

## INFORMATION TO USERS

This was produced from a copy of a document sent to us for microfilming. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting through an image and duplicating adjacent pages to assure you of complete continuity.
2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a round black mark it is an indication that the film inspector noticed either blurred copy because of movement during exposure, or duplicate copy. Unless we meant to delete copyrighted materials that should not have been filmed, you will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.
3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., is part of the material being photographed the photographer has followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin filming at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. If necessary, sectioning is continued again—beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.
4. For any illustrations that cannot be reproduced satisfactorily by xerography, photographic prints can be purchased at additional cost and tipped into your xerographic copy. Requests can be made to our Dissertations Customer Services Department.
5. Some pages in any document may have indistinct print. In all cases we have filmed the best available copy.

University  
Microfilms  
International

300 N. ZEEB ROAD, ANN ARBOR, MI 48106  
18 BEDFORD ROW, LONDON WC1R 4EJ, ENGLAND

8006445

HAHNER, KATHRYN KAREN

THE APPRECIATION OF HUMOR AND GROUP IDENTIFICATION

*City University of New York*

PH.D.

1979

University  
Microfilms  
International

300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

18 Bedford Row, London WC1R 4EJ, England

Copyright 1979

by

Hahner, Kathryn Karen

All Rights Reserved

COPYRIGHT

by

Kathryn Hahner

© 1979

THE APPRECIATION OF HUMOR AND GROUP IDENTIFICATION

by

KATHRYN HAHNER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate  
Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1979

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

August 8, 1979  
date

Gertrude Schmeidler  
Chairperson of Examining Committee

August 8, 1979  
date

Martin L. Hoffman  
Executive Officer

Professor Gertrude R. Schmeidler

professor Florence Denmark

Professor Stanley Milgram  
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

## ABSTRACT

### THE APPRECIATION OF HUMOR AND GROUP IDENTIFICATION

by

Kathryn Hahner

Adviser: Professor Gertrude Schmeidler

The research was conducted to find whether the appreciation of humor relates to the social context in which the humor occurs. It was hypothesized that a person would have more appreciation of jokes about his or her sex or race when the jokes were thought to originate from a member of the group, rather than from an outsider.

A between subjects design was utilized. Approximately half the subjects were given jokes to read by an experimenter who was a group member. The experimenter read aloud a biography of the comedian who had supposedly contributed the jokes. The comedian was described as a group member. The other subjects were given the same jokes to read by an outsider who described a comedian who was also an outsider.

There were 282 subjects, most of whom were in undergraduate black studies and women's studies classes. The membership groups were: black women, black men, white Jewish women, and white non-Jewish women. The experiment manipulated two factors: race and sex.

The experimenter read the instructions and then a

short biography of a comedian. The experimenter, a group member or outsider, showed the subjects a photo of the comedian, also a group member or outsider. Subjects were told that the study was about the effects of feedback on a comedian's writing. The subjects read 20 jokes and rated them for funniness. There were jokes in each of the following categories: Jewish, black, female, gay, and neutral. After rating the jokes, subjects filled out a questionnaire to check on their identification with the group.

The hypothesis was supported by some of the findings, as follows: Black men, as predicted, preferred the black jokes when experimenter and comedian were black. Black women disliked the black jokes more when they were "written" by a white male racist.

The following null findings did not support the hypothesis. There were no differences in self-referent joke ratings by black women with sexist and feminist experimenters. The same null result occurred for Jewish and non-Jewish white women with sexist and feminist experimenters.

Thus, as predicted, subjects under ingroup conditions tend to tolerate or like jokes about their reference group. This finding has implications for theories of the appreciation of humor. Superiority humor theory explains the response to humor as a way of feeling superior to the butt of the joke. People do not laugh at themselves. Support

for this idea can be inferred from post hoc correlations. For example, black females with a sexist experimenter disapproved of black jokes, the more that they identified with blacks. But the theory is challenged by the findings that support the hypothesis. Superiority theory seems to apply under some conditions, but not under others.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to my dissertation adviser, Dr. Gertrude Schmeidler, for her encouragement and support, as much as for her guidance and critical expertise. I wish to thank also, Dr. Stanley Milgram and Dr. Florence Denmark for their help. A number of people were instrumental in the execution of the research; I thank particularly, Mark Shulgasser and Beverly Rubinstein. Dr. Ira Kramer was of invaluable assistance in the editing of the dissertation. Special appreciation goes to those who served as subjects and to the faculty who gave me access to their classrooms.

The dissertation is dedicated to Heddy Hahner and to the memory of my father.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES. . . . . x

INTRODUCTION. . . . . 1

    History. . . . . 1

    Hypotheses of the Current Study. . . . . 17

METHOD. . . . . 18

    Choice of Humor Stimuli. . . . . 18

    Subjects . . . . . 18

    Experimenters. . . . . 20

    Materials. . . . . 21

    Procedure. . . . . 23

RESULTS . . . . . 25

    Joke Ratings by Subjects in Experimental Groups. . . 25

    Sympathy Ratings by Subjects in Experimental  
    Groups . . . . . 29

    Joke Ratings by Additional Subjects. . . . . 33

    Sympathy Ratings by Additional Subjects. . . . . 35

    Sympathy Ratings by the Entire Sample:  
    Sex Differences. . . . . 37

    Tests of the Hypotheses. . . . . 41

    Correlations Between Joke Ratings and  
    Sympathy Ratings . . . . . 47

DISCUSSION. . . . . 50

    Support for the Main Hypothesis. . . . . 50

The Appreciation of Humor by the Sample as a Whole . . . . .	52
Implications for Superiority Theory. . . . .	52
Female Identification and the Appreciation of Humor. . . . .	55
Sex Differences in Sympathy Ratings by the Entire Sample . . . . .	58
Indirect Evidence for the Appreciation of Humor about the Ingroup . . . . .	58
Direct Evidence for the Appreciation of Humor about the Ingroup . . . . .	60
Construct Validity and Problems of Measurement . . . . .	61
Optimal Conditions for the Appreciation of Humor about the Ingroup . . . . .	62
Further Theoretical Considerations . . . . .	65
APPENDICES	
A: Humor Stimuli. . . . .	67
B: Biographical Descriptions. . . . .	70
C: Reference Group Questionnaire. . . . .	72
REFERENCES. . . . .	75

LIST OF TABLES

1.	Subjects' Ratings of Funniness of Jokes According to Type of Joke and Subjects' Membership Group. . . . .	27
2.	Subjects' Ratings of Sympathy for All Membership Groups According to Experimental Condition . . . . .	30
3.	Additional Subjects' Ratings of Funniness of Jokes According to Type of Joke and Subjects' Membership Group. . . . .	34
4.	Additional Subjects' Ratings of Sympathy for all Membership Groups . . . . .	36
5.	Percentage of Male and Female Subjects' Responses in Each Rating Category on the Reference Group Questionnaire . . . . .	39
6.	Differences in Ratings of Funniness of Jokes Between Subject Groups 1 and 2. . . . .	42
7.	Differences in Ratings of Funniness of Black Jokes Between Subject Groups 3 and 4. . . . .	45
8.	Differences in Ratings of Funniness of Jewish Jokes and Gay Jokes Between Subject Groups 5 and 6. . . . .	46
9.	Correlations Between Subjects' Ratings of Funniness of Jokes and Ratings of Sympathy for All Membership Groups According to Subjects' Membership Group . . . . .	48

## INTRODUCTION

The current study involves the appreciation of jokes which disparage one's reference group. An assumption underlying the study is that the response to a self-deprecating joke is especially sensitive to the effect of the situation in which the joke is presented. It is being suggested that one salient aspect of that situation is the degree to which the joke teller and the one who hears the joke are alike. This factor interacts with the content of the joke to help determine how funny the person finds the joke.

### History

#### Freud's theory of humor

Freud's theory (1960) involves aggression that underlies the response to humor. The theory is relevant to self-deprecating humor, one variety of disparaging humor. Freud describes two types of humor, tendency and nontendency. Tendency humor is a manifestation of repressed libido. Nontendency humor refers to all other types of humor which are not sexual or aggressive. Freud seems to think that tendency humor is both more important and more funny than the nontendency variety.

An experimental hypothesis derived from Freud's

theory is that subjects who do not enjoy tendency humor are repressing their hostility or sexuality. Proponents of Freud's theory have not been successful in demonstrating this. For example, Rosenwald (1969) assigned subjects to "levels of drive intensity." Subjects who mentioned such things as restaurants, union strikes, and expressions of familial affection, were classified as repressed. Repressed subjects were most indifferent to hostile cartoons. This is taken as evidence that they were repressing their hostility, but clearly the data may be interpreted in other ways.

Another attempt to support Freud's theory is that of Singer et al. (1969). The authors exposed half of their subjects to etchings depicting brutality, while control subjects viewed benign works by the same artist. All subjects then rated cartoons for funniness. As predicted, the subjects rated the brutal cartoons as less funny after seeing brutal art. Singer et al. infer that the subjects exposed to brutality had inhibited their own aggression. But as in the case of Rosenwald's experiment, the data can be otherwise interpreted. It could be argued that the subjects had seen enough brutality in the art work and were not amused when offered aggressive cartoons.

There is another problem with the Singer et al. study. Given Freud's "saving of energy" model, it would have made just as much sense to have hypothesized a greater preference for brutal humor on the part of subjects after exposure to

brutal art. These subjects would have had a greater need to experience catharsis through humor.

Singer (1968) appears to have demonstrated the aggression-reducing property of hostile humor. Singer's stimulus materials, while "hostile," are also self-deprecating. This is alluded to by Singer in the discussion of his results. The point is crucial and will be returned to when experiments in the self-deprecating realm are reviewed.

#### Aggression and the response to humor

Research has explored the relationship between subjects' aggressiveness and their response to humor. For example, a joke about a person's group could arouse anger. The same joke, delivered by a member of that group, could have the opposite effect.

Mueller and Donnerstein (1977) used humor which was not hostile or deprecating. Their subjects were male and female undergraduates. They were either angered or treated neutrally by an experimental confederate. They then heard one of three tapes, described as a part of the "learning experiment" they believed they were taking part in. The tapes were: high arousal (most funny) humor, mild arousal (mildly funny), and nonhumorous material (least arousing). The subjects were given the opportunity to deliver supposed shocks to the confederate.

Female subjects supported the prediction that mildly

arousing humor would result in a decrease in aggression. Females who heard mild arousal humor tended to aggress less toward the confederate than did females who heard the high arousal humor. The authors assume that both high and mild arousal humor were aggression-reducing. Both produce an attentional shift in the subjects. But subjects who heard high arousal humor maintained their anger due to the effects of high arousal alone. The most aggression on the part of angered females was displayed by those in the nonhumorous tape condition.

Prerost and Brewer (1977) also aroused aggression in subjects who subsequently rated humor for funniness and filled out mood adjective check lists. Female university students were either angered or not. They then rated for funniness jokes of one of three types: aggressive-threatening, aggressive-nonthreatening, and nonaggressive. Results indicate that the nonthreatening-aggressive humor reduced the aggressive state more than did either threatening aggressive humor or nonaggressive humor. Nonthreatening-aggressive humor was preferred by angered subjects, while subjects not angered preferred nonaggressive humor. The authors interpret their finding in terms of greater safety in the nonthreatening-aggressive humor condition. These subjects presumably felt safe to ventilate aggression through aggressive humor which did not threaten themselves.

In a study by Baron (1978), male undergraduates were either angered or treated neutrally by a male confederate.

They were then shown neutral pictures, exploitative sexual cartoons, or nonexploitative sexual cartoons. In the exploitative sexual cartoons the female character was clearly subservient to the male. Subjects were then given the opportunity to aggress against the confederate by delivering bogus shocks. It was found that the angered subjects who had seen exploitative sexual cartoons acted less aggressively toward the confederate than did angered subjects who saw neutral pictures. Nonexploitative sexual humor had no effect on subsequent aggression.

A parallel between the Prerost and Brewer and the Baron studies appears to exist. Aggression was reduced in Baron's subjects who ventilated anger through humor consonant with their own mood. (The exploitative sexual humor was also a vehicle for identifying with the "top dog" in the cartoons.) Taken together, the findings of the studies by Baron, Prerost and Brewer, and Mueller and Donnerstein suggest that the response to humor and the effect of that response both vary with changing person and situation variables.

#### Superiority humor theory

Superiority humor theory describes humor as a way of feeling superior to others. The theory cannot account for self-deprecating humor. The theory was originated by Thomas Hobbes (1909, 1966). In 1651 he wrote that humor is a vehicle for feelings of superiority (Leviathan, 1909).

A passage from Human Nature serves as a summary statement of this view:

. . . the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some hidden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or even with our own formerly: for men laugh at the follies of themselves past, when they come suddenly to remembrance, except they bring with them any present dishonor. (1966a, p. 46)

According to Hobbes, we laugh at ourselves only in hindsight, when the joke has lost its sting. Hobbes does not approve of laughter at all, and writes that the truly great person does not have "leisure enough to laugh," because "they need not the infirmities and vices of other men to recommend, as all men do when they laugh" (1966b, p. 455).

The modern counterpart of Hobbes' theory is sometimes called "vicarious superiority theory" (LaFave, 1976). The butt of the joke is someone or something that the subject identifies with vicariously. There is considerable support for the theory. Wolff et al. (1934) demonstrated that Gentile male and female undergraduate subjects rated jokes about Jews as funnier than jokes with a Gentile as the butt. The reverse was true for Jewish subjects. However, the two groups reacted differentially to the same jokes when Scottish names were used. Jews found Scots jokes less funny than did Gentiles. The authors offer the interpretation that Jewish subjects were identified with Scots via the stereotype of miserliness.

A major proponent of superiority theory is LaFave (1972). In an early study (1961), described in LaFave, et al. (1976) it was found that jokes were not appreciated when they were about the subjects' religious group. The same jokes were appreciated when they referred to outsiders. LaFave et al. (1974) utilized a 1970 university sit-in. Anti-occupier (opposed to students' sit-in) and pro-occupier jokes were used. Pro-occupier students found jokes about anti-occupiers funnier than those about pro-occupiers. The opposite was true for anti-occupiers. LaFave et al. (1973) obtained similar results with pro-Canadian and pro-American university students in Canada, substituting a Canadian or American as the butt of the joke.

Further support for the theory was provided by Priest and Wilhelm (1974). Female undergraduates appreciated antimale humor more than antifemale. The opposite was true for males. A similar finding by Wolff et al. (1934) was that female students appreciated jokes about men more than did the male subjects. For jokes where females were the butt, the opposite was true. Losco and Epstein (1975) found that both male and female undergraduates gave higher ratings to cartoons where the butt of the joke was a female, and gave lower ratings when the butt of the joke was a male. Stocking and Zillman (1976) found that females appreciated self-disparaging humor more than males did.

Smith and Levenson (1976) did not confirm the superiority hypothesis. Care was taken to ensure that the

subjects' membership group (a university student body) was also the group to which they referred themselves. Reference group did not determine how they rated the pro-university and anti-university jokes. Perhaps self-reference to the group was, in this case, of too transitory a nature.

A study done in 1957 by Roberts and Johnson represents a possible exception to superiority theory. Mental hospital patients were rated on their ability to empathize with the butt of cartoons. They also rated cartoons for funniness. Consistent with prediction, the most highly empathic subjects gave the highest ratings to the cartoons.

These findings suggest that superiority is not the only basis for the response to humor. Would a replication with normal subjects yield the same results? Stocking and Zillman (1976) found that university students approve of self-disparaging humor less than they approve of humor which disparages another. Subjects thought that self-disparaging humor was maladaptive.

Freud (1928) distinguishes between the id humor he had previously described, and the humor which results when a person is able to take the role of the butt of the joke. The second type is seen as a kind of gift from the ordinarily stern super-ego to the ego. Without accepting Freud's topology, one can easily view this empathic humor as a gift from oneself to oneself. (Extrapolating to groups, a case can be made for the social functions of disparaging

ingroup humor.) One need not accept Freud's assumption that the dynamic underlying the empathy is a saving of negative feelings. Rather than providing an escape from feeling, empathic humor may provide a tolerable way of experiencing negative feelings. Exception can be taken with Roberts and Johnson's claim that they had provided support for Freud's saving of feeling notion. They did demonstrate that their subjects rated humor as funny, the more they empathized with it. But nowhere is there support for the inferred Freudian dynamic.

#### Humor which disparages oneself or one's group

There has not yet been much controlled research on self-deprecating humor. There are anecdotal accounts of it. For example, Freud (1960) cites jokes told about and by Jews. Martineau (1972) provides some of the conceptual underpinnings for the phenomenon. Humor disparaging the ingroup is seen as having four possible social functions. The first is to control ingroup behavior. Social cohesion is preserved through humorous hostility toward deviance. Anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown (1940) calls this the "joking relationship," through which the "disjunctive" aspects of relationships are resolved without resorting to serious hostility. Martineau describes a second function which is a byproduct of the first. Through humor, ingroup members recognize and presumably ameliorate their own faults. The last two functions are mechanisms of social change. Disparaging ingroup humor can serve as a

vehicle for conflict through which the group is transformed. A final function is the actual disintegration of the group.

Sociologists and anthropologists have recorded their observations of self-disparaging humor. Miller (1967) describes tension management through humor in some meetings of the tribal council on a Chippewa Indian reservation in Minnesota. Humor about the ingroup is seen as a way of affirming group solidarity. This is done by making a joke of something that outsiders cannot joke about. Hammond (1964) describes a process where members communicate displeasure in a relatively harmless fashion. He observed the Mossi of West Africa, where a husband might express displeasure with his wife by jesting with his wife's sisters, saying, "Here come women more worthless than my wife."

Miller points out that ingroup humor appears to communicate things other than displeasure. He offers the example of the Chippewa council members who poked fun at their chairman by putting up a cartoon depicting an American corporate "chairman." This communication by the members was not a simple expression of displeasure. It was especially subtle in that it used a joke about an outgroup member (corporate chairman) to make fun of their own leader. This example represents a process whereby negative aspects of a person's (or group's) characteristics or activities are rendered assimilable and acceptable.

An observational study by a psychologist (Childs, 1976) examined disparaging ingroup humor in an outpatient therapy group and in a classroom group. Childs considers the main function of humor as commenting on and controlling ingroup behavior. It was seen as conducive to the group's activities. Similar examples of disparaging ingroup humor have been documented by Fox (1959). Fox observed that on hospital wards, patients' humor appeared to be a way of coming to terms with their situation. Group solidarity was important and arose out of the needs of otherwise isolated individuals. The group itself served as a vehicle for reassurance and tension reduction. For example, one group of patients with hypertensive cardiovascular disease who were to have adrenalectomies, organized themselves into a club. Explained a patient who was to undergo the operation, "The first guy to have his adrenal glands removed is President of the Adrenalectomy Club."

One of the few controlled experiments in the area is that of Stocking and Zillman (1976). Taped humorous communications were manipulated. The target of a male's disparaging humor was either the disparager himself, a male friend of the disparager, or a male enemy of the disparager. Undergraduate subjects rated the self-disparager as less intelligent, confident, and witty than the disparager of others. But female subjects tended to approve of self-disparaging humor more than

did the males. Men appreciated the disparagement of an enemy more than women did. A second experiment was performed where a female self-disparager was used as well. Here too, females appreciated self-disparaging humor more than did males. It may be that when self-disparaging humor is not within the context of a group process, it tends to be viewed as maladaptive. Females' greater tolerance of this type of humor is explained by the authors in terms of cultural conditioning whereby females are socialized into a self-effacing mode.

An earlier controlled study was done by Middleton (1959). He compared the reactions of white and black undergraduates to humor which disparaged whites or blacks. Blacks appreciated antiwhite humor more than white subjects did. Contrary to prediction, the blacks reacted as favorably as did the whites to the antiblack humor. Middleton considers this finding to be in line with his finding that black students tell more antiblack jokes than do white students. The favorable reaction on the part of the blacks to antiblack humor in the second study is apparently not due to these subjects' acceptance of black stereotypes. Subjects who accepted black stereotypes and those who rejected them did not respond differently to the black humor. The picture is complicated by the fact that middle class blacks reacted more favorably to antiblack humor than lower class blacks did. Middle class blacks also reacted more favorably to antiwhite

humor than lower class blacks did. We can rule out the possibility that blacks were simply more responsive to humor, since they liked the control jokes less. But there is the possibility that they were biased toward ethnic humor, regardless of the joke's target.

Whatever their reasons for endorsing antiblack humor, we can speculate that middle class black subjects could have been illustrating the principle of ingroup humor as a control mechanism. Perhaps they perceived lower class blacks as the butt of the joke and wanted to bring them jokingly into line. But it is also possible that they were employing humor as a means of tolerating, even enjoying, potentially painful material. Perhaps their approval of antiwhite humor reflects a sensitivity to racial prejudice in general.

In the study by Singer (1968) the subjects were black men, most of whom had participated in the Black Civil Rights Movement. They first listened to either a taped excerpt of horrifying accounts of injustices to black people or to an excerpt from a noninflammatory discussion of race relations. Subjects next listened to and rated for funniness one of three tapes: hostile humor, neutral humor, or documentary. The hostile humor is also self-deprecating. The black comic on the tape seems to be laughing at his own race in the following excerpt: "Thirty years from this year a Negro can become president . . . If I was President, you talk about good

living--ooh! Everybody would be swingers . . ." The tape is hostile toward segregationists, as the author claims, but its subtle caricatures of blacks are for the most part ignored. The comic makes fun of humans, as in, "We tested (a nuclear bomb) underground. I go for that! We're going after the groundhogs . . ." This example is interesting from the standpoint of group identification. The "we" referred to is not blacks. It appears to mean, "we Americans," those who are testing the bombs. The entire excerpt satirizes human foolishness and supplies a moral corrective. The mode of expression and the tone suggest an identification with the butt of the joke.

Singer administered mood check lists to the subjects after the arousal and humor manipulations. The aroused subjects' aggression was reduced by both hostile and neutral humor, but not by the documentary. It has been demonstrated that humor can reduce aggression. (The results do not necessarily warrant the author's interpretation of a catharsis which leads to the reduction in aggression.) Singer writes that humor may have helped subjects to "assert their invulnerability for the moment."

#### The concept of reference group

The concept of reference group in humor research has been criticized by Zillman and Cantor (1976). In 1972 they demonstrated that students appreciated jokes about fathers rather than jokes about sons, while professional people

preferred jokes about sons to those about fathers. The authors describe the subjects' identification through experiential similarities, rather than affiliation to a group. They replace the concept of affiliation with a "continuum of affective disposition." This distinction can be seen as primarily semantic. Subordinates (e.g., sons) could have constituted a reference group for the student subjects. LaFave et al. (1974) were able to handle the pro- and anti-occupier data within the reference group framework, although they updated the terminology to that of "identification class."

#### Summary

Theories of the appreciation of humor make conflicting claims. The basis of appreciation is seen by some (Freud, 1960) as unconscious hostility on the part of the person hearing the joke. Others (the superiority humor theorists) describe a person who enjoys a joke as striving to feel superior to the butt of the joke. There are theories (Nerhardt, 1976) that claim incongruity as the basic element in the appreciation of humor. Something is funny to the extent that it is incongruous with our expectations about it.

These theories are not mutually exclusive. They constitute the beginning of a taxonomy of humorous situations. For example, the superiority model might apply in one instance, but not in another. Aspects of the person

and of the situation interact with the enjoyment of humor. One aspect is hostility on the part of subjects (Baron, 1978; Prerost and Brewer, 1977; and Mueller and Donnerstein, 1977). Findings of the above studies imply that humor is appreciated or not, depending on when and to whom the humor is presented.

The present research was undertaken in order to see whether people would appreciate humor under one set of circumstances, but not under another. Subjects in the Roberts and Johnson study (1957) appreciated jokes the more that they empathized with the butt of the joke. Extrapolating from this finding, it was reasoned that jokes that disparage a person would be appreciated if the person is able to identify with the butt of the joke. One would probably not appreciate self-deprecating jokes if one did not feel safe in identifying with the joke's butt. Under some circumstances, the response to humor might conform to the superiority humor model; under others, self-deprecating humor might be appreciated.

Zillman and Cantor (1976) advance principles that can be seen as refinements of the superiority model. They propose that a person will appreciate humor about someone else, the more that the person is ill disposed toward the other. They also propose that humor will be appreciated the more that the person is favorably disposed toward the disparaging humorist.

The second proposition above is pertinent to the

research to be described. According to superiority theory, humor about a person's reference group is not appreciated. However, it seems plausible that such humor will be appreciated to the extent that the person is "positively disposed" toward the disparager. If the disparager is a member of the person's reference group, the person ought to appreciate humor that disparages the group. If the disparaging humorist is not a group member, then group members ought to disapprove of humor about their group and approve of humor about groups other than their own.

The research to be presented investigates this line of reasoning by comparing people's responses to jokes under two conditions. In one condition, the jokes that disparage the person's reference group originate with a member of that group. In the second condition, the same jokes originate with someone who is not a group member.

#### Hypotheses of the Current Study

The major hypothesis is that if both the experimenter and the comedian who contributed the jokes are of the subjects' own group, then subjects will appreciate jokes that disparage the group more than will subjects for whom experimenter and comedian are outsiders.

(A subhypothesis is offered in the event that the first is not confirmed. Since the data supported the major hypothesis, the subhypothesis is described here only for completeness. It was that increased variability

would occur in the ratings to self-referent jokes. This allowed for the possibility that, in this exploratory study, the experimental manipulations are effective, but in different ways for different individuals.)

## METHOD

### Choice of Humor Stimuli

It was thought best to ensure consistency by using one type of humor format (Cattell and Luborsky, 1947), that of jokes in printed form. Twenty jokes were used. This number would hold the subjects' interest without tiring them. There were four jokes concerning each of four groups (blacks, Jews, females, and gays), and four neutral jokes that did not refer to any of the four groups. To equate the jokes for funniness, they were rated by judges who were not black, Jewish, female, or gay. The five categories of jokes had equivalent ratings. Thus, they were operationally equated for funniness.

The choice of jokes had been posited on the expectation that blacks, females, Jews, and gays would be available in groups as subjects. However, attempts to recruit gay male subjects were unsuccessful. There was no gay subject condition in the study, but the gay jokes were included with the rest, because they provided cover for the jokes which were self-referent for the subjects.

### Subjects

There were 282 sets of useable data from: 52 white,

non-Jewish females, 52 Jewish (white) females, 88 black (non-Jewish) females, 53 black (non-Jewish) males, 15 Jewish (white) males, 18 white, non-Jewish males, three Jewish (white) gay females, and one black (non-Jewish) gay female. (It is possible that there were gay subjects who did not profess to be so.)

Naturally occurring groups of subjects were used, rather than groups created in the laboratory. This was in an attempt to preserve ecological validity and to help ensure that reference and membership groups were the same. Undergraduate women's studies classes at the City University of New York provided white and black female subjects. An organization of feminist psychotherapists took part; the members were Jewish and non-Jewish females, one black female, and one non-Jewish white male. Black studies classes at CUNY undergraduate schools were the main source of black subjects. A few groups of black undergraduates took part in small groups near the Black Studies Department at one of the colleges. A small group of Jewish female graduate students took part on their campus.

In most cases, subjects were told by their teacher that if they wished, they could participate in a study on jokes being conducted by a graduate student. There were many refusals. One black studies class refused to participate, although their professor was amenable. A few black studies students wrote hostile comments on the questionnaires, even when experimenter and comedian were

black. In a couple of instances, white feminists wrote angry comments on their joke booklets. The most extreme reaction was that of a black studies class which ordered the "white racist" experimenter out of the room. He frantically collected data on the run.

Groups of Jewish subjects were not readily available. A number of the feminist subjects were also Jewish. Data from these Jewish subjects were utilized to form Jewish female conditions. The subjects were in the feminist groups, and consequently had either a feminist or sexist experimenter.

White male subjects and gay female subjects occurred unexpectedly in the black groups and female groups. There were a few black men in the women's studies classes and white women in the black studies classes. Data from these subjects were not included in tests of the formal hypotheses.

### Experimenters

The feminist experimenter was a white woman. A white man served as the sexist experimenter. Other than being white, they were ethnically neutral. This is because the emphasis was on the dimension of gender. Jewish female subjects and white, non-Jewish female subjects had either the sexist or feminist experimenter.

The racist experimenter was a white man, and the black experimenter, a black man. Black male subjects had

either the racist or the black experimenter. In the case of black female subjects, it seemed likely that the experimenter's race is more salient than the experimenter's gender. A black male is perceived as a group member by black women. Black female subjects were in all four experimental conditions. They had an experimenter who was either a feminist (white female), a sexist (white male), a racist (white male), or a black male.

### Materials

Humor stimuli: A group of 20 jokes was prepared. There were four each of Jewish, black, female, and gay jokes. There were also four "neutral" jokes which did not disparage any of the four groups above. Appendix A contains the jokes as they were shown to the subjects.

To equate the jokes for funniness, five independent judges were used. They rated for funniness 69 jokes on a scale of 0 ("not at all funny") to 10 ("very funny"). The judges belonged to none of the four groups treated in the jokes. All were white, non-Jewish, heterosexual males.

In choosing the final list of 20 jokes, their range of funniness and not just their mean funniness rating was taken into account. Jokes were discarded that were enjoyed by two or three judges, but disliked by the rest. The 20 jokes were in the midrange of funniness.

The order of presentation of the 20 jokes was determined by block randomization, with jokes of the neutral

variety assigned to positions 1, 6, 11, and 16.

The rating scale used by the subjects appeared on each page of the 20 joke booklet. The scale ranged from 0 to 1 ("not at all funny") to 6 or 7 ("very funny").

Comedian: For financial reasons, it was not possible to use comedians to deliver the jokes to the subjects. The delivery could have been standardized with video or audio tape, but a live human presence is an important independent variable in the experiment. The solution was to have a group member act as the experimenter and read biographical material about the comedian who allegedly had contributed the jokes. The experimenter also showed the group of subjects a photograph of the comedian. Paragraphs about each ingroup comedian and each outgroup comedian were composed by the author to be comparable. For example, "Ron Gilbert" was described as a black, former theatre student who had been active in the Black Movement. His white counterpart, "Chris Reynolds," was described as from a family of industrialists, a former business major who became interested in theatre. Both Chris and Ron were currently "at work on producing a comedy program for a cable TV station." (See Appendix B for the biographical paragraphs used in the research.)

The photographs of the comedians were head shots of young adults. The person depicted in the photo of the male chauvinist was white, but otherwise ethnically neutral. The male chauvinist photo was also used for subjects in

the white racist condition. The feminist, like the racist/sexist, was white, but otherwise ethnically neutral. A pseudonym was chosen for each comedian and printed on a label clipped to the photo.

Reference group questionnaire: (See Appendix C.) The questionnaire was constructed by the author as a check on group identification. When the item pertains to the subject's own group, it is a measure of identification with or sympathy for the group. Possible responses are "none" (0), "a little" (1), "somewhat" (2), and "very much" (3). Items that do not pertain to a subject's group, assess sympathy for outgroups. Possible responses are, "none," "somewhat," and "very much."

The questionnaire was originally intended only as a check on group identification. When the responses were examined in post hoc analyses, they provide a tentative measure of sympathy for the various groups.

The questionnaire, as well as the joke booklet, contained no spaces for names. Subjects were assured that their names would never be requested or recorded on any of the materials and they would remain anonymous throughout.

#### Procedure

The classes and the feminist organization had been asked by their teachers and a member, respectively, if they wished to take part in a study on humor. The groups of

students formed on campus had been approached by the experimenter who had arranged to meet them later at a designated place on the campus. Most of the undergraduates in the spontaneously formed campus groups were given a dollar for their participation. This irregularity was inconsequential, since paid subjects gave ratings like those of other subjects in their respective conditions.

The experimenter arrived at the appointed time and introduced him/herself. It was sometimes necessary to modify the experimenter's name. For example, one of the male chauvinist experimenters changed his Jewish surname to the more ethnically ambiguous "Stevens."

In order to help make feminism salient in the case of the feminist experimenters, feminist experimenters carried a bag with an "ERA" button visibly displayed on it. In the black and racist conditions, the physical characteristics of the black and white experimenters established the experimenter's in- or outgroup status. As for the sexist experimenter, it was thought that the experimenter's gender, in connection with the chauvinism of the comedian, would ensure his outgroup status.

The experimenters read to the groups of subjects from a page of instructions for subjects. The instructions were as follows:

Hi. I'm (name). I'm helping out the psychologists who are doing this research, by explaining what you'll be doing and giving you the materials you'll

be using. The study is about how comedians go about creating humor; how feedback from people affects the comedians. A few aspiring comedians contributed humor for the research. The joke booklet you'll be getting was put together by one of these comedians. You'll notice that we are not asking for your name on anything you fill out. There are 20 jokes; each has a blank next to it where you can write your rating of the joke. (Experimenter holds up an enlarged version of the rating scale.) This is a copy of the rating scale you'll be using to rate the jokes. It goes from 0 or 1 - not funny at all, to 6 or 7 - very funny. Write just one number for your rating. There's a copy of the rating scale on each page of the joke booklet. In rating a joke, just decide how funny it is to you at the moment; don't worry about what other people would find funny. Are there any questions so far? (Experimenter answers questions without encouraging discussion.) I'll be telling you a little about the comedian who contributed the jokes in the booklet. This is a picture of him (her). (Experimenter reads biographical paragraph about the comedian.) Now if there are no questions, I'll pass out the booklets. When you finish rating the 20 jokes, please let me know, and I'll give you a final short questionnaire to fill out. Thank you for taking part in what we hope is an enjoyable study.

The experimenter handed out reference group questionnaires to the subjects as they finished with their joke booklets. No time restrictions were placed on the subjects. Most took between 20 minutes and a half-hour to complete both joke booklet and reference group questionnaire.

## RESULTS

### Joke Ratings by Subjects in Experimental Groups

The tables contain findings from analyses with all subjects included. Some subjects reported being unidentified with their groups, or did not answer the question about group identification. When a finding was altered

by excluding low or unknown identity subjects, both sets of data are reported.

Table 1 presents the mean joke ratings and standard deviations of subjects in the experimental conditions. The rating scale the subjects had used ranged from 0 and 1 ("not at all funny") to 6 and 7 ("very funny"). It can be seen that, in general, the joke ratings were low. The highest group mean rating of the 20 jokes (total jokes) is that by white, non-Jewish females with white, male (sexist) experimenter. The mean total jokes rating by the above female subjects is 3.17, or just beyond "slightly funny."

For the white, non-Jewish females, the critical jokes were the female jokes. Their mean rating for female jokes is 3.19, almost identical to that of total jokes, and not appreciably different from their highest mean rating (Jewish jokes, mean rating = 3.66). These subjects in the sexist condition did not rate the female jokes as less funny than did their counterparts in the feminist condition (mean female joke rating = 2.45). The two mean female joke ratings did not differ appreciably. The two white, non-Jewish female groups did differ in other joke categories (Table 8).

The female dimension was not salient for Jewish women. Those with a white, male sexist experimenter rated the female jokes (mean = 2.40) the same as did Jewish females with a feminist experimenter (mean = 2.67).

Table 1

Subjects' Ratings of Funniness of Jokes According to Type of Joke and Subjects' Membership Group  
(Jokes: 0 = Not at all funny; 7 = Very funny.)

Subjects	Experimenter and Comedian	N	Joke Type											
			Black		Female		Jewish		Gay		Neutral		Total	
			Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Black Females	White Male (Sexist)	20	1.30	1.27	1.61	1.48	2.23	1.45	2.19	1.27	1.93	1.41	1.88	1.22
Black Females	White Female	24	1.53	1.37	2.05	1.76	2.66	1.67	2.35	1.40	1.99	1.29	2.12	1.28
Black Females	Black Male	24	1.84	1.62	2.28	1.89	2.49	1.79	2.85	1.73	2.30	1.28	2.35	1.50
Black Females	White Male (Racist)	20	.35	.52	1.58	1.31	2.33	1.54	1.95	1.17	1.46	1.20	1.53	.78
White Non-Jewish Females	White Female	29	2.12	1.33	2.45	1.44	2.79	1.53	2.83	1.25	2.53	1.37	2.54	1.16
White Non-Jewish Females	White Male (Sexist)	22	2.43	1.61	3.19	1.53	3.66	1.36	3.59	1.36	2.99	1.44	3.17	1.24
Jewish Females	White Female	30	1.95	1.51	2.67	1.71	3.19	1.60	2.68	1.30	2.57	1.40	2.61	1.34
Jewish Females	White Male (Sexist)	20	1.89	1.34	2.40	1.67	2.70	1.56	2.74	1.51	2.40	1.37	2.42	1.38
Black Males	Black Male	24	2.70	1.77	2.38	1.33	2.83	1.54	3.04	1.69	2.00	1.11	2.61	1.30
Black Males	White Male (Racist)	23	1.67	1.35	2.21	1.47	3.01	1.35	2.57	1.67	2.23	1.64	2.34	1.27

For black women, the black dimension was more important than the female one. Table 1 shows a mean rating of 1.61 for female jokes by black females with a sexist experimenter and a mean of 2.05 for female jokes by black females with a white feminist experimenter. The difference is not statistically significant.

The mean female joke rating by black females with a black male experimenter was 2.28. That by black females with a white, male racist experimenter was 1.58. The difference did not reach statistical significance ( $t = 1.45$ ; 41 df;  $p < .16$ ).

Inspection of Table 1 reveals that the black women with a racist experimenter gave the lowest mean rating of total jokes in any condition (mean = 1.53; i.e., midway between "not at all funny" and "slightly funny"). These subjects' lowest mean rating was that of black jokes (mean = .35, or "not at all funny;" standard deviation = .52, indicating considerable agreement regarding black jokes). Their highest mean rating was that of 2.33 for Jewish jokes, a finding with implications for race relations.

As shown in Table 1, the mean total joke ratings by black males in both experimental conditions were similar to those of the other groups (mean = 2.61 when experimenter was a black male and mean = 2.34 when experimenter was a white male). But the mean ratings of black jokes by subjects with a white experimenter (mean = 1.67) was significantly lower than the mean black joke rating by

those with a black experimenter (mean = 2.70, at the upper end of the "slightly funny" range). As in the case of their female counterparts, the black men in both conditions gave the highest mean ratings to Jewish jokes and to gay jokes. These jokes tended to be relatively popular with subjects in all conditions, including Jewish subjects. In general, the black jokes were the least liked.

#### Sympathy Ratings by Subjects in Experimental Groups

Table 2 presents the experimental subjects' mean sympathy ratings and standard deviations. (The label "sympathy" is used to refer to all responses to the reference group questionnaire items.) This, therefore, constitutes a check on how identified subjects are with their membership groups.

It can be seen that subjects tended to be identified with their membership groups. In every case, blacks showed high average ratings of sympathy with blacks; Jews were in sympathy with Jews, and females with females. Apparently, this method of checking on identification with the membership group served its original purpose.

Post hoc examination of the ratings of sympathy suggests some provocative patterns that may be meaningful when considered in relation to the joke ratings. Examples of these patterns follow, but since none were predicted, each must be considered as only a possibility to be examined in future research.

Table 2

Subjects' Ratings of Sympathy for All Membership Groups According to Experimental Condition  
(Sympathy: 0 = None at all; 3 = Very much.)

Subjects	Experimenter and Comedian	N	Sympathy for:							
			Blacks		Females		Jews		Gays	
			Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Black Females	White Male (Sexist)	20	2.65	.49	2.80	.41	1.21	1.08	1.58	1.02
Black Females	White Female	24	2.67	.70	2.63	.58	.96	.96	1.83	1.27
Black Females	Black Male	24	2.83	.48	2.63	.77	1.00	1.14	1.36	1.09
Black Females	White Male (Racist)	20	3.00	0	2.70	.47	1.28	1.23	1.26	1.28
White Non-Jewish Females	White Female	29	1.39	1.20	2.72	.46	1.22	1.25	1.86	1.08
White Non-Jewish Females	White Male (Sexist)	22	1.96	.90	2.68	.48	1.50	1.10	1.91	1.15
Jewish Females	White Female	30	1.82	.67	2.77	.57	2.52	.57	1.96	.94
Jewish Females	White Male (Sexist)	20	2.00	.87	2.75	.44	2.60	.50	2.05	1.03
Black Males	Black Male	24	2.88	.34	2.00	.76	.92	1.14	1.23	1.07
Black Males	White Male (Racist)	23	2.90	.31	1.93	1.10	1.56	1.20	1.29	1.16

The black females with a white male (racist) experimenter were, of all subjects, the most highly identified with their group (blacks). All of them indicated that they were "very much" a part of black people. Since these subjects had given a mean black joke rating not significantly different from 0 ("not at all funny"), it appears that appreciation of ingroup humor did not occur along the black dimension. Their mean rating of sympathy for females was not appreciably lower than that of sympathy for blacks (mean = 2.70). However, their average ratings of sympathy for Jews and for gays were in the "little" to "somewhat" range.

The two groups of white, non-Jewish females were identified with women (means = 2.72 and 2.68). Their mean ratings of sympathy for blacks, Jews, and gays were in the "little" to "somewhat" range. But the ratings of gay and of Jewish jokes by black and by non-Jewish white subjects (all but four, heterosexual), were relatively high.

The experimental Jewish female subjects also gave mean Jewish joke ratings which were as high as other joke categories (mean = 3.19 and mean = 2.70). They were more than "somewhat" identified with Jews (mean Jewish identification ratings by the two groups are 2.52 and 2.60). It may be that these Jewish women appreciated humor that disparages the ingroup.

Jewish women, relative to other subjects, were sympathetic to outgroups. They had sympathy in the "somewhat"

range for both blacks (means = 1.82 and 2.00) and for gays (means = 1.96 and 2.05). Black subjects sympathized "a little" to "somewhat" with Jews. Jewish females in the sexist condition were the only subject category with a mean sympathy for gays rating at or past the "somewhat" point (mean = 2.05). An unexpected finding was that white, non-Jewish, experimental subjects and those in the black experimental conditions had about as little sympathy for Jewish people as they had for gays. Also surprising was that white subjects in the experimental conditions expressed sympathy for blacks only at or below the "somewhat" point.

Another aspect of the sympathy findings emerges when Table 2 as a whole is inspected. There tends to be little variability of response in the sympathy categories which apply to a subject's own group(s). For example, the black males with white male (racist) experimenter, had a standard deviation of .31 in black identification ratings, compared with a standard deviation of 1.20 in their sympathy for Jews ratings. Subjects more often agreed about how much they endorsed their own groups, as opposed to the outgroups. The least variability in black identification ratings occurred in the conditions where the racist was the experimenter. In fact, there was no variance in the case of black females with white male (racist) experimenter. All were "very much" identified with blacks, galvanized into a consensus reaction.

### Joke Ratings by Additional Subjects

Table 3 contains mean joke ratings by subjects whose presence in the classroom or meeting was unexpected, and who were run along with experimental subjects. Mean total joke ratings by these subjects are similar to those by experimental subjects. The white, non-Jewish males gave mean joke ratings of at least "slightly funny" in all joke categories. This is not surprising, since none of the jokes pertained to white, non-Jewish males. There is a fair amount of variance in each of the joke categories for these subjects.

Joke ratings by the additional Jewish males were similar to those by non-Jewish, white males, although the Jewish males tended to show slightly lower variance, as compared to their non-Jewish counterparts. (Standard deviation of total jokes ratings by Jewish males was .69, while that of non-Jewish males was 1.32.) Jewish male subjects had a greater consensus of response than did the non-Jewish males, the only "joke-free" subjects in the study.

The three Jewish, gay females were the only category of subject with a mean female joke rating as low as the "not at all funny" range (mean = .42). They are also distinguished by the fact that they are the only type of subject to rate the Jewish jokes in the "not at all funny" range (mean = .75). These subjects were mocked along three dimensions--gay, female, and Jewish; which fact

Table 3

Additional Subjects' Ratings of Funniness of Jokes According to Type of Joke and Subjects' Membership Group  
 (Not included in tests of the hypotheses.)  
 (Jokes: 0 = Not at all funny; 7 = Very funny.)

Subjects	Experimenter and Comedian	N	Joke Type											
			Black		Female		Jewish		Gay		Neutral		Total	
			Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
White Non-Jewish Males	All	18	2.40	1.65	2.43	1.53	2.51	1.57	2.71	1.28	2.15	1.38	2.46	1.32
Jewish Males	All	15	2.28	1.18	2.65	1.16	2.38	1.02	2.28	1.15	2.13	.71	2.35	.69
Black Males	White Male (Sexist)	6	.67	.67	1.50	1.92	1.92	1.86	1.63	.86	.88	.70	1.26	1.14
Black Gay Female	White Female	1	2.25	--	3.25	--	3.25	--	2.50	--	4.50	--	3.15	--
White Non-Jewish Female	Black Male	1	1.50	--	3.00	--	3.50	--	3.00	--	2.50	--	2.70	--
Jewish Females	Black Male	2	2.00	.71	2.38	.88	3.50	0.0	2.13	1.24	2.00	.35	2.40	.35
Jewish Gay Females	Sexist or White Female	3	1.08	1.13	.42	.72	.75	.66	1.33	1.16	1.50	1.00	1.08	.75

could have amplified a group identity "galvanizing" process. Their mean gay joke rating (mean = 1.33) and mean neutral joke rating (mean = 1.50) were closer to the "slightly funny" mark. Neutral jokes was the joke category rated highest by the black, gay female also (mean = 4.50). The gay subjects were the only subjects in the study to rate neutral jokes highest.

#### Sympathy Ratings by Additional Subjects

In Table 4 are presented the mean sympathy ratings by the additional subjects. As in the case of mean total jokes ratings, the mean sympathy ratings by these subjects resemble those by experimental subjects. The 18 white, non-Jewish males (in the black and female groups) are the only male subjects whose highest mean sympathy rating was that of sympathy for females. This rating of sympathy for females (mean = 1.89) falls short of "somewhat." The white, non-Jewish men join two of the experimental groups --black females with feminist experimenter, and black males with black experimenter--in having barely "a little" sympathy for Jews. All other subject categories showed "a little" or more sympathy for Jews.

The Jewish men who were in the black studies and women's studies classes expressed "a little" sympathy for blacks and for gays (both means = 1.27). Their female counterparts in the two Jewish female experimental conditions had mean sympathy for blacks ratings which were near

Table 4

Additional Subjects' Ratings of Sympathy for All Membership Groups  
(Sympathy: 0 = None at all; 3 = Very much.)

Subjects	Experimenter and Comedian	N	Sympathy for:							
			Blacks		Females		Jews		Gays	
			Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
White Non-Jewish Males	All	18	1.22	1.31	1.89	.96	.94	1.11	1.44	.92
Jewish Males	All	15	1.27	1.10	2.07	.96	2.27	.80	1.27	1.10
Black Males	White Male (Sexist)	6	2.50	.84	2.17	.41	1.83	.98	1.20	1.10
Black Gay Female	White Female	1	3.00	--	No Response		0	--	No Response	
White Non-Jewish Female	Black Male	1	2.00	--	3.00	--	2.00	--	0	--
Jewish Females	Black Male	2	3.00	0	2.00	1.41	3.00	0	1.50	2.12
Jewish Gay Females	Sexist or White Female	3	2.50	.71	3.00	0	2.33	.58	3.00	0

or in the "somewhat" range. (These female subjects have a mean rating of Jewish identification which is similar to that of their Jewish male counterparts. All of their mean sympathy for females ratings and mean sympathy for Jews ratings were in the middle of the "somewhat" range.)

The pattern of mean sympathy ratings by the six black, male subjects in the women's studies classes, is analogous to that of the Jewish men, in that about as much sympathy for females was professed as was identification with the subjects' own group. These six black men had mean black identification ratings and mean sympathy for females ratings in the "somewhat" range (means = 2.50 and 2.17, respectively). Like the additional black males, the experimental black males had a moderate amount of sympathy for females (the two experimental groups having means of 1.93 and 2.00). There is greater sympathy for Jews (mean = 1.83) by the black men in the women's studies classes. The mean is twice that of the sympathy for Jews rating by black males with black male experimenter (mean = .92).

Inspection of Table 4 reveals that, in many cases, the ratings seem appropriate to the subject category. For example, the two Jewish women in the black studies classes were "somewhat" identified with women, while they expressed "very much" sympathy for blacks.

#### Sympathy Ratings by the Entire Sample; Sex Differences

Table 5 contains post hoc findings based on sympathy

ratings by the entire sample of 282 subjects. The issue of sex differences is tangential to the current study, but it was thought that a breakdown by sex would be of interest. The unequal numbers of males (N = 86) and females (N = 196) of differing membership groups were subjects in various conditions. The contents of Table 5 represent sex differences in ratings of sympathy only for the transitory population created by the experiment.

Along the sympathy for blacks dimension, there is a slight trend toward a difference between males and females. Seventy-seven females or 40.7 percent of females endorsed being "somewhat" sympathetic toward (or identified with) blacks. Nineteen males or 22.9 percent of males endorsed the "somewhat" category in regard to blacks. The one male and one female subject who endorsed "a little" were black. (The "little" rating category was an option only if the question pertained to the subject's own group(s). This accounts for what looks like the under-utilization of the "little" category by subjects.)

In the case of sympathy for females, six women (3.1 percent of females) answered "none" or "a little" to the question about female identity. Ten men (13.2 percent of males) as opposed to the one female, had no sympathy for females. Male subjects used the "somewhat" category in rating sympathy for females more than female subjects did. Females endorsed the "very much" category about three times as much as males did.

Table 5.  
 Percentage of Male and Female Subjects' Responses in Each  
 Rating Category on the Reference Group Questionnaire (N = 282)  
 (Sympathy: 0 = None at all; 3 = Very much.)

	Rating Category									
	None		Little		Somewhat		Very Much		No Response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<u>Sympathy for Blacks</u>										
Females	20	10.6	1	.5	77	40.7	91	48.1	7	3.7
Males	15	18.1	1	1.2	19	22.9	48	57.8	3	3.6
<u>Sympathy for Females</u>										
Females	1	.5	5	2.6	44	22.6	145	74.4	1	.5
Males	10	13.2	0	0	47	61.8	19	25.0	10	13.2
<u>Sympathy for Jews</u>										
Females	60	31.6	7	3.7	77	40.5	46	24.2	6	3.2
Males	31	38.3	3	3.7	32	39.5	15	18.5	5	6.2
<u>Sympathy for Gays</u>										
Females	49	26.3	0	0	85	45.7	52	28.0	10	5.4
Males	29	37.7	0	0	44	57.1	4	5.2	9	11.7

While not apparent from Table 5, one of the subjects who had answered "none" to the black sympathy question was a black woman in the feminist condition. Three black men did not fill out the reference group questionnaire. Their reference group is considered unknown, although they were part of a black studies class which was hostile toward the racist experimenter and highly identified with blacks. As shown in Table 5, one of the black female subjects and one black male had expressed being only "a little" identified with blacks.

Three Jewish men and seven Jewish women were only "a little" identified with Jews. No Jewish subjects endorsed the "none" category. One Jewish woman in the feminist condition did not answer the question. Jewish males and females gave similar ratings of identification. Both are at least moderately identified.

One striking finding is the apparent anti-Semitism of non-Jewish subjects. Sixty females (31.6 percent of females) and 31 males (38.3 percent of males) had no sympathy for Jewish people. Even though 28.1 percent of females and 13.9 percent of males were Jewish, only 24.2 percent of females and 18.5 percent of males were "very much" in sympathy with Jews.

Forty-nine women (26.3 percent of females) and 29 males (37.7 percent) had no sympathy for gays. About the same number of females (46 subjects) were "very much" in sympathy with Jews as were with gays (52 females). Not so

with male subjects. Only four men had "very much sympathy" for gays, as opposed to the 37.7 percent of males who had "none." (No male subjects and four females professed to being gay.) Over half of the 86 male subjects (61.8 percent) used the "somewhat" category in rating sympathy for females. Only 22.6 percent of females (44 subjects) were "somewhat" identified with females.

### Tests of the Hypotheses

Tables 6 and 7 contain the findings which confirm the main hypothesis. Student's  $t$  tests were performed on the data from subjects in the experimental conditions to assess group mean rating differences. In Table 6 are presented the differences between joke ratings by black females with a black male experimenter and those by black females with a white male (racist) experimenter.

Race was a more important dimension than was sex for black females. Contrary to prediction, the black female subjects in the feminist condition did not differ in their ratings from black females in the sexist condition.

As predicted, the black females with a black male experimenter appreciated the black jokes more than did those with a white male (racist) experimenter. The black joke rating by subjects with a black male experimenter was almost "slightly funny," (mean = 1.84). The rating by those in the racist condition is "not at all funny" (mean = .35,  $t = 3.96$ , 42 df;  $p < .001$ ).

Table 6

## Differences in Ratings of Funniness of Jokes Between Subject Groups 1 and 2

Group 1: Black female subjects with black male experimenter and comedian.

Group 2: Black female subjects with white male (racist) experimenter and comedian.  
(Jokes: 0 = Not at all funny; 7 = Very funny.)

<u>Joke Type</u>	<u>Subject Group</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Diff.</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>P</u>
<u>All Subjects In:</u>							
Black	1	24	1.84	1.61	1.49	3.96	.001
	2	20	.35	.52			
Neutral	1	24	2.30	1.28	.84	2.25	.03
	2	20	1.46	1.20			
Gay	1	24	2.85	1.73	.90	2.05	.05
	2	20	1.95	1.17			
<u>Only Highly Identified Subjects In:</u>							
Black	1	22	1.75	1.63	1.11	3.80	.001
	2	20	.35	.52			
Neutral	1	22	2.20	1.29	.09	1.93	.06
	2	20	1.46	1.20			
Gay	1	22	2.66	1.66	.71	1.62	.11
	2	20	1.95	1.17			

For black females with a racist or black experimenter, the only hypothesis concerned the black jokes. But these women tended to react differentially to other joke categories besides black jokes, depending on experimental condition. A difference only on black jokes would have provided the most clear-cut support for the major hypothesis. This occurred when the two low identity subjects were excluded from the analysis. Both subjects had a black male experimenter. One was high on black identity, and not at all identified with females; the other was only a little identified with both blacks and females. When their data were excluded, the remaining 22 data sets were from subjects all highly or moderately identified as black and as female. They differed from their counterparts in the racist condition only along the black joke dimension. There was also a significant difference in sample variances ( $F = 10.02, p < .001$ ). When the data from the two low identity subjects were included, significant differences emerged between group mean ratings of gay jokes and neutral jokes, in addition to black jokes. The differences in the gay joke and in the neutral joke categories were not as strong as between mean black joke ratings. The mean neutral joke rating by subjects with black experimenter = 2.30, that by subjects with a white experimenter = 1.46 ( $t = 2.25, 42 \text{ df}; p < .03$ ). Mean gay joke rating by subjects with a black experimenter = 2.85, that by those with white experimenter = 1.95 ( $t = 2.05, 42 \text{ df};$

$p < .05$ ).

Only the main hypothesis has been addressed so far. There was also a subhypothesis. In the event that no group mean differences were found, there would occur heightened variance in responses by subjects within a condition to the critical jokes. Where the main hypothesis was confirmed, this subhypothesis was not examined. Where the main hypothesis was not confirmed, neither was the prediction of heightened variance.

Support for the major hypothesis was also provided by the finding presented in Table 7. The black males with a black male experimenter had a black joke rating toward the upper end of the "slightly funny" range (mean = 2.70). Black males with a white male experimenter had a black joke rating at the upper end of the "not at all funny" range (mean = 1.67,  $t = 2.24$ , 45 df;  $p < .03$ ).

As in the case of Table 7, the results of the analysis of data from only high identity subjects are not included in Table 8. The "high identity only" results do not differ from those of the analysis of all subjects in the white, non-Jewish female conditions. It had been predicted that non-Jewish, white females would differ from each other along the female joke dimension, depending on whether the experimental manipulation was feminist or sexist. There was no significant difference between the two groups in female joke ratings. There were differences in Jewish joke ratings and in gay joke ratings. White,

Table 7

Differences in Ratings of Funniness of Black Jokes Between Subject Groups 3 and 4

Group 3: Black male subjects with black male experimenter and comedian.

Group 4: Black males subjects with white male (racist) experimenter and comedian.

(Jokes: 0 = Not at all funny; 7 = Very funny.)

<u>Subject Group</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Diff.</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>P</u>
3	24	2.70	1.77			
				1.03	2.24	.03
4	23	1.67	1.35			

Table 8

Differences in Ratings of Funniness of Jewish Jokes and Gay Jokes Between Subject Groups 5 and 6

Group 5: White, non-Jewish subjects with white female experimenter and comedian.

Group 6: White, non-Jewish subjects with white male (sexist) experimenter and comedian.

(Jokes: 0 = Not at all funny; 7 = Very funny.)

<u>Joke Type</u>	<u>Subject Group</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Diff.</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>P</u>
Jewish	5	29	2.79	1.53	.87	2.13	.04
	6	22	3.66	1.36			
Gay	5	29	2.83	1.25	.76	2.05	.05
	6	22	3.59	1.36			

non-Jewish females with white female experimenter rated Jewish jokes (mean = 2.79) as less funny than did their counterparts in the sexist condition (mean = 3.66,  $t = 2.13$ , 49 df;  $p < .04$ ). The subjects in the feminist condition also rated gay jokes (mean = 2.83) as less funny than did their sexist condition counterparts (mean = 3.59,  $t = 2.05$ , 49 df;  $p < .05$ ).

There were no differences in any ratings between the two Jewish female groups.

#### Correlations Between Joke Ratings and Sympathy Ratings

Table 9 contains post hoc correlations between joke ratings and sympathy ratings. This analysis was performed for each of the ten experimental conditions and for additional subjects, wherever sample sizes were large enough. Separate analyses were performed for "high identity only" subjects, bringing the total number of correlation matrices to 19. Only the correlations which reached acceptable significance levels are presented in Table 9.

The correlations were performed to sharpen the focus of the analyses of group differences. In the case of black females with either a white sexist or white feminist experimenter, there were no significant differences in mean joke ratings between the two subject groups. A pattern of correlations emerged for black females in the sexist condition. (There were no subjects of low or unknown identity in this condition.) The more subjects professed empathy with the

Table 9

**Correlations Between Subjects' Ratings of Funniness of Jokes and Ratings of  
Sympathy for All Membership Groups According to Subjects' Membership Group**

<u>Subjects</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Experimenter and Comedian</u>	<u>Correlated Ratings</u>	<u>Correlation Coefficient</u>	<u>P</u>
Black Females	20	White Male (Sexist)	Black Jokes and Sympathy for Blacks	-.67	.001
Black Females	20	White Male (Sexist)	Female Jokes and Sympathy for Blacks	-.47	.04
Black Females	24	Black Male	Jewish Jokes and Sympathy for Females	-.42	.04
Black Females (High Black and Female Identity Only)	22	Black Male	Gay Jokes and Sympathy for Jews	.54	.01
Black Females (High Black and Female Identity Only)	22	Black Male	Black Jokes and Sympathy for Jews	.58	.01
Black Males	20	White Male (Racist)	Jewish Jokes and Sympathy for Blacks	-.46	.04
Jewish Females (High Jewish and Female Identity Only)	26	White Female (Feminist)	Jewish Jokes and Sympathy for Females	-.51	.01
Jewish Females (High Jewish and Female Identity Only)	24	White Female (Feminist)	Jewish Jokes and Sympathy for Gays	-.42	.04
White Males (Non-Jewish)	18	Various	Gay Jokes and Sympathy for Blacks	.47	.05
White Males (Non-Jewish)	18	Various	Gay Jokes and Sympathy for Females	.63	.01
White Males (Non-Jewish)	18	Various	Neutral Jokes and Sympathy for Females	.52	.03

ingroup, blacks, the less they appreciated black jokes. There is an inverse correlation of  $-.67$  ( $p < .001$ ). There is also an inverse correlation of  $-.47$  ( $p < .04$ ) between ratings of female jokes and black identification ratings. The more these subjects were identified as blacks, the less they appreciated any self-referent jokes.

As shown in Table 9, black women with black male experimenter had differing patterns of correlation, depending on whether data from low identity subjects were excluded or not. With all subjects included, there is an inverse correlation of  $-.42$  ( $p < .04$ ) between Jewish joke ratings and female identification ratings. When the two low identity subjects were excluded from the analysis, there was no correlation between female identity and Jewish joke ratings. Two other correlations emerged which had not existed in the data for all subjects in the condition. High identity subjects liked black jokes and gay jokes, the more they expressed sympathy for Jews.

One correlation was significant for black males with a racist experimenter. Jewish joke ratings and black identification ratings were negatively correlated ( $r = -.46$ ,  $p < .04$ ). The more that subjects were identified with blacks, the less they appreciated the Jewish jokes.

While there were no significant differences between

joke ratings by Jewish females, two correlations do occur, as shown in Table 9. The correlations exist only for subjects who were highly identified with Jews and with females. Two subjects were of low female identity. One was low on Jewish identity; the other was of unknown Jewish identity. When their data are excluded from the analysis, there is a correlation ( $r = -.51, p < .01$ ) between Jewish joke and female identity ratings.

A correlational pattern emerges for one of the additional subject conditions. Non-Jewish white males were the only subjects not mocked in the jokes. These male subjects were black studies and women's studies students. The more sympathy that they had for females, the more they liked the gay jokes and the neutral jokes. Gay joke ratings correlated with ratings of sympathy for females ( $r = .63, p < .01$ ). Neutral joke and sympathy for females ratings correlated ( $r = .52, p < .03$ ). They approved of gay jokes more when they had sympathy for blacks ( $r = .47, p < .05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

### Support for the Main Hypothesis

It had been hypothesized that jokes about the ingroup would be appreciated more by group members, if presented in an ingroup context. "Ingroup context" means that the experimenter was a group member who described a comedian who was a group member. "Outgroup" indicates

that experimenter and comedian were outsiders. It was expected that significant differences would occur between group mean ratings of the critical jokes. In the case of black subjects, such differences did occur in the predicted direction. Subjects in the outgroup conditions disliked the black jokes more than did subjects in the ingroup conditions.

The most dramatic demonstration of the effect would have been no appreciation of the critical jokes in the ingroup condition and moderate to extreme appreciation of the same jokes in the outgroup condition. The black men tended toward this pattern. Two of the black female groups also responded differentially to the black jokes, depending upon experimental condition. Although they liked the black jokes in neither condition, they liked them significantly less in the outgroup condition. This supports the hypothesis. Only the direction of the difference and not the absolute magnitude of appreciation was specified by the hypothesis. This was because it was not known whether subjects would enjoy, or only tolerate self-referent jokes. The hypothesis did not specify which process, tolerance or enjoyment, would occur, only that either of them would occur. The effect was not as clear-cut in the case of the black women as it is with black male subjects. Black women with a racist experimenter tended to rate all jokes lower than black women with a black experimenter. Perhaps their mood was altered,

and not just their perception of the black jokes.

#### The Appreciation of Humor by the Sample As a Whole

The subjects' joke ratings show as a whole that the jokes were not much appreciated. However, significant group differences did emerge. Despite the low levels of perceived funniness, some of the jokes were disapproved of more than others.

The subjects are not representative of college students or of the population at large. They were chosen for their membership in certain groups. Such group affiliations could be partly responsible for the low levels of appreciation of humor. Perhaps all the jokes were unappreciated due to the presence of the ingroup jokes. More likely, is that jokes presented in printed form are less funny than those delivered by a person. There is also the context of the rating of the jokes. Subjects knew that they were providing data in an experiment. Ratings do not constitute a spontaneous response to humor. The low levels of appreciation of humor are not a problem for the study, since it is relative funniness that is being investigated.

#### Implications for Superiority Theory

The findings that support the main hypothesis challenge the superiority humor model. But the model applies in some instances.

Joke ratings indicate that subjects in general disapproved of the black jokes, relative to other joke

categories. The sympathy ratings by nonblacks showed them to be "somewhat" sympathetic toward blacks. It could be that sympathy for an outgroup prevents subjects from appreciating jokes that deprecate the outgroup. This implies that if one is sympathetic toward the butt of a joke, then the joke is not funny.

The superiority model applies to a finding with black women in the sexist condition. They were identified with blacks, the more they disliked the black jokes. Under certain conditions, ingroup jokes are unacceptable, as when black women were presented with jokes about blacks from a white male chauvinist.

There is further support for superiority theory. Minimal sympathy for Jews and for gays was professed by non-Jewish heterosexual subjects. In general, the Jewish jokes and the gay jokes were popular. This implies that the outgroups of Jews and gays were deprecated.

More of the post hoc correlations between joke ratings and sympathy ratings have implications for superiority humor theory. A correlation emerged for black females (with a black male experimenter) when data from low identity subjects were removed from the analysis. There was a tendency to disapprove of black jokes, the more that sympathy for Jews was expressed. These high identity subjects indulged in the appreciation of ingroup humor to the extent that they sympathized with a traditional outgroup.

Another correlation showed that highly identified Jewish women tended to disapprove of Jewish jokes, the more that they expressed feeling identified as females. What is especially interesting is that one self-referent category (female) may be interacting with another self-referent category (Jewish). Also of note, is that a correlational pattern involving joke and sympathy ratings only occurred for Jewish women in the "safe" condition (white female--feminist) and only when data from subjects of low Jewish or female identity were excluded from the analysis. These high identity Jewish females also tended to disapprove of Jewish jokes the more they expressed sympathy for gays. The correlation was not as strong statistically, as that between Jewish jokes and female identification. Still, it could represent a trend toward a vicarious superiority effect analogous somewhat to that which occurred in the Wolff et al. study (1934). Wolff et al. had found that Jewish subjects tended to disapprove of jokes mocking Scots. The explanation was that these subjects identified with the Scottish butt of the joke through the stereotype of miserliness attributed both to Jews and to Scots. It is possible that the Jewish women in the present study, most of them women's studies students, were identified with gays. They tended to dislike self-referent (Jewish) jokes, the more sympathy they expressed for gays. Both feminists and gays are involved with changing sex roles. It would stand to reason that a vicarious effect occurred, although it is

only hinted at in the post hoc data.

### Female Identification and the Appreciation of Humor

A surprising finding was that white, non-Jewish females in the "unsafe" (sexist) condition gave the highest mean total jokes rating of any subject group. Their mean female joke rating is nearly identical to that of their mean total jokes rating. These women could have been overlooking the sexism to which they were subjected. It is possible that antifemale jokes are appreciated under all circumstances. More likely, the experimental manipulation was not effective. There are a number of ways of explaining its ineffectiveness. One is that the female jokes were simply not perceived as derogatory. Women's studies students and feminists are products of their socialization. Jokes about women are taken for granted where women, as a group, are considered to be of inferior status to men. Two of the sexist experimenters reported that after the experiment, one or two women asked which of the jokes were the female ones. These considerations are relevant to the Stocking and Zillmann (1976) finding that females appreciated self-deprecating humor more than males did.

A common notion is that a woman's worth is judged by her physical attributes, a man's by his moral attributes. To a woman who does not question this, some of the female humor loses its sting. For example, a joke from the study

is as follows: "Did you hear about Henny Youngman's nightmare? He dreamed that his wife and Raquel Welch had a fight over him and his wife won." To a woman who accepts the "pretty woman/good man" dichotomy, the joke deprecates Youngman's wife, and she is the butt of the joke, not women in general. Of course, there is the possibility that the sexism in the female jokes was acknowledged and laughed at by the subjects. It is difficult to interpret a null result, but it seems more plausible that the women were ignoring (or not perceiving) the sexism in the jokes.

Both Jewish female groups rated the female jokes in the middle of the "slightly funny" range, as they did all jokes. They were identified as Jews in the mid to upper range of "somewhat." In terms of the experimental manipulations, only the female dimension, and not the Jewish one, was explored with Jewish females. It is for future research to tell whether the predicted results would be obtained if a Jewish feminist manipulation were contrasted with a Gentile sexist one. The findings point to the appreciation of jokes about the ingroup under certain conditions. Jewish females in the feminist ("safe") condition gave their highest mean joke rating to the Jewish jokes. The mean is not significantly different from the mean for all jokes, but may suggest a trend toward the appreciation of jokes about Jews. However, the highly identified women in that group

disliked the Jewish jokes more when they were more identified with women.

A similar correlation occurred between joke and sympathy ratings by black females in the sexist condition. These women tended to dislike the female jokes more when they were identified with blacks. As with Jewish females, there is an apparent relationship between one self-referent category (female) and another self-referent category (black). It may be that the women who were highly identified with blacks were also politically aware. They could have noticed (and resented) the sexism in the female jokes that were supposedly written by a sexist. The interaction between black and female dimensions and between Jewish and female dimensions remains as an issue to be explored.

A last finding is of relevance to female identity. It is the differences in joke ratings by the two non-Jewish, white, female groups. Those in the sexist condition liked both Jewish jokes and gay jokes more than did their counterparts in the feminist condition. While it did not have the predicted effect, the experimental manipulation apparently did influence the appreciation of humor. Jokes about gays, and not those about females, were involved. There is the possibility that some of these women were gay, although they did not profess to be so.

There are other possible reasons why the sexist experimental manipulation was not more successful. The

presence of a white person may have been more salient for blacks than the presence of a man for females. Perhaps the predicted effect would have occurred if only committed feminists had been included in the sample.

#### Sex Differences in Sympathy Ratings by the Entire Sample

The data from the 86 males and 196 females suggest a greater tolerance of gay people on the part of female subjects. There is also greater endorsement of "very much" sympathy for females on the part of female subjects. It is possible that the men in the study tended to be "somewhat" in sympathy with females, but unfriendly toward a radical change in sex roles.

#### Indirect Evidence for the Appreciation of Humor About the Ingroup

The sexism manipulation had little or no effect on the Jewish women's ratings of either female or Jewish jokes. It is possible to infer the appreciation of Jewish ingroup humor from some of the data. For example, both of the Jewish female experimental groups rated the black jokes toward the upper end of the "not at all funny" range, while their mean Jewish joke ratings were toward the upper end of the "slightly funny" range. As mentioned, Jewish subjects tended to rate the Jewish jokes as high as their non-Jewish counterparts did. But there may have been opposing trends in the data. When low identity Jewish female subjects' data were removed from the analysis, an

inverse correlation emerged between Jewish jokes and female identification. This finding is consonant with the superiority model which disallows ingroup humor. Still, there are the relatively high mean Jewish joke ratings by Jewish subjects. There is probably no reason to think that Jewish subjects were unaware that their ingroup was the butt of the Jewish jokes. Unlike the case of the female jokes, the Jewish jokes are unambiguous in this regard.

A particularly interesting Jewish joke was contributed by a Jewish woman who had served as a volunteer subject in the research. The joke consists of a conversation between two Jewish men who speak with Yiddish accents. The punchline consists of a single French pronoun. One man tells the other, his friend, Moishe, that there is just one thing that he does not like about him. It's that Moishe is "pretentious." After hearing his friend's criticism, Moishe answers, "Vat?! Pretentious? Moi?"

The functions of ingroup humor described by Martineau (1972) are applicable to the joke about Moishe and his friend. Two of the functions of ingroup humor in Martineau's list are to control group behavior and to ameliorate the faults of group members. Moishe and his friend seem to be doing both in the joke. There is an evolutionary process implicit in the joke. The usual Jewish stereotypes are absent. In their place is a new message, "It is ridiculous to pretend to be more than what we are." The critique is gentle, humorous, and sophisticated. The

joke renders Moishe ridiculous, but does not destroy his integrity.

The Jewish jokes used in the study were appreciated a little by subjects, with the exception of the three Jewish, gay females. Perhaps the presence of three self-referent joke categories caused the subjects to become hostile to the Jewish jokes, rather than indulging in ingroup humor.

#### Direct Evidence for the Appreciation of Humor About the Ingroup

The black male subjects' data (Table 7) provide support for the main hypothesis and demonstrates the appreciation of humor about the ingroup. Black men in the racist condition found the black jokes "not at all funny," although the rating was toward the upper end of the "not at all funny" range. Black male subjects in the ingroup condition had a black joke mean that was well into the "slightly funny" range. This appreciation of jokes about the ingroup is not simply part of a global mood phenomenon. The black joke category is the only one where there is a significant difference between the two black male groups. The mean ratings of all jokes by the two groups do not differ significantly. The difference between mean black joke ratings by the two groups was significant at the .03 level. This effect is robust. Improving aspects of the manipulations, would probably lead to replications at more respectable significance levels.

A relationship between ethnicity and humor existed for black female experimental subjects. For those in the sexist and feminist conditions, a correlational pattern emerged between joke ratings and sympathy ratings. The black women in the racist and black male conditions, differed from each other in their mean ratings of the black jokes ( $p < .001$ ). This has been interpreted as strongly supportive of the main hypothesis. Black females with a black male experimenter rated the black jokes significantly higher than did those in the racist condition, but the higher mean was still within the "not at all funny" range. Near the upper end of that range, the mean approaches "slightly funny." A literal interpretation of the data would lead us to say that these black women disapproved less of the black jokes. Their black male counterparts (with a black male experimenter) did appear to appreciate humor about their group, if at a minimal level.

#### Construct Validity and Problems of Measurement

In regard to concerns of construct validity, it is suggested that subjects' joke ratings were based on perceived humor. However, there is little way of knowing whether a joke or sympathy rating represents socially desirable responding or a response style such as acquiescence. Messick (1967) cited studies which demonstrated the existence of more than one acquiescence dimension.

There is also the problem that people have their own metrics. One person's "somewhat" may be another's "slightly."

It is possible that a high rating of a joke simply means that the subject is endorsing a statement. Behavioral measures of humor appreciation such as amount and quality of laughter and smiling, are difficult to obtain and to interpret. A multiple measures approach, although desirable, was beyond the scope of the present study.

Jackson (1971) has warned against the construction of psychological measures without regard for sources of method variance. The present study claims only to have demonstrated the greater endorsement of certain items in one, as opposed to another, subject condition, whatever the sources of variance. The joke ratings and sympathy ratings all represent bits of behavior in themselves. The manipulations affected the rating of, e.g., black jokes. To explore these group mean differences and their relationship to group identification, requires more sophisticated and highly validated measuring instruments.

#### Optimal Conditions for the Appreciation of Humor About the Ingroup

Lewis Carroll's Alice, once down the rabbit hole, was completely isolated from her own kind. She never loses her sense of humor and of play. These see her through her adventures as much as do her youthful resiliency and strength of character. But in this unsafe

wonderland, she seldom laughs at herself. Her humor conforms to the superiority model, as when she screams with laughter to hear that the Duchess is to be executed for having boxed the Queen's ears (Carroll, 1975).

The studies by Prerost and Brewer (1977) and by Mueller and Donnerstein (1977) suggest that greater appreciation of humor will occur under conditions of psychological safety and mild arousal. No wonder Alice was more often bemused than amused. The issue of psychological safety is crucial to an understanding of humor about the ingroup. The black subjects in the racist conditions are somewhat comparable to Prerost and Brewer's previously angered subjects who were found to prefer nonthreatening, aggressive humor over threatening, aggressive humor. Black jokes may be perceived as threatening in the outgroup conditions and as nonthreatening in the ingroup conditions, where they are relatively appreciated. The perception of group identification may change from ingroup to outgroup conditions. There were no significant differences between pairs of experimental groups in the ratings of group identity, and none were predicted. However, subjects who were not highly identified with their group tended to be in the ingroup conditions. This suggests that the ingroup situation engenders an atmosphere of psychological safety in which it feels comfortable to criticize the ingroup through humor or through little professed identification with the group.

This does not imply that criticism is the sole ingredient in ingroup humor. Perhaps Martineau has placed too much emphasis on this function, and not enough on the balance between criticism and acceptance.

"Acceptance" is not meant as synonymous with approval. It has the connotations of forbearance. In her book, Song of Solomon, the black author, Toni Morrison, tells a humorous anecdote. The only black physician in town lived on a street which came to be known among blacks, as "Doctor Street." Over the years, mail came to that address, and a running feud developed between inhabitants and the Post Office, which refused to acknowledge the unofficial street name. Eventually, black residents retaliated by calling it "Not Doctor Street." They were not simply making fun of themselves, or of their adversaries. They were playing with painful facts, such as that there was only one black doctor. And one aspect of that playful behavior is criticism. In this case, the critique is of the situation, rather than of either party (Post Office or black citizens). The joke in the Morrison anecdote does not represent the only paradigm for humor about the group. Jokes that refer clearly to the ingroup and which change in meaning, depending on who is telling them, were used in the present research.

One of the black jokes used is an excerpt from the monologue of a black comic, and so was in actuality an ingroup joke. Asked the comic, "Do you know what NAACP

really stands for?--Niggers Ain't Acting like Colored People." When supposedly delivered by a white racist, the joke is entirely deprecating of blacks. But when a black person presents it, its meaning changes dramatically. One transformation is that the actions of black people, alluded to in the joke, are now of a positive nature. The use of the derogatory term, "nigger," by the black comic, is no longer simply derogatory. It becomes a combination of elements--such as triumph over whites through stealing their thunder, and ironic reference to the lower status of blacks.

#### Further Theoretical Considerations

Some of the data directly challenge the superiority model, while other data support it. The finding that black subjects tended to enjoy, if minimally, the gay jokes and Jewish jokes and not the black jokes lends support to the model. Among the post hoc correlations there was support for the notion that people do not laugh at themselves, such as when black females disliked the black jokes more as they expressed feeling identified with black people. However, the model is invalid in many situations, as in the case of black men in the ingroup condition, who were an exception to the superiority trend stated above. These men liked the black jokes, if only "slightly."

Perhaps the racist condition was highly arousing

and threatening for black subjects resulting in superiority humor (e.g., Jewish jokes appreciated) and defensiveness regarding the ingroup. The ingroup condition could have provided a safe, mildly arousing atmosphere, leading to either appreciation or tolerance of jokes about the subject's group.

The response to ingroup humor contains a critique either of the group itself (Martineau, 1972), or of the situation in which the group finds itself. A more ambiguous element is the acceptance of a sometimes cruel reality. Self-deprecating humor seems to defy reality by mocking its seriousness and making it tolerable. There appears to be a kind of ventilation, although the data do not directly address this issue. The Freudian description of catharsis may be an apt one, while inferences about the unconscious dynamic tend to be tenuous and unnecessary.

Data from black subjects show that the black jokes were reacted to differentially as a function of the experimental manipulations. This supplies some of the groundwork to understanding the appreciation of humor that is denied by superiority humor theory. The data do not speak to the issue of whether a change in perception of (and not just reaction to) the jokes occurred from ingroup to outgroup condition. It is assumed that such a change in perception occurred and it is hoped that future research will document its relationship to the multiple dimensions of group identification.

## APPENDIX A

## HUMOR STIMULI

1. There's this ad for Raid on TV: "-kills bugs dead!"  
. . .great -- I'd hate to see a roach in a coma.
2. The most confusing day in Harlem: Father's Day.
3. Two gay guys were driving in their car. They hit a truck, backing into a driveway. One of the guys got out and ran over to the truck. The truck driver yelled, "Kiss my. . .!" The guy got back into the car and said to his friend, "We're settling out of court."
4. Two Jewish refugees passed the home of a millionaire. "If only I had that man's millions," said one; "I'd be richer than he is."  
"That doesn't make sense," the other said. "You'd be just as rich as he, not richer." "You're wrong," said the first. "Don't forget that I could give Hebrew lessons on the side."
5. Conversation overheard between two gay men on a corner in the West Village: "Were you in New York during the blackout last summer?"  
"Yes. I wanted to join in the looting, but I couldn't get up to Bloomingdale's."
6. The new Valium diet: It doesn't make you lose your appetite. It's just that most of your food falls on the floor.

7. The ladies certainly have come a long way. Barbara Walters interviewed the President of the United States, and she made more money asking the questions than he did answering them.
8. Do you know what NAACP really stands for? It's: Niggers Ain't Acting like Colored People.
9. Overheard in a fashion models' dressing room: A black model said to a group of whites, "Most of my calls still come from the National Geographic."
10. Three women were discussing their sons. Said the first, "My son is the biggest doctor on Park Ave." "My son's the biggest lawyer on Park Ave." said the second. "Is your son a professional man?" she asked the third. "Not exactly," she answered. "He's a plumber. And what's worse, he's a homosexual. But he has some lovely boyfriends. One's the biggest doctor on Park Ave. . . ."
11. I stepped on a tack in my doctor's waiting room, and he charged me twenty-five dollars for acupuncture.
12. God was looking for a prophet to accept his commandments. Turned down by Mohammed and Confucious, he approached Moses. Moses asked, "What's the price?" "They're free," God said. "I'll take ten," said Moses.
13. The manager of a gambling club was trying to find a way to tell a woman that her husband had died. He called her, saying, "Mrs. Goldberg, your husband lost

\$1,000 today." "He should drop dead," said Mrs. Goldberg. "He just did," the manager said.

14. I heard that scientists discovered that hair dyes cause cancer in female rats. But they also found out that blond rats have more fun.
15. A British colonel encountered a black American soldier in Burma about 25 years ago. The colonel asked the soldier, "Are you Indo-Chinese?" The GI answered, "No suh, ah is outdo' Mississippi."
16. I read in the paper that you can now buy a portable TV with a two-inch screen. I suppose that's TV's idea of reducing sex and violence.
17. Did you hear about Henny Youngman's nightmare? He dreamed that his wife and Raquel Welch had a fight over him and his wife won.
18. I saw a bumper sticker the other day that read:  
". . .But who will do Anita Bryant's hair?"
19. Two women were lounging by a pool in Miami, comparing their jewels. One held out her hand so that the other could admire her diamond ring. "It's the famous Bernstein Diamond. But it comes with a curse," she said. "What's the curse?" asked the other. "Mr. Bernstein," answered the first.
20. Women's Lib fans are made because the Equal Rights Amendment didn't pass through Congress, but Elizabeth Rae did.

## APPENDIX B

## BIOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTIONS

Black comedian, Ron Gilbert:

Ron has a long-standing interest in the black movement. He says that he would like to combine his interests in comedy and politics, and feels that a lot can be accomplished through laughter. As a theatre student, he had produced a comedy piece entitled "Uncle Tom Don't Stop Here Anymore." He is currently at work producing a comedy program for a cable TV station.

White racist comedian, Chris Reynolds:

Chris is a comic who came to show business by a roundabout route. He is from a family of industrialists, and was himself a business major in college before changing to theatre arts. He also writes country and western tunes with such colorful titles as, "The Dentist from Memphis." Currently, he is at work on producing a comedy program for a cable TV station.

White sexist comedian, Doug Caldwell:

Doug was a theatre major in college, and since then has written comedy programs and documentaries for cable TV. One of these programs was entitled, "Man and his Sense of Humor." An admitted playboy, Doug says that he'll settle down when, as he puts it, he "finds the girl with the perfect laugh."

White feminist comedian, Nancy Stone:

Nancy became interested in comedy writing through her work in feminist theatre. While a drama major in college, she organized a successful women's theatre group. Her documentary, "Female Humorists of the Twentieth Century," will be aired on cable TV. Eventually, Nancy would like, as she puts it, to "dabble in motherhood."

## APPENDIX C

## REFERENCE GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

We're interested in how you like the jokes which make fun of different kinds of people. For instance, how will our comedians respond to feedback from women in writing jokes which mock women? So, we'd like you to answer some questions about how much you resemble the people in the jokes. (You may remember that the jokes made fun of Jews, blacks, women, and gay people.) We don't want you to worry about giving out some possibly personal information: your name is on none of the things you fill out. We need to know how you feel, but not who you are -- in order to help us understand your reactions to the jokes. Thank you for your cooperation.

1.a. I am Jewish. \_\_\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

b. If yes: I feel a part of the Jewish people -

\_\_\_\_\_ Not at all

\_\_\_\_\_ A little

\_\_\_\_\_ Somewhat

\_\_\_\_\_ Very much

c. If no: Though not Jewish, I have a special sympathy for them -

\_\_\_\_\_ Not at all

\_\_\_\_\_ Somewhat

\_\_\_\_\_ Very much

- 2.a. I am black.  No  
 Yes
- b. If yes: I feel a part of black people -  
 Not at all  
 A little  
 Somewhat  
 Very much
- c. If no: Though not black, I have a special sympathy  
for them -  
 Not at all  
 Somewhat  
 Very much
- 3.a. I am gay.  No  
 Yes
- b. If yes: I feel a part of the gay community -  
 Not at all  
 A little  
 Somewhat  
 Very much
- c. If no: While not gay, I am accepting of them -  
 Not at all  
 Somewhat  
 Very much
- 4.a. I am a female:  No  
 Yes

- b. If yes: I feel a part of a larger community of girls/women - \_\_\_\_\_Not at all  
\_\_\_\_\_A little  
\_\_\_\_\_Somewhat  
\_\_\_\_\_Very much
- c. If no: While not female, I am in sympathy with most feminist causes - \_\_\_\_\_Not at all  
\_\_\_\_\_Somewhat  
\_\_\_\_\_Very much

## REFERENCES

- Baron, R. A. Aggression-inhibiting influence of sexual humor. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1978, 36, 189-197.
- Carroll, L. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. New York: Viking Press, 1975 (originally published 1865).
- Cattell, R. B. and Lurborsky, L. B. Personality factors in response to humor. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1947, 42, 402-421.
- Childs, A. W. A tale of two groups: An observational study of targeted humor. Dissertation Abstracts International, 1976, 36 (11-B), 5860.
- Freud, S. Humour. The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 1928, 9, 1-6.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious. New York: W. W. Norton, 1960.
- Fox, R. C. Experiment Perilous. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959.
- Hammond, P. B. Mossi joking. Ethnology, 1964, 3, 259-267.
- Hobbes, T. The English Works of Thomas Hobbes, Vol. 4, ed. by W. Molesworth. London: John Bohn, 1966a (originally published 1640) and 1966b (originally published 1650).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Leviathan. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909 (originally published 1651).
- Jackson, D. The dynamics of structured personality tests: 1971. Psychological Review, 1971, 78, 229-248.
- LaFave, L. Humor judgments as a function of reference groups and identification classes. In The Psychology of Humor, ed. by J. H. Goldstein and P. E. McGhee. New York: Academic Press, 1972.

- LaFave, L., Haddad, J., and Maesen, W. A. Superiority, enhanced self-esteem, and perceived incongruity theory. In Humour and Laughter: Theory, Research, and Applications, ed. by A. J. Chapman and H. C. Foot. New York: John Wiley, 1976.
- LaFave, L., Haddad, J., and Marshall, N. Humor judgments as a function of identification classes. Sociology and Social Research, 1974, 58, 184-194.
- LaFave, L., McCarthy, K., and Haddad, J. Humor judgments as a function of identification classes: Canadian vs. American. The Journal of Psychology, 1973, 85, 53-59.
- Losco, J. and Epstein, S. Humor preference as a subtle measure of attitudes toward the same and opposite sex. Journal of Personality, 1975, 43, 321-324.
- Martineau, M. A model of the social functions of humor. In The Psychology of Humor, ed. by J. H. Goldstein and P. E. McGhee. New York: Academic Press, 1972.
- Messick, S. J. The psychology of acquiescence: An interpretation of research evidence. In Response Set in Personality Assessment, ed. by I. A. Berg. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967.
- Middleton, R. Negro and white reactions to racial humor. Sociometry, 1959, 22, 175-182.
- Miller, F. C. Humor in a Chippewa tribal council. Ethnology, 1967, 6, 263-271.
- Morrison, T. Song of Solomon. New York: New American Library, 1978.
- Mueller, C. and Donnerstein, E. The effects of humor-induced arousal upon aggressive behavior. Journal of Research in Personality, 1977, 11, 73-82.
- Nerhardt, G. Incongruity and funniness: towards a new descriptive model. In Humour and Laughter: Theory, Research, and Applications, ed. by A. J. Chapman and H. C. Foot. New York: John Wiley, 1976.
- Prerost, F. J. and Brewer, R. E. Humor content preferences and the relief of experimentally aroused aggression. The Journal of Social Psychology, 1977, 103, 225-231.
- Priest, R. F. and Wilhelm, P. G. Sex, marital status, and self-actualization as factors in the appreciation of sexist jokes. The Journal of Social Psychology, 1974, 92, 245-249.

- Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. On joking relationships. Africa, 1940, 13, 195-210.
- Roberts, A. F. and Johnson, D. M. Some factors related to the perception of funniness and humor stimuli. Journal of Social Psychology, 1957, 46, 57-63.
- Rosenwald, G. C. The relation of drive discharge to the enjoyment of humor. In Motivation in Humor, ed. by J. Levine, New York: Atherton Press, 1969.
- Singer, D. L. Aggression arousal, hostile humor, catharsis. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Monograph Supplement, 1968, 8, 1-14.
- Singer, D. L., Gollob, H. F., and Levine, J. Mobilization of inhibitions and the enjoyment of aggressive humor. In Motivation in Humor, ed. by J. Levine. New York: Atherton Press, 1969.
- Smith, D. J. and Levenson, H. Reaction to humor as a function of reference group and dogmatism. The Journal of Social Psychology, 1976, 99, 57-61.
- Stocking, S. H. and Zillmann, D. Effects of humorous disparagement of self, friend, and enemy. Psychological Reports, 1976, 39, 455-461.
- Wolff, H. A., Smith, C. E., and Murray, H. A. The psychology of humor, I.: A study of responses to race-disparagement jokes. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1934, 28, 341-365.
- Zillmann, D. and Cantor, J. R. A disposition theory of humour and mirth. In Humour and Laughter: Theory, Research, and Applications, ed. by A. J. Chapman and H. C. Foot. New York: John Wiley, 1976.