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The Relationship Between CA and Humor

Michael Sean McMurtry

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The Relationship Between CA and Humor

(TITLE)

BY

Michael Sean McMurtry

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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The Relationship Between CA and Humor

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Abstract

Research has shown that communication apprehension is seen as a negative effect of speaking in public as well as in other situations. The nervous and anxious feelings experienced in these contexts take away from understanding and add to the breakdown of interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, humor is found to be an excellent coping mechanism to deal with embarrassing and fear-related anxieties and it adds to group cohesiveness. The relationship between CA and humor was investigated to determine what effects CA has on humor and how well the use of humorous messages alleviates the problems associated with CA.

Results of this study showed that there was a substantial link between CA and humor. Subjects were 566 undergraduate student volunteers at Eastern Illinois University who were enrolled in a variety of classes across the curriculum. Each participant was given a questionnaire containing the PRCA-24 and the Humor Orientation Scale along with a computerized sheet for recording responses. Data were collected during one month. Descriptive analyses were conducted and correlations, T-tests, and post hoc analyses were computed, and offer support for the conclusion that CA and humor orientation are significantly related. There was substantial evidence to reject the null hypothesis

suggesting no relation between CA and an individual's level of humor orientation. Specifically, people who reported using humor in their communication with others regularly (humor frequency) and effectively (humor effectiveness) have lower levels of CA. By contrast, people who do not report using humor in their communication with others regularly and effectively have higher levels of CA.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
CHAPTER 1.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Review of literature.....	7
Communication Apprehension.....	7
Humor.....	12
Hypotheses.....	21
CHAPTER 2.....	23
Methodology.....	23
Pilot Study.....	24
CHAPTER 3.....	27
Results.....	27
CHAPTER 4.....	34
Discussion.....	34
Limitations.....	37
Future Study.....	38
Conclusions.....	39
REFERENCES.....	41
APPENDIXES.....	46

Chapter 1

Introduction and Literature ReviewIntroduction

In any speaking situation, whether formal or informal, public or interpersonal, there is always some level of anxiety and apprehension. While it is not possible to eliminate all apprehension, it is possible to control or at least to mask the problems experienced with communication apprehension (CA). One obvious tool that might help eliminate the manifestations of CA is the facilitation of humorous messages. Typically, humor is perceived as a positive communication attribute that generates support, approval, and goal attainment (Glenn, 1989). Therefore, humor's positive attributes may be implemented to counteract the undesirable behaviors associated with CA.

Beatty, Dobos, Balfantz & Kuwabara (1991) define CA as "the predisposition to avoid communication, if possible, or suffer a variety of anxiety type feelings" (p. 48). Researchers have also further divided CA into two distinct classifications. Trait-CA is characterized by fear or anxiety with respect to many different types of oral communication encounters. State-CA, on the other hand, is specific to a given communication encounter (Wheless & Williamson, 1990).

Since general trait anxiety is likely to account for

state anxiety quite well, Beatty & Andriate (1985) explain that, "it would not be surprising that measures of general anxiety prowess are at least as predictive as specific measures" (p. 73). According to McCroskey, however, (1984) this distinction between trait and state-CA is insignificant. He states, "to view all human behavior as emanating from either a trait like personality orientation of the individual or from the state like constraints of the situation ignores the powerful interaction of these two sources" (p. 15). These same researchers have also suggested that all CA can be traced to a fear of negative personal evaluation. This, in turn, can lead to a breakdown in communication and interpersonal relationships.

Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield (1990) define humor as, "intentional verbal and nonverbal acts which elicit laughter, chuckling, and other forms of spontaneous behavior taken to mean pleasure to the targeted receiver" (p. 206). Graham, Papa & Brooks (1992) state that there are over 100 documented theories of humor. These theories have been categorized into three broad theoretical perspectives. One area that deals specifically with this study are the relief and arousal theories. The common element of these theories is the belief that laughter is "a release of repressed or unused energy" (p. 162). According to Freud's physiological theory, this energy comes from emotions such

as fear and embarrassment.

Due to the far reaching effects of CA and the powerful implications of humor, it is essential to be knowledgeable about the factors that incite CA and those that govern the conceptualization and communication of humorous messages. While there is a plethora of information about variables related to CA and humor, research in the use of humor to modify CA behaviors is non-existent.

Review of Literature

Communication Apprehension Wheelless & Williamson's (1990) research reflects the first phase in investigating CA in initial interactions. In these face-to-face interactions, there are often tensions and uncertainties concerning the outcome of the situation. Researchers examined the relationship between CA and uncertainty during first encounters. The methodology used in this particular study involved 168 college students who were given the Receiver Apprehension Test (RAT) and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA). It was discovered that uncertainty is determined by the number of alternatives that could occur in a given situation. To limit these alternatives, individuals usually incorporate some form of information-seeking to obtain a better grasp of the situation. The results indicate that uncertainty and state-CA were lower after later initial interactions than

after earlier interactions (Wheless & Walker, 1990). Since the findings of this study supported their hypothesis, there was evidence that a relationship between uncertainty and state-CA does exist.

Beatty, Dobus, Balfantz & Kuwarbara (1991) point out that CA is a major contributor to a wide range of communication behaviors. Trembling, stammering, and low verbal outputs are typical examples of such behavior. Although CA may be the cause of behavioral disruptions, it is also possible that behavioral disruptions lead to the development and maintenance of CA. Researchers asked 73 undergraduate students to fill out the PRCA-24 and the State Anxiety Measure (SAM). Results showed that state anxiety experienced during communication influenced the level of CA and state anxiety and behavioral disruptions contribute uniquely to the prediction of CA (p. 53).

In a similar study, Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield (1991) discovered that anxiety can be involved in information processing in two primary ways. On one hand, anxious arousal may cause difficulty or interfere with effective communication. On the other hand, anxiety may be the result of the cognition about the communication process. The methodology used in this study included 175 undergraduates involved in a basic public speaking course who were asked to fill out the PRCA-24.

Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield's study offers important information on cognitive and emotional reactions to communication presentations. First, the negative behaviors experienced with public speaking anxiety seem to bias the cognitive pattern. Second, the absence of negative effects does not necessarily produce an increase in positive effect (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991, p. 45). In other words, simply because people do not fear public presentations does not mean they enjoy them.

Not only does CA affect individual perceptions of communication situations, it also affects interpersonal perceptions in small task-oriented groups. Hawkins & Stewart (1991) point out that perceptions of behavior and actual behavior do not appear consistent. It was also discovered the high apprehensives were rated lower in attraction as social and as task partners than were lower apprehensives (p. 7). The study consisted of twelve groups of five to seven members who were asked to fill out the PRCA-24 with a five-point Likert-type scale. It was determined that highly apprehensive individuals engaged in significantly less task-irrelevant communication than those individuals with lower apprehension.

It is noted that "standing out" in one's environment produces anxiety. Beatty (1988) states that, "giving a public speech is a prime example of being conspicuous or

standing out" (p. 28). Physiological arousal in conjunction with a predisposition to interpret arousal in communication situations as anxiety (CA) leads to anxiety reactions. Measurement was taken by using the five-item version of the STAI anxiety scale which was administered to 76 undergraduates. Results support the conclusion that feelings of dissimilarity must be reduced as much as possible to reduce CA.

In addition to understanding what variables influence CA, it makes sense to examine how one might avoid CA. Neer (1990) investigated the effects of acquaintance levels, formality, and ambiguity reduction on moderating the state anxiety level of low and high CA's (p. 58). Researchers sampled 206 undergraduate students with the Classroom CA Measure. Findings in this study confirm that situational factors affect high anxiety levels and that select factors interact to further reduce anxiety levels. It seems that anxiety is reduced by an increase in acquaintance levels.

It was also reported that high CA's perform better under highly structured conditions. Neer demonstrated that reported anxiety and the avoidance behavior of CA is moderated by both the discussion situation and by instructional intervention. According to Neer, CA is found to be lessened when individuals feel that they know what they are doing, and if they are comfortable in their

environments.

Communication Apprehension Measurement One of the most popular methods of measuring CA has been through the use of self-reports. The most widely used is the PRCA-24, whose main purpose is to measure trait-CA in four communication contexts: dyadic, group, meeting, and public (Levine & McCroskey, 1990). To test the PRCA-24, researchers used 8,879 subjects, who completed a short questionnaire containing the PRCA-24. The results of the study concluded that the PRCA-24 is consistent with prior work and with a substantiating body of literature on this topic.

Along the same line of research, Beatty & Andriate (1985) examined the predictive power of the PRCA-24. A general anxiety measure was taken at three separate intervals by 92 undergraduate students during a semester-long public speaking course. Results indicated that the PRCA-24 and a general anxiety measure predicted anxiety experienced during public speaking with equal power. By the end of the semester, the PRCA-24 was clearly superior to a general measure in self-reporting performance anxiety.

Humor In today's world, humor is a fundamental ingredient of social communication. It is a rare conversation in which at least one participant does not try to elicit laughter at some point or does not respond with amusement to something that another has said or done.

Jokes, witticisms, and other humorous verbal and nonverbal behaviors are commonplace in social interaction situations and can have a major impact on the quality of the interaction. For example, one's interpretation of a stranger's remarks as humorous can influence the impression one forms of that person. In addition, humor is often used strategically to decrease the tension felt during heated discussions (Kane, Suls, & Tedeschi, 1977) or even to enlighten a boring one.

Clearly, the transmission and comprehension of humor are central features of social interactions. Due to the substantial relevance of humor and the powerful effects of humor, it is essential to be knowledgeable about the factors that govern the conceptualization and communication of humorous messages.

Humor Theories Humor serves a variety of functions in interpersonal communication. Humor has been associated with verbal aggression (Berkowitz, 1970; Landy & Mettee, 1969), information retention and recall (Kaplan & Pascoe, 1970; Zillmann & Bryant, 1983), learning (Graham & Christophel, 1990) and entertainment (Stocking & Zillmann, 1976). Humor has been viewed as a facilitator and regulator of communication (Rossel, 1981), a predictor of relationship development (Graham & Rubin, 1987), and has been correlated with emotional intelligence (O'Connell, 1960), scholastic

aptitude and emotional maturity (Stump, 1939). The list of humor theories seems almost endless.

According to Graham et al. (1992), there are over 100 theories of humor, which have typically been categorized into one of three broad theoretical perspectives: superiority theories, incongruity theories, and relief arousal theories (Foot, 1986). According to Hobbes (1958), superiority theories contend that all humor originates from the desire of one person to feel superior to another. This theory is the cornerstone of modern superiority theories (Morreall, 1987). Gruner (1978) argues that this form of humor actually began with early humans, before language had fully developed. Much of the research that examines humor from a superiority perspective deals with disparagement, or humor that elevates a person above the target of humor (Zillmann, 1983).

Incongruity theories focus on the cognitive processes involved in perceiving humor and reacting to incongruities. From this perspective, humor results from the discovery of an incongruity (Berger, 1976). For example, an oxymoron such as "jumbo shrimp" is an incongruity that could provoke a humorous response (Blumenfeld, 1986).

Relief or arousal theory includes a variety of theories that fall into the areas of psychology and physiology. The common element among these theories is the belief that

laughter is a release of repressed or unused energy. Freud's psychoanalytic theory has been the most influential theory of this type. Freud suggests that laughter is an outlet for psychic or nervous energy. More specifically, Freud considered humor to be "an economy in the expenditure of emotional energy; energy for emotional responses such as fear and embarrassment is found to be unnecessary and is released as laughter" (Graham, Papa & Brooks, 1992, p. 163).

While these three perspectives of humor are not exhaustive, they do represent the basis for the vast majority of humor research. Some scholars argue that aspects of each perspective are necessary for a comprehensive theory of humor. Others have attempted to develop a theory that combines aspects of each perspective. The most encompassing of these theories was purposed by La Fave, Haddad & Maesen (1976), who suggested that an adequate theory of humor must involve an increase in happiness as a result of some sort of perceived incongruity.

Most attempts at defining humor rely on the interpretation rather than the creation or the use of humor and most of the research in humor focuses on certain areas of humor rather than on the generalization of humor. A notable exception is the recent work by Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield (1991) who examined individual predispositions to enact humorous messages and found that

subjects scoring high in humor orientation have a wider range of humorous behaviors at their disposal.

Clearly, the use of humor can be approached from either a trait or situational perspective. An individual might use humor consistently throughout any and all interactions, or individuals might only use humor in response to particular situations. While sense of humor is typically viewed as a personality trait, one might possess a sense of humor while not actually using humor in all interactions. Many scholars have indicated that humor serves a variety of functions. However, according to Chapman (1983), the independent functions have yet to be collected into a reliable and valid measure that indicates an individual's repertoire of humor motives or tendency to enact these motives. To get a fundamental understanding of how humor is facilitated and elicited, the next section will focus on some of the specific social interactions in which humor is explicated. By looking at specific instances of humor research, humor's complexity can be analyzed.

Classroom Humor Generally, the use of humor in the classroom results in positive outcomes for the teacher and student. Teachers employing humor in the classroom receive higher teacher evaluations, and develop a positive rapport with students. The relationship between teacher use of humor in the classroom and student learning, however, is

unclear. Neuliep (1991) examined high school teachers' humor in the classroom using an inductively derived taxonomy of teacher humor. Researchers used a questionnaire containing the description of the participant's last use of humor which was then coded. Results indicated that high school teachers generally use less humor than college teachers, they perceived college teacher humor as appropriate, and use humor as a learning facilitator rather than a learning strategy.

Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield (1990) suggest that people who use humor often, process information differently than people who use humor less often. It appears that individuals develop different levels of expertise in choosing, producing, and timing humor. Just as some people are better at conforming or adopting persuasive messages than others, some people are better at encoding humor. For their study, 54 participants in general communication classes were administered the Humor Orientation Scale. Researchers concluded that people with a more humorous orientation make use of more different categories of humorous communication. In other words, if one category is not successful at generating humor, then they will employ other methods to accomplish a humorous response.

Conversational Organization Research by Glenn (1989)

identified that there is a conversational organization of shared laughter. Data were derived from the analysis of shared laughter sequences in naturally occurring conversation. It was discovered that in multi-party interactions, someone other than the current speaker generally provides the first laugh. By allowing someone else to laugh first, current speakers have a tendency to bias themselves against laughing at their own humor. In more than 70 percent of the multi-party cases examined, someone other than the current speaker initiated shared laughter. In general, for shared laughter to take place it is essential not only for laughter to start, but more importantly, to be facilitated by others in the group as well.

Humor Functions Graham, Papa & Brooks (1992) focus on understanding the functions of humor. When attempting to explore humor from a functional perspective, they administered the Situation Humor Response Questionnaire and the Uses of Humor Index to 191 college students. Data suggest that, "humor may serve the social functions of defining and redefining a group, clarifying and easing tensions brought by new stimuli" (p. 167). Their results were threefold. First, people communicate for pleasure and use humor for entertainment as well as for positive affect. Second, making oneself known through humorous

self-disclosure is an appropriate means of displaying affective behavior. Third, while humor may be used for positive social gains, this analysis indicates a tendency for use with an antisocial purpose as well.

Disparaging Humor Graham, Papa & Brooks (1992) point out that a major division in the use of humor in communication comes through the use of masking verbal aggression as humor. While there is nothing positive about verbal aggression, researchers claim that self-disparagement not only leads to others' enjoyment, but it is beneficial in the development of an individual's sense of humor. Hackman (1988) believes that there seems to be a demonstrative need to learn more about the perceptual impact of the use of self-disparaging humor. His study involved 208 students who were randomly assigned subjects dealing with three speech conditions. Results indicate that high status speakers were rated significantly more competently than low status speakers. Speakers using humor in their presentations, whether related or not related to the presentation, received significantly higher ratings.

In a similar study conducted by Smith and Powell (1988) it was discovered that, "the appreciation of disparaging humor depends upon the target of the humor and the target's relationship to the respondent" (p. 288). Further, their results support the identification approach to understanding

humor. Their purpose was to examine impressions of leadership in terms of the target of disparaging humor. Subjects used were 86 student volunteers who were divided into experimental stimuli to encourage laughter. The results indicate that disparaging humor can be an effective tool, particularly if it is self-disparaging. However, leaders of group communication should be careful in humor directed at other targets, since messages could limit the perceived effectiveness of the functions of the leadership position.

Nonverbal Aspects of Humor Another important facet in the understanding of humor is the nonverbal aspect. Grammer (1990) notes that the meaning attributed to laughter ranges from a signal of aggressive intention to a signal of sexual excitement. Research indicates that laughter is intricately linked with other nonverbal signals occurring at the same time. For this study, 158 males and females were video-taped during their first encounter. A coding scheme was then applied to analyze their nonverbal behavior. The results suggested that the critical locations for body movement and posture are indicative of interest in an opposite sex partner and different for males and females.

Humor Response Another area of humor research delves into the dimensions of response towards humor. Ruch & Rath (1993) used a sample of 50 males and 50 female adults to

judge 24 jokes and cartoons on a 17-point rating scale. The set of ratings was empirically selected from spontaneous responses of subjects to a set of humor stimuli and represented a variety of reactions to humor. Positive and negative responses were recorded, as were judgments about perceived stimulus properties and the subject's own feeling state.

A factor analysis of the findings among the response scales yielded one positive response factor, which was exhilaration. The two negative response factors were indignation and boredom. In all three factors, the distinction between evaluation of stimulus properties and one's feeling state turned out not to be of importance. The high stimulus ratings for those perceived as funny and witty support the view of the emotion of exhilaration theory which was advanced by Ruch (1990). The use of marked variables for all three response dimensions is recommended for humor studies.

With all the possible implications associated with CA, like low verbal outputs, stammering, and the avoidance of communication, it is reasonable to assume that individuals must resort to some kind of strategy to cope with CA. One possible strategy could be the facilitation of humor. Humor is frequently used by professional orators during a public speaking situation, depending on the occasion, in order to

"warm up the audience." According to Grice & Skinner (1993) the use of humor can be one of the most effective attention-getting strategies, if used properly. It is possible for a speaker to use humor to show a favorable self-image. Humorous messages may do more than just get the audience's attention; it may also help alleviate some of the anxiety experienced by a speaker.

Hypotheses Throughout this literature review research has shown that CA is seen as a negative effect of speaking in public, as well as other situations. The nervous and anxious feelings experienced in these contexts take away from understanding and add to the breakdown of interpersonal relationships. Also, humor is found to be an excellent facilitator of embarrassing and fear-related anxieties and adds to group cohesiveness. The relationship between CA and humor is worthy of further investigation to determine what effects CA has on humor usage and how the use of humorous messages might alleviate the problems associated with CA.

For the current study, the following hypotheses were identified to examine the relationship between CA and humor orientation.

H1: An individual with low communication apprehension has a high level of humor orientation.

H2: An individual with high communication apprehension has a low level of humor orientation.

- H3: An individual with low communication apprehension has a high level of humor effectiveness.
- H4: An individual with high communication apprehension has a low level of humor effectiveness.
- H5: An individual with low communication apprehension has a high level of humor frequency.
- H6: An individual with high communication apprehension has a low level of humor frequency

In accordance with the other hypotheses a null hypotheses was developed in order to justify the results of the study.

- H0: An individual's level of communication apprehension has no relationship to an individual's level of humor orientation.

Clearly, these hypotheses suggest that the higher one's level of humor orientation, the lower the level of CA. It is proposed that individuals with higher levels of CA are not as effective with humor and see fewer situations as being humorous.

For this study, high and low CA will be defined as the top and bottom fourth of cumulative scores on McCroskey's PRCA-24. High and low humor orientation will be defined as the top and bottom fourth of cumulative scores on Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield's Humor Orientation Scale.

Methodology

The project design for this study consists of two self-report measures, the PRCA-24, (see Appendix A) and the Humor Orientation Scale (see Appendix B). Both of these surveys have proven to be effective and reliable. The PRCA-24 has been tested by numerous researchers and consists of 24 self-evaluation questions with a five-point Likert scale that measures an individual's level of communication apprehension.

As noted earlier, the Humor Orientation Scale consists of a list of 17-statements which relate to the communicative use of humor in interpersonal situations, using a Likert-type response format. The instrument has two dimensions, frequency of use and effectiveness of use. Items essentially address one global question: "Do you use humor regularly and effectively in your communication?"

To test the validity of this measurement, Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield (1991) administered the scale to several samples of undergraduate students at a large eastern university during a variety of validation tasks over the course of two years. A total of 275 participants completed the scale under various conditions. The results from all participants were combined into one sample, then analyzed. In conducting the analysis researchers looked at chi-square values, the ratio of chi-square to degrees of

freedom, the normal fit index, and the nonnormed fit index. Researchers also explored the Steiger-Lind RMS Index and the Adjusted Population Gamma statistic. Researchers concluded that the Humor Orientation Scale was proven to be both reliable and valid.

In addition to these two instruments, subjects were asked to identify their year in school, and their gender. Although the hypotheses do not incorporate these demographics, they were included because of potential informational value.

Pilot Study Subjects for the study consisted of 124 undergraduate student volunteers at Eastern Illinois University who were enrolled in a basic speaking course. Each participant was given a questionnaire containing the PRCA-24 and the Humor Orientation Scale along with a computerized sheet for recording responses. Data were collected during a one week time span. After the data were collected, descriptive analyses and correlations were conducted. To test the hypotheses even further, t-test analyses were also implemented.

The results from the pilot study offer support for the conclusion that CA and humor orientation are significantly related. Specifically, people who reported using humor in their communication with others regularly (humor frequency) and effectively (humor effectiveness) have lower levels of

CA. By contrast, people who do not report using humor in their communication with others regularly and effectively have higher levels of CA.

The major limitations of the pilot study stem from the chosen population. While the sample was selected for its accessibility and convenience, it was also limited to those who already had a predisposition to CA. Also, the vast majority of the sample had either a freshman or sophomore standing in college.

The present study was conducted to attempt to replicate results while curtailing the aforementioned limitations. This included gathering a more representative sample of undergraduates at Eastern Illinois University and increasing sample size. This, in turn, will enhance reliability and validity of the results and allow for greater generalization of results.

Subjects for this study consisted of 566 undergraduate student volunteers at Eastern Illinois University who were enrolled in a variety of courses across the curriculum. This population represents a wide variety of students at Eastern Illinois University. Demographic information revealed that of the 566 valid observations, 43.4% were male and 56.2% were female. The sample consisted of 35.9% freshmen, 17.6% sophomores, 18.7% juniors, 27.4% seniors and .4% were graduate students. Each participant was given a

questionnaire containing 24 items from the PRCA-24 and 17 items from the Humor Orientation Scale along with a computerized sheet for recording responses. All participants were instructed to record their responses on the form provided. Instructions were provided in written form and were also orally administered to ensure the consistency of administration. While no time limit was given, participants were asked to work quickly and to record their first impressions. The average time taken to fill out the survey was under fifteen minutes in length. Data were collected during a one month time span. After data were collected, descriptive analyses were conducted. To ensure validity, t-tests and post hoc analyses were also computed.

Results

Out of the 566 subjects, there was less than .001 data missing, and most of this was due to not noting gender. Because no assumption can be made concerning year and gender, missing data in these items were not treated. Missing data from the PRCA-24 and the Humor Orientation Scale were given a value of +3 for undecided.

One-hundred-thirty-nine subjects (24.6%) who scored from + 5 to 48 on the PRCA-24 were identified as having a high level of CA. One-hundred-forty-four subjects (25.4%) who scored from -22 or below on the instrument were said to have low CA. Moderate scores (50.0%) ranging from -21 to +4 were considered for the correlation analyzes, but not for the t-tests. Concerning the Humor Orientation Scale, individuals who scored in the top 25 percent of the range were identified as having high humor effectiveness and frequency. Those who scored in the bottom 25 percentile were diagnosed as having low humor effectiveness and frequency.

Correlations Correlation Coefficient is the label given to the z-score covariance which identifies the relative strength of a relationship. A Pearson's r correlation was administered to the data collected from both surveys to determine the correlation coefficients (See Table 1). Pearson's r analyzes relationships between this set

based on the entire sample. This procedure revealed that CA and humor frequency are negatively related ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$).

Table 1
Correlation Matrix

	Gender	Year	PRCA-24	Hum Freq	Hum Eff
Gender	1.000	-.0050	.0140	-.1104*	-.1160**
Year		1.000	-.1539*	-.1061*	-.0442
PRCA-24			1.000	-.2303**	-.2634**
Hum Freq				1.000	.8315**
Hum Eff					1.000

*-Signif. LE .05 **-Signif. LE .01

The procedure also indicated that CA and humor effectiveness are substantially negatively related ($r = -.26$, $p < .01$). This means that the higher the level of CA the lower the level of humor effectiveness. When the items concerning humor frequency and effectiveness were correlated, a highly significant relationship was discovered ($r = .83$, $p < .01$). Thus, those individuals who have a high level of humor frequency also have a high level of humor effectiveness.

Correlating demographic information yielded several

significant relationships among CA, humor, year in school, and gender. CA and year in school showed a significant negative relationship ($r=-.15$, $p<.05$) while no other relationship was discovered between CA and gender. Therefore, as an individual's year in school increases, their level of CA decreases. However, when gender and humor frequency and effectiveness were correlated, significant relationships were discovered ($r=-.11$, $p<.05$; $r=-.11$, $p<.01$). Year in school, when correlated to the humor variables, produced only one significant relationship ($r=-.10$, $p<.05$). Overall, correlations revealed that there is a significant relationship between an individual's level of CA and humor orientation.

T-Tests To strengthen correlation findings, t-tests were also performed. The t-test is frequently used to test the significance of correlations in bivariate relationships. As noted earlier, subjects who scored moderately (-21 to +4) were not considered. The groups of high and low CA were compared with the variables of humor frequency and humor effectiveness, as was gender.

Results of the t-tests support those found through correlation procedures (See Table 2). In terms of humor frequency, significant differences were found between individuals with high and low CA ($t=4.80$, $p<.001$). Similarly, concerning humor effectiveness, significant

differences were found between individuals with high CA and low CA ($t=5.17$, $p<.001$). These results conclude that individuals with high CA score low on humor frequency and effectiveness.

T-tests performed on the variables of gender and humor orientation produced significant results as well ($t=2.42$, $p<.05$; $t=2.58$, $p<.05$). Results showed that males score higher than females on humor frequency and effectiveness. Overall, t-test analyses confirmed the correlations and strengthened the results.

Table 2

T-test Results

Variable	Group	Mean	t-value	Prob
Humor Freq	High CA	31.2518	4.80	.001**
	Low CA	34.6875		
Humor Eff	High CA	27.4892	5.17	.001**
	Low CA	30.6597		
Humor Freq	Males	33.5532	2.84	.05*
	Females	32.2993		
Humor Eff	Males	29.5872	2.63	.05*
	Females	28.4507		
**-Signif. LE .001		*-Signif. LE .05		

Analysis of Variance ANOVA's were also performed on

the data to ensure reliability (See Table 3). In general, ANOVA is designed to examine statistically the between-groups variance to see if it is substantially larger than the variance within the group. In comparing the variables of CA (high, middle, low) against humor frequency, each group was significantly different ($f=.0001$, $p<.05$). Along those same lines, when CA variables were compared to humor effectiveness, the post hoc analysis revealed the same results ($f=.0001$, $p<.05$).

Table 3

ANOVA

Group	Variable	Mean	f Prob
Humor Freq	Medium CA	32.5159	.0001
	High CA	34.6875	
	Low CA	31.2518	
Humor Eff	Medium CA	28.5406	.0001
	High CA	30.6597	
	Low CA	27.4892	

Demographic variables only produced one significant conclusion (See Table 4). Analysis reveals that year in school and humor frequency differ at a significant level among freshman and seniors ($f=.07$, $p<.05$). This post hoc analyses justify the sub-groups established to identify the

differences between the different levels CA as compared to humor frequency and effectiveness and year in school.

Table 4

ANOVA

Group	Variable	Mean	f Prob
Humor Freq	Freshman	33.3960	.0700
	Sophomore	32.9091	
	Junior	33.0000	
	Senior	31.7532	

Chi-Square To determine the differences among nominal data, a Chi-square analysis was conducted. It was discovered that the major difference between variables was freshman and junior value's (See Table 5). All other variables were consistent among each other, meaning that sophomores and seniors did not vary in their level of CA as compared to the other groups tested.

Table 5

Chi-Square

Year	Middle CA Mean Score	Low CA Mean Score	High CA Mean Score
Freshman	49.5	18.3	32.2**
Sophomore	48.5	24.2	27.3
Junior	56.2	35.2	8.6**
Senior	47.4	28.6	24.0

** - Signif. LE. .00025

These results offer support for the conclusion that CA and humor orientation are significantly related. There was substantial evidence to reject the null hypothesis that no relationship exists between CA and an individual's level of humor orientation. Specifically, people who report using humor in their communication with others regularly (Humor frequency) and effectively (humor effectiveness) have lower levels of CA. By contrast, people who do not report using humor in their communication with others regularly and effectively have higher levels of CA. Other findings in this study show that males have a tendency to implement humorous messages more frequently and effectively than females. Along those same lines, it was also discovered that freshman and juniors vary the most in their level of CA.

Chapter 4

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion Support was found for both of the hypotheses tested. From this study, one can conclude that the higher an individual's level of humor orientation is, the lower his/her level of CA will be. Other results showed that males and females differ significantly in their implementation of humorous messages. It was also discovered that year in school also differs significantly concerning an individual's level of humor orientation and CA.

The transfer of these findings to everyday communication situations suggest a major impact on the way individuals deal with CA. First, since individuals with high levels of CA do not use humor frequently and effectively, it is unrealistic to expect them to be able to perceive certain situations as being funny or humorous. But, if the level of CA can be reduced, then the level of humor orientation should rise. This, in turn, could make them more effective communicators and lessen the amount of conflict that arises from misconstrued messages.

Along those same lines, individuals who already have high levels of humor orientation could use their skills to feel even more confident in speaking situations. This supports the findings of Graham, Papa & Brooks (1992) who state that one side effect of using humorous messages is the

release of built up energy. Since it is known that CA causes a psychological arousal in people, humor could be used to facilitate the energy generated by the arousal.

During initial interactions there is almost always a high level of CA. According to Wheelless & Williamson (1990), the amount of CA that is experienced during initial interactions is decreased as the same amount of information seeking rises. In other words, the more comfortable a person feels, the more willing he/she is to self-disclose about themselves. In this situation, humor could be used to alleviate the tension felt during initial encounters which would lead to greater levels of information seeking.

It is important to note that Beatty et al. (1991) concluded that while CA frequently causes behavioral disruptions, these disruptions of the communication flow in turn lead to the development and maintenance of CA. This gives CA the image of being a continuous cycle that can not be broken. If an individual suffering from these behavioral disruptions incorporated more effective humorous messages during dialectic conversations, these disruptions might become less frequent or severe in nature. This, in fact, could help break the link between CA and behavioral disruptions. Along those same lines, Neer (1990) demonstrated that CA is found to be lessened when individuals feel that they know what they are doing, and if

they are comfortable in their respective environment. One of the easiest ways to relax and to feel comfortable in awkward situations is to convey a humorous message. This not only alleviates some of the discomfort experienced by a single individual, but the discomfort of others as well. It is also important to note that these conclusions are based on the effective use of humor. There is always the possibility of ineffective humor adding to the level of CA.

Another area that humor could be applied to is in the realm of public speaking. Grice & Skinner (1993) conclude that the use of humor makes an excellent attention-getting device during the introduction of a speech. It is conceptualized that humorous messages help a speaker identify with the audience, which in turn leads to greater levels of speaker credibility. On the other hand, using humor in public speaking situations could also relieve the CA experienced by the speaker prior to the beginning of the discourse. This, in turn, could lead to greater speaker confidence and a higher level of speaker credibility. In other words, the facilitation of humorous messages during public speaking situations not only gets the audience's attention, but alleviates speaking anxiety as well.

It is also important to note that even though the hypotheses did not mention gender usage, there is evidence to suggest that males report using humor more frequently and

effectively than females. Gender differences were apparent in the correlations and the analysis of variance. These findings relate to the study conducted by Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield (1990) where it was determined that people who use humor often process information in different ways. This also could hold true for gender. Since males and females process information differently it would also be apparent that they process humorous messages differently as well.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the data that was not mentioned in the hypotheses is the difference in the level of CA between freshman and juniors. Among those surveyed, freshman had the highest level of CA while juniors had the lowest. This could be due to the fact that freshmen are naturally going to have a high level of CA and that juniors are the most comfortable in a classroom since they have experienced these situations before. Sophomores, on the other hand may still have uneasiness about classroom situations while seniors would experience anxiety from the greater difficulties presented in classes and from the pressures of graduation.

Limitations The major limitation of this study stems from the chosen population. While the sample was selected for its accessibility and convenience, it was limited to college students, who may not be representative of all

individuals with CA. Some of the population could have just given a speech or were in the process of preparing for a speech which would heighten their level of CA. Also, including more graduate students would have allowed for a greater comparison among year in school.

Another limitation in this study comes from the use of self-report measures. Any time self report measures are used there is always the risk of invalid responses and participant biases, which could be particularly problematic concerning CA and humor.

Recommendations For Future Study Investigation into the plethora of information about humor has exposed a multitude of uses for this communication tool. Theories about this phenomenon range from humor as a test of intelligence to humor's ability to relieve built up aggression. Using humor in most small group situations is one of the most effective ways an individual can use humor in order to form group cohesiveness. Due to these outreaching effects, it is essential to be knowledgeable about the power of humor. Therefore, it is important for individuals to understand that humor, while it brings us joy and entertainment also makes us better communicators as well.

It is also necessary to understand how humans use these properties of humor to form shared meaning and how this

meaning influences the roles that individuals take in society. It seems that if an individual could master the fundamentals that govern the use of humor, there would be few problems they could not overcome. Further research in this area could concentrate on finding ways to make individuals increase their levels of humor orientation. Research should also address specific performance concerns dealing with the implementation of humorous messages. This problem leads to several hypotheses concerning the memorization of humor and the mental formation of humor. From this, theories can build on a link between humor and the competence of individuals using humor in social situations.

Conclusion While this study has its limitations, such as those stemming from the chosen population and the use of self-report measures, the results are clearly meaningful. As the aforementioned discussion suggests, there are many ways that humor could be facilitated to reduce the anxiety experienced with CA. A better understanding of the effects of humor could suggest even greater applications. Further research into this area could concentrate on the specific variables of situation and other people's perceptions of humorous messages. It would also be interesting to find out what effects humor has on gender perceptions of CA. Overall, this study showed that an individual's level of CA

does affect their level of humor orientation. Future research may find that individuals with high levels of CA could benefit dramatically from the use of humorous messages. These individuals could strengthen their intrapersonal, interpersonal and group communication skills to the point where they would be able to cope with the problems associated with CA.

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Appendix A

PRCA-24

Directions: This survey is composed of 24 statements concerning feelings about communicating with other people. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking in pencil on the computerized form whether you (A) strongly agree, (B) agree, (C) are undecided, (D) disagree, or (E) strongly disagree. Work quickly; record your first impression.

1. I dislike participating in group discussions.
2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.
4. I like to get involved in group discussions.
5. Engaging in group discussions with new people makes me tense and nervous.
6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.
7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.
8. Usually I am calm and relaxed while participating in meetings.

9. I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.
10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.
11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me feel uncomfortable.
12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at meetings.
13. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
15. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.
16. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
17. While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.
18. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.
19. I have no fear of giving a speech.
20. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while I am giving a speech.
21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
24. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

Appendix B

Humor Orientation Scale

DIRECTIONS: Items 55-71* deal with how an individual is humorously oriented. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking in pencil on the computerized form whether you (A) strongly agree, (B) agree, (C) are undecided, (D) disagree, or (E) strongly disagree.

55. I regularly tell jokes and funny stories when I am with a group.
56. People usually laugh when I tell a joke or story.
57. I have no memory for jokes or funny stories.
58. I can be funny without having to rehearse a joke.
59. Being funny is a natural communication style with me.
60. I cannot tell a joke well.
61. People seldom ask me to tell stories.
62. My friends would say that I am a funny person.
63. People don't seem to pay close attention when I tell joke.
64. Even funny jokes seem flat when I tell them.
65. I can easily remember jokes and stories.
66. People often ask me to tell jokes or stories.
67. My friends would not say that I am a funny person.
68. I don't tell jokes very well.
69. I tell stories and jokes very well.

70. Of all the people I know, I'm one of the funniest.
71. I use humor to communicate in a variety of situations.
72. Please indicate your year in school by marking either
(A) Freshman (B) Sophomore (C) Junior (D) Senior
(E) Graduate.
73. Please indicate your gender by marking either
(A) Male (B) Female

* Questions 25-54 are exempt from this study

Appendix C

Directions: This survey is composed of 24 statements concerning feelings about communicating with other people. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking in pencil on the computerized form whether you (A) strongly agree, (B) agree, (C) are undecided, (D) disagree, or (E) strongly disagree. Work quickly; record your first impression.

<u>QUESTION</u>	<u>MEAN</u>
1. I dislike participating in group discussions.	3.60
2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.	2.17
3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.	3.58
4. I like to get involved in group discussions.	2.30
5. Engaging in group discussions with new people makes me tense and nervous.	3.17

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|---|------|
| 6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions. | 2.59 |
| 7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting. | 3.30 |
| 8. Usually I am calm and relaxed while participating in meetings. | 2.52 |
| 9. I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting. | 2.71 |
| 10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings. | 3.58 |
| 11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me feel uncomfortable. | 3.48 |
| 12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at meetings. | 2.66 |
| 13. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous. | 3.43 |
| 14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations. | 2.51 |
| 15. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations. | 3.88 |

- | | |
|--|------|
| 16. Ordinarily I am very calm
and relaxed in conversations. | 2.16 |
| 17. While conversing with a new
acquaintance, I feel very relaxed. | 2.62 |
| 18. I'm afraid to speak up in
conversations. | 3.79 |
| 19. I have no fear of giving a speech. | 3.45 |
| 20. Certain parts of my body feel very
tense and rigid while
I am giving a speech. | 2.46 |
| 21. I feel relaxed while giving
a speech. | 3.39 |
| 22. My thoughts become confused and
jumbled when I am giving
a speech. | 3.13 |
| 23. I face the prospect of giving a
speech with confidence. | 2.84 |
| 24. While giving a speech, I get so
nervous I forget facts I
really know. | 3.20 |

Appendix D

DIRECTIONS: Items 55-71* deal with how an individual is humorously oriented. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking in pencil on the computerized form whether you (A) strongly agree, (B) agree, (C) are undecided, (D) disagree, or (E) strongly disagree.

<u>QUESTION</u>	<u>MEAN</u>
55. I regularly tell jokes and funny stories when I am with a group.	2.29
56. People usually laugh when I tell a joke or story.	2.13
57. I have no memory for jokes or funny stories.	3.69
58. I can be funny without having to rehearse a joke.	2.07
59. Being funny is a natural communication style with me.	2.28
60. I cannot tell a joke well.	3.61
61. People seldom ask me to tell stories.	3.48
62. My friends would say that I am a funny person.	2.14

- | | |
|--|------|
| 63. People don't seem to pay
close attention when I tell
joke. | 3.73 |
| 64. Even funny jokes seem flat
when I tell them. | 3.74 |
| 65. I can easily remember jokes
and stories. | 2.57 |
| 66. People often ask me to tell
jokes or stories. | 2.67 |
| 67. My friends would not say that
I am a funny person. | 3.74 |
| 68. I don't tell jokes very well. | 3.56 |
| 69. I tell stories and jokes
very well. | 2.54 |
| 70. Of all the people I know,
I'm one of the funniest. | 3.20 |
| 71. I use humor to communicate
in a variety of situations. | 2.09 |
| 72. Please indicate your year in
school by marking either
(A) Freshman (B) Sophomore
(C) Junior (D) Senior
(E) Graduate. | 2.39 |

73. Please indicate your gender 1.57
by marking either
(A) Male (B) Female

* Questions 25-54 are exempt from this study