to account for some of the variation in listener response to radio humor. Results of the study might enable one to match a set of listener characteristics to a particular type of humorous content in much the same way music formats are matched to specific audience demographics.

The proposed study has both theoretical and applied implications. Of primary importance is the theoretical application of the model. The study has roots in Newcomb's ABX model. As Newcomb (1953) indicates, "communicative acts . . . may be viewed as outcomes of changes in organism-environment relationships . . . and may result in changes anywhere within the system of relations between two or more communicators and the objects of their communication" (p. 403). In other words, the dynamics of this communication activity are such that if one

understands the properties of the system, one can predict "both the likelihood of occurrence of a given act of communication and the nature of the changes in those properties which will result from that act" (p. 403). Applied to the present study, then, we can see that an understanding of the audience's perceptions of radio humor can indicate whether the audience is either positively or negatively oriented toward the station as a particular result of that station's use of humorous material. Since the tendency in communication is, as Newcomb says, to attempt to achieve a balance in orientation between elements in a communication system, knowing the audience's perceptions of humorous radio material would enable a typical station to use humorous content that would promote balance and minimize the "strain" toward equilibrium.

A study of humorous material on radio has a number of applied uses. First, the study would yield information on the types of humor which appear to be successful with certain kinds of persons in an audience. Armed with this information, radio station managers and program directors could more effectively evaluate air checks of potential employees with a view toward determining their probable success on the air in attracting new listeners and in pleasing present ones.

Second, the study results could be used to evaluate the humorous material currently being used on the air by

station personnel. For example, if material currently in use is perceived as not funny by the audience, management could suggest ways to modify or adapt the humor so that it becomes humor which has been shown to be more effective for the station's target audience.

Scope and Limitations of the Project

This study proposes to examine an audience's perception of the degree of funniness of various kinds of humorous content on radio. The suggested model would enable one to more accurately match humorous content with audience demographics.

The study is not concerned with the context of the humor. Humorous material may be conveyed at any point in a broadcast program. Many humorous segments are aired between records. Others may occur either before or after a set of commercial announcements. An evaluation of the context of these humorous segments is beyond the scope of this study. This study emphasizes the reaction to these segments regardless of where they occur.

Also, this study is not concerned with the time of day the humor is aired. While this might be an interesting variable to examine in some future research, it is beyond the scope of this study.

Not all types of humorous content may be available for judging by the subjects associated with this study. The

humorous material selected for use is simply a part of longer, more complex radio shows recorded from around the country. The supplier had no knowledge of what material would be used or how it would be used. Consequently, not all humorous types are available for study. However, the material, by virtue of its selection, represents a wide range of both style and content. It is not the supplier's purpose to illustrate only one aspect of a radio program, but to show that there are a number of very different, yet apparently successful, types of programs on the air.

Another limitation on the project involves the absence of humorous material from small market stations. Humor may not be used in small markets to the extent it is in large markets. Many small market radio stations have little or no competition and thus may have a captive audience, a loyal audience who may not have many other listening options. Thus, announcers on these stations might be less likely to use humor in an attempt to build a larger share of the audience. No research data are available to support this view, but many small market station managers and program directors readily admit that they don't have to be concerned with hiring the "flashy, funny personalities" that seem to dominate the larger markets.

One other variable which has the potential to impact on this study has also been excluded from the project. It

is the technique by which the humor is delivered. This might include the method or format used to present the humorous material. Some common techniques are character voice, character impersonation, dramatization, and pun, among others.

While this variable could be influential in determining an individual's appreciation of a certain type of humor, it is not addressed in this study because it is viewed as being of secondary importance to content area in determining listener appreciation. For example, if a listener does not like ethnic humor, then regardless of how this type of humor is delivered, the listener is not likely to change his/her view, solely on the strength of delivery technique alone. In other words, preference for a particular content area seems to be the first variable on which humor is judged. This study proposes to determine preference for five types of content. Future research could possibly use these results and address other variables, such as technique.

Finally, the proposed study makes no claim in being able to measure "sense of humor" nor does it rule out all subjective factors. "It offers a comparison of humorous tastes of . . . people having certain characteristics in common" (Omwake, p. 692).

Definition of Terms

Appreciation of humor--the degree to which a particular radio segment is judged funny on a 0-100 scale. Used interchangeably with "degree of funniness."

Humor type--content, theme, or subject matter of the humorous segments. For example, humor could have a sexual, political, or ethnic theme or subject, among others.

Humor preferences--those content areas rated highest by subjects on a 0-100 scale. Determined by forming a humor index for a particular type of content and comparing it with indexes for other types of content.

Degree of funniness--the extent to which a particular segment is judged funny on a 0-100 scale. Used interchangeably with "appreciation of humor."

Humorous segments--individual bits of humorous material from a variety of stations and markets, placed on a separate tape for further study..

Humor index--the number resulting from an average of the ratings of three segments for each humor type.

Liking index--the number resulting from an average of the ratings of the announcer's style or delivery for each humor type.

Model--the selected demographic variables presumed to have some relationship to humor appreciation. Also, the regression equation expressing this relationship.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Historical Views of Humor and Laughter

"The word 'humor' has a variety of meanings, all derived from the original sense of moisture, dampness, fluid" (Flugel, 1954, p. 709). Ancient psychological doctrines apparently gave humor its mental connotations by associating it with the four chief fluids thought to compose the body: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. Flugel (1954) suggests that it was probably thought to be the quality which produced amusement and laughter, which were associated with temperament, mood, and disposition.

Goldstein (1976) divides the study of humor into three phases: (1) a pre-theoretical phase (until about 1940) which mainly involved observational studies; (2) a psychoanalytical phase employing the Freudian theories of humor; and (3) the current phase, an examination of the cognitive processes involved in humor (p. 104).

However, most researchers prefer to define humor in their own terms and study it from their own perspectives. For some, humor is directly related to laughter, sometimes called the humor response.

Descartes (1649) felt laughter results from the joy that comes when we have been indignant at some wrong and realize that we cannot be harmed by it. Hazlitt (1819) suggested that humor is describing the ludicrous as it is in itself. Darwin (1872) described laughter as a sound "produced by a deep inspiration followed by short, interrupted, spasmodic contractions of the chest, and especially the diaphragm . . . the mouth is open more or less widely, with the corners drawn much backwards, as well as a little upwards; and the upper lip is somewhat raised" (p. 200). This physiological description is quite accurate, but it really tells us little about what laughter or humor is.

Willmann (1940) suggests laughter is the "overt expression of the emotion joy; an expression denoting pleasure and happiness, and indicative of a carefree, playful state of mind" (p. 82).

Some have tried to relate laughter to other, quite different reactions. "Some writers have emphasized enjoyment, playfulness, and relief, whereas others have emphasized conditions that might be thought conducive to discomfort, disturbance, or displeasure, including surprise, incongruity, and conflict, on the one hand, and the afflictions or defects of other people, on the other hand" (Berlyne, 1969, p. 803).

LaFrance (1983) suggests that "humor seems to evade our best attempts to explain it, just as jokes lose something when they are explained" (p. 1). But Gruner (1979) feels that ridicule is the basic component of all humorous material and finding out who is being ridiculed, how and why, is the only way to understand humor.

The issue is summarized most effectively by Davis and Farina (1970). They suggest that humor "appears to be a whole composite of different behaviors rather than a single one, and any explanation which attempts to explain them equally would appear doomed to do so by explaining them marginally" (p. 175).

Some Early Humor Experiments

Perl (1933a) found the first research on humor to be widely reported was a study by Hall and Allin (1897). Three thousand questionnaires were distributed and respondents were asked to identify and describe humorous situations. The result was a rudimentary classification system and a suggestion that further research was warranted.

Martin (1905) reported the results of an experiment involving humor and suggested that an individual's humorous judgment is dependent on the length of time he/she is exposed to the humorous stimuli. Hollingworth (1911) suggested a theory that "the comic is the success of a

trick as play activity, and that there is an objective-comic and a subjective-comic . . ." (Perl, p. 754).

Walker and Washburn (1919) used the Healy-Fernald Picture Completion Test as a test for perception of the comic and found that fourth graders had the most intense reaction to humorous stimuli and adults the least.

Scofield (1921) studied the effect of jokes and pictures and found that reaction time was longer for jokes than for pictures and that there was a variation in breathing rate in the subjects when confronted with the stimuli. The lowest breathing rate occurred when the subjects were listening to jokes.

Hester (1924) studied variations in sense of humor according to age and mental condition, concluding that sense of humor among normal persons has no relationship to intelligence.

Lange (1927) studied crowd reaction to laughter in a theater and found that most humor caused laughter of less than 10 seconds duration. Gregg (1928) found that laughter among young children occurred mostly when they were in groups, concluding that laughter was more a matter of temperament and social environment than IQ.

Perl (1933b) studied the influence of social factors on humor appreciation and found that jokes rated in private seemed less funny and that jokes presented visually seemed

funnier than those presented verbally. Landis and Ross (1933) studied individual differences in rating and classifying jokes and found no significant relationship between humor, personality, and intelligence, though there were significant differences between men and women of like age and social status.

Humor on Radio and Television

Cantor (1976) studied television humor and found that humor plays a part in almost all aspects of television programs, even to the point of being included in programs considered serious in nature. This study stands almost alone as a general description of the humorous content of television programming. However, Duncan and Nelson (1985) estimate that up to "twenty percent of all television commercials and a substantial portion of radio commercials contain some element of humor" (p. 33).

Use of Humor in Advertising

A number of studies have, however, explored the relationship of humor to advertising, which is found on both radio and television, as well as elsewhere. Duncan and Nelson (1985) examined humor's effects in a radio advertising setting and found that humor appears to increase attention paid to the commercial and improves liking for both the commercial and the product. They

concluded that humor is more appropriate when the objective is to create awareness. It does not seem to impact as significantly on comprehension or intention to purchase.

Gelb and Pickett (1983) found that perceived humor and the resulting favorable attitude may aid advertising effectiveness, but the relationship is moderated somewhat by the degree to which people like the ad initially.

Brooker (1981) found that mild humor is more effective than mild fear in developing favorable responses to certain products. However, Cantor (1981) found that a serious ad for good nutrition was more effective than a humorous one.

Cantor and Venus (1980) tested the effect of humor on memorability and persuasiveness of radio ads and found neither the humorous ad nor the context in which it was placed exerted a significant effect on product recall.

Madden and Weinberger (1982) tested the effects of humor on attention in magazine advertising and found humor worked better for men than for women, and actually decreased attention levels for readers of black-oriented publications. Further, humorous ads tend to outperform magazine ad norms, but these effects are moderated by gender and racial differences.

Sutherland and Middleton (1983) tested the effect of humor on advertising credibility and recall and found no difference between a subject's ability to recall a humorous

and a nonhumorous condition. Humor may attract attention and hold the audience, but the audience is not more likely to recall the humorous message. Significant differences were observed regarding credibility between humorous and nonhumorous conditions.

Gender Differences and Humor with a Sexual Theme

A number of studies have been done on the humor response differences between the sexes. Leventhal and Cupchick (1976) found that individuals will differ in their humor preferences, and "classes of individuals, such as males and females, may differ in their tastes for different kinds of humorous material" (p. 190).

Whipple and Courtney (1981) found men and women vary considerably in their appreciation of certain kinds of humor. Stocking and Zillmann (1975) found that self-disparaging humor is perceived as funnier by males than by females. Sewall (1984) investigated the potential role of profanity in appreciation of humor and found that men and women agreed in evaluations of humor in non-profane captions. However, with both mild and strong profanity, men found cartoons significantly more humorous than did women.

Levine (1976) points out that jokes with a sexual theme are actually a serious matter. "It is often by witty

remarks that a taboo subject is broached" (p. 173). Fine (1976) agrees in that sexual humor "serves very definite and often quite important functions for society" (p. 134). It establishes a sense of community, Fine says, by binding together those members of the group who have "eaten of the forbidden fruit." However, "in Anglo-American culture . . . sexual humor has been primarily a male prerogative usually found at such times when females are not present" (p. 134).

Fine (1976) suggests that joking serves an educational purpose. Especially with sexual humor, joking implicitly "strengthens the norms for appropriate sexual behavior and teaches quite directly the facts of life" (p. 139). The laughter response at the telling of sexual jokes indicates that the target has understood both the content of the humor and the norms present in it. Fine further asserts that sexual humor is a staple of most cultures. "Its prevalence has been noted for virtually every society" on which data about humor are available (p. 134). Most cultures, however, find it necessary to limit its use by establishing circumstances where it is and is not appropriate.

Leventhal and Cupchick (1975) found that male and female subjects process humor responses in different ways. Females tend to be a bit more emotional in their responses than males.

Cantor (1976) studied the gender of the victim of humor and found that much humor contained a definite anti-female bias. She suggests the "sex of the target of ridicule is an important determinant of the humor response," and that it is still "funnier to see a woman than a man disparaged" (p. 172).

It should be noted that "sex differences in evaluations of funniness have also been demonstrated in some types of non-sexual humor" (Chapman and Gadfield, 1976, p. 141). Groch (1974) studied college student responses to cartoon types, humorous photographs, and humorous literature and found differences between the sexes in response to various stimuli, although there was some "generality for wit and humor constructs" (p. 838).

Studies of Humor and Aggression

The use of humor in aggressive, stressful situations has been widely studied. Strickland (1959) found that in a hostility-arousing situation, subjects preferred humorous material of a hostile and aggressive nature, while subjects placed in a sexually-arousing situation, preferred humorous material with a sexual theme. However, Byrne (1961), in an almost identical experiment, found that humor preferences were independent of motivational states. Yet Lamb (1968) replicated the Strickland study and found that subjects in

the sexual-arousal condition did indeed laugh more and gave higher ratings to sexual cartoons than control subjects.

Hetherington and Wray (1966) investigated the effects of stress and aggression on ratings of cartoons and found that aggression affected humor ratings, but the direction and extent of the effect was dependent on the type of subject and cartoon; further, aggression seemed to be a more salient factor than stress in humor appreciation.

La Gaipa (1968) investigated the effects of stress on the appreciation of hostile humor with different stimulus characteristics and found that classifying humorous material in broad categories, such as sex and aggression, ignores differences present in the thematic content within each category. "The use of gross indices . . . may obscure the effects of motive arousal on humor preference" (p. 7).

Doris and Fierman (1956) examined the relationship between humor and anxiety and found that a relationship existed between anxiety, preference for cartoons with aggressive content, and the social context of the humor stimuli. Gollob and Levine (1967) examined distraction as a factor in the enjoyment of aggressive humor and confirmed Freud's earlier argument that "successful aggressive humor distracts a person so that he is not fully aware of the content of what he is laughing at" (p. 368).

Winick (1963) views hostile humor as "a gift of shared aggression" (p. 271). A person telling a joke is able to express aggression yet blunt its force by "sharing" the joke with another. Singer (1968) warns, however, that there is "no simple one-to-one relationship between the strength of aggressive impulses and appreciation of hostile humor" (p. 11).

Other Important Humor Studies

Sewall and Moore (1980) found a cartoon-embellished text was perceived as significantly more enjoyable than any other presentation when information was presented in print, audio, and visual modes.

Skinner, Dubinsky, and Ingram (1983) tested the use of humor to solicit respondent cooperation in questionnaire return and found the no-humor condition response rate was significantly higher than the joke-humor condition, but not significantly different from the cartoon condition.

Davis and Farina (1970) examined humor as social communication and found that social variables play a role in humor appreciation, and that one of the principal uses of humor is as a tool for communication with another person. Chang and Gruner (1981) found a speaker of relatively high-ethos can raise the audience's estimation of the speaker's funniness and sense of humor by using

mildly self-disparaging humor, provided the humor does not disparage the values of the audience.

Zillmann and Stocking (1976) feel that "disparagement of others underlies much of what we consider funny" (p. 154). We seem to enjoy ridiculing others because it puts ourselves in a more positive light. However, Goldstein (1976) suggests there is something in the nature of jokes "which goes beyond simple disparagement: jokes are somehow broader than that" (p. 110). Jestng about one's inadequacies is one possible way to diminish them, making them seem laughable. Yet Goldstein feels it might be more an issue of "self-directed jokes which concern the helplessness one feels in certain situations" (p. 110).

Even linguists have studied humor. Pepicello and Wershing (1983) manipulated grammatical categories to produce humorous effects. Shultz and Horibe (1974) studied children's appreciation of verbal jokes and found that a transition occurs between the ages of 6 and 8 in terms of understanding and appreciating the incongruity often present in humor. This, they say, suggests that humor may indeed have some linguistic implications.

Levine and Redlich (1955) suggest that the failure to enjoy a cartoon or joke does not mean that the person has failed to understand it. It may simply mean that the person has some hidden wish not to understand the humor.

Losco and Epstein (1975) studied the relationship between attitudes and preferences for specific humor content and concluded that preferences for humor can be used as a "subtle index of attitudes" (p. 333).

Hollingworth (1911) studied the effect of repetition on the appreciation of humor and found that jokes do "change in relative merit under the influence of repetition" (p. 149). Anticipation and repetition can cause certain types of humor to wane rapidly. Jokes that tend to fade quickly include the sharp retort, the pun, the caricature, and the occupation joke. Those with somewhat more staying power include the naive joke and the calamity joke. Hollingworth concludes by indicating that the variable elements in judgments of the comic fall into two categories: variations in the observer and variations in the comic situation. Either may have an influence on the resulting appreciation of humor.

Humor and Organizational Communication

Ullian (1976) studied humor in a factory-work situation and found that "joking is not a random behavior, but occurs in definite patterns" (p. 131). Further, there are many types and varieties of humor observable in the work situation. Punning, making witty statements, telling stories with "punch-lines," and general bantering were all observed with frequency. Ullian suggests that this is a

practical use of humor in that "the joker is protected from being charged with the responsibility for the serious content or implications of the joke" (p. 129).

Classification Systems

Sigmund Freud was one of the first to classify humor. Freud (1905) placed the ludicrous into three categories: wit, comical, and humor. Wit induces laughter through a play on words. It accomplishes this by causing a "saving in inhibition," which Freud says is a situation in which one prepares for or expects to make a certain expenditure and finds that a smaller expenditure is required. Comical points out the contrast between something to be taken seriously and something trivial or between something befitting an adult and something worthy of a child. Humor results from a situation where a person is able to see a funny side of his own misfortune.

Fowler (1926) places the ludicrous into the following categories: humor, wit, satire, sarcasm, invective, irony, cynicism, and the sardonic. He lists the motive, method and means, and audience for each type. But Kambouropoulou (1926) uses only two categories: personal humor and impersonal humor. Personal humor is dependent on a feeling of superiority. One laughs, therefore, at the misfortunes or infirmities of others. Impersonal humor is dependent on incongruities of ideas or of situations.

Willmann (1940) suggests humor results from the joining of two ideas which involve something incongruous or contradictory. This can be accomplished in three ways: two ideas can be united if they have some common elements; two ideas can be united if one may be an inference drawn from the other; or two ideas can be joined if they actually occur together in objective reality.

One of the most popular classification schemes is the one advanced by Eysenck (1942, 1947). He suggests two aspects of humor: cognitive and oretic. Cognitive humor is incongruity, deceived expectation, i.e., a contrast between ideas. Oretic humor gives laughter based on the satisfaction of needs or desires, often emotional in nature.

Andrews (1943) outlines six categories: derisional superiority, reaction to debauchery, subtlety, play on words or ideas, sexual, and ridiculous wisecracks.

Stephenson (1951) suggests only two categories: conflict and control. Conflict humor expresses agreement and strengthens the morale of those who are present while undermining the morale of those against whom it is aimed. Control humor expresses approval or disapproval and indicates safety or friendship.

Comprehension of Humor

Levine and Redlich (1960) studied the role of comprehension in the appreciation of humor and found that "even highly sophisticated and well-adjusted individuals were unable to comprehend, let alone appreciate, relatively uncomplicated cartoons" (p. 21). This failure to understand and appreciate may be tied to emotional factors which "could be traced to an underlying wish to avoid recognizing the joke because of some conflict which the theme aroused" (p. 25). The theme of the humor is often "disguised or distorted" so that it can be made to look ridiculous or incongruous. In doing so, the initiator runs the risk of having the viewer or listener not understand the reference behind the distortion. The comprehension of humor usually involves a "high order of intellectual abstraction" (p. 26), but emotional factors were shown to have clearly impaired the ability to appreciate humor.

Social Contexts of Humor

Winick (1976) suggests there are no universal jokes. There are no stories which appeal to everybody. Instead, he says, jokes are "told by a teller to an audience that is perceived as being equal to the teller" (p. 126). Winick's research indicates a joke reflects social attitudes and provides a vehicle "through which people can voice feelings for which there is no socially acceptable or easily

accessible outlet" (p. 125). Many different types of attitudes are so expressed, usually addressing taboo subjects or expressing approval or disapproval of some idea or behavior. In short, Winick says "humor is one way of bringing significant problems down to manageable size" (p. 128).

Chapman (1983) agrees with Winick, adding that the use of humor in social situations must "inevitably be mediated by the perceived values, motives, and intentions of the initiator . . . thus aiding members of small groups to engage in smooth interactions" (p. 135). Young and Frye (1966) found essentially the same thing, i.e., that social interaction "plays an extremely important part in determining the individual's appreciation of . . . various types of humor" (p. 754).

Fine (1983) makes an important point about the social context of humor by stressing that humor must involve "communication among at least two people--either directly or indirectly" (p. 176). We rarely laugh alone and never tell ourselves jokes or play jokes on ourselves. Fine adds that most sociologists of humor "agree that jokes only become jokes because of the social responses to them" (p. 176).

Winick's (1963) study of orally communicated jokes revealed that such jokes "may have considerable sharpness and some are clearly irreverent. Many of them have an

explosive quality" (p. 189). Yet, as Hollingworth (1911) points out, reaction to comic situations is often "dependent on individual temperament, mood, and circumstance" (p. 132).

Theories of Humor

According to Keith-Spiegel (1972), theory refers to "notions writers have put forth" about humor. These notions should not be taken strictly. Many are merely statements or "descriptions of conditions under which humor may be experienced, rather than attempts to explain humor" (p. 5).

A number of humor theories have been popular down through the ages. Biological, instinct, and evolution theories were popular early on, but soon gave way to superiority theories, incongruity theories, surprise theories, and ambivalence theories. Many major humor studies are tied to one of these theories.

Young and Frye (1966) suggest the majority of recent research in humor has been "inspired by the psychoanalytic theory of humor as an adaptive adjustment mechanism" (p. 747). In other words, the pleasure we derive from appreciation of humor comes from the sudden release of tension or anxiety. It is a way of adapting to our environment.

Winick (1963) believes that "the relationship between current events and joke content would appear to be relevant to a theory of humor as a form of public opinion" (p. 288).

Pollio (1983) acknowledges the social context requirements of humor, yet suggests that humor is a broader, field event, i.e., we need "a complete description of the total field of events--both near and far--against which humorous actions and ideas manage to emerge and do their work" (p. 214). This is best illustrated by the remark, "you had to be there." This implies a field theory of humor that "pays full attention to the laughing/smiling person in the full, rich context of his or her contemporary first-person world" (p. 228).

Not all researchers agree that a useful theory of humor exists. La Fave and Mannell (1976) feel that "an adequate theory of humor remains to be formulated" (p. 119). Omwake (1937) warns, however, that "no one theory can explain all the factors involved in a humorous situation . . . but some interesting viewpoints may be given" (p. 688).

Evaluation

Clearly, humor has been the subject of much research. One might wonder whether there is room for yet another humor study. There is, of course, always room for one more, especially since the study of humor is so subjective. Too, there are numerous areas where humor has yet to be studied. Radio is one of these. The research reviewed above provides a good, basic foundation on which to build. It does not answer the specific questions raised by the use of humor by

disc jockeys in radio programming, nor does it directly address an audience's perception of that humor. However, it does provide a context in which the present study may be viewed and understood.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Research Design

The research design for this study involves a treatment and post test. Measurement usually occurs after a stimulus or treatment which can either be presented as an opportunity for exposure or as a forced exposure. In the present study, fifteen humor segments were played for the subjects who responded to each segment by assessing the humorous content of the material in degrees of funniness on a 0-100 scale. Figure 1 shows the research design, diagrammed using the Haskins (1978) notational system.

Note that although the basic research design is termed post-test, four measures were taken before treatment was administered. These measures were demographic and could be recorded at any time, independently of any treatment. The two key measures--degree of funniness and assessment of announcer--were taken following forced exposure treatment.

No causal inferences should be made from a project employing this research design. However, the statistical analysis of the data will involve a regression equation which will produce an explanatory model rather than a prediction model, though a good explanatory model will predict fairly well (Lewis-Beck, 1980, p. 20).

	t1	t2	t3	t4
P1	----	M1-4	T (fx)	M5-6

Legend:

- t1 = time period before study began;
- t2 = time period during which subjects were providing demographic data;
- t3 = time period during which subjects were listening to treatment tape;
- t4 = time period during which subjects were recording assessments of humor and announcer (concurrent with t3);
- P1 = a group of 160 subjects;
- T = forced exposure (fx) to an audiotape containing fifteen humor segments;
- M1 = sex of subject;
- M2 = age of subject;
- M3 = education level of subject;
- M4 = time spent with radio (in hours);
- M5 = degree of funniness of each humor segment on 0-100 scale;
- M6 = assessment of announcer style/delivery on Likert scale.

Figure 1. Research Design for Humor Study.

Working Hypothesis

H1 = Appreciation of radio humor can be explained by examining humor type and its relationship to an audience's age, gender, education, liking of announcer, and time spent with radio.

Preparation of Treatment

Examples of radio humor were obtained from an objective source. California Airchecks of San Diego collects examples of actual disc jockey shows from across the country and makes them available to radio stations, schools, and interested individuals. The purpose of this collection is to illustrate the content and variety of typical shows on radio without regard to whether they contain any particular content.

Twenty-one aircheck tapes were examined. Humor segments occurring on each were identified and transferred to a separate tape for convenience in handling. A content analysis was performed and segments classified according to type or content. Categories were adapted from those found by Winick (1963) in his content analysis of orally communicated jokes.

Segments were numbered for identification purposes and informational data were maintained on each segment. Such data included call letters of station broadcasting the material, city of license, and the name of the announcer.

This information is included in Appendix A. A copy of the audiotape used in the treatment is located In Pocket.

The classification of humor segments into Winick's categories was judged best accomplished by the researcher who was familiar with the operational definitions of Winick's system and with previous research using the system. This improved chances that the segments were properly classified. Classification left to uninformed individuals or even individuals who have been briefly trained is appropriate for some types of research, but presented significant opportunities for error here.

Next, three examples of humor in each of five subject areas were readied for the subjects. Fourteen subject areas resulted from the classification process, but a pre-test (discussed below) indicated that presentation of material in fourteen categories was impractical. The five selected were the areas pre-test subjects remembered best and seemed most interested in. These five areas are sexual humor, political humor, ethnic humor, humor involving alcoholic beverages, and humor involving looks or personality.

Three examples of each humor subject area were used so that the degree of funniness of that particular content area would not be judged on the basis of a single appearance in the material. Such a single appearance might not be particularly funny, but when the content area

surfaced again, it might be recorded as very funny. In order to permit the widest possible latitude in judgments of content, yet keep the study feasible, it was decided that three segments on each of five content areas would be presented.

In essence, a humor index (the average of the responses to each of the three examples) resulted for each content type. This figure represented the degree to which the subject felt a particular content area funny.

Recording Subject Responses

Decisions concerning the humorous segments were recorded on two forms. The first asked subjects to rate their appreciation of each segment in terms of "degrees of funniness" on a thermometer-type scale, ranging from zero ("totally unfunny") to 100 ("one of the funniest things I have ever heard"). This thermometer-type scale has been validated by Haskins (1960) and others as a measure of reading interest in newspapers. Its application here, as a measure of what is essentially interest in humorous content, seems a logical extension of that research.

Next, subjects were asked to indicate whether they liked or disliked the style or delivery of the announcer. A typical Likert scale (strongly dislike to strongly like) was used with the responses being averaged to form an announcer liking index for each humor type.

To facilitate data tabulation, demographic data were recorded on a separate form prior to the treatment.

Pre-Test

In order to refine the research instruments, a pre-test was conducted. Babbie (1973) suggests that the selection of subjects for instrument pre-tests "can profitably be kept flexible and varied" (p. 207). The primary concern was that the instruments be pre-tested in the manner intended for the final study so that they could be reworked to eliminate any flaws.

Fifteen subjects were selected to hear thirty-three humorous radio segments. The pre-test indicated, among other things, that the treatment session was too long and should be shortened and, further, that some humor segments were so unintelligible as to make their use impractical. Based on information provided by the pre-test, the instruments were appropriately revised and the treatment shortened.

Identification of Subjects

One hundred sixty subjects, ranging in age from 19 to 50-plus, were selected from both the university academic community and the Knoxville city population. These subjects were part of a convenience sample and were not selected at random. Research results will reflect only the views of

this particular group and will not, therefore, be generalized to any other population.

The Treatment

Subjects, in small groups of ten to twenty, were gathered in a small room so that each had the opportunity to hear the audio recording clearly. Subjects were positioned several feet apart and given a packet of materials with instructions to leave the packet face down until told to turn it over.

The treatment administrator presented the instructions and the materials to each group in precisely the same manner in order to avoid contamination from extraneous variables. A copy of the instructions for the administrator appears in Appendix B.

As part of the instructions, cautions were made that subjects should refrain from watching others and from talking or laughing aloud during the treatment process. Particular emphasis was placed on the need to have each subject record an honest evaluation of the material, not one influenced by other subjects.

Subjects were first asked to complete the demographic section of the questionnaire. Subjects were then exposed to three humor segments for each of five content areas and asked to rate the degree of funniness of each of the fifteen segments on the 0-100 thermometer scale and assess

their liking of the announcer's style or delivery for that segment on a Likert scale. The tape was stopped briefly after each segment to allow subjects time to write down their responses.

Following the completion of the treatment, subjects were given a minute to look over their questionnaires to insure their completeness, and the questionnaires were then collected.

Subjects were debriefed in a short session following the treatment. An explanation of the entire project was provided and subjects were asked if they had any questions. These questions were answered and subjects were excused.

Control of Extraneous Variables

Some research (Eysenck, 1947) has shown that an individual's particular appreciation of humor may depend, in part, on his/her personality. This is a variable not addressed in this study. Ideally, subjects would be given a personality test as a pre-test activity and results of that test could then be correlated with the responses to the humorous segments. Such an activity might be revealing, but is clearly beyond the scope of this project.

Cantor, et al. (1974) found that "a person's response to humor may be influenced by his excitatory state deriving from immediately prior experience" (p. 819). This excitation may be transferred to the humor analysis

experience thereby hindering an unbiased evaluation of the humor. However, this potential problem was not viewed as serious since such experiences would be just as likely to occur in normal day-to-day radio listening situations as they would be just prior to these research activities. The influence of prior experiences would not be controlled for in an individual's normal activities, so there was no compelling need to control for them here.

Two significant problems arose regarding the physical environment of the evaluation session and the length of the session. Humor responses are apt to be influenced somewhat by the responses of nearby individuals. For example, if a subject does not find a segment particularly funny, but hears a nearby subject laugh, the first subject, not wanting to seem out-of-step with peers, might be tempted to change an original evaluation, perhaps on the grounds that others appear to have gotten the point. The proximity and reaction of others, then, could be a problem. Every effort was made, however, to structure the physical environment of the evaluation session so that each subject had a maximum amount of privacy and a minimum amount of peer contact during the treatment session.

A second problem involved the anticipated length of the session. Listening to fifteen humorous segments extended the session to more than thirty minutes. Will the evaluation of the humor be as consistent toward the end of

the session as it presumably was near the beginning? Again, there is no practical way to guarantee such consistency. An effort was made, however, to adjust room temperature and treatment pace to control for fatigue.

Statistical Analysis of Data

Multiple regression was used to analyze the relationship between five independent variables and a single dependent variable. The purpose of this analysis was to determine whether the variance in response to radio disc jockey humor could be explained by the five independent variables, and, to some extent, what percent of the variance was attributable to each variable.

The regression equation and the variables are described below:

Dependent variable: Y = degree of funniness of content areas;

Independent variables: X_1 = gender of subject;
 X_2 = age of subject;
 X_3 = time spent with radio (in hours per day);
 X_4 = years of education completed;
 X_5 = liking of announcer.

The regression equation is as follows:

$$Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5 + e.$$

This prediction equation, as it is commonly called, can be used to predict Y for given X values.

The regression analysis was followed by stepwise regression. Other variables of interest were analyzed and reported using descriptive techniques, primarily correlation and t-tests.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

General Characteristics of Subjects

Ninety females and seventy males comprised the convenience sample used in this research. Table 1 presents means and standard deviations for each demographic variable.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Demographic Variables.

Gender	n	Age		Time		Education	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Females	90	22.9	5.8	3.2	2.0	14.2	1.5
Males	70	27.2	8.9	2.5	2.2	15.0	1.6
Total	160	24.8	7.6	2.9	2.1	14.6	1.6

An effort was made in the selection of subjects to go beyond the academic community in order to reach individuals from different demographic groups. Subjects were selected from local apartment complexes, industries, and churches, as well as from the university community. It should be noted

that these subjects were not randomly selected. No attempt will be made, therefore, to generalize results to any other population.

It has been said that the individuals who most frequently serve as subjects for social science research are college sophomores. The age of the typical sophomore would be somewhere near twenty years, with a corresponding level of educational achievement at slightly more than thirteen years. The data displayed above indicate that subjects used in this research were beyond the "sophomore syndrome." On the average, subjects were about four years older than the typical sophomore and had about two years more education. Males, especially, were well beyond typical sophomore demographics.

The variable time represents time spent with radio in hours listened per day. Recent figures indicate that the national average radio listening time per day is three hours, six minutes (3.1 hours). Note that females reported an average of 3.2 hours per day listening time and males 2.5 hours per day. For males and the total group (2.9 hours), time spent with radio was a little less than the reported national average.

The Sexual Humor Model

The regression model tested in this research suggests that a subject's appreciation of a certain type of humor

is a function of five variables: age, gender, education, time spent with radio, and liking of the announcer's style or delivery. This is expressed as the regression equation $Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5 + e$, where a is the Y-intercept, the value of Y when $X = 0$. B is the slope of the line, the number of units and direction that Y changes for each single unit increase in X (Younger, 1979, p. 15). X_i is one of the variables of interest. Y is the dependent variable.

The first type of humor tested was sexual humor. The sample yielded a mean humor appreciation index of 41.2 on a 0-100 scale. Liking of the announcer's style or delivery showed a mean of 2.5 on a 5-point Likert scale.

Results of a t-test indicated that there was no significant difference in the way males and females rated sexual humor ($t=1.57$, $df=158$, $p<.118$). Males had a mean appreciation score of 43.9 and females 39.1. Liking scores were 2.7 and 2.5, respectively.

Table 2 presents the results of the regression analysis for this model. Two of the variables were found to be significant in a subject's appreciation of sexual humor. Age was a contributor ($F=4.14$, $df=1$, $p<.0436$) and liking of announcer was highly significant ($F=97.88$, $df=1$, $p<.0001$).

The precise relationship between age and sexual humor appreciation was difficult to determine. Several statistical tests revealed no relationship between these two

Table 2. Regression Analysis Results for Sexual Humor Model.

Variable	F-value	p
Gender	1.71	0.1923
Age	4.14	0.0436
Time	0.01	0.9186
Education	0.02	0.8981
Liking	97.88	0.0001
R-Square = 0.4052		

variables ($t=0.6577$, $df=158$, $p<.5117$; $r=-.03$, $p<.69$; $\chi^2=1.102$, $df=2$, $p<.576$). It appears that age and appreciation of sexual humor may be related spuriously because of a nonrepresentative sample. Stepwise regression failed to improve the model, but indicated that liking of the announcer accounted for most of the variation found in the dependent variable. Table 3 presents the results of the stepwise analysis. Note that the R-Square value for the analysis is 0.4051. The R-Square value for a multiple regression equation "indicates the proportion of variation in Y 'explained' by all the independent variables" (Lewis-Beck, p. 53). A high value indicates a more complete explanation of the variable being studied. In this case, the value is .40, indicating that the model explains 40 percent of the variation in the dependent variable.

The relationship between appreciation of sexual humor and liking of the announcer is clearly indicated as a moderate, positive correlation ($r=.61$, $p<.0001$). In other words, the degree to which sexual humor was appreciated was due in large part to a subject's liking for the announcer and possibly due in some small part to the subject's age.

The Body Humor Model

The second type of humor tested was material related to one's looks, body size or type, or personality. The sample mean for appreciation of this type of humor was 53.9.

Table 3. Stepwise Regression Results for Sexual Humor Model.

Variable	R-Sq.	F-value	p
Liking	0.3803	96.9464	0.0001
Age	0.0181	4.7142	0.0314
Gender	0.0068	1.7857	0.1834

Total R-Square = 0.4051

No other variables met the 0.5000 significance level for entry into the model.

The mean announcer liking index was 3.0. The mean appreciation index for males was 55.8, somewhat higher than the 52.4 for females. Liking indexes were 3.1 and 2.9, respectively. However, a t-test indicated that the differences recorded between males and females were not significant ($t=1.22$, $df=158$, $p<.22$).

Table 4 presents the results of the regression analysis for this model. Only one variable--liking of announcer--is significant ($F=77.27$, $df=1$, $p<.0001$). Stepwise regression, shown in Table 5, confirmed this finding, indicating that the degree to which subjects thought this type of humor funny was clearly a function of their liking of the announcer. Note that the R-Square value is 0.3567, indicating that the liking variable explains about 35 percent of the variation in appreciation of body humor. The relationship between liking of announcer and appreciation of body humor can be described as a moderate, positive correlation ($r=.59$, $p<.0001$).

The Ethnic Humor Model

The third type of humor tested was ethnic humor. The sample mean for appreciation of this type of humor was 43.3. The announcer liking index mean was 2.6. Males appreciated this type of humor more than females, with mean indexes of 46.7 and 40.7, respectively. The announcer liking index means were 2.6 for males and 2.5 for females.

Table 4. Regression Analysis Results for Body Humor Model.

Variable	F-value	p
Gender	0.32	0.5746
Age	0.67	0.4159
Time	0.17	0.6820
Education	0.02	0.8941
Liking	77.27	0.0001
R-Square = 0.3589		

Table 5. Stepwise Regression Results for Body Humor Model.

Variable	R-Sq.	F-value	p
Liking	0.3531	86.2455	0.0001
Age	0.0036	0.8858	0.3481

Total R-Square = 0.3567

No other variables met the 0.5000 significance level for entry into the model.

A t-test indicated a tendency toward significance, with males liking this type of humor better than females ($t=1.77$, $df=158$, $p<.07$). While these differences were not significant at the usual .05 level, there appeared to be a tendency toward significance. Younger subjects (18-34) appreciated ethnic humor to a greater degree than did older subjects ($\chi^2=13.695$, $df=2$, $p<.001$).

As might be expected, the regression model showed gender to be one of three variables significant to the appreciation of ethnic humor. Table 6 presents the results of the regression analysis for this type of humor. Appreciation of ethnic humor was found to be a function of gender ($F=4.45$, $p<.03$), age ($F=5.06$, $p<.02$), and liking of announcer ($F=150.08$, $p<.0001$). As with models discussed previously, liking of announcer proved to be highly significant. The relationship between the appreciation of ethnic humor and liking of announcer can be described as a high, positive correlation ($r=.71$, $p<.0001$). Stepwise regression results, shown in Table 7, confirmed the three variable model for this type of humor. Note that these three variables explain about 54 percent of the variation in the appreciation of ethnic humor ($R\text{-Square}=0.5450$).

The Political Humor Model

Political humor means were lowest for any of the humor types tested. The sample mean appreciation index for this

Table 6. Regression Analysis Results for Ethnic Humor Model.

Variable	F-value	p
Gender	4.45	0.0365
Age	5.06	0.0258
Time	0.00	0.9627
Education	0.02	0.8842
Liking	150.08	0.0001
R-Square = 0.5450		

Table 7. Stepwise Regression Results for Ethnic Humor Model.

Variable	R-Sq.	F-value	p
Liking	0.5183	169.9969	0.0001
Age	0.0129	4.3128	0.0395
Gender	0.0138	4.7292	0.0312

Total R-Square = 0.5450

No other variables met the 0.5000 significance level for entry into the model.

type of humor was 38.2. The announcer liking index mean was 2.6. Males and females differed little in their appreciation of this type of humor. The male appreciation mean was 39.4; the female mean was 37.3. Announcer liking means were 2.7 and 2.6, respectively. A t-test revealed that the differences noted here were not significant ($t=0.678$, $df=158$, $p<.49$).

As with the body humor model, regression results, presented in Table 8, indicate that only one variable--liking of announcer--was significant for the political humor model ($F=84.31$, $df=1$, $p<.0001$). Stepwise regression results, shown in Table 9, confirmed that no other variables contributed significantly to appreciation of political humor. Liking accounted for about 36 percent of the variation in this model ($R\text{-Square}=0.3676$). A moderate, positive correlation exists between the appreciation of political humor and liking of announcer ($r=.60$, $p<.0001$).

The Alcohol Humor Model

Humor relating to the consumption and/or abuse of alcoholic beverages yielded a mean index rating of 55.1, the highest mean among the types of humor tested. The mean announcer liking index was 3.2, also the highest of those tested. Females scored this humor higher than males, with a mean appreciation index of 55.5 and 54.5, respectively. The announcer liking mean was 3.2 for both

Table 8. Regression Analysis Results for Political Humor Model.

Variable	F-value	p
Gender	0.47	0.4962
Age	0.00	0.9855
Time	0.17	0.6837
Education	1.06	0.3043
Liking	84.31	0.0001
R-Square = 0.3682		

Table 9. Stepwise Regression Results for Political Humor Model.

Variable	R-Sq.	F-value	p
Liking	0.3607	89.1624	0.0001
Education	0.0047	1.1566	0.2838
Gender	0.0021	0.5288	0.4682

Total R-Square = 0.3676

No other variables met the 0.5000 significance level for entry into the model.

groups. A t-test revealed that these two groups were not significantly different in their appreciation of this type.

As Table 10 indicates, liking of announcer proved to be the only significant variable in the regression model ($F=115.08$, $df=1$, $p<.0001$). However, stepwise regression, shown in Table 11, revealed that age was nearly significant when used in combination with the liking variable ($F=3.7$, $p<.0548$). No other variables proved to be significantly related to appreciation of alcohol-type humor. Liking and age together explain about 44 percent of the variation in the dependent variable ($R\text{-Square}=0.43944$). The correlation between liking of announcer and appreciation of this type of humor is a moderate, positive one ($r=.65$, $p<.0001$).

Multicollinearity

One possible explanation for the lack of significance of some of the variables in these models might be that some of the independent variables could be highly correlated with each other. "One of the results of this phenomenon is that an estimated regression coefficient may be so unstable that it fails to achieve statistical significance, even though X is actually associated with Y in the population" (Lewis-Beck, p. 59).

One way to assess multicollinearity is to regress each independent variable on all other independent variables. If the R-Square is near 1.0, there is high multicollinearity.

Table 10. Regression Analysis Results for Alcohol Humor Model.

Variable	F-value	p
Gender	0.31	0.5768
Age	1.21	0.2729
Time	0.05	0.8258
Education	0.59	0.4449
Liking	115.08	0.0001
R-Square = 0.4406		

Table 11. Stepwise Regression Results for Alcohol Humor Model.

Variable	R-Sq.	F-value	p
Liking	0.4238	116.1954	0.0001
Age	0.0134	3.7440	0.0548
Education	0.0022	0.6200	0.4323
Total R-Square = 0.4394			
No other variables met the 0.5000 significance level for entry into the model.			

Stepwise regression analysis was performed on each of the models and the resulting R-Square values were nowhere near 1.0. Therefore, multicollinearity was ruled out.

An examination of a correlation matrix is another way one can judge whether multicollinearity exists. The matrix for these models indicated that only two significant relationships existed among the independent variables. Age and education were moderately, positively correlated ($r=.62$, $p<.0001$) and education and time were found to have a weak, negative correlation ($r=-.29$, $p<.0002$). These relationships do not appear to be significant enough to declare the presence of multicollinearity.

Therefore, one can conclude, based on this analysis, that multicollinearity is not responsible for the lack of significance of several variables to the respective models.

Other Observations

The individual humor segment which consistently received the highest appreciation rating was segment eleven, a parody of a current popular song. The segment, from station KITS in San Francisco, was an example of alcohol humor. It involved the music to George Michael's song "Careless Whisper." However, the words were changed and the song became "Careless Hangover."

The individual humor segment which consistently received the lowest appreciation rating was segment eight, a

character voice. The segment, an example of sexual humor, was from station KWSS in San Jose. It involved an appearance by Slezo, the clown. Slezo, in falsetto voice, urged children in the audience to participate in voyeur-type activities.

Index ratings ranged from 0 to 97. At least one subject gave zero ratings to each of the three humor segments in the sexual, ethnic, and political content areas. One subject rated the alcohol segments high enough to yield a 97 appreciation index rating.

Summary

Mean appreciation index scores and mean announcer-liking index scores for each of the five humor types are summarized in Table 12. Table 13 summarizes the results of the regression analysis, indicating the appropriate model for each humor type.

Table 12. Means and Standard Deviations for Appreciation and Liking Variables by Humor Type.

Humor Type	Appreciation		Liking	
	Mean	Index SD	Mean	Index SD
Sexual	41.2	19.3	2.5	0.77
Body	53.9	17.2	3.0	0.67
Ethnic	43.3	21.1	2.6	0.90
Political	38.2	19.3	2.6	0.78
Alcohol	55.1	20.4	3.2	0.66

Table 13. Models Showing Variables Influencing Humor Appreciation.

Humor Type	Significant Variables
Sexual	Age; Liking of Announcer
Body	Liking of Announcer
Ethnic	Gender; Age; Liking of Announcer
Political	Liking of Announcer
Alcohol	Age; Liking of Announcer

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study has essentially achieved its purpose, i.e., to account for some of the variation in listener response to radio disc jockey humor. It has accounted for up to 40 percent of the variation in the appreciation of selected types of humor.

The three variables found to be important in the appreciation of ethnic humor are gender, age, and liking of announcer. Age and liking of announcer are significant in the appreciation of sexual and alcohol humor. For body and political humor, liking of announcer is the significant contributor to humor appreciation.

Younger subjects (18-34) had a greater appreciation of sexual, ethnic, and alcohol humor than did older subjects (35-plus). Males found ethnic humor significantly funnier than females did.

Discussion

One of the things most apparent in the data is the clustering of scores in the middle of the 0-100 scale. Several explanations are possible. First, radio listening is often a personal experience, i.e., often done alone at

home or in automobiles. Yet subjects were asked to listen to a series of radio humor segments and evaluate them while in an unnatural setting and in the presence of at least a dozen other persons. This artificial environment may have contributed to the distribution of scores about the midpoint of the scale.

Second, subjects had no knowledge of the time of day these humor segments were aired, the program elements surrounding the humor segments, or of the occasional regional references made by some of the announcers.

Third, subjects were not familiar with either the announcers delivering the humor or the stations for which they were working. Absent any particular loyalty or prejudice, subjects could be expected to remain unsure of individuals with whom they were not acquainted.

Fourth, the meaning of the midpoint of the 0-100 scale may not have been clear to some participants. This may have resulted in measurement error.

Additionally, other problems may have influenced subject responses. Some humor segments were only ten to fifteen seconds long. Subjects may have had some difficulty in becoming accustomed to the announcers or the subject matter in such a short time. Subjects were exposed to three examples of each humor type and their judgments averaged to form an index. Would responses have been different if

responses to five segments had been averaged to form the humor appreciation index?

The result of these factors was a compression of the distribution of scores. Nevertheless, up to 40 percent of the variation in appreciation for each humor type was accounted for. R-Square values clearly indicate that another 60 percent of the variation remains unaccounted for. The variables which may account for this variation were not specified in the regression equation. This specification error is often a problem in regression analysis. It reflects a problem in the conceptualization of the regression equation and is not an issue that can be addressed through data analysis (Lewis-Beck, 1985, p. 25).

Conclusions

The data support the following conclusions:

1. Liking of announcer was a significant contributor to the appreciation of humor with sexual, ethnic, political, body, and alcohol themes.
2. Age was significant to the appreciation of sexual, ethnic, and alcohol humor. Younger subjects (18-34) appreciated these types to a greater degree than older subjects did.
3. Gender was significant to the appreciation of ethnic humor, with males appreciating this type of humor to a greater degree than females.

4. For the five types of humor examined, two variables--education and time spent with radio--did not significantly contribute to appreciation.
5. Measurement error may have been responsible for the distribution of appreciation scores about the midpoint of the 100-point scale.
6. Subject unfamiliarity with both the station and the announcer may have contributed to the compression of appreciation scores.
7. In rank order, subjects preferred humor with the following themes: alcohol, body, ethnic, sexual, and political. These findings may be generalized to other audiences only to the extent that the sample used here represents a cross-section of a typical audience. Variation in appreciation of these types seems to indicate that a rank ordering of other humor types would be possible for other audiences.

The Hypothesis

The hypothesis tested by this study--that five variables could explain appreciation of humor--cannot be supported in full. The results do indicate, however, that the hypothesis can be partially supported in that liking of announcer was a significant contributor to appreciation of

all five humor types. Age was significant in three and gender in one.

Humor Theory Implications

Omwaké (1937) studied humor and its relationship to age, gender, and other personal characteristics. Though Omwake's research and the present study share more differences than similarities, both concern themselves with some of the same variables.

Omwake reported results as follows:

1. No joke was consistently marked best or poorest.
2. Each was marked "pointless" by at least one person.
3. Males showed a greater liking for the shady jokes than did females.
4. Every joke was ranked as best and poorest by at least one person.

With the exception of number three, Omwake's conclusions fit the present study easily. However, her statements are general and not supported by statistical analysis. The present study does support these conclusions, but goes beyond to apply the conclusions to specific content areas.

Singer (1968), after his study of hostile humor and aggression, concluded "concentration, involvement, and perhaps wariness and defensiveness, stemming . . . from

perceptions of the experimental situation as potentially demanding or threatening . . . inhibited humor appreciation" (p. 12).

Eysenck (1943), in an attempt to refine measuring techniques, employed a number of different ways of measuring humor judgments. These included comparing a person's ranking of humorous items with that of a standard group, requiring the subject to select the funniest ending for a joke when several were offered, and requiring a subject to caption a cartoon or finish a joke, among others (p. 192).

After examining the data, Eysenck concluded that "scores on the ordinary type of test of 'appreciation of humor' are valueless . . . [and] measure nothing but the subject's reaction to the test itself" (p. 204). Although Eysenck was measuring "sense of humor," his point may have implications for the present study. The measures here may have only face validity. A more sensitive measure of appreciation of humor may be needed.

Taking Eysenck one step further, one sees that "if scored on number of items found amusing, it is possible to predicate a general factor embracing all the tests" (p. 204). This suggests, he says, that the essence of the sense of humor is affective rather than cognitive.

The present study falls well within the framework of results reported by others. It supports most of Omwake's conclusions, is likely susceptible to Singer's

contamination, and may ultimately rest on Eysenck's conclusion that appreciation of humor is mainly affective rather than cognitive.

Implications for Station Operation

Although not all five variables were significant, results of this study have several implications for radio station operation and management practices. First, the results clearly point to the skills of the announcer as a significant contributor to appreciation of humor. These skills were loosely termed "liking of announcer's style or delivery," but may have taken on broader characteristics in the minds of the subjects. Voice quality, volume, word choice, credibility, and the like may be part of "style or delivery," but were not separated for detailed analysis in this project. Station managers might be advised, then, that humor alone may be insufficient to win an audience's attention; the humor must be integrated into an announcer's style.

Second, this research supports standard radio station practice. Station management typically pays little attention to the type of humor used on the air. Some managers and program directors merely encourage willing announcers to use humor as part of their programs. Not much concern is usually expressed about the type of humor used. According to the data gathered here, this turns out to be a

fairly workable practice. Announcers should be good, i.e., personable and skillful in the performance of their jobs. They should be likable. But management should be aware that age and gender can sometimes contribute to the appreciation of some types of humor and that air personalities, at the very least, should choose their humorous material with some attention to audience demographics.

Of primary interest to station managers, however, should be the issue of liking of announcer. This liking could include voice quality, personality, credibility, word choice, and the like. It would be helpful if station managers could determine what listeners like about an announcer's style or delivery. Since the liking variable was significant in each of the five humor types tested, a great deal could be learned by exploring this variable further.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study, while not completely explaining the appreciation of humorous content on radio, does provide a foundation on which to base additional research. The following suggestions are made for further study.

First, other humor types need to be examined. Five types were examined here, but a study of other content areas should provide additional insight.

Second, other variables need attention. These might include delivery technique, music preference, heavy and light radio users, or personality traits and their relation to humor appreciation. These might become additional variables in a regression equation.

Third, other research designs should be considered. A classical laboratory experiment, i.e., treatment and control groups, could yield some useful information. Or conversely, a naturalistic setting and unobtrusive measures might yield more meaningful data.

Clearly, there is much work still to be done in the area of radio disc jockey humor. This study presents some significant findings, but many more questions remain to be answered.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
INFORMATIONAL DATA ON TREATMENT SEGMENTS

INFORMATIONAL DATA ON TREATMENT SEGMENTS

<u>SEGMENT</u>	<u>ANNOUNCER</u>	<u>STATION AND CITY</u>
1	Don Rose	KFRC, San Francisco
2	Don Rose	KFRC, San Francisco
3	Barsky	WCAU, Philadelphia
4	Don Rose	KFRC, San Francisco
5	Barsky	WCAU, Philadelphia
6	Barsky	WCAU, Philadelphia
7	Rich Brothers	KFMB, San Diego
8	Kelly and Kline	KWSS, San Jose
9	Rich Michaels	WVIC, Lansing
10	M. G. Kelly	KOST, Los Angeles
11	Ed Volkman	KITS, San Francisco
12	Dean and Jones	KIXI, Seattle
13	Lannigan and Friends	WMGG, Tampa-St. Pete
14	Robert Murphy	WKQX, Chicago
15	Robert Murphy	WKQX, Chicago

APPENDIX B
INSTRUCTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATOR

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATOR

BEFORE subjects arrive, place one packet of materials at each desk or seat. Place materials face down.

AS SUBJECTS ARRIVE, ask them to take a seat and request that they do not look at the materials in front of them at this time.

BEGIN by saying "Please turn over the packet of materials and look only at the first page. Let's read the information on page 1 of the materials together." (READ PAGE)

CONTINUE by saying "Now, please turn to page 2 of the materials. These items should be answered honestly. No names will be associated with responses, so you are assured of anonymity. Please answer items one and two on page 2 now." (PAUSE)

CONTINUE by saying "Now please complete item three on page 2. Note that this asks for the number of hours per day you spend listening to the radio, so please think carefully about the number of hours you spend listening in the morning, afternoon, and evening." (PAUSE) "Please complete item 4. This asks for the number of years of education completed. If you finished high school, then you have

completed 12 years; one year of college or post-secondary work would be 13, and so on." (PAUSE)

CONTINUE by saying "Item five asks for you to check your music preference. The category "rock" includes Top 40, Top 100, Album Rock, and Contemporary Hits. Local stations WOKI & WIMZ are examples of stations playing this type of music. The category "black/soul/R&B" includes music designed to appeal to primarily black audiences. Urban contemporary formats are also included here. Local stations WBMK & WKGN are examples of stations playing this type of music. The category "country" includes all music termed modern country or country western. Local stations WIVK, WNOX, and WNKX are examples of stations playing this type of music. The category "adult contemporary" includes softer rock hits designed to appeal primarily to an adult audience. Local station WMYU (U-102) plays this type of music. The category "religious" includes gospel or inspirational music and can be found locally on WRJZ, WITA, WKXV, & WSKT. The final category "easy listening" is sometimes called elevator music. It is soft, smooth, and often features more instrumental cuts than vocals. WEZK is the local station playing this type of music. Please check your preference." (PAUSE)

CONTINUE "Now please write down in the space provided the call letters of the station you normally listen to."

CONTINUE by saying "Next, please turn to page 3 of the materials and follow along as I read and explain the instructions." (READ INSTRUCTIONS; CALL ATTENTION TO EXAMPLE). "The scale for the announcer's style or delivery is different from the one you will use for rating the humor segments. Note that the scale goes from 1 to 5. One means strongly dislike and 5 means strongly like. You may circle any of the five numbers, depending on the strength of your like or dislike for the announcer's style or delivery.

EXPLAIN what subjects will be hearing. "You will be hearing examples of radio disc jockey humor. Some humor segments or some of the announcers involved may be familiar to you. Some may not. Your task will be to provide two judgments about each segment. First, judge the degree of funniness of the humor itself on the 0 to 100 scale. Then rate the style or delivery of the announcer on the 1 to 5 scale. Please listen carefully and avoid talking with or watching other persons. We want your honest evaluation of the humor, not an evaluation based on how you saw others react to it. YOUR HONEST AND CANDID EVALUATION IS ESSENTIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THIS STUDY. Please avoid any verbal response to the humor i.e., no laughing out loud at a particularly funny segment or groaning at one that appears not so funny. The tape will

be stopped after each humor segment to allow you time to write down your responses. Now, before we begin, are there any questions?"

ANSWER QUESTIONS, if any. PLAY TAPE.

APPENDIX C
TREATMENT PACKET OF MATERIALS

A COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH PROJECT

YOU HAVE BEEN SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN A COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH STUDY. ALTHOUGH YOUR PARTICIPATION IS NOT REQUIRED, THE RESEARCHER WOULD VERY MUCH APPRECIATE YOUR CONSENT TO HELP WITH THIS STUDY. YOUR NAME WILL NOT BE USED OR ASSOCIATED WITH YOUR ANSWERS. COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE REPRESENTS YOUR INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE.

IT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY TO EXAMINE AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF CERTAIN TYPES OF RADIO HUMOR. PLEASE RESPOND TO EACH ITEM HONESTLY AND TO THE BEST OF YOUR ABILITY. PLEASE DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON ANY OF THE MATERIALS.

BACKGROUND DATA

Office
Use

1. Are you (Check One) _____ Male
_____ Female 1. _____
2. How old are you, as of your last
birthday? _____ 2. _____
3. Approximately how many hours per day
do you spend listening to the radio?
_____ 3. _____
4. Please indicate the number of years
of education completed: _____ 4. _____
5. Which type of music do you prefer?
(Check One)
- (1) _____ Rock (2) _____ Black/Soul/R&B
(3) _____ Country (4) _____ Adult Contemporary
(5) _____ Religious (6) _____ Easy Listening 5. _____

What local station do you normally
listen to?

HUMOR RATING SHEET

INSTRUCTIONS: Below you will see a thermometer rating scale which indicates degrees of funniness. The highest possible rating is 100 ("One of the funniest things I have ever heard"); the lowest possible rating is zero ("Totally unfunny"). For each of the humorous elements played, please indicate the degree to which you thought the segment funny. Make sure your response is in the appropriate blank. Remember to judge the funniness of the humor first, then rate your liking of the announcer's style or delivery on the

1 to 5 (Dislike to Like) scale provided:

For example:

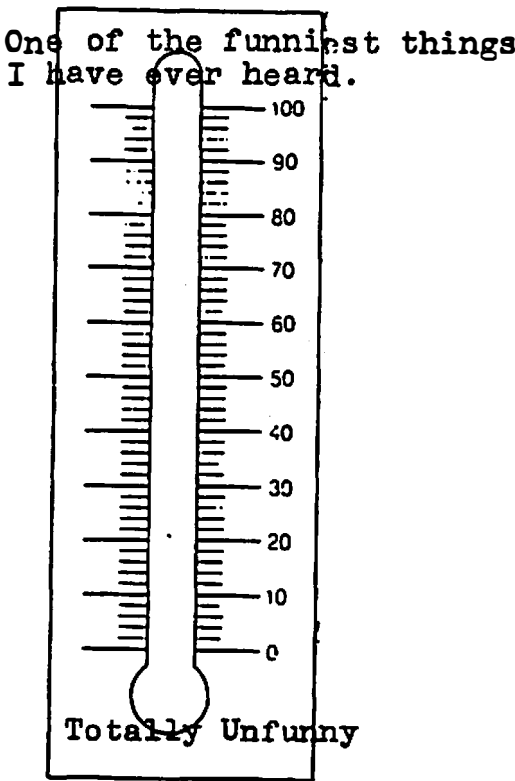
Humorous Rating
(0-100)

Announcer Style/Delivery
(Dislike-Neutral-Like)

73

1 2 3 4 5

Your answers will be kept confidential and will not be associated with your name.



VITA

Larry Zane Leslie was born in Marion, Kentucky on September 5, 1944. He attended elementary schools in that city and in Murray, Kentucky. He graduated from Lawrenceville (Illinois) Township High School in 1962. He entered Eastern Illinois University in the fall of 1962 and graduated from that institution with a Bachelor of Science in Education degree with a major in English in 1966.

While teaching high school English in Robinson, Illinois, he began working for radio station WTAY AM-FM. He entered Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee in 1970 and graduated in 1973 with a Master of Arts in English. He worked for the next several years at radio station WDXN in Clarksville.

After serving three years as broadcasting department head at Sumter (South Carolina) Area Technical College, he entered The Graduate School of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in the fall of 1983. He received the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in Communications in June 1986.

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