THE EFFECT OF SEXIST HUMOR ON WOMEN'S SENSE OF POSSIBLE-SELVES

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By

Christopher Breeden

Director: Dr. Thomas Ford
Professor of Psychology
Psychology Department

Committee Members: Dr. Christopher Holden, Psychology
Dr. Erin Myers, Psychology

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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECT OF SEXIST HUMOR ON WOMEN'S SENSE OF POSSIBLE-SELVES

Chris Breeden

Western Carolina University (April 2016)

Director: Dr. Thomas Ford

Social identity theory encourages the importance of maintaining a positive self-image, and positive view of one's own group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). A person's sense of possible-selves (the imaginations of who they are and who they could be in any given interaction) can become damaged when interacting with an individual who encourages threatening stereotypes (Brown, 1998). The present study aims to extend the understandings of how one's image can be threatened, via "social identity-threat," using sexist humor. In this study, participants' ideations of their "possible-selves" will be measured by how they respond to self-survey questionnaires. Participants will imagine interactions with a graduate Teaching Assistant who engages in humor by telling jokes. The humor will be sexist or neutral in manner. The imagined interaction will contain either a confederate (TA) who offers the jokes, or a different confederate whose behaviors are ambiguous and does not participate in the jokes. I hypothesize that by degrading and diminishing women, sexist humor will derogate and threaten women's social identities, and break their sense of self-worth, in a way that isn't limited to contextual factors.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

An organizational consultant for a bank described an incident in which a woman teller accidentally short-circuited a computer system that monitored the bank's transactions. As a result, many men throughout the organization joked about women's "inferiority" with technology. At a subsequent meeting, a female secretary accidentally unplugged a slide projector with her foot as she walked by. A male supervisor joked to his colleagues about a "woman's touch," which elicited laughter from other male supervisors (Kahn & Yoder, 1989).

Research suggests that experiences like these occur all too frequently for women in the workplace. In fact, gender harassment in the form of sexist jokes and teasing is the most commonly experienced type of sexual harassment by women in the workplace (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; Pryor, 1995a, 1995b). For example, Fitzgerald et al. (1988) surveyed 2,599 undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty and staff at two universities. Among all participants, they found that gender harassment (e.g., suggestive stories or offensive jokes) was the most frequently reported experience of sexual harassment among five dimensions of sexual harassment assessed by their Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ).

A large body of research has accumulated showing that sexist humor—humor that denigrates women (LaFrance & Woodzicka, 1998)— is not simply "just a joke"; it can negatively affect the way men perceive and treat women. For instance, sexist men exposed to sexist jokes or comedy skits versus other stimuli (e.g., sexist statements, neutral jokes) have reported greater acceptance of rape myths (Ryan and Kanjorski 1998), greater tolerance of sexist events (Ford, 2000), greater rape proclivity (Romero-Sanchez et al., 2010; Thomae and Viki 2013), and greater willingness to discriminate against women (Ford et al. 2008).

In addition there is a growing literature showing that sexist humor can have important detrimental effects on how women perceive themselves in social settings. Ford, Woodzicka, Petit, Richardson and Lappi (2015) demonstrated that sexist humor causes an identity threat for women in the form of state self-objectification and its accompanying manifestation of body surveillance. The present research builds on this finding by further addressing important questions of how women experience identity threat in response to sexist humor. My research addresses whether sexist humor has a detrimental effect on women's stable definition of self, or whether it affects women's view of themselves only in the context of the specific relationship or setting in which the humor occurred.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Identity Threat

Social identity refers to that part of an individual's self-concept deriving from perceived membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986). Social identity becomes salient in intergroup settings where individuals categorize themselves and others according to conspicuous social group memberships (e.g., biological gender, race). The social identity that becomes pertinent depends largely on which categorizations are relevant in a given context—individuals self-categorize to adapt to situational demands (Turner & Reynolds, 2001; Turner et al., 2006). Thus, in one context, one might categorize his or her self-based on race (e.g., when interacting with members of a different race) and, in another, based on occupation (e.g., during a weekly meeting at work).

Intergroup settings elicit comparisons with out-groups on valued dimensions (e.g., ''How does my fraternity compare to others in terms of athletic ability and intellect?''). Social identity theory proposes that people ''strive to maintain or achieve a positive social identity'' (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 16). People do this by favorably distinguishing their in-group from relevant out-groups (e.g., ''My fraternity is the best at intramural sports.''). People experience a threat to social identity when their in-group compares negatively with an out-group (e.g., ''My fraternity is the dumbest on campus!''). Therefore, people experience social identity threat when they *think* that their social identity could be diminished in a given context (Logel et al., 2009; Steele, Spencer & Aronson, 2002).

Stereotype threat is a specific form of social identity threat or diminishment. It is born of contextual cues indicating that a salient negative stereotype might be used to interpret an

individual's behavior (Steele et al, 2002). Similarly, stereotype threat encourages the assumption that sub-optimal performance in an area of relevance might confirm the negative stigma. Thus, evaluation apprehension becomes the mechanism through which stereotype threat operates.

Women experience stereotype threat most when they perform tasks for which they are stereotypically expected to do poorly (Spencer, Steele & Quinn, 1999; Steele, Spencer & Aronson, 2002). For instance, men predominantly occupy the fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). As a result, there exists a stereotype of female inferiority in STEM fields (Steele et al., 2002; Logel et. al., 2009). One of the consequences for stereotype-threat are performance deficiencies. Spencer et al. asked male and female participants (who were highly competent in math) to complete a difficult math test. Participants were informed that there may be gender differences on the exam, (i.e. men historically performed better than women). The salient negative stereotype of women's inferiority to men catalyzed poor test performance.

It appears that people are attuned to even subtle, innocuous cues of social identity threat (e.g., Adams et al., 2005; Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; Steele et al., 2002). For instance, Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev (2000) expressed that, for women, stereotype-threat can be experienced even when contextual cues only minimally activate a negative stereotype. Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev activated stereotype threat by manipulating the gender composition of a group to which female participants were assigned to complete a math test. In the "stereotype threat" condition, the group consisted of two *male* confederates and the female participant. In the "no-stereotype threat" condition, the group consisted of two *female* confederates and the female participant. Women in the stereotype threat condition performed significantly worse on the math test than women in the no-stereotype threat condition. Taken together, women like the bank

tellers in Kahn & Yoder's (1989) study described above, and in Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev are likely to experience identity threat in response to extremely subtle instances of sexism (e.g., sexist joking).

Sexist Humor and Identity Threat among Women: Self-Objectification

Research has shown that sexist humor creates social identity threat for women in the form of self-objectification (Ford, Woodzicka, Petit, Richardson, & Lappi, 2015). Objectification theory posits that Western societies sexually objectify women through media images and other cultural portrayals of feminine beauty (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Exposure to such messages encourages women to self-objectify, that is, to view themselves as mere social objects meant for judgment based on physical appearance (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). Women's self-objectification can create a stable, chronic third-person perspective for perceiving the self. In addition, women can experience "state self-objectification", a fleeting response to contextual cues (Calogero and Pina 2011; Fredrickson et al., 1998).

Sexist humor is enough of a subtle, contextual cue to induce state self-objectification by (a) depicting women in traditional gender roles (b) reducing women to sex objects, and (c) playing upon specific sexist stereotypes of inferiority (Bemiller & Schneider, 2010; Greenwood & Isbell, 2002; Ford et al., 2015). Accordingly, Ford et al. found that sexist humor subtly induced women to view themselves as a social object and monitor their appearance from a third party viewpoint.

The diminishment of target personality traits (through sexist humor) that are often associated with women has specific measurable responses (Ford et al., 2015). Ford et al. (2015) examined the extent of which women may self-objectify after being exposed to sexist humor. In their first study, experimenters asked participants to complete Noll and Fredrickson's (1998)

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Self-Objectification Questionnaire, after exposure to either sexist or neutral humor videos. Neutral humor videos consisted of four comedy skits: one featured a male supervisor with a phobia of spoons. Another featured an *E-Trade* commercial. The final two clips remained congruent in their emotional valence. Alternatively, the Sexist humor videos included: a skit by Daniel Tosh in which women were made to seem inferior, a video featuring a skit about women in "wife school" and a video of a male and female duo at a dinner party, in which the male actively refers to the woman as being "less than competent" and "a very attractive waste of time." Ford et al. (2015) indicates that sexist humor has a direct influence on identity threat. Women who experience sexist humor survey their body, and adhere more closely to the tenets of Fredrickson and Robert's (1997) objectification theory.

A Stable or Contextual Threat?

Stable Social Identity Threat Hypothesis.

People's social identity constitutes a fundamental, stable part of their self-concept; people use social group memberships to define the self (Glick, Wilkerson, & Cuffe, 2015; Tajfel, 1981; Grieve & Hogg, 1999). Furthermore, threats to social identities can result in stable, enduring negative self-evaluations and devaluations of other group members (Schmitt and Branscombe, 2001; Turner, et. al., 1987). Threats to a woman's social-identity can create a fissure in her personality. In essence, she can separate or *bifurcate* (devalue) the characteristics of her personalities that are in conflict with traditional qualities valued in the stereotyped domain (Pronin, Steele, Ross, 2004). Identification with stereotypically feminine characteristics (empathy, friendliness, sensitivity) weakens after receiving bogus negative feedback regarding ability (Pronin, et. al., 2004).

In addition, Slotter, Winger, and Soto (2015) found that threats to one's social identity can confuse one's self-definition and reduce self-esteem. Participants were asked to identify a group that they felt strongly connected to (alum status at Villanova). Subjects were told to identify all the aspects of their identity that pertain to belonging to the target group. After identifying groups that they felt closely tied to, participants were asked to fantasize that they had membership to the group revoked. Losing membership to the group bewildered participants' self-clarity; that is, the discernment of who he or she is (a member of a specific group) in relation to others. Additionally, threats to identification resulted in a depression of self-esteem. Participants expressed that five important domains of their personality would change permanently (appearance, activities, social circle, future plans and values) if group membership was revoked. Alterations of stable personality traits are indicative of a fluctuating self-concept. Taken together, this research suggests that women might experience a stable social identity threat in response to sexist humor.

Contextual Identity Threat Hypothesis.

In contrast to the *Stable Social Identity Threat Hypothesis*, an argument exists that threats to a woman's social identity are only contextually relevant. Performance in a stigmatized domain (math ability of women) might only become depressed if stereotype based judgments are guaranteed to be made (Brown, 1998). Social identities may be malleable and reflexive, able to become revitalized once a threat has been removed. This idea that identity-threats are only relevant contextually is the *Contextual Identity Threat Hypothesis.*

Brown (1998) investigated the link between socially available stigma and their detriment to *Future Possible-Selves*. Those are the "…ideal selves that we would very much like to become; they are the selves that we could become, are afraid of becoming, and those we wish not

to become" (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Brown 1998). In her research, Brown (1998) subjected

participants to an interaction with a possible Teaching Assistant at their University. The TA was

made to either match or contrast the participants' ethnicity. Participants were asked to assess the

Teaching Assistant as a qualified applicant for the desired position, and evaluate how they

viewed their interaction with the assistant might unfold. Some individuals were asked to evaluate

an interaction with the Teaching Assistant for only the contextually relevant interaction (a single

study session), while others were prompted to imagine a semester-long interaction (study group).

Brown (1998) found that participants who matched the Teaching Assistant's ethnic

demographic (majority / minority) generally rated both the Assistant and themselves as more

positive in contextual and future interactions. Alternatively, it was shown that minority

participants who were asked to imagine future interactions with the cross-racial TA fantasized

themselves as being inferior in subject material, and that the TA would devalue them. According

to these findings, the *Contextual Identity Threat Hypothesis* claims that when stigmatizations do

not persist, our social identity is not damaged. Any social identity threat that is experienced will

be only relevant in the context in which it originated.

Sexist humor can present for women either a stable threat to their social identity (their

identity as women in general), or a contextual identity threat—a threat to one's identity in the

context of a specific interpersonal relationship.

The Present Research

The present research provided a direct test of two competing hypotheses that address how

sexist humor affects a woman's social identity. According to the *Stable Identity-Threat*

hypothesis, sexist humor creates a fundamental, constant threat to women's social identity; one

that is not limited only to the context in which the sexist humor originated. Specifically, women

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should have reported a diminished sense of *Future Possible-Selves* in all sexist humor conditions. In contrast, the *Contextual Identity-Threat* hypothesis predicted that sexist humor threatens women's social identity only in the context in which the sexist humor occurred. Similarly, this relationship is mediated by *Contextual Bias Anticipation*. That is, women diminish their *Future Possible-Selves* due in part to an anticipation of biased interactions.

Identity threat was revealed using two self-survey questionnaires. The first questionnaire, designed to assess a participants' sense of *Future Possible-Selves,* contained questions that assessed how the participant imagined themselves in the context of a future interaction with their TA (e.g., competent v. incompetent, qualified v. unqualified). The second questionnaire asked the participant to assess the TA and the possible dynamics of his classroom (i.e. fairness to all students, environment hostility).

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Participants and Design

One hundred and sixty female participants aged 19 to 70 ($M = 36.72$, $SD = 12.96$, Median = 33) were recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk survey platform. Of the 160 participants, 132 reported themselves as being "White", 16 as "Black", 8 as "Asian" and 4 as "Other." Subjects received monetary compensation for their participation. I randomly assigned participants to one of four conditions in a 2 (Humor Style: Sexist or Neutral) X 2 (TA Pairing: same, different) between-subjects experimental design. To estimate minimum sample size, I conducted power analyses using G*Power 3 software (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang & Buchner, 2007). I assumed an alpha (α) of .05, power of .80 and a medium effect size ($\eta^2 = .25$). The power analysis suggested that I need a minimum of 160 participants distributed across the four conditions of my experiment (roughly 40 in each condition).

Procedure

First, upon accessing the experiment through Mechanical Turk, participants were asked to provide their informed consent. After consenting, subjects were invited to participate in a "Teaching Assistant Application Study." In both the *same TA pairing* and *different TA pairing* conditions, participants watched a video featuring "David" a supervisory teaching assistant. In talking about his teaching philosophy David expressed that he had three staple beliefs about teaching: (a) humor has a unique and important role in the classroom, (b) teachers and students should maintain high academic integrity, and (c) teachers and students should maintain high levels of professionalism. After explaining that he believes humor to be critical in a classroom, David offered three neutral or three sexist jokes. See attachments for a complete transcript of the

video. In the *same TA pairing* condition, participants imagined they would take a semester-long class from David.

In the *different TA pairing* conditions, participants read an additional vignette describing a second teaching assistant, John. The vignette indicated that John was equally as qualified as David and included a statement about his teaching philosophy and proficiency. Finally, participants imagined they would take a semester-long class from John (not David).

Next, participants completed an 11-item Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 5 (*very likely*) designed to evaluate their *Future Possible-Selves* (Brown, 1998). The survey asked participants how they might view themselves in the context of the class to which they were assigned (David's class or John's class). Specifically, participants rated themselves on the following dimensions: well-qualified vs. unqualified, competent vs. incompetent, prepared vs. unprepared, confident vs. scared, calm vs. anxious, similar to the TA vs. different from the TA, motivated to do well vs. not motivated to do well, impressed by the TA vs. turned off by the TA, comfortable vs. uncomfortable, the right person for the class vs. the wrong person for the class, and just the student the TA wanted vs. not the student the TA wanted. To prevent overlap between the hypothesized mediation variable and my dependent measure, I separated items 6, 8 and 11 from aggregate measures of *Future Possible-Selves*. The remaining 8 items had high internal consistency, (α = .93). I collapsed responses to the 8 items into an aggregate measure of *Future Possible-Selves*.

Finally, participants responded to three items measuring the degree to which they expected the TA (David or John) to view or treat them unfairly. The questions asked, "Do you believe that this TA may treat or grade you unfairly?", "Do you believe that this TA could unintentionally make the class environment somewhat uncomfortable for you?" and "Do you

believe that this TA would be extra helpful in seeing that you do well in this class?" Participants responded to each item using a scale ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 5 (*very likely*). After reverse-coding the third question, I averaged responses to the three items to form an overall measure of *contextual bias anticipation*. Internal consistency for this measure was high ($\alpha = .87$).

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

I tested the competing hypotheses by subjecting the *Future Possible-Selves* and

Contextual Bias Anticipation measures to separate 2 (type of humor: sexist, neutral) x 2 (TA

pairing: same, different) analyses of variance (ANOVAs). The *Stable Identity Threat Hypothesis*

predicted a significant main effect of type of humor. Exposure to sexist humor should have

fostered a diminished view of *Future Possible-Selves* and a heightened *Contextual Bias*

Anticipation regardless of whether participants anticipated working with the TA who delivered

the sexist jokes or the TA who did not. The *Contextual Identity Threat Hypothesis* predicted a

type of humor x TA pairing interaction effect. Participants should have reported a diminished

view of possible selves and greater anticipation of bias only when they anticipated working with

the TA who told the sexist jokes (David). The *Contextual Identity Threat Hypothesis* further

predicted that Bias Anticipation should mediate the effect of sexist humor on *Future Possible-*

Selves in the Same TA condition. Participants reported diminished ideations of self only in the

context of David's class, because they believed he would view them through a stigmatized lens.

Future Possible-Selves

The ANOVA on the measure of *Future Possible-Selves* revealed a significant main effect

of humor, F (1, 156) = 18.76, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$. Overall, participants imagined themselves more

positively in the neutral humor conditions ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.67$) than in the sexist humor

conditions ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.94$). Supporting the *Contextual Identity Threat Hypothesis*, this

main effect was qualified by a significant type of humor x TA pairing interaction effect, F (1,

156) = 5.92, $p < .016$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Mean scores for this interaction effect are displayed in Figure 1.
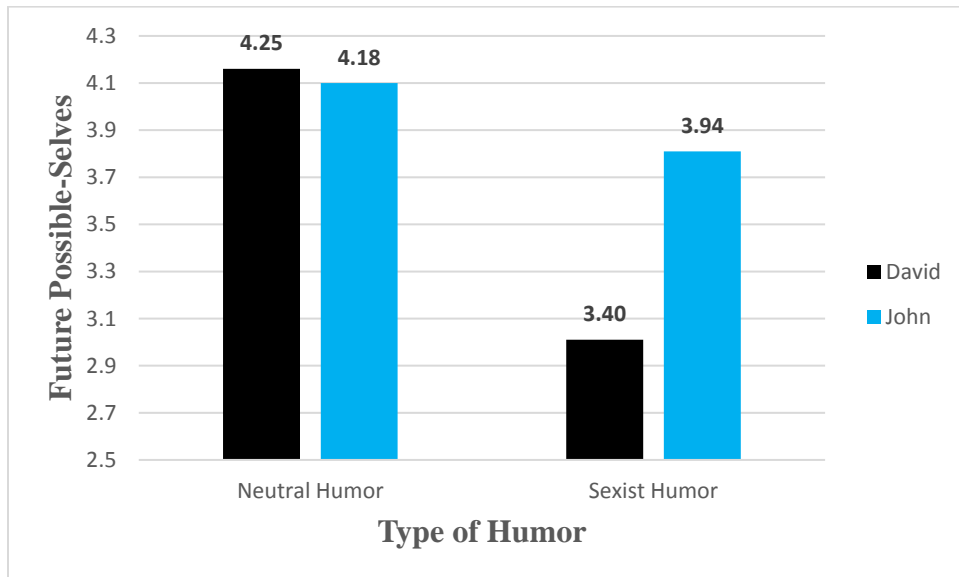
*Figure 1.* Effect of *type of humor* on *Future Possible-Selves*

I further examined this interaction effect by conducting a series of planned comparisons. First, when participants expected to take a class with David they reported less positive *Future Possible-Selves* when David told sexist jokes ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.02$) than when he told neutral jokes ($M = 4.25$, $SD = .65$), $F(1,156) = 24.75$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$. When participants expected to take a class with John, they did not report feeling less positively about themselves when David told sexist jokes ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .64$) versus neutral jokes ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .89$), $F(1, 156) = 1.67$, $p > .05$.

Additionally, when David told sexist jokes, participants reported more negative *Future Possible-Selves* when they expected to work with David ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .87$) than when they expected to work with John ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .72$), $F(1, 156) = 9.00$, $p = .003$. Finally, when David told neutral jokes, participants' *Future Possible-Selves* did not differ when they expected

to work with David (M = 4.25, SD = .65) or John (M = 4.18, SD = .70), F (1, 156) = .171, p > .05.

Bias Anticipation

The ANOVA on the measure of *Bias Anticipation* revealed a significant main effect of type of humor, $F (1,156) = 61.01$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .37$. Overall, participants anticipated more bias from the TA in the sexist-humor conditions, ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.23$) than in the neutral-humor conditions ($M = 2.06$, $SD = .78$). Supporting the *Contextual Identity Threat Hypothesis,* the main effect was qualified with a significant type of humor x TA pairing interaction effect, $F (1,156) = 27.41$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .15$. Mean scores for the interaction effect on the *Bias Anticipation* measure are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The effect of *type of humor* and TA-pairing on *Bias Anticipation*.
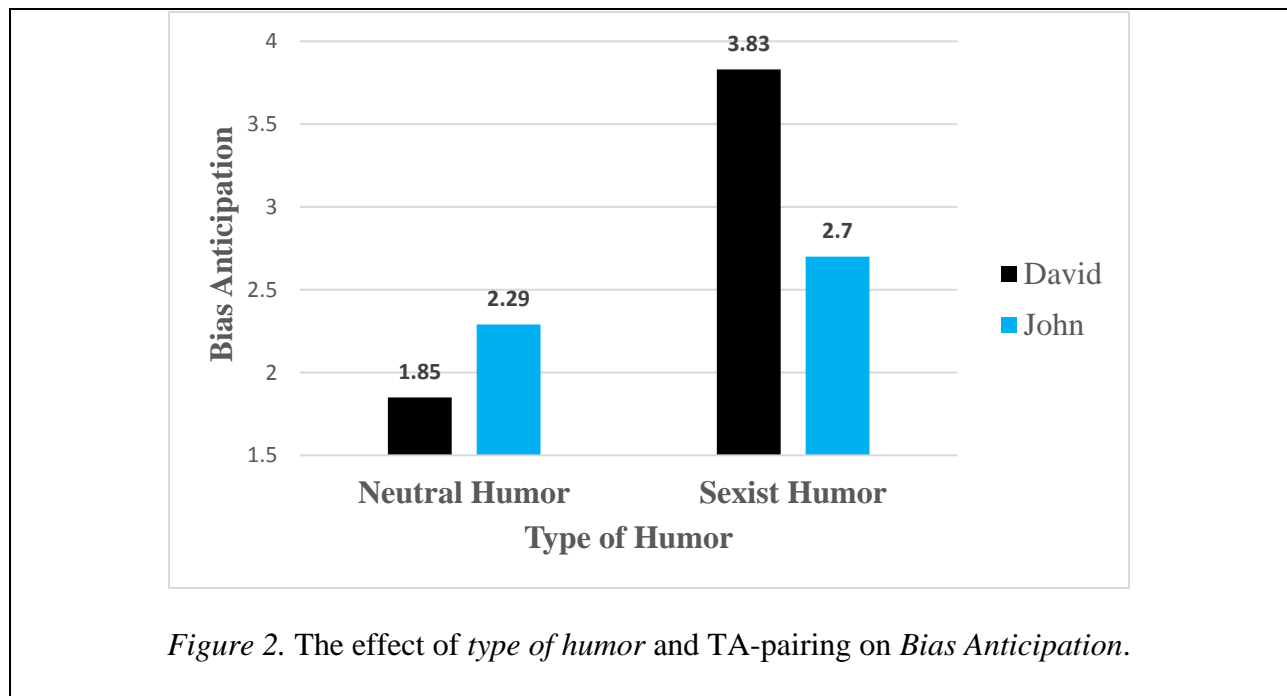
To further investigate the differences on the *Bias Anticipation* measure, I subjected the data to a series of planned comparisons. First, participants anticipated more bias from David when he told sexist jokes, ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.20$) than when he told neutral jokes, ($M = 1.85$, $SD = .78$), $F (1, 156) = 94.96$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .15$. Participants did not expect more bias from John

when David told neutral jokes ($M = 2.29$, $SD = .71$) than when he told sexist jokes ($M = 2.70$, $SD = .95$), $F(1,156) = 3.58$, $p > .05$.

When participants heard David tell sexist jokes, they expected to experience greater bias higher levels of *Bias Anticipation* when they expected to work with David, ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.21$) than when they expected to work with John, ($M = 2.7$, $SD = .95$), $F(1, 156) = 27.77$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .18$. Finally, when David told neutral jokes, participants' levels of *Bias Anticipation* also differed when they expected to work with David, ($M = 1.85$, $SD = .78$) than when they expected to work with John ($M = 2.29$, $SD = .71$), $F(1,156) = 4.46$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .08$

Mediation Analyses

To test my hypothesis that the relationship between BAS and happiness is mediated by self-enhancing humor style, we performed a path analysis following the procedures described by Baron and Kenny (1986; see Figure 3).
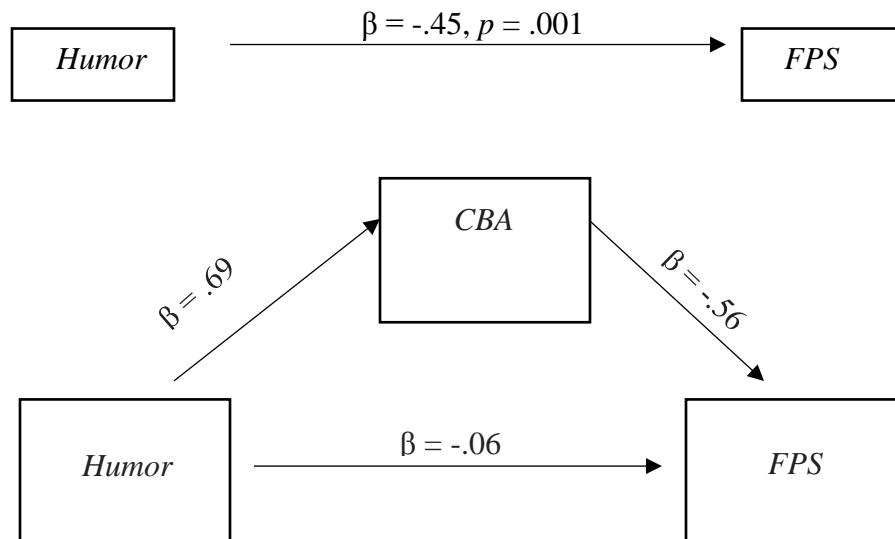

Figure 3. Mediation relationship between *Future Possible-Selves, Bias Anticipation* and *type of humor*

First, I regressed the criterion variable, *Future Possible-Selves*, onto the predictor variable, *type of humor*. This direct path was significant ($\beta = -.45$, $t = -4.61$, $p < .001$). Next, I

regressed the mediator variable, *Bias Anticipation*, onto *type of humor*. That path also was significant ($\beta = .699$, $t = 9.97.78$, $p < .001$). Finally, I regressed *Future Possible-Selves* onto both *Bias Anticipation* and *type of humor*. The path from *Bias Anticipation* to *Future Possible-Selves* was significant ($\beta = -.56$, $t = -4.53$, $p < .001$). However, the direct path from *type of humor* to *Future Possible-Selves* was no longer significant ($\beta = -.06$, $t = -.49$ $p = .62$). A Sobel test revealed that the decrease in the direct path from *type of humor* to *Future Possible-Selves* when *Bias Anticipation* was included in the model (from -.45 to -.06) was significant, $Z = -4.04$, $p < .001$.

In addition, I tested the competing hypotheses using bootstrapping procedures described by Preacher and Hayes (2004), Model 4. The bootstrapping analysis tests whether the indirect effect (i.e., the path from *type of humor* to *Future Possible-Selves* through *Bias Anticipation)* is different from zero by providing a 95% confidence interval for the population value of the indirect effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). If zero is not in the 95% confidence interval the indirect effect is significant at $p < .05$.

Using Preacher and Hayes' (2004) bootstrapping macro for SPSS, I computed bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for 5,000 samples with replacement and found that the indirect effect was significant, as indicated by a confidence interval that did not include zero, 95% CI [-1.18, -.399]. Taken together, my mediation analyses support the *Contextual Identity Threat Hypothesis* suggesting that the relationship between *type of humor* and *Future Possible-Selves* was mediated by *Bias Anticipation*. Women who experienced sexist humor reported diminished *Future Possible-Selves*, at least in part, because they believe that the Teaching Assistant will view them through a stigmatizing lens.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Previous research has shown that sexist humor diminishes women, (Ford, 2000; Ford, 2008, LaFrance & Woodzicka, 1998, Ford, et al., 2015). The goal of the present research was to extend these findings by investigating whether sexist humor diminishes women's stable definitions of self, or whether it only affects women's views of themselves only in the context of the relationship or setting in which the humor occurred. The results of the study support the latter possibility. Women reported less favorable *Future Possible-Selves* only when they imagined that they would interact with the Teaching Assistant who perpetrated the sexist humor. Diminishments of *Future Possible-Selves* were not reported in the presence of neutral humor. Additionally, deflations of self were not evident when women experienced sexist humor, but not encouraged to imagine working in the environment of its origination.

Self-reports on the measure of *Bias Anticipation* were also consistent with those predicted by the *Contextual Identity Hypothesis*. Overall, women reported a higher likelihood that they would be viewed through a stigmatizing lens when they were asked to imagine themselves working with the Teaching Assistant who told sexist jokes. Mediation analyses showed that the higher likelihood of *Contextual Bias* at least partially mediated the relationship between type of humor and *Future Possible-Selves*. More specifically, participants reported lower ideations of self because they expected to be viewed through a stigmatizing lens. They expected that they might be devalued and viewed stereotypically, so they imagined themselves in that diminished way. Finally, women indicated less *Bias Anticipation* when working with David after he told neutral jokes than when they imagined working with John. However, this lends credence to the

notion that humor can play very different roles in social contexts, (Ford, 2004). Overall, type of humor facilitated the level of *Bias* participants expected from their Teaching Assistant.

It appears that the relationships between sexist humor, *Future Possible-Selves* and *Bias Anticipation* are congruent with those results predicted by the *Contextual Identity Threat Hypothesis*, and closely mirror the findings of Brown (1998). A woman's diminishment of self was only prevalent when they were asked to imagine themselves working in a social context that encourages sexist joking. Those social-identity threats only altered her perceptions of herself when they were made to be more relevant and represented some contextual permanency.

The finding that women felt diminished by sexist humor only in the context of a specific relationship raises the more general possibility that threats to one's view of self (to social or personal identities) incorporate the complexities of interpersonal relationships and broader social contexts. This contextual view of self-definition is consistent with the *Sociometric* theory of self-esteem, (Leary, Tambor, Terdal & Downs, 1995). According to *Sociometer* theory, self-esteem is not merely an internal metric of self-worth. Instead, self-esteem exists as an interpersonal gauge, much like the fuel gauge in a car, which encourages an impromptu evaluation of current contextual status (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). If there are no negative cues in the social environment, a woman is likely to have high self-esteem. In contrast, when her environment (i.e., people) implicates that her social-standing is undesirable or unfavorable, her *Sociometer* begins to move towards "empty." (Leary, 2011). These social exclusion cues are what encourage her to evaluate her social-status in the first place. Upon realizing that she is being viewed unfavorably, she may begin acting in ways that restore her social-standing, (Leary & Baumeister, 2000).

This *Sociometric* understanding of social exclusion provide a direct framework for understanding the present research through the lens of the *Contextual Identity Threat Hypothesis*.

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It is possible that women who experienced sexist humor (a social exclusion cue) began to evaluate their social standing. When the social disparagement's relevance was validated, (i.e., when participants were asked to imagine themselves interacting with the Teaching Assistant who told sexist jokes), women reported lower *Future Possible-Selves* than when they were not asked to imagine interactions with the sexist Teaching Assistant. Women in this study were able to compartmentalize the social-identity threats that resulted from sexist humor. Thus, sexist humor only threatens women's social-identity in the context of the humor's origination.

Overall, the *Contextual Identity-Threat Hypothesis* and the *Sociometric* approach of compartmentalization validates the assumption that sexist humor only threatens a woman's social identity in very specific contexts. With self-esteem acting as a monitor of interpersonal value, women were able to make contextual interpretations of themselves. It is likely that these findings represent a larger understanding of how identity-threats might exist only within the context of origination. When a social setting is malleable, identity-threats may be relegated to a status of irrelevance due to cognitive compartmentalization. This devaluation of threat might allow people to elude their momentary exclusion, and leave their social-identities relatively unscathed.

Future Directions

Future research in this paradigm would need to fully investigate the effect of undesirable behavior. It is possible that women imagined themselves in a deflated manner simply because the male Teaching Assistant was behaving undesirably. To address this concern, research should continue to show that women do not report diminished *Future Possible-Selves* when the Teaching Assistant behaves in undesirable ways that does not specifically target women, (i.e. tells jokes that disparage other social groups). Specifically, additional conditions that manipulate

the type of humor need to be added to the current research design. These conditions should include humor that derogates other vulnerable social groups (Muslims, gay men, African-Americans, etc.). A series of ANOVAs should reveal no significant difference in self-reported *Future Possible-Selves* for those women who experience three of the four possible humor conditions, (neutral, anti-Muslim and anti-Gay). However, measures of *Future Possible-Selves* and *Bias Anticipation* should be significantly different for those women who experience sexist humor. This pattern of results would further validate the *Contextual Identity Threat* hypothesis, and address concerns that question the internal validity of the current study.

Additionally, it will be important to show that sexist humor only diminishes women's *Future Possible-Selves*. To address this concern, the present methodology should be expanded to include men. If men do not report diminished *Future Possible-Selves* and heightened levels of *Bias Anticipation* after hearing any undesirable jokes, further conclusions can be drawn. Specifically, these findings would further validate the *Contextual Identity Threat Hypothesis*. They would also further our understanding of the specific threat that sexist humor causes for women. Overall, these two additions will help researchers more fully understand (a) the boundaries for how sexist humor can threaten a woman's sense of self and (b) how interacting with an individual who behaves undesirably affects individuals who are and those who are not the target.

Finally, I must further elaborate on the connection between *Bias Anticipation* and self-esteem. Future research should demonstrate a link between a Rosenberg Self-Esteem score (Rosenberg, 1965) and *Bias Anticipation*. Showing correlations between the two measures would validate my claim that *Bias Anticipation* is a self-report of attentiveness to social-exclusion. This

link would also further validate the conceptual connections between the current research and the

Sociometric view of social-exclusion.

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Please answer the following questions according to how you would view yourself in a semester long study group with the TA to whom you were assigned:

I believe that I will be:

Unqualified	○	○	○	○	○	Well-Qualified
Incompetent	○	○	○	○	○	Competent
Unprepared	○	○	○	○	○	Prepared
Scared	○	○	○	○	○	Confident
Anxious	○	○	○	○	○	Calm
Similar to the TA	○	○	○	○	○	Different from the TA
Not Motivated to Do Well	○	○	○	○	○	Motivated to Do Well
Turned Off by the TA	○	○	○	○	○	Impressed By the TA
Uncomfortable	○	○	○	○	○	Comfortable
The Wrong Person for the Class	○	○	○	○	○	The Right Person for the Class
Not the Student the TA Wanted	○	○	○	○	○	Just the Student the TA Wanted

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE 2

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements, in regards to your semester long interaction with the TA.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
This TA may treat or grade me unfairly.	1	2	3	4	5
This TA could unintentionally make the class environment somewhat uncomfortable for me.	1	2	3	4	5
This TA would be extra helpful in seeing that I do well in the class.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant,

I am writing you to request your participation in a study concerning application standards for Teaching Assistants. We value your participation and the information you can provide is of interest.

You will be asked to watch a short video and to assess a Teaching Assistant.

You will not be identified at any time in this study, and your name will not be used in this research. The researcher will not connect you to the answers you provide. You may choose to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. You may also decline to respond if you do not wish to answer. There is no foreseeable harm to the participants of this study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to discuss them with us. If you would like to discuss this research, you should contact Christopher Breeden at cjbreeden1@catamount.wcu.edu or Dr. Thomas Ford, Associate Professor, Psychology Department, Western Carolina University at tford@wcu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you can reach the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through WCU's Office of Research Administration at 828-227-7212.

If you agree to participate in the research, please select the button entitled, "Continue." If you do not agree to participate, please close your internet browser.

APPENDIX D: SEXIST CONFEDERATE SCRIPT

David: "Hello! My name is David. I am a Senior Teaching Assistant at Western Carolina University. Here at Western, we frequently use TA's to teach classes. This allows professors more freedom from time constraints, and helps students grow into professionals. I am applying for the position of Associate Professor for the Engineering and Mathematics department here at Western. My undergraduate and Master's degrees are both in electrical engineering, and I have a 3.2 GPA in all graduate courses. I have been given a list of three questions that my supervisors would like me to answer, that will help you understand more about who I am and how I teach. Let's see…. It looks like they want me to describe my philosophy about teaching. I believe that students and teachers must create a genuine connection so that the student feels comfortable in the learning environment. I often create a comfortable learning environment for my students by using humor in the classroom. I always start each semester with the same joke, 'Intelligence is important if you are going to be in this field. What do you call a woman who has lost 95% of her intelligence? DIVORCED!!' That one always gets a good laugh. I once had a student comment with his own joke on the first day of class that was better than mine! Let's see if I can remember it, I think it was '…How many feminists does it take to change a light bulb? None – Feminists can't change anything!' The whole class appreciated that joke. I think it's important to create an environment like that where people feel comfortable enough to joke with each-other. Doing so allows the learning environment to change and become more constructive. Let's see, the next question I'm supposed to answer is in regards to what I expect from myself as a Teacher. This is pretty easy for me. I expect myself to be on time and helpful. I expect that I should be available to help my students. I expect myself to be patient and understanding so that the highest success rate of my students can be achieved. This job is essentially service, and it is my job to make sure that students benefit from their time at Western. Finally, the prompt is asking me to describe what I expect from my students. I expect my students to maintain high academic integrity. I expect my students to be punctual and attend class. I encourage students to seek help outside the classroom…'I believe all of my students can succeed…except for the blonde women – they are better off in the kitchen, where the only math they have to learn are the numbers on the outside of the microwave!' If hired, I would be grateful for the opportunity. I thank you for taking this time to give me adequate consideration. Goodbye!

David: "Hello! My name is David. I am a Senior Teaching Assistant at Western Carolina University. Here at Western, we frequently use TA's to teach classes. This allows professors more freedom from time constraints, and helps students grow into professionals. I am applying for the position of Associate Professor for the Engineering and Mathematics department here at Western. My undergraduate and Master's degrees are both in electrical engineering, and I have a 3.2 GPA in all graduate courses. I have been given a list of three questions that my supervisors would like me to answer, that will help you understand more about who I am and how I teach. Let's see…. It looks like they want me to describe my philosophy about teaching. I believe that students and teachers must create a genuine connection so that the student feels comfortable in the learning environment. I often create a comfortable learning environment for my students by using humor in the classroom. I always start each semester with the same joke, 'My dog used to chase people on a bike a lot. It got so bad, I finally had to take his bike away!' That one always gets a good laugh. I once had a student comment with his own joke on the first day of class that was better than mine! Let's see if I can remember it, I think it was, 'What did the pirate say on his 80th birthday? Aye Matey!' The whole class appreciated that joke. I think it's important to create an environment like that where people feel comfortable enough to joke with each-other. Doing so allows the learning environment to change and become more constructive. Let's see, the next question I'm supposed to answer is in regards to what I expect from myself as a Teacher. This is pretty easy for me. I expect myself to be on time and helpful. I expect that I should be available to help my students. I expect myself to be patient and understanding so that the highest success rate of my students can be achieved. This job is essentially service, and it is my job to make sure that students benefit from their time at Western. Finally, the prompt is asking me to describe what I expect from my students. I expect my students to maintain high academic integrity. I expect my students to be punctual and attend class. I encourage students to seek help outside the classroom…'I believe all of my students can succeed…even the student who asked the question: What's the stupidest animal in the tropical rainforest? The polar bear!' If hired, I would be grateful for the opportunity. I thank you for taking this time to give me adequate consideration. Goodbye!

APPENDIX F: CONFEDERATE SELECTION

If randomly assigned to "Same Confederate" conditions:

Participant,
Thank you for watching the video about David. You have been paired with David for the remainder of the study. Please answer the following questions about yourself and about David in regards to possible future interactions.

If randomly assigned to "Different Confederate" conditions:

Participant,
Thank you for watching the video about David. You have been paired with John for the remainder of the study. John is also a Senior Teaching Assistant, and has been working with the University for two years. He maintains an acceptable GPA of 3.2 in all of his Graduate Coursework. John is an electrical engineering major. John is also seeking employment as an Associate Professor at Western Carolina University. Please answer the following questions about yourself and about John in regards to possible future interactions.

APPENDIX G: DEBRIEF

Dear Participant,

    I am writing you to express my gratitude for your completion of my study. As always, we are grateful for your time and effort. I must take this time, however, to explain the study to you. There is more to this study than what I originally told you. You were told that you completed two separate and independent studies today. One study was designed to assess a new measure of interactions between entry-level employees and authority figures. Following your completion of the first study, I told you that it was time to begin the second study. I informed you that the second study was a "Teaching Assistant Application Study," and that you were to rate how effective and well-qualified a prospective TA would be.

    There is more to this study than what I've told you. First, let me explain why I had to deceive you. Often in Social Psychological research, we are interested in how a person responds to a given stimulus in a specific setting. Researchers need these responses to be genuine and authentic. If participants feel as if they understand what the study is truly about, he or she may be inclined to respond in a way that they think conforms to what we are looking for, instead of responding genuinely and authentically. An individual's responses need to be free of bias and influence. Researchers use deceptions to ensure that participants respond to stimuli in a genuine and authentic way.

    The true purpose of this study was to investigate how a woman's social identity may be threatened in a given interaction. It has been shown that sexist humor can target and derogate women. This derogation may influence how a woman responds to her surrounding and how she feels about herself. I hypothesize that being exposed to sexist humor will threaten a woman's sense of self, and influence her future interactions, even with males who haven't offered sexist values.

    The study, "Teaching Assistant Application Study," was designed to measure how a female participant might interact when imagining herself in future interactions. There are four possible conditions for this study. All participants witnessed David's video. In some conditions, David offered jokes that were neutral in nature. In some conditions, David offered sexist jokes that targeted women's intelligence. It is possible that you were told to imagine future interactions with David. Accordingly, you might have been told to imagine future interactions with "John," a different TA.

    I hypothesized that women who experience David's sexism would be more likely to imagine themselves as being less competent in future interactions with David, than those who were asked to fantasize about John. Similarly, I hypothesized that women who experience David's sexism would be more likely to devalue themselves in future interactions with him.

    Again, I thank you for your participation in this study. If at any time you feel like you have been mistreated, please feel free to contact me at cjbreeden@email.wcu.edu. Thank you for your time.