

THE IMPACT OF HUMOR TYPE ON PERCEPTIONS OF TRUSTWORTHINESS

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By

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF HUMOR TYPE ON PERCEPTIONS OF TRUSTWORTHINESS

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When we meet other people for the first time, we quickly “size them up” and form impressions of them based on social categorical variables (e.g. gender) and personal characteristics (e.g. attractive or unattractive, intelligent or dull, etc., Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Jones, 1990). One personal characteristic that affects our initial impression of others is the way they express humor. Furthermore, we form different impressions of people based on the type of humor they express (e.g. Derks & Berkowitz, 1989). The present research endeavors to learn how different types and targets of humor influences our perceptions of a person’s trustworthiness (comprised of perceived integrity and ability to fulfill a promise). It was hypothesized that benign, nondisparaging humor would increase perceived trustworthiness, while disparaging humor would decrease perceived trustworthiness. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that the target of disparaging humor would affect how much the humor affects trustworthiness perceptions. In each of three studies, participants view a video of a new addition to their workplace and evaluate that person’s trustworthiness along the dimensions of ability and integrity. In Study 1, the videos differ by the type of humor (e.g. nondisparaging, other-disparaging, self-disparaging, no humor) displayed by the person. Study 2 and Study 3 explore the boundary conditions for the effects of other-disparaging humor by manipulating the target of the humor, deriving targets from the Normative Window Model (Study 2; Crandall, Ferguson, & Bahns, 2013) and Social Identity

Theory (Study 3; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Study 1 provides no evidence that humor increases perceptions of the joker's trustworthiness, but does show that other-disparaging humor can have a detrimental effect. Results from Study 2 and Study 3 provides evidence that disparaging humor against some targets have less of a detrimental effect than others.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Oliver has established himself as perhaps the most disruptive journalist on television.”

– Vanity Fair “New Establishment List” (Bilton, et al., 2015)

“I’m not a journalist at all, obviously. Obviously, I’m a comedian.”

– John Oliver (CBS This Morning, 2015)

Despite John Oliver’s vocal insistence that he is a comedian, many regard him as a credible source of information, frequently labeling him as a journalist (Variety, 2018; Vanity Fair, 2015). He was named one of Time’s “100 Most Influential People” in 2015, and his HBO show “Last Week Tonight” has been nominated for the Television Critics Association’s award for “Outstanding Achievement in News and Information” every year since 2015; TCA has yet to nominate the show for their “Outstanding Achievement in Comedy” award (Television Critics Association, n.d.). Fellow comedians Samantha Bee, host of TBS’s “Full Frontal with Samantha Bee,” and Jon Stewart, former host of “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart,” hold reputations similar to Oliver’s. In fact, a 2007 poll revealed Stewart as the fourth most trusted journalist in the country, tying Tom Brokaw, Dan Rather, and Anderson Cooper (Pew Research Center, 2007).

Reputations like these are not exclusive to political comedians either. In a 2013 poll of its readership, Reader’s Digest revealed that people consider comedians Ellen DeGeneres, Whoopi Goldberg, and Adam Sandler more trustworthy than then-President of the United States Barack Obama. The same poll showed that Judith Sheindlin (better known as “Judge Judy”) was more trusted than any of the U.S. Supreme Court Justices (Smith, 2013). Furthermore, a former public relations director for Coca Cola once made the following declaration in a magazine interview:

“the three most believable personalities are God, Walter Cronkite, and Bill Cosby,” referring to the company’s enthusiasm to have Bill Cosby as a spokesperson for their product (Gayle, 1981). Indeed, in many articles reporting on Cosby (even current articles referring to his sentencing for sexual assault), the reporters bring up Cosby’s reputation as “America’s Dad” (Dent, 2018).

Evidently, these comedians capture the trust of their viewers, which presents an interesting paradox: humor as a medium of communication, signals to its audience that underlying message content is merely a joke and not to be taken seriously or literally, however people perceive comedians and political satirists as trustworthy, reliable sources of information.

The key to understanding this paradox could lie in the power that humor seems to have on its audience. Plenty of evidence suggests that humor can influence our perceptions of people; we perceive funny people as more extraverted, more intelligent, more confident, and less neurotic than less funny people (Cann & Calhoun, 2001; Decker, 1987; Kuiper & Leite, 2010; Priest & Swain, 2002). Part of the reason for this appears to be that humor engenders positive affect in its audience (e.g. Cann, Holt, & Calhoun, 1999; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987), a mental state which has been shown to view people and situations in a more positive light (e.g. Baron, 1987).

Trust plays an important role in all types of relationships. Trust informs how interactions within the relationship will occur, and whether the relationship will last. It is viewed as so important that betrayal, or the breaking of trust, constitutes the deepest layer of Hell in *Dante’s Inferno*, written in the 14th century. Thus, strong impressions of another person’s trustworthiness encourage the continuation of the relationship, while lack of trustworthiness signifies the end.

Given the ubiquity of humor and the importance of trust, I will examine how one’s use of humor affects perceptions of their trustworthiness. First, I will determine if one’s use of benign

(non-disparaging) humor positively affects overall perceptions of their trustworthiness and whether this effect is mediated by positive affect. Second, I will determine whether one's use of self-disparaging and other-disparaging humor differentially affects perceptions of two components of trust: integrity and ability to fulfill a promise.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Trustworthiness

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) defined *trust* as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party.” Thus, two people are involved in trust: someone who is to be trusted (trustee), and someone to do the trusting (trustor). Several characteristics influence trust: the trustee’s ability, benevolence, and integrity, and the trustor’s propensity to trust and affective state (Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman, Mayer, and Davis, 2007).

Concerning qualities of the trustee, it is important to note that trustworthiness is a multi-dimensional construct resulting from the judgement of three separate factors. The first is *ability*, defined as “the group of skills, competencies, and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain.” Importantly, a perceiver evaluates ability by the skills required in a specific situation or task. For example, one may trust their accountant to handle their taxes, but would not necessarily trust that accountant to repair their car. Thus, ability serves as an essential antecedent to trust.

The second factor is *benevolence*, defined as “the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor, aside from an egocentric profit motive.” It is the perception that the trustee has a positive personal orientation towards the trustor. If the trustee shows care for the trustor’s best interests, the trustee demonstrates their benevolence.

The last factor of trustworthiness detailed by Mayer et al. (1995) is *integrity*, defined as the “perception that the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable.” The key parts of this definition are the adherence to and acceptability of a set of rules. Perceivers

consider many things when evaluating a trustee's integrity, such as the consistency of their past actions, whether they have a firm sense of justice, and the extent to which they keep their word.

The effect of integrity on trustworthiness is at its strongest early in relationships, while the effect of benevolence grows stronger over time as the relationship develops. For this reason, lab studies often show high correlations between integrity and benevolence. Since benevolence is not highly salient to the perceiver at the start of a relationship, I will consider only ability and integrity in the present study.

Beyond qualities of the trustee, qualities of the trustor also influence trust. To explain individual differences in people's base trust levels, Mayer et al. (1995) outlined the concept of *propensity to trust*. Specifically, they defined propensity as "the general willingness to trust others." This stable trait influences how much trust a person has for someone prior to having any information about them. Those with high propensity are more willing to trust others, while those with low are less inclined to trust others.

Beyond stable traits, temporary affective states also influence a trustor's willingness to trust. Schoorman, Mayer, and Davis (2007) reviewed findings that the trustor's affective state clouds judgment, creating a temporary "irrationality" over evaluations of the factors of trustworthiness. Relevant to the current research, higher positive affect should engender stronger perceptions of trustworthiness. Supporting this notion, Mislin, Williams, and Shaughnessy (2015) found people experiencing positive affect (induced through both a video of waddling penguins and a recall task in which participants write about a happy memory) were more willing to trust an anonymous partner in a trust game than those in a neutral emotion control group (induced through an unemotional video of random sticks piling up, no recall task). Along that same line, Baron (1993) found that when role-playing as an interviewer for an entry-level job,

participants experiencing positive affect (induced through recalling a happy event) rated an ambiguously-qualified job candidate (confederate) more favorably than did participants in the negative affect (induced through recalling a sad event) and control conditions (no recall task). In short, while experiencing positive affect, people are more willing to trust others.

Humor Styles

Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and Weir (2003) distinguished between four humor styles based on whether humor is used to benefit the self or one’s relationships with others and whether the humor is benign or derogatory (see Table 1).

Table 1

Depiction of Martin et al.’s (2003) four humor styles as a function of who benefits from the humor and whether the humor is benign or derogatory.

		Who benefits from the humor?	
		Self	Relationships With Others
At whose Expense?	No one’s Expense: Beneficial	Self-enhancing Humor	Affiliative Humor
	Someone’s Expense: Detrimental	Others’ expense: Aggressive Humor	One’s own Expense: Self-defeating Humor

Illustration from Martin and Ford (2018).

As one can see from Table 1, people with a self-enhancing humor style use humor for *intrapersonal* reasons, that is, to enhance or maintain positive psychological well-being and distance themselves from adversity. They maintain a humorous outlook on life, coping with difficult circumstances by viewing them from a humorous perspective (Cann et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2003). Because self-enhancing humor is strictly intrapersonal and not relational, I will not examine the relationship between one's use of self-enhancing humor and perceptions of how trustworthy they are.

People characterized as having an affiliative humor style use benign, non-disparaging humor for *interpersonal* reasons, that is, to amuse and entertain others. Affiliative humor functions to enhance relationships and reduce interpersonal tension. Evidence for the interpersonal nature of this style comes from its strong correlations with extraversion and openness to experience (Martin et al., 2003).

People with an aggressive humor style engage in humor that disparages or "hurts" others as a means of criticizing or manipulating others. They tease and ridicule others to demonstrate their superiority over others, without concern for others' well-being; as might be expected, this style is associated with greater interpersonal hostility and aggression (Martin et al., 2003).

Self-defeating humor style involves the excessive use of self-disparaging humor to enhance relationships with others and allowing oneself to be the target of others' jokes. This negative style enhances relationships with others at the expense of the self and is associated with low self-esteem and problem avoidance (Stieger, Formann, & Burger, 2011), as well as less satisfaction with their social support (Martin et al., 2003).

Humor and Perceived Trustworthiness

Research has addressed the connection between humor and the concept of trust in general. Hampes (1999), for instance, reported positive correlations between a person's sense of humor and their propensity to trust others. Other research suggests that the positive affect that humor elicits, rather than humor itself, influences perceptions of a person's trustworthiness, specifically their integrity. Kurtzberg, Naquin, and Belkin (2009) asked pairs of participants to engage in an online negotiation task and showed that sharing nondisparaging humor (*Dilbert* cartoon) prior to the negotiation resulted in greater perceptions of integrity in their partner.

Gkorezis and Bellou (2016) explored the effects of "self-deprecating" humor used by a leader in an organization. Self-deprecating humor was conceptualized in their study as a tool of the affiliative humor style, such that it enhances relationships without being detrimental to the self (as opposed to self-disparaging humor). In this cross-sectional design, participants (MBA students, working adults, and supervisors) reported the extent to which their supervisors used self-deprecating humor, how much they trusted their supervisor (measured in terms of integrity). The results indicated that using self-deprecating humor (in an affiliative manner) leads to higher perceptions of integrity. But because self-deprecating humor in this study fell more under the umbrella of "affiliative humor" rather than "self-disparaging", and because they did not measure other types of humor, their study does not directly address how the use of different types of humor affect perceived trustworthiness.

Hackman (1988) provides the strongest evidence of different humor types on perceptions of trustworthiness. He examined how different types of humor used by a public speaker influenced perceptions of that speaker. Participants were exposed to one of three informative speeches on the topic of "Effective Listening". One speech contained instances of self-

disparaging humor, in which the speaker mocked his personal shortcomings. Another condition involved the use of other-disparaging humor, in which the speaker poked fun at his brother's personal shortcomings. The final condition contained no humor. The results showed that participants perceived speakers using self-disparaging humor as having less ability than the speaker in the no humor condition. Furthermore, they rated speakers that used other-disparaging humor as having less integrity than the speaker in the no humor condition. However, an important limitation of their study is the lack of a nondisparaging humor condition. Without that condition, it is not possible to disentangle how much of the observed variance was due to the humorous nature of the speech versus the disparaging content of the speech. Regardless, it seems different types of humor have different effects on the audience's perceptions of the speaker.

Present Research

In the present research, I examine the effects of different types of humor on initial perceptions of trustworthiness (Study 1). From the humor styles model and relevant literature described above, I derived the following three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1.1: People perceive another person that engages in benign, non-disparaging humor as more trustworthy because such humor elicits a general, positive affective evaluation.

Hypothesis 1.2: People should perceive a person who engages in self-disparaging humor as having less *ability* to fulfill a promise (Hackman, 1988) but greater *integrity* (Gkorezis and Bellou, 2016).

Hypothesis 1.3: People should perceive a person who engages in other-disparaging humor as *less* trustworthy, as this diminishes perceptions of their integrity (Hackman, 1988).

Participants will view a video of a job candidate and report how trustworthy that candidate is. When assigned to the video in which the candidate uses nondisparaging humor, participants should perceive him to be more trustworthy (relative to a non-humorous candidate). When the candidate uses self-disparaging humor, the candidate should be viewed

In addition, I describe two follow-up studies with the aim of determining the importance of the target of other-disparaging humor, using similar video protocols in each. That is, are some targets considered “acceptable” targets, such that they will not adversely affect the joker’s trustworthiness? I derive hypotheses from two prejudice frameworks to determine how humor target influences trustworthiness, elaborated upon below. Study 2’s model defines targets by their social group’s position in society, while Study 3’s model defines targets by their relationship to the participant.

CHAPTER THREE: STUDY 1

Method

In Study 1, I anticipate that nondisparaging humor, other-disparaging humor, and self-disparaging humor affect trustworthiness in different ways. To test this, participants engage in a role play scenario in which they imagine they are advising a hiring manager about whether to hire a job candidate. Participants view a video of the candidate's interview, in which the candidate uses some form of humor (or no humor at all). They will then rate the trustworthiness of the candidate (in terms of ability and integrity) and report their own propensity to trust and affective state. I predict that the candidate using nondisparaging humor will be seen as more trustworthy (relative to the no humor condition). The candidate using other-disparaging humor will be seen as less trustworthy, particularly in terms of integrity. Lastly, the candidate using self-disparaging humor will be seen as having less ability, but more integrity.

Participants and Design

For this study, 313 participants (ages 18+) were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (mTurk) in exchange for \$0.40. Of these, 241 participants were included in analysis (the others failed attention checks, reported participating in pilot testing, or commented in Spanish). The median age was 35 years old, and more participants were male ($n = 130$) than female ($n = 111$). Each participant was randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a between-subjects design: nondisparaging humor, self-disparaging humor, other-disparaging humor, or a no-humor (control) group. To determine the minimum sample size, I conducted an a priori power analysis in G*Power 3 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). Assuming propensity would be treated

as a covariate and assuming $\alpha = .05$, power = 80%, and a medium effect size (Cohen's $f = 0.25$), the power analysis required a minimum of 179 participants across the four conditions. Post hoc power analysis with the usable sample size reveal the study achieved 99.98% power.

Pilot Test

The videos in each condition were pilot-tested to ensure each represent their intended humor type. Pilot study participants were randomly assigned to view one of four videos (representing my manipulation of the candidate's type of humor), and rate the candidate in terms of his qualifications, funniness, self-disparaging nature, and other-disparaging natures of the candidate along 7-point scales (see Appendix H for pilot test measures). Separate one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted on each dependent variable (funniness, perceived other-disparagement, perceived self-disparagement, qualification). Overall, the results show support the effectiveness of the manipulation.

The nondisparaging humor video ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 2.09$) and self-disparaging humor video ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 2.08$) were both rated as significantly more funny than the no humor video ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.51$), $p = .01$ and $p = .04$, respectively. The difference between the other-disparaging video ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.79$) and the no humor video was not significant, $p = .76$; however, several comments in our manipulation check suggest that humor was acknowledged in the other-disparaging condition, but believed the humor was inappropriate for an interview scenario. For example, one participant explained their poor evaluation of the candidate by writing: "He should maybe consider a job in stand up comedy. I dont [sic] think his comment [sic] were appropriate for a job interview, would make one wonder how his comments would affect harmony in the work place."

The candidate in the other-disparaging humor video was perceived as using more other-disparaging humor ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 2.15$) than the candidates in the nondisparaging humor video ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.70$; $p = .004$), the self-disparaging humor video ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.75$; $p = .001$), and the no humor video ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.35$; $p < .001$).

The candidate in the self-disparaging humor video was perceived as more self-disparaging ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 1.55$) than the candidate in either the other-disparaging humor video ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.69$) and in the no humor video ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.47$), $p < .001$ for both cases. The difference between the self-disparaging humor video and the nondisparaging humor video ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.59$) was not significant, $p = .12$. However, the participant's comments showed differences in content between the two videos. Comments in response to the nondisparaging humor video indicated a sense that the candidate was nervous, but participants' comments tended to reflect a positive evaluation of the candidate. Conversely, several comments responding to the self-disparaging humor video focused on the candidate's tendency towards belittling himself, and evaluations of the candidate were a noticeably more polarized. Coupled with the literal wording of the jokes, these comments suggest that participants perceived these videos as different types of humor; the high self-disparaging scores in the nondisparaging video seem to reflect a perception of discomfort rather than a perception of actual self-disparagement.

Lastly, the candidate in the no humor video was rated as ambiguously qualified for the position ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.30$); in other words, the candidate was not viewed as particularly under-qualified or over-qualified for the position. This was important to verify, as Baron (1993) found that positive affect has its most desirable effect when the candidate is ambiguously-qualified.

Procedure and Materials

Participants were asked to imagine that a hiring manager has asked for their advice on a candidate who had recently interviewed at a company they work for. After consenting to participate in the study, participants read a brief job description explaining the nature of a job they will be hiring for. The role was titled “Junior Manager” and described as an entry-level position requiring skills such as leadership, public speaking, and organization (see Appendix D for the full job description).

After reading the job description, participants viewed a video of a candidate (“Michael”) interviewing for the Junior Manager position. Each question (supposedly posed to the candidate by an off-screen interviewer) appeared on the screen for five seconds, and the candidate provided a brief 2-4 sentence answer. These questions targeted the candidate’s skills, history, ambitions, and reasons for wanting the job (e.g. “Why do you want this job?”; see Appendix E for full script). The candidate’s demeanor and responses indicated that he was an average candidate in terms of qualifications. I consulted with a professional recruiter to determine appropriate questions and answers for these videos (J. Mosberg, personal communication, April 17, 2018).

During the course of the video, the candidate incorporated either nondisparaging humor, self-disparaging humor, other-disparaging humor, or no humor into his responses to the interview questions (see Appendix E). For example, when asked “Would you consider yourself to be a good public speaker?” the candidate responded with one of the following answers:

Nondisparaging: I’m pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. **The secret is to use the right gestures; jazz hands are not the way to go in most cases *the actors waves his hands enthusiastically***

Other-Disparaging: I'm pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. I would speak like a poet, and the other students would blow it!

Self-Disparaging: I'm pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. And I don't think it was because of my "good looks"! *air quotes*

No Humor: I'm pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations.

After viewing the video, participants reported their perceptions of the candidate's ability, benevolence, and integrity on a 17-item scale derived from Mayer and Davis (1999). Six of those items assess perceptions of ability. For example, one ability item reads "I feel very confident about the candidate's skills." Five items assess perceptions of the candidate's benevolence. A sample item reads "The company's needs and desires are very important to the candidate." The remaining six items assess perceptions of the candidate's integrity. One integrity item reads "I like the candidate's values." Response options on this scale range from 1 (*Disagree strongly*) to 5 (*Agree strongly*). Each scale is included in Appendix A. I computed an overall measure of trustworthiness by averaging all of the ability and integrity items together, for which Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$. For the ability subscale, Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$, and for the integrity subscale, Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$ (Cronbach, 1951).

Next, participants reported their current affective states via the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1998). The scale consists of twenty words that reflect different feelings and emotions (Appendix B). Participants read each word and indicate to what extent they feel that way at that current moment. Ten of the items reflect

dimensions of positive affect (i.e. “Interested” and “Enthusiastic”), while the other ten reflect dimensions of negative affect (i.e. “Nervous” and “Irritable”). Response options on this scale range from 1 (*Very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*Extremely*). I averaged the ten items reflecting positive affect into an overall score of positive affect, for which Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$. As I had no hypotheses regarding negative affect, these items were excluded from analysis.

Next, to maintain the cover story, participants decided whether to hire or reject the candidate. They were prompted with the statement “This candidate should be hired as the Junior Manager” and the response options ranged from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Participants were also instructed to write 1-2 sentences explaining their decision & thoughts on the candidate.

Lastly, participants reported their propensity to trust on another scale from Mayer and Davis (1999). Response options ranged from 1 (*Disagree strongly*) to 5 (*Agree strongly*). A sample item reads “Most people can be counted on to do what they say they will do” (see Appendix A). The scale showed adequate reliability, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .76$. Following this, participants completed some standard demographics questions, wrote their thoughts on their experience, and were debriefed.

The use of a job interview was selected for the relationship scenario for two reasons. First, it marks the start of a professional relationship, and thus removes external reasons to trust. Secondly, ability is strongly salient in interviews, as it is required for the job. At the same time, however, interviewers also attempt to gauge other variables, such as a candidate’s work ethic and genuine interest in working for the company.

Results

To test my hypotheses, I use separate one-way analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) on each dependent variable (overall trustworthiness, ability, integrity), with humor type (nondisparaging humor, other-disparaging humor, self-disparaging humor, no humor) serving as a between-subjects factor. Bivariate correlations confirmed that propensity was an appropriate covariate, given its significant relationship with overall trustworthiness, ability, and integrity ($r = .35$, $r = .32$, and $r = .32$, respectively; $p < .001$ for each correlation). Specific planned contrasts were conducted to tests my hypotheses. Lastly, to fully enumerate on significant effects, I conducted post hoc pairwise comparisons, using the Sidak procedure to control for inflated Type I error.

Test of Hypothesis 1.1

Recall that Hypothesis 1.1 states that the use of nondisparaging humor increases perceptions of trustworthiness through the generation of positive affect. I first conducted a one-way ANCOVA to determine the effect of humor type on overall trustworthiness. Table 2 displays the means and standard deviations for overall trustworthiness for each experimental condition. The effect of humor type was significant, $F(3, 236) = 9.33$, $p < .001$, with a small effect size, $\eta_p^2 = .11$ (Cohen, 1966).

Since humor type has an effect on overall trustworthiness, I proceeded to test the effect of humor type on positive affect (my proposed mediator). I subjected positive affect scores to a one-way ANCOVA as described above. The ANCOVA was not significant, $F(3, 236) = 1.07$, $p = .36$, and planned contrasts revealed no significant differences in positive affect across the four

humor type conditions. Since positive affect was not affected by the humor manipulation, the assumptions for mediation analysis outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) are not met, thus we could not treat it as a mediator.

Given the failed mediation analysis, I enumerated on the direct effect of humor type on overall trustworthiness with pairwise comparisons. Participants reported lower overall trustworthiness in the other-disparaging humor condition ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 0.84$) than in the nondisparaging humor and no humor conditions, $p < .001$ (for both comparisons). No other comparisons were significant. Thus, there is no support for Hypothesis 1.1.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations (SD) for Trustworthiness Variables in Each Condition

	Nondisparaging Humor	Other- Disparaging Humor	Self- Disparaging Humor	No Humor
Overall Trustworthiness	3.65 (0.67) ^a	3.03 (0.84) ^b	3.36 (0.63) ^{ab}	3.60 (0.61) ^a
Ability	3.59 (0.83) ^c	3.05 (0.95) ^d	3.37 (0.77) ^{cd}	3.57 (0.74) ^c
Integrity	3.71 (0.63) ^e	3.01 (0.88) ^f	3.36 (0.58) ^{fg}	3.63 (0.57) ^{efg}
Sample Size per condition	65	56	56	64

Note. Means on the same line that do not share any superscripts are significantly different from each other, $p < .05$.

Test of Hypothesis 1.2

Hypothesis 1.2 states that other-disparaging humor reduces perceptions of integrity. The one-way ANCOVA on integrity. The effect of humor type was significant, $F(3, 236) = 12.56$, p

< .001, with a small effect size, $\eta_p^2 = .14$. Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics for integrity in each experimental condition. Following up on this significant effect, a planned contrast comparing the other-disparaging humor condition (coded as -1) to the no humor condition (coded as +1) supports Hypothesis 1.2. The comparison was significant; the candidate was seen as having less integrity in the other-disparaging humor condition ($M = 3.01, SD = 0.88$) compared to the no humor condition ($M = 3.63, SD = 0.57$), $t(238) = 4.72, p < .001$, with a medium effect size, $r^2 = .09$. Thus, Hypothesis 1.2 is supported.

To further investigate the significant effect of humor type, I conducted pairwise comparisons, again using the Sidak procedure. Participants reported greater perceptions of integrity in the nondisparaging humor condition ($M = 3.71, SD = 0.63$) compared to the self-disparaging humor condition ($M = 3.36, SD = 0.58$), $p = .02$. Integrity ratings in the nondisparaging humor condition were also significantly higher than those in the other-disparaging humor condition, $p < .001$. No other comparisons were significant.

Test of Hypothesis 1.3

Hypothesis 1.3 states that self-disparaging humor reduces perceptions of ability, and increases perceptions of integrity. The previous ANCOVA failed to provide evidence that perceived integrity is increased. Turning to the ability portion, the effect of humor type was significant, $F(2, 236) = 4.71, p = .003$, with a small effect size, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. I performed a planned contrast comparing the self-disparaging humor condition (coded as -1) to the no humor condition (coded as +1). Contrary to my hypothesis, the comparison was not significant; there was no difference in the candidate's perceived ability between the self-disparaging humor condition (M

= 3.37, $SD = 0.77$) and the no humor condition ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.74$), $t(238) = 1.49$, $p = .14$, $r^2 = .01$, a small effect size.

I followed up on the significant effect of humor type with pairwise comparisons, again using the Sidak procedure. Participants rated the candidate as having less ability in the other-disparaging humor condition ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.95$) than in the nondisparaging humor ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.83$) and no humor conditions, $p = .008$ and $p = .007$, respectively. No other comparisons were significant.

Discussion

Study 1 tested how a person's use of different humor styles impacted perceptions of that person's trustworthiness, while controlling for individual participants' propensity to trust. Contrary to Hypothesis 1.1 and Hypothesis 1.3, nondisparaging humor and self-disparaging humor appeared to have no effect on overall trustworthiness or its individual components (ability and integrity) – participants did not perceive a job candidate as significantly more or less trustworthy when they used these types of humor. However, other-disparaging humor was shown to reduce perceptions of not just integrity (as predicted in Hypothesis 1.2), but also perceptions of ability.

But something does not add up here. Several of the trusted funny people I mentioned in the introduction have a tendency to use other-disparaging humor. Jon Stewart would frequently lampoon politicians, Adam Sandler cracks jokes at his parents' expense, and Judge Judy frequently ridicules the people appearing in her courtroom; and yet all of these people appear to be trusted. This conundrum poses a new question: are some targets of humor "safe" to make fun of (in that they mitigate the trust liability observed in Study 1)? To begin answering this

question, Study 2 and Study 3 use different prejudice frameworks to determine the influence of the target of other-disparaging humor on trustworthiness.

CHAPTER FOUR: STUDY 2

The purpose of Study 2 is to explore how different targets of humor affect a person's perceived trustworthiness. For this study, we selected groups based on the normative window model of prejudice (Crandall, Ferguson, & Bahns, 2013). This model posits that social groups fall in one of three categories based on whether a society permits prejudice against the group, and how widely that prejudice is shared within the society (see Figure 1 below). The left-most category is the "justified prejudice" window; this entails groups against whom prejudice is considered well-deserved, and is indeed the social norm. Some examples include racists and terrorists. On the other end of the spectrum are the "unjustified prejudice" groups. Very few people actually harbor prejudice for groups in this window, and society largely agrees that it is unacceptable to have prejudice against such groups. Some examples include doctors/nurses and grandmothers. Between these two categories is the "normative ambiguity window". These groups are facing emerging norms of nonprejudiced, but those norms are not universally endorsed. As such, they are considered to be disadvantaged and thus prejudice is considered to be unjustified by the larger society, but attitudes towards them are ambivalent within members of the larger society. Some people hold positive affect towards them, others feel negative affect; the norm of prejudice is not consensual. Some examples in this window are women and gay people.

Figure 1

Normative Window Model of Prejudice.

Justified Prejudice Window	Normative Ambiguity Window	Unjustified Prejudice Window
E.g. Racists, Terrorists	E.g. Women, Racial Minorities	E.g. Doctors, Grandmothers

Entirely socially acceptable prejudices

Entirely socially unacceptable prejudices

Ford, Woodzicka, Triplett, Kochersberger, & Holden (2014) established that people respond to other-disparaging humor that targets normative ambiguity and justified prejudice groups differently. Specifically, they found that while disparaging humor targeting groups in the normative ambiguity window fosters discrimination, there is no such effect for the justified prejudice groups – social norms already approve of expressing prejudice against these groups. However, no study to date has examined how the groups targeted by humor affects our perceptions of a person telling the jokes. Because social norms condone the expression of prejudice against justified prejudice groups, I propose that disparaging humor directed at justified prejudice groups will not result in decreased perceptions of trustworthiness. Based on the normative window model and the results of Study 1, I derived the following new hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2.1 People should suffer less of a trust liability from mocking justified prejudice groups than if they mock normative ambiguity or unjustified prejudice groups.

Due to the lack of research on humor targeting unjustified prejudice groups, I did not make any a priori hypotheses specific to that category, but I will explore it through post hoc comparisons.

Method

In Study 2, I anticipate that other-disparaging humor will affect trustworthiness in different ways depending the target of the humor. To test this, participants go through the same protocol as Study 1, this time with different videos to manipulate the target of the humor. They will then rate the trustworthiness of the candidate and report their general propensity to trust. I predict that the candidate mocking justified prejudice targets will lose less trustworthiness (relative to the nondisparaging humor condition) than the candidate mocking normative ambiguity targets.

Participants and Design

A total of 299 participants (ages 18+) were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (mTurk) in exchange for \$0.40. Of these, 226 participants were included in analysis (the others failed attention checks, reported participating in pilot testing, or commented in Spanish). The median age was 33 years old, and more participants were female (n = 128) than male (n = 98). Each participant was randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a between-subjects design based on the target of the candidate's humor: justified prejudice target, normative ambiguity target, unjustified prejudice target, or a nondisparaging (control) group. To determine the minimum sample size, I conducted an a priori power analysis in G*Power 3 (Faul, Erdfelder,

Lang, & Buchner, 2007). Assuming propensity would be treated as a covariate and assuming $\alpha = .05$, power = 80%, and a medium effect size (Cohen's $f = 0.25$), the power analysis required a minimum of 179 participants across the four conditions. Post hoc power analysis with the usable sample size reveal the study achieved 99.50% power.

Pilot Test

As in Study 1, the videos in each condition were pilot-tested to ensure each represent their intended category and were equally funny. Pilot study participants viewed one video each and rated the funniness, as well as how much the candidate mocked each group joked about across all videos, all along 7-point scales (see Appendix I for pilot test questions). Each of these dependent variables were subjected to a one-way ANOVA, using the video condition as a between-subjects variable. The manipulations proved successful; the candidate was seen as equally funny across all four videos (see Table 3).

To determine how disparaging the candidate was of the different windows, participants were asked to rate the extent to which the candidate made fun of each groups mentioned in any video. The responses to those questions were subjected to a reliability analysis, and then averaged into their window-level disparagement score. Specifically, the items asking about how much the candidate made disparaging remarks against convicts, suicide bombers, and racists (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$) were averaged together to create an index of "justified disparagement," or the representation of how critical the candidate was of justified prejudice groups. The same was repeated for normative ambiguity groups (women, gay people, black people; Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$) and unjustified prejudice groups (doctors, grandmothers, veterans; Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$). As expected, the candidate in the justified prejudice target condition was perceived as more

disparaging of justified groups ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.32$) than the candidate in normative ambiguity target condition ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 1.37$; $p < .001$), the unjustified prejudice target condition ($M = 1.48$, $SD = 0.91$; $p < .001$) or the no target condition ($M = 1.04$, $SD = 0.20$; $p < .001$); the candidate in the normative ambiguity target condition was perceived as more disparaging of women, gay people, and black people than the candidates in the other videos; and the candidate in the unjustified target condition was perceived as more disparaging of doctors, grandmothers, and veterans than the candidates in the other videos (see Table 3).

The candidate in the nondisparaging humor video was rated as ambiguously qualified for the position ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.21$).

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations for Study 2 Pilot Test

	Justified Target	Normative Target	Unjustified Target	No Target
Funniness	2.32 (1.79) ^a	1.56 (1.38) ^a	2.35 (1.87) ^a	2.50 (1.48) ^a
Justified Disparagement	5.00 (1.32) ^b	1.95 (1.37) ^c	1.48 (0.91) ^{cd}	1.04 (0.20) ^d
Normative Disparagement	1.38 (0.80) ^e	5.54 (1.80) ^f	1.46 (0.80) ^e	1.01 (0.07) ^e
Unjustified Disparagement	1.35 (0.69) ^g	1.22 (0.60) ^g	5.49 (1.01) ^h	1.05 (0.18) ^g
Sample Size per cell	28	34	23	26

Note. Means that do not share a superscript are significantly different from each other, $p < .05$.

Procedure and Materials

The procedure and measures for Study 2 were identical to Study 1. Specifically, participants read the same job description (Junior Manager) and watch the same candidate (Michael) applying for the job, and rated Michael on the same traits (trustworthiness) using the same measures. The only difference between the two studies was the videos used to manipulate the independent variable. This time, I used a nondisparaging humor video as the control condition (as opposed to a no humor video as in Study 1) to ensure the conditions only differed by target (as opposed to including manipulation could not be due to a difference in funniness. In the other videos, the candidate made jokes that disparaged groups in one of the three windows of the normative window model. The groups targeted by the candidate were selected from literature about the model (e.g. Crandall, Ferguson, & Bahns, 2013; Ford et al., 2014). In the justified prejudice target condition, the candidate made jokes about racists, convicts, and suicide bombers. In the normative ambiguity target condition, the candidate made jokes about women, gay people, and black people. In the unjustified prejudice target condition, the candidate made jokes about doctors, grandmothers, and veterans (See Appendix F for the full script).

For example, when asked “Would you consider yourself to be a good public speaker?” the candidate responded with one of the following answers:

Nondisparaging: I’m pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. **When it comes to public speaking, I don’t phone it in (I typically show up in person!)**

Justified: I’m pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. **Though any racists in the class probably thought I used too many big words, like “hello” and “thank you”.**

Normative: I'm pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. **Everyone else's presentations sounded a lot like a woman's driving: lots of screeching with no sense of direction!**

Unjustified: I'm pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. **Everyone else's presentation was about as clear as a doctor's handwriting!**

After watching the video, participants responded to the same trustworthiness scales from Study 1: ability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$), integrity (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$), and propensity (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$). Reliability for the overall trustworthiness score was Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$.

Results

As in Study 1, I will test this data using one-way ANCOVA, with humor target serving as a between-subjects variable (justified prejudice target, normative ambiguity target, unjustified prejudice target, nondisparaging [or no target]). Propensity will again be treated as a covariate, given its significant relationships with overall trustworthiness, ability, and integrity ($r = .35$, $r = .32$, and $r = .33$, respectively; $p < .001$ for each correlation). Specific planned contrasts were conducted to tests my hypothesis. Lastly, to fully enumerate on significant effects, I conducted post hoc pairwise comparisons, using the Sidak procedure to control for inflated Type I error.

Test of Hypothesis 2.1

Hypothesis 2.1 stated that participants should suffer less of a trust liability when they mock justified prejudice targets than when they disparage normative ambiguity targets or

unjustified prejudice targets. A one-way ANCOVA on overall trustworthiness revealed that the effect of humor target was significant, $F(3, 221) = 8.66, p < .001$, with a small effect size, $\eta_p^2 = .11$. Figure 2 displays the overall trustworthiness means for each condition. I conducted a planned contrast comparing the justified prejudice target condition (coded as +1) to the normative ambiguity target condition (coded as -1). The contrast was not significant; there was no difference in perceived overall trustworthiness between the justified prejudice target condition ($M = 2.77, SD = 0.84$) and the normative ambiguity target condition ($M = 2.64, SD = 0.89$), $t(223) = -0.10, p = .92, r^2 = .00$. Surprisingly, when contrasting justified prejudice targets to unjustified prejudice targets, the contrast was marginally significant in the opposite direction; mocking groups in the unjustified prejudice damaged overall trustworthiness perceptions less than mocking justified prejudice targets, $t(223) = -1.94, p = .053, r^2 = .02$, a small effect size. Thus, Hypothesis 2.1 was not supported.

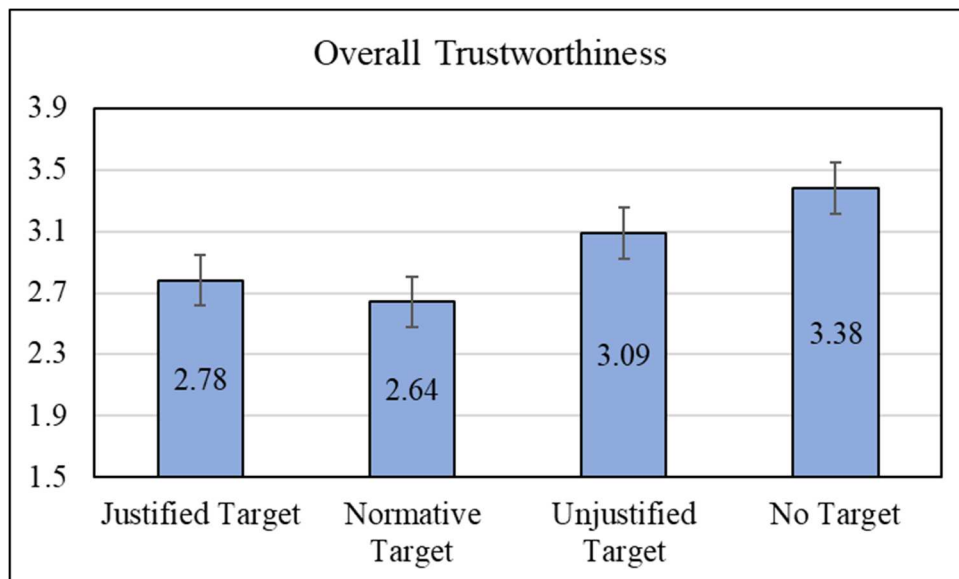


Figure 2. Overall trustworthiness by prejudice target (controlling for propensity).

Discussion

Study 2 tested how the target of other-disparaging humor influences perceptions of the joker's trustworthiness. Contrary to Hypothesis 2.1, mocking justified targets did not attenuate this effect; in fact, pairwise comparisons suggested that *unjustified* prejudice targets were "safer" to mock than either justified prejudice targets or normative ambiguity targets. While Study 2 used a model in which groups whose positions are determined by the larger society, Study 3 will use a model in which group's are defined by their relative position to the participant.

CHAPTER FIVE: STUDY 3

Study 2 examined the possibility that disparaging humor fosters different degrees of mistrust depending on the target. Whereas Study 2 examined how the social position of the targeted group affects perceived trustworthiness of the joker, Study 3 examines how the relationship between the targeted group and the self affects perceived trustworthiness. That is, instead of using the normative window model, we will derive the categories of targets from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986)

Social identity theory contends that people make sense of themselves in social interactions (that is, they form “social identities”) based on their subjective membership/relation to social groups (be they demographic, social, psychological, etc.) that they perceive as important to distinguishing people from one another. People hold many social identities (e.g. based on occupation, race, gender, beliefs, hobbies), and when a specific social identity becomes salient or “activated” by the social context, it becomes a meaningful way to differentiate your self and others in your group (ingroup) from those who do not share that affiliation (outgroup). For instance, when discussing government and politics with others, one’s political social identity (i.e. liberal, conservative) is activated.

The theory also states that people’s social identities influence their self-evaluations; a social identity can enhance or diminish how positively a person views themselves, depending on whether the ingroup compares positively or negatively to relevant outgroups. Thus, people are motivated to distinguish their ingroups from relevant outgroups. People experience social identity *threat* when they believe their group membership will put them at a social disadvantage in a given social context (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). For instance, women experience social identity threat in a school setting if it appears the professor might be sexist (Adams,

Garcia, Purdie-Vaughns, & Steele, 2005). As such, people are also motivated to reduce social identity threats.

From this framework, we can derive three meaningful types of targets for other-disparaging humor: ingroups (groups inclusive of one's social identity; e.g. your political affiliation), relevant or "opposing" outgroups (groups that threaten one's social identity; e.g. the opposing political affiliation), and irrelevant outgroups (groups that do not trigger social identity threat but are also not a part of one's social identity; e.g. Florida drivers). I propose that one would perceive humor disparaging their ingroup as a social identity threat, which would foster mistrust. Conversely, one should *not* perceive humor disparaging an outgroup as a social identity threat; in fact, it is possible that disparaging an opposing outgroup could be identity-enhancing, thus engendering greater trust. Given people's desire for positive evaluation of their ingroup and aversion to social identity threats, I derived the following hypotheses for Study 3:

Hypothesis 3.1: People should perceive a person mocking their ingroup as less trustworthy than if they mock an outgroup.

Hypothesis 3.2: People should perceive a person mocking an opposing outgroup as more trustworthy than if they mock an irrelevant outgroup.

Method

In Study 3, I anticipate that other-disparaging humor will affect trustworthiness in different ways depending on the target's relationship to the participant. To test this, participants engage in a role play scenario in which they imagine they are about to start a new job and have just received a video introduction from their new supervisor. Participants view a video of the

supervisor's introduction, in which the supervisor makes jokes targeting either liberals, conservatives, Florida drivers, or no one (nondisparaging humor). They will then rate the trustworthiness of the supervisor and report their own propensity to trust. I predict that the supervisor mocking the participant's politically opposing outgroup (e.g. for conservative participants, liberals) will face less of a trust liability than a supervisor that mock's the participant's political ingroup or a nonpolitical outgroup.

Participants and Design

A total of 316 participants (ages 18+) were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (mTurk) in exchange for \$0.40. Of these, 199 participants were included in analysis (the others failed attention checks, or indicated they were from outside of the country). The median age was 38 years old, and more participants were female ($n = 108$) than male ($n = 90$); 1 participant chose not to disclose their gender. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a between-subjects design based on the target of the candidate's humor: ingroup target, opposing outgroup target, irrelevant outgroup target, or a nondisparaging (control) group. To determine the minimum sample size, I conducted an a priori power analysis in G*Power 3 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). Assuming propensity would be treated as a covariate and assuming $\alpha = .05$, power = 80%, and a medium effect size (Cohen's $f = 0.25$), the power analysis required a minimum of 179 participants across the four conditions. Post hoc power analysis with the usable sample size reveal the study achieved 99.99% power.

Procedure and Materials

The procedure for Study 3 was similar in flow to Study 2. But there were several key differences. To start, the joker to be evaluated by participants in this study was no longer a job applicant, but rather a supervisor. Participants were told to imagine they just got a job and that their new supervisor (“Jamie”) has sent them an introductory video. In this video, the supervisor introduces himself and the company culture. Throughout the video, the supervisor tells a few jokes, a habit he says is part of the company culture to “make employees feel comfortable in the work environment,” and these jokes serve as the manipulation.

In addition to the change in scenario, I used jokes established by Hodson, Rush, and MacInnis (2010). These jokes were written to target any group required by the research. For example, one joke reads “Why do only 10% of ____ make it to heaven? Because if they all went, it’d be hell!” Depending on the video they saw, the joke mocked either liberals, conservatives, or Florida drivers. Other jokes were used for the nondisparaging condition (e.g. “Why did the scarecrow win an award? Because he was out-standing in his field!”). These four videos (in conjunction with participants’ self-reported political affiliation) serve as our experimental manipulation; ingroup target (e.g. liberal participant watch supervisor mock liberals), opposing outgroup target (e.g. liberal participant watching supervisor mock conservatives), irrelevant outgroup target (supervisor mocks Florida drivers), or nondisparaging (control).

Once participants viewed the video, they rated the supervisor on the same trustworthiness scale used in Study 1 and Study 2 (modified to be about a supervisor rather than a candidate; see Appendix B for full scale and Cronbach’s alphas). Participants then reported their general propensity to trust, and filled out their demographics. For this study, we added a question to assess political affiliation: “We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives.

Where would you place yourself on the following scale of political views?” Participants selected one of two response options: *Lean Liberal* or *Lean Conservative*. Afterwards, participants completed an attention check and were debriefed.

Results

As in the first two studies I present in this thesis, I analyze this data using one-way ANCOVA, with humor target serving as a between-subjects variable (ingroup, opposing outgroup, irrelevant outgroup, nondisparaging [or no target]). Propensity is again treated as a covariate, due to its significant relationships with overall trustworthiness, ability, and integrity ($r = .30$, $r = .34$, and $r = .24$, respectively; $p < .001$ for each correlation). Specific planned contrasts were conducted to tests my hypothesis. Lastly, to fully enumerate on significant effects, I conducted post hoc pairwise comparisons, using the Sidak procedure to control for inflated Type I error.

Test of Hypothesis 3.1

Hypothesis 3.1 predicts that people who mock a participant’s ingroup will be perceived as less trustworthy by the participant than had they mocked an outgroup (regardless of whether the outgroup is opposing or irrelevant). I conducted a one-way ANCOVA on overall trustworthiness, treating propensity as a covariate and humor target as the between-subjects factor. The effect of humor target was significant, $F(3, 194) = 18.99$, $p < .001$, with a small-to-medium effect size, $\eta_p^2 = .23$. To enumerate on this significant effect, I conducted two planned contrasts comparing the ingroup target condition (coded as -1) to each of the outgroup target

conditions (coded as +1). The first contrast was not significant; there was no difference in perceived overall trustworthiness between the ingroup target condition ($M = 2.54, SD = 0.87$) and the opposing outgroup condition ($M = 2.92, SD = 0.92$), $t(196) = 1.94, p = .054, r^2 = .02$, a small effect size. The other contrast was significant; the supervisor was seen as less trustworthy in the ingroup target condition than in the irrelevant outgroup condition ($M = 3.45, SD = 0.76$), $t(196) = 5.49, p < .001, r^2 = .13$, a medium effect size. Thus, Hypothesis 3.1 is partially supported.

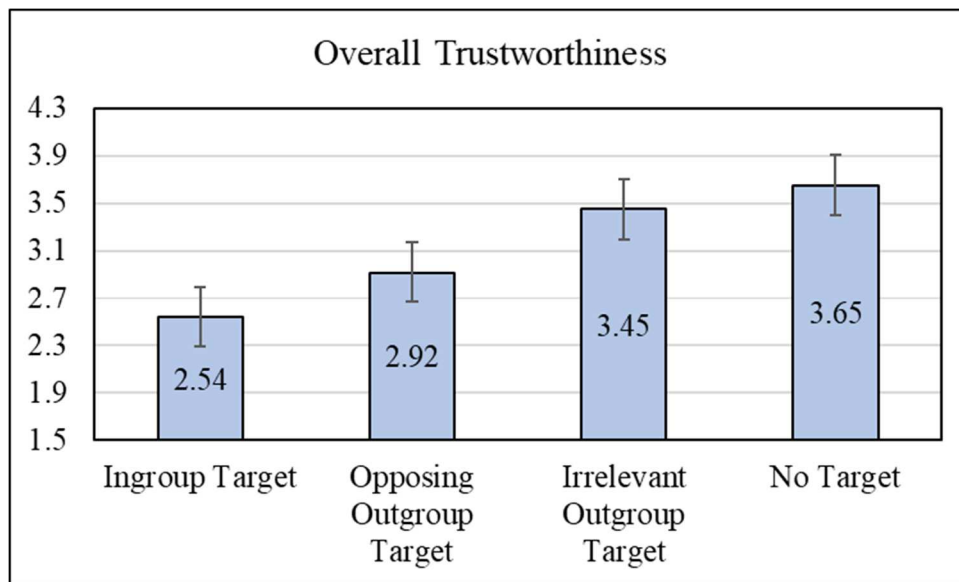


Figure 3. Overall trustworthiness by humor target (controlling for propensity).

Test of Hypothesis 3.2

My final hypothesis stated that people would perceive someone who mocks an opposing outgroup as more trustworthy than if they mock an irrelevant outgroup. I conducted a one-way ANCOVA on overall trustworthiness, treating propensity as a covariate and humor target as the

between-subjects factor. The effect of humor target was significant, $F(3, 194) = 18.99, p < .001$, with a small-to-medium effect size, $\eta_p^2 = .23$. To enumerate on this significant effect, I conducted a planned contrast comparing the opposing outgroup target condition (coded as +1) to the irrelevant outgroup target conditions (coded as -1). The contrast was significant, but not in the anticipated direction; rather, the supervisor was considered more trustworthy in the *irrelevant* outgroup condition ($M = 2.92, SD = 0.92$) than in the *opposing* outgroup condition ($M = 2.92, SD = 0.92$), $t(196) = -3.16, p = .002, r^2 = .05$, a small effect size. Thus, Hypothesis 3.2 is not supported.

Discussion

Like Study 2, Study 3 tested how the target of other-disparaging humor influences perceptions of the joker's trustworthiness. We found no evidence for Hypothesis 3.1; there was not a significant difference in perceived trustworthiness ratings between the ingroup and opposing outgroup conditions. That is, I found no evidence that making fun of an opposing or disliked outgroup mitigates the liability to trustworthiness that appears to accompany other-disparaging humor. However, target of other-disparaging humor still appears to matter. Contrary to expectations, making fun of an irrelevant outgroup did not appear to affect perceptions of trustworthiness (thus failing to support Hypothesis 3.2). Collectively, the results of Study 3 suggest that some targets are "safe" to mock, in that other-disparaging humor against these groups does not damage perceptions of trustworthiness; but contrary to expectations that we would see someone mocking an opposing outgroup as more trustworthy, it seems that disparagement of *irrelevant* outgroup targets had no influence on participants' judgements of trustworthiness.

CHAPTER SIX: GENERAL DISCUSSION

Summary of Results

When looking at the impact of humor type, Study 1 provided no evidence that using humor increases perceived trustworthiness. However, it was shown that using other-disparaging humor damages trustworthiness. Following up on this, two studies show that different targets of other-disparaging humor influence trustworthiness differently. Study 2 showed that humor targeting groups in the unjustified prejudice window reduces perceptions of trustworthiness less than humor targeting justified prejudice or normative ambiguity groups. Study 3 showed that humor targeting either ingroups or opposing outgroups reduced trustworthiness, but there was no reduction at all when targeting irrelevant outgroups. Collectively, these studies suggest that while humor may not increase perceived trustworthiness, it can decrease it if it's the wrong type of humor (other-disparaging) and it targets the wrong people (i.e. justified prejudice groups, normative ambiguity groups, ingroups, opposing outgroups).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are several limitations to the present research. In Study 1, nondisparaging humor did not generate positive affect, as it has been shown to do in previous research. Positive affect was a critical component of Hypothesis 1.1, and it was associated with inflated perceptions of trustworthiness. Previous research has shown that humor can increase positive affect (e.g. Cann, Holt, & Calhoun, 1999; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987); it just seems that the humor the candidate used in the present research did not have that effect. Based on participant comments in Study 1 (both the main study as well as its pilot test), the nervous delivery by the participant may

have blocked positive affect from generating positive perceptions, and several participants would attribute the candidate's use of humor to his nervousness. The nervous delivery was done deliberately in an effort to make the candidate seem more average (to stay in line with the previously discussed findings of Baron, 1993). However, nervousness is associated with negative affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1985); it could be that the candidate's nervousness worked against the candidate's humor, preventing the generation of positive affect. Future researchers should ensure that positive affect is generated by the humor manipulation in the pilot testing phase; to the extent that humor generates positive affect, it should also increase trustworthiness ratings.

Also pertaining to Study 1, though I did not find a significant effect of self-disparaging humor, it is still possible that it negatively affects perceptions of trustworthiness. The literature from which the hypothesized effect of self-disparaging humor on trustworthiness (particularly ability) was derived (e.g. Hackman, 1988) was vague about how their speaker made fun of themselves (simply describing it as "personal shortcomings"). It is possible that the specific aspect of the self a person mocks plays an important role in the effect of self-disparaging humor on perceptions of their trustworthiness. In the present research, the candidate mostly made fun of traits such as his weight and appearance. However, it may be that in order for self-disparaging humor to negatively impact trustworthiness evaluations, it needs to target specific trustworthiness dimensions to begin with. For example, the candidate saying his good academic record in college "clearly wasn't because of his 'good looks'" (in a tone that implies sarcasm) does not reflect his ability to perform the job he is interviewing for. However, if the candidate instead made a joke about getting good grades despite his tendency to procrastinate on major assignments, the participants (roleplaying as the interviewer) may be concerned about whether

they will procrastinate on company time if they are hired. In short, it may be that the content of self-disparaging humor impacts its effect on perceived trustworthiness; relevant versus irrelevant to the task at hand. One participant left a comment about his recommendation against hiring the candidate that gets at this idea: “Rather than celebrating his ability to get his team to function, he made a joke of it. Not a wise choice in a job interview.” This comment refers to a section of the video in which the candidate jokes that he was able to get his project team to cooperate after talking with them, “probably because they were sick of hearing my voice.” This participant seems to believe that this joke isn’t mocking so much the candidate’s voice (as intended by the researcher) as much as it is making fun of his team’s spite towards him as a leader, in which case it is relevant to job performance.

Another issue concerning the self-disparaging humor participants viewed is the accuracy of the disparaging comment. Much to the delight of the actor in the video, several comments indicated that they did not believe the candidate’s criticism of himself was warranted. When describing why they suggested hiring the candidate, one participant mentioned “He does seem to struggle with an impaired ego, presenting a disconnect between how he perceives himself and how he actually appears. I.E. weight, physical appearance.” It may be that making fun of a nonexistent flaw makes the candidate seem ingenuine. The roles that disparagement accuracy and the relevance of the disparaged aspect both play in the formation of trustworthiness impressions provide interesting directions for future research.

Across all three studies, I found evidence that other-disparaging humor diminishes perceptions of trustworthiness, but also that the target of that humor matters. In Study 2, the candidate mocked groups of differing social position in the normative window model. But one limitation involves the selection of targets for each condition. While pilot testing affirmed that

the videos appropriately made fun of each group it was supposed to (e.g. gay people), no pilot testing was conducted to ensure that each group is perceived by participants to represent their respective position in the normative window model. Selection of these targets was derived from literature (e.g. Ford et al., 2014; Crandall, Ferguson, & Bahns, 2013), but a part of the normative window model does state that a group's position in the model is subject to change. It's possible that some targets did not truly represent the window intended. For example, in the justified video, the candidate mocks the group "convicts". However, much research since then has shown that stigma against criminal offenders prevents them from effectively reintegrating into the greater society (e.g. Moore, Stuewig, & Tangney, 2016). Furthermore, such issues that prisoners in the United States face have gained more public attention. For instance, going back to one of comedians mentioned earlier, John Oliver has had many full-length shows concerning various aspects of prisons and the legal system in the last four years (e.g. "Prisoner Re-Entry", "Mandatory Minimums"). Oliver's comedy has received attention from researchers for its effectiveness in increasing its viewers' knowledge and participation in the topics he discusses, colloquially termed "the John Oliver Effect" (e.g. Bode & Becker, 2018; Jennings, Bramlett, & Warner, 2018; Time, 2015). Increased coverage on such topics (like Oliver's) may have begun the process of moving prisoners out of the justified prejudice region of the model. Veterans are another group that may be misplaced in the model; while explicit prejudice is rare among Americans, there is a growing body of evidence that they face implicit stereotyping that inhibits their reintegration (e.g. Stone, Lengnick-Hall, & Muldoon, 2018), thus veterans may not truly be within the unjustified window as anticipated. Because Study 2 used both of those groups, its results should be interpreted cautiously. Future research derived from Crandall et al.'s (2013) model should be sure to pilot test for the *current* social placement of the groups.

The results of Study 2 and 3 ran contrary to my hypotheses that humor disparaging justified prejudice targets and opposing outgroup targets would not result in trust liabilities; Study 2 provided evidence that it was less damaging to trustworthiness perceptions to mock unjustified prejudice targets, and Study 3 provided evidence it was less damaging to mock irrelevant outgroup targets. In fact, if the speculation above on veterans' position in the normative window model has merit and veterans are *not* considered an unjustified prejudice target, it's possible the difference between the unjustified prejudice and nondisparaging conditions would have disappeared.

One possible reason for these unexpected findings could lie in how people perceive the humor when it targets different groups. Ruch, Heintz, Platt, Wagner, and Proyer (2018) introduced the concept of *comic styles* (not to be confused with the aforementioned *humor styles* detailed earlier), which describe eight basic literary elements of different types of humor in terms of their sophistication and tone. Four comic styles are considered light (fun, benevolent humor, nonsense, wit), while four are considered dark and depict various forms of mockery (irony, satire, sarcasm, cynicism). There has yet to be any published research specifically concerning how perception of comic styles influences perceptions of the joker, but there is evidence that group membership can influence how we perceive comedian's motivations. For example, one study reports that the satirical humor used by Stephen Colbert on *The Colbert Report* was interpreted differently by liberals and conservatives; liberals perceived Colbert's character as a joke (believing his "pro-conservative" reporting did not reflect his true values), while conservatives perceived the character as an accurate representation of Colbert's true beliefs and his humor to simply be a cover to express conservative beliefs (LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009). Extrapolating from these findings, it is possible that participants in the present research

perceived the joker as using different comic styles depending on who he targeted. For instance, when the candidate made fun of unjustified targets (who no one truly has prejudice against), they may have perceived it as a lighter comic style, just fun or benevolent humor with no real prejudiced motives. The same could be true of Study 3's irrelevant humor condition, in which the supervisor mocked Florida drivers (another group against which no consequential prejudice truly exists). However, when making fun of normative ambiguity or justified prejudice groups (conceptually reflected in Study 3 with the ingroup and opposing outgroup conditions, respectively), we may perceive the disparaging remarks as reflecting true beliefs masked within a darker comic style such as satire or sarcasm; perhaps presenting one's social biases too early in a relationship reduces perceptions of one's trustworthiness. Future studies should investigate how our perceptions of a person are influenced by our perceptions of their comic styles.

Summary and Conclusions

Past research has provided strong evidence that we view funny people more favorably and that the type of humor a person uses matters. For example, research has shown we view funny people as more extraverted (e.g. Kuiper & Leite, 2010), as well as more competent and confident (e.g. Bitterly, Brooks, & Schweitzer, 2017). The present research explores how humor affects trust, looking at both the type of humor used, as well as the targets of other-disparaging humor. While this study provided no evidence that humor increases perceptions of one's trustworthiness, the use of other-disparaging humor can damage it if it targets the wrong groups. The present research begins to disentangle who those wrong groups are, but further research still must be conducted on this subject.

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APPENDIX A: Trustworthiness Scales (Modified – Study 1 & Study 2)

Indicate the degree to which you agree with each statement by using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Agree strongly

Think about the candidate Michael for the role of Junior Manager. For each statement, write the number that best describes how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

Ability

The candidate is very capable of performing his job.

The candidate is known to be successful at the things he tries to do.

The candidate has much knowledge about the work that needs done.

I feel very confident about the candidate's skills.

The candidate has specialized capabilities that can increase our performance.

The candidate is well qualified.

Benevolence

The candidate is very concerned about the company's welfare.

The company's needs and desires are very important to the candidate.

The candidate would not knowingly do anything to hurt the company.

The candidate really looks out for what is important to the company.

The candidate will go out of its way to help the company.

Integrity

The candidate has a strong sense of justice.

I would never have to wonder whether the candidate will stick to its word.

The candidate tries hard to be fair in dealings with others.

The candidate's actions and behaviors are not very consistent. *

I like the candidate's values.

Sound principles seem to guide the candidate's behavior.

Propensity

One should be very cautious with strangers.

Most experts tell the truth about the limits of their knowledge.

Most people can be counted on to do what they say they will do.

These days, you must be alert or someone is likely to take advantage of you.

Most salespeople are honest in describing their products.

Most repair people will not overcharge people who are ignorant of their specialty.

Most people answer public opinion polls honestly.

Most adults are competent at their jobs.

APPENDIX B: Trustworthiness Scales (Modified – Study 3)

Indicate the degree to which you agree with each statement by using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Agree strongly

Think about the supervisor Jamie. For each statement, select the option that best describes how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

Ability

The supervisor is very capable of performing his job.

The supervisor is known to be successful at the things he tries to do.

The supervisor has much knowledge about the work that needs done.

I feel very confident about the supervisor's skills.

The supervisor has specialized capabilities that can increase our performance.

The supervisor is well qualified.

Benevolence

The supervisor is very concerned about the company's welfare.

The company's needs and desires are very important to the supervisor.

The supervisor would not knowingly do anything to hurt the company.

The supervisor really looks out for what is important to the company.

The supervisor will go out of his way to help the company.

Integrity

The supervisor has a strong sense of justice.

I would never have to wonder whether the supervisor will stick to its word.

The supervisor tries hard to be fair in dealings with others.

The supervisor's actions and behaviors are not very consistent. *

I like the supervisor's values.

Sound principles seem to guide the supervisor's behavior.

APPENDIX C: Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then mark the appropriate answer in the space next to that word. Indicate to what extent you feel this way right now, that is, at the present moment. Use the following scale to record your answers.

1	2	3	4	5
Very slightly or not at all	A little	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely

___ Interested	___ Irritable
___ Distressed	___ Alert
___ Excited	___ Ashamed
___ Upset	___ Inspired
___ Strong	___ Nervous
___ Guilty	___ Determined
___ Scared	___ Attentive
___ Hostile	___ Jittery
___ Enthusiastic	___ Active
___ Proud	___ Afraid

APPENDIX D: Job Description (Study 1 & Study 2)

Junior Manager

Job Description

The *Junior Manager* will work closely with Senior Management to learn the industry and facilitate the company-customer relationship. Other duties include:

- Lead small teams to meet changing project goals.
- Present proposals to potential customers.
- Plan meetings around other employees' customer obligations.
- Support the Senior Manager as needed.

Knowledge & Skills

This position requires a Bachelor's degree in a business-related field, preferably in Management. Other desired skills, attributes, and experiences include:

- Demonstrated leadership experience.
- Strong public speaking and presentation skills.
- Well-organized.
- A great student who is excited to grow.

Previous professional experience is preferred but not required.

APPENDIX E: Script for Interview Questions and Responses (Study 1)

Question 1: Tell me about yourself.

Answer (all conditions): Well, my name is Michael. I recently graduated from University of North Carolina with my Bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a minor in Communications. My final GPA was 3.1. While there I also served as the Vice-President of the History Club, and volunteered at the park in my free time.

Question 2: Would you consider yourself to be a strong public speaker?

Nondisparaging: I'm pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. **The secret is to use the right gestures; jazz hands are not the way to go in most cases *the actors waves his hands enthusiastically***

Other-Disparaging: I'm pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. **I would speak like a poet, and the other students would blow it! *gestures open hand toward camera, blows on it***

Self-Disparaging: I'm pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. **And I don't think it was because of my "good looks"! *air quotes***

No Humor: I'm pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations.

Question 3: Describe a time you led a team.

Nondisparaging: Once I was the leader of a group project in a business classes, and there was a dispute among some of the group members that was slowing our progress. I talked with them about it, and they worked more cooperatively after that. **Probably because they realized there's no "I" in "Team" (unless you work for Apple, I'm sure they have their iPod, iTeam).**

Other-Disparaging: Once I was the leader of a group project in a business classes, and there was a dispute among some of the group members that was slowing our progress. I talked with them about it, and they worked more cooperatively after that. **Probably because they realized they were being bigger *children* than kids at fat camp!**

Self-Disparaging: Once I was the leader of a group project in a business classes, and there was a dispute among some of the group members that was slowing our progress. I talked with them about it, and they worked more cooperatively after that. **Probably because they were sick of hearing my voice!**

No Humor: Once I was the leader of a group project in a business classes, and there was a dispute among some of the group members that was slowing our progress. I took them aside & talked with them about it privately, & they worked more cooperatively after that.

Question 4: Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Nondisparaging: **Probably still in a mirror, unless I turn into a vampire before then.** I would like to have earned a promotion to Senior Manager, maybe even further. I have a lot to offer and firmly believe I can and will grow quickly here.

Other-Disparaging: **Away from my roommate's dangerous cooking, for sure!** I would like to have earned a promotion to Senior Manager, maybe even further. I have a lot to offer and firmly believe I can and will grow quickly here.

Self-Disparaging: **In a mirror, unless I'm lucky enough to go blind first!** I would like to have earned a promotion to Senior Manager, maybe even further. I have a lot to offer and firmly believe I can and will grow quickly here.

No Humor: I would like to have earned a promotion to Senior Manager, maybe even further. I have a lot to offer and firmly believe I can and will grow quickly here.

Question 5: Why do you want this job?

Nondisparaging: I want to get more professional experience, get involved in the business world. This opportunity has a lot of potential for my professional growth, plus I like the part about working with customers. I'm more excited than a sugared-up 10-year old at a sleepover!

Other-Disparaging: I want to get more professional experience, get involved in the business world. This opportunity has a lot of potential for my professional growth, plus I like the part about working with customers. I'm more excited than a crackhead on a snowday!

Self-Disparaging: I want to get more professional experience, get involved in the business world. This opportunity has a lot of potential for my professional growth, plus I like the part about working with customers. I'm more excited than my scale when I step off!

No Humor: I want to get more professional experience, get involved in the business world. This opportunity has a lot of potential for my professional growth, plus I like the part about working with customers. I'm very excited for this opportunity.

APPENDIX F: Script for Interview Questions and Responses (Study 2)

Question 1: Tell me about yourself.

Answer (all conditions): Well, my name is Michael. I recently graduated from University of North Carolina with my Bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a minor in Communications. My final GPA was 3.1. While there I also served as the Vice-President of the History Club, and volunteered at the park on weekends.

Question 2: Would you consider yourself to be a strong public speaker?

Nondisparaging: I'm pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. **When it comes to public speaking, I don't phone it in (I typically show up in person!)**

Justified: I'm pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. **Though any racists in the class probably thought I used too many big words, like "hello" and "thank you".**

Normative: I'm pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. **Everyone else's presentations sounded a lot like a woman's driving: lots of screeching with no sense of direction!**

Unjustified: I'm pretty good, yes. My teachers always gave me good grades on my oral presentations. **Everyone else's presentation was about as clear as a doctor's handwriting!**

Question 3: Describe a time you led a team.

Nondisparaging: Once I was the leader of a group project in a business classes, and there was a dispute among some of the group members that was slowing our progress. I took them aside & talked with them about it privately, & they worked more cooperatively after

that. Probably because they realized there's no "I" in "Team" (unless you wanna turn off spellcheck).

Justified: Once I was the leader of a group project in one of my business classes, and there was a dispute among some of the group members that was slowing our progress. I talked with them about it, and they worked more cooperatively after that. Probably because they realized their work ethic stunk worse than a convict cleaning the latrines.

Normative: Once I was the leader of a group project in a business classes, and there was a dispute among some of the group members that was slowing our progress. I talked with them about it, and they worked more cooperatively after that. Probably because they realized they were being more dramatic than an all-gay soap opera!

Unjustified: Once I was the leader of a group project in a business classes, and there was a dispute among some of the group members that was slowing our progress. I talked with them about it, and they worked more cooperatively after that. Probably because they realized they were making us go slower than a grandmother checking out with coupons!

Question 4: Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Answer (all conditions): I would like to have earned a promotion to Senior Manager, maybe even further. I have a lot to offer and firmly believe I can and will grow quickly here.

Question 5: Why do you want this job?

Nondisparaging: I want to get more professional experience, get involved in the business world. This opportunity has a lot of potential for my professional growth, plus I like the

part about working with customers. I'm very excited for this opportunity. **I'm more excited than a sugared-up 10-year old at a sleepover!**

Justified: I want to get more professional experience, get involved in the business world. This opportunity has a lot of potential for my professional growth, plus I like the part about working with customers. **I'm more excited than a suicide bomber on his first day off!**

Normative: I want to get more professional experience, get involved in the business world. This opportunity has a lot of potential for my professional growth, plus I like the part about working with customers. **I'm more excited than a black guy finding out he's not the father!**

Unjustified: I want to get more professional experience, get involved in the business world. This opportunity has a lot of potential for my professional growth, plus I like the part about working with customers. **I'm more excited than a veteran getting a free PTSD dog!**

APPENDIX G: Script for Orientation Videos (Study 3)

Welcome to the team! Our whole department is excited about your decision to accept our offer of employment. My name is Jamie, and my job is to help smooth your transition to working at our company. The purpose of this video is to give you a quick overview of what you'll be doing for your first few days.

But before we begin, let me tell you a bit about the culture we've developed here. Our philosophy is that employees and managers must create a genuine connection so that the employee feels comfortable in the work environment. We often create that comfortable environment for employees by using humor in the office. I always start out orientation by sharing some of my favorite jokes:

INSERT JOKE 1 I heard another good one from Julia the other day: ***INSERT JOKE 2*** Julia's great, and she's actually going to be your employee mentor. She'll help you get to know the company and your new department.

But back to business, we have put together an orientation schedule for your first week. Our goal is to orient you to both your new job and the company. With this in mind, in addition to your mentor, we have asked Mike Logan to work with you to provide on-the-job training. He is experienced in all aspects of the positions you need to learn. You'll also share an office with him, so the training can be ongoing.

We have set up a meeting schedule that will put you in contact with all of the departments you will need to learn and the employees you will need to meet. We'll have this schedule finalized when you arrive on Tuesday.

We believe that after going through this orientation, all our employees can succeed, ***INSERT JOKE 3***

If you have questions, please feel free to email or call me. We really look forward to working with you.

Joke 1:

Nondisparaging: What do Alexander the Great and Winnie the Pooh have in common?

Same middle name!

Disparaging: What's the difference between Bigfoot and an intelligent

[liberal/conservative/Florida driver]? Big Foot has been before!

Joke 2:

Nondisparaging: Why did the scarecrow win an award? Because he was out-standing in his field!

Disparaging: Why do only 10% of [**liberals/conservatives/Florida drivers**] make it to Heaven? Because if they all went, it would be Hell!

Joke 3:

Nondisparaging: like elephants in hide-and-go-seek; you never see them hiding in trees, they're really good at it!

Disparaging: except for [**liberals/conservatives/Florida drivers**]; a smart [**liberal/conservative/Florida driver**] is a lot like a UFO; you keep hearing about them, but you never see one!

APPENDIX H: Pilot Test Questions (Study 1)

1. Based on the clips you just watched, how qualified is the candidate for the Junior Manager position?

Not at all							Extremely
Qualified							Qualified
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

2. Specifically in the clips you saw, how funny did you find the candidate?

Not at all							Extremely
Funny							Funny
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

3. Specifically in the clips you saw, how much did the candidate make fun of other people?

							Very
Not at all							Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

4. Specifically in the clips you saw, how much did the candidate make fun of himself?

							Very
Not at all							Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

5. Briefly describe your reactions to the candidate.

APPENDIX I: Pilot Test Questions (Study 2)

1. Based on the clips you just watched, how qualified is the candidate for the Junior Manager position?

Not at all							Extremely
Qualified							Qualified
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

2. Specifically in the clips you saw, how funny did you find the candidate?

Not at all							Extremely
Funny							Funny
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

3. Specifically in the clips you saw, how much did the candidate make fun of racists?

							Very
Not at all							Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

4. Specifically in the clips you saw, how much did the candidate make fun of grandmothers?

							Very
Not at all							Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

5. Specifically in the clips you saw, how much did the candidate make fun of gay people?

							Very
Not at all							Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

6. Specifically in the clips you saw, how much did the candidate make fun of suicide bombers?

							Very
	Not at all						Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

7. Specifically in the clips you saw, how much did the candidate make fun of doctors?

							Very
	Not at all						Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

8. Specifically in the clips you saw, how much did the candidate make fun of women?

							Very
	Not at all						Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

9. Specifically in the clips you saw, how much did the candidate make fun of convicts?

							Very
	Not at all						Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

10. Specifically in the clips you saw, how much did the candidate make fun of veterans?

							Very
	Not at all						Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

11. Specifically in the clips you saw, how much did the candidate make fun of Black people?

							Very
Not at all							Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

12. Briefly describe your reactions to the candidate.